

# Push back the darkness

Dec. 12, 2000

## *Memorial service held to recall those hurt or killed by violence*

Through the lighting of candles, the lives of individuals snuffed out by violence were re-kindled on Dec. 6 at a memorial service held at La Ronge's St. John Vianney Catholic Church.

The intimate liturgy, led by Sr. Anne Lewans, honoured not only the 14 women killed on Dec. 6, 1989 in what has become known as the "Montreal massacre", but all those who have lived — and died — with violence.

Thus, after 14 candles had been lit for the 14 women murdered at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique, those in the small congregation were invited to come forward to light candles of their own, and to name those for whom they were lit.

So, into the stillness of the sanctuary, names were spoken: a mother lost, three women who suffered, a young man murdered, a young boy killed by a teenager he trusted, women in prison whose deaths were at their own hands, a man who died on the job, children abused. The room was very still, and sulphur

lingered in the air.

And then, voices lifted in the words of the psalmist: "For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; that I could bear. It is not a rival who taunts me, but you, my other self, my companion and close friend!

"I will call on God, who will save me. Evening, morning and noon, I will grieve and sigh; and my Liberator will hear my voice. God will rescue my soul from those who war against me; for they who oppose me are many. Cast your care upon the Lord, and he will support you."

It was during the dark days of Advent, the month-long Christian celebration of waiting for the birth of Christ, that Marc Lepine murdered his 14 victims, and Sr. Lewans drew these threads together to paint a tapestry of hope.

"Loving God," read Sr. Lewans, "we long to realize Isaiah's dream, that women and men shall live together in love, and partners shall lie down together within the embrace of tenderness; that men will be gentle and strong, and women will be strong and gentle.

"Children will see this and learn to love; they will play within the safe havens of their own homes; they will build a world of peace, far beyond our imagining."

What people need to remember, Sr. Lewans said after the service, is that violence is an age-old human problem.

"The Montreal massacre just highlighted in a very vivid way the violence that is in our world," she explained. "It (the anniversary) is a remembrance, but also a time to become more conscious and (recall) that we all have a responsibility to promote peace and loving relationships, rather than condone any kind of violence."

As a Christian witnessing violence, Sr. Lewans has had to come to grips with the "not yet" of Christ's return. "During Advent we're 'looking forward,'" she said. "We hope for, we're waiting for."

Linda Cunningham deals that "not yet" every day, in her work with Piwapan women's shelter. Her hope is that services like this one will make her work, and her clients' lives, that much easier.

"People will tell people what they heard, what they learned, and perhaps our goal of a non-violent society will be a little closer," Cunningham said.

"It (the massacre) is an incident that could have happened anywhere in Canada, and it's important that we not forget that."

Carmen Pauls

Staff