

DAILY NEWS

50¢

NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

OPINIONS

BE OUR GUEST By MSGR. JOHN POWIS

Priest's plea for help

Commissioner Kelly, it's time to send us some cops

A turf war is taking place in the streets of Bushwick, Brooklyn. It's not a fight between the Bloods and Crips but a war being waged by local drug dealers and domestic terrorists against the neighborhood's schools and families.

Uncharacteristically, local police have been inconsistent allies of the neighborhood in this battle. How they respond will determine whether a new school succeeds, a community becomes safer and another corner of the borough is reclaimed from thugs and criminals.

As an adviser and pastor of a large Catholic church in Bushwick for more than 15 years, I saw the worst of the arson, drug wars and shootouts in the 1980s and '90s and know that we have come a long way. Many children are alive because there are fewer murders than there were 10 years ago. The significant progress made by the NYPD, with the help of churches and schools, is undeniable.

That's why the presence of dozens of chronic drug sites, including one in front of our church rectory, is so disturbing.

On almost any night or weekend, our parishioners and neighbors can hear drug addicts shouting out their dealer's name. The

dealer is so brazen that one day he and his thug buddies set up a television and video game set on the sidewalk in front of an apartment building. The message to the neighborhood was, "I own this place."

There are several other apartment buildings, stoops and corners in Bushwick like that spot. The police pass by, but the gangsters and drug dealers control the sites.

Even our schools have not gone untouched. One is Bushwick Leaders' High School for Academic Excellence. Less than two years old, it is an oasis of learning and discipline. Not a single student has dropped out.

As a new small school with almost 90% attendance, it is driven by a committed group of parents, teachers and administrators. Drop in any day and you will see classrooms that are orderly, parents who are talking with teachers, and administrators who are on top of every detail.

Parents, clergy and teachers fought hard for this school and are not about to let the termination of gang members or the inaction of police jeopardize its success.

Sadly, one of the least-safe places in Bushwick is not in a dark alley at 2:30 a.m. but right out in front of this school at 2:30 p.m.,

when school lets out. On a corner 200 feet from the school, students get menaced or beat on by gang members. A staff principal's car has been vandalized and shot up almost a dozen times this year.

"Too little, too late" could be the motto of the 83rd Precinct. Twice in the past few months parents, teachers, students and parishioners filled the church sanctuary to meet with precinct brass. Twice they were promised attention, but it lasted only a few days. When the police went away, more students got beaten up and the drug dealers returned.

The gangsters control too many street corners and apartments in Bushwick. It doesn't have to be that way.

Here's what needs to be done: The 83rd Precinct needs to permanently assign an officer to the school until it is safe for students to walk outside. The precinct also needs to take consistent and aggressive action against the other known drug sites to prevent similar situations from getting out of control.

The police always say to call 911 when there is an emergency. There is certainly an emergency in Bushwick. Now it's up to the police to respond.

Powis is the retired pastor at St. Barbara's Catholic Church and a leader of the East Brooklyn Congregations.

**Drug dealers
are winning
turf war in
Bushwick**