

Huge crowd attends slain priest's funeral

By Janet Cotton
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On the sunny Easter Monday when they would have joined Father Roger Rinfret in celebration of the Resurrection, the congregation of Angers-Gardien instead buried their murdered parish priest.

A single Easter lily adorned Rinfret's casket as more than 1,000 friends and family bade him a final farewell in the cemetery 100 yards from his parish home in Angers.

Emotions ran freely as parishioners helped one another through the hour-long funeral mass celebrated by Hull Bishop Adolphe Proulx and 96 white-robed priests.

Children paid tribute

In an earlier church ceremony, some 450 local children and teenagers sang to a softly-strummed guitar and paid their tribute to the slain priest.

Many mourners hugged and wept during the ceremony, while detectives combed the crowd for some clue in the bizarre and brutal stabbing of the 49-year old Rinfret in a Gatineau motel room one week ago.

Police still have no motive or suspect and have denied earlier reports they have recovered a possible murder weapon.

However, sources close to the investigation yesterday revealed a bloodied towel and a butcher knife were found near the Gatineau police headquarters on the weekend.

Rinfret was stabbed 13 times.

Police are trying to account for Rinfret's whereabouts between 9:45 p.m. Sunday when he left the home of friends in Aylmer and 11 p.m. when he checked in alone to the Ritz Motel.

In a moving eulogy, Bishop Proulx called on the mourners to "keep faith even in the face of such a violent, unjust death."

He likened the untimely death of their spiritual leader and the great

loss felt by Angers parishioners, to the shocked disbelief experienced by many at Christ's crucifixion.

"But with resurrection they were filled with hope and their spirits filled with faith," Proulx told the disheartened gathering.

"With the resurrection there is the promise of new life for those who believe."

Many outside church

Several of the mourners, overcome by emotion, left the church in mid-service. More than 100, who could not even find standing room in the 120-year-old church heard the service piped outside over a loud-speaker system.

Priests joining Proulx in the service came from parishes throughout the Ottawa Valley, Montreal, Quebec City, the Gaspé Peninsula and as far away as Massachusetts.

Proulx repeatedly referred to Rinfret's work in the community, particularly with youth and handicapped groups whose loyalty to their parish priest was evident in their grief.

"He spent with them days of reflection and gave them new hope through his smile and his faith," the bishop said.

Proulx said a special prayer for Rinfret's immediate family and asked the congregation to join him in the message of sympathy.

"The community and the church, we were his other family," Proulx said. "But we must especially remember his real family and give them our sympathy."

Joined arms

Six of Rinfret's seven brothers and sisters joined arms for strength in the walk up the gravel path from the church to the parish burial site.

Another sister working as a missionary in Africa was unable to attend.

Much of the church space was reserved for family, including 40



Hull Bishop Adolphe Proulx, attended by many priests, pours ashes on the draped coffin of Father Roger Rinfret.

younger relatives, and for Rinfret's religious colleagues.

Many mourners who could not find a seat or standing room in the church argued with ushers that they were "practically family" and deserved a proper place.

"We have been so close for 20

years, to me he was my family," said one distraught woman.

Last touch

At the close of both the funeral and youth ceremonies, mourners reached for one last touch of Rinfret's casket. Many of the young-

sters, dressed in girl guide and scout uniforms, wept openly as they left the church.

Outside the church and by the grave the mourners broke into hymns and chants of alleluia.

But even in their display of faith, the memory of Rinfret's cruel and

unusual death could not be erased from the minds of the mourners.

During the funeral many speculated in hushed tones about the murder that one tearful woman described as "this horrible, horrible thing."