

Clergy Comment

by Rev. Jean Stahs

The discovery of a young girl's body stuffed in a refrigerator ended the massive search for nine-year-old Sharin Morningstar Keenan. The girl's body, clad in shirt and blouse, was discovered Tuesday, February 1, in a downtown Toronto rooming house after police received information from residents of the house. The building was near the playground where she had last been seen on January 23. The girl had been sexually assaulted and strangled and as a result a nation-wide search warrant was published for the suspect.

Copies of posters featuring a picture of Sharin, with the printed message "Have you seen Sharin Keenan, Call Metro Police" were plastered all over Toronto. Subways, buses and streetcars were but some of the places the posters were tacked. As part of the massive search for the girl, helicopters, sound trucks, mounted police, tracking dogs and scores of police in cruisers and on foot, were called in to provide assistance.

The parents of Sharin, Brendan Caron and Lynda Keenan, appealed to their daughter and to the public by means of television broadcasts. Anyone with information which might have aided the search was requested to contact the police.

The response of the public to this tragic and pitiful event was significant. Everyone I spoke with during the week in which the girl was missing, made reference in a compassionate manner, to the parents and to Sharin. People were emotionally sick over her disappearance. This nine-year-old girl brought out all sorts of mixed feelings in people. Fear, sorrow, sympathy, worry, mistrust, confusion, helplessness and rage were but some of the feelings I noted being expressed.

One parent shared with me the dark fantasy he was haunted with. He imagined his own six-year-old son at the mercy of such an attacker. The very picture of his little boy's helplessness and fragility in light of the strength of an adult man motivated by sexual violence, was enough to give this particular parent nightmares for the entire week. In one simple, but moving, comment this parent said: "I can only hope God removes from that little girl, Sharin, the terror and fear that must have possessed her during the at-

tack." Another parent shared with me that while he was not an advocate of capital punishment and thus had no desire to see Sharin's attacker killed, if a person came after his own daughter he would not hesitate to pull a trigger and kill him.

Still another person described the emotions that stirred in her when she contemplated what the parents of Sharin Keenan had to live through after the body was discovered. The impact of such a tragedy would certainly have devastating effects on family and friends for many years to come. "How will those parents live a normal life and forget the sordid affair?", the young woman asked me.

I, too, had most of the reactions described above. But, as a minister, I also had a few other feelings stir up within me. One such feeling was that of gratitude. I am grateful that the public responded with compassion and with identification for it indicates to me that as humans we still possess, in spite of our depravity and sinfulness, a measure of true care and genuine love. The worst crisis often brings out the best potential for care that is within us.

Yet I cannot help but wonder why it takes a crisis to provoke a compassionate response. Why is it that one child can so easily become the focus of attention while other children remain unnoticed and neglected? Sexual abuse and child battering is on the increase in our world. Every single day, in addition, thousands of young children with innocent eyes die in "third world" countries. Although they may not have been sexually assaulted, surely they have been just as violently abused. The sinful machinations and distortions of our world have created exploitation and injustice which leads to the death of many children.

"Why," I ask myself, "do we find it so easy to close our eyes and ignore their silent plea for help, and yet open our eyes and react to the obvious cry so close to home?"

Surely the life of one child overseas is no less precious and significant in God's sight than the life of one child here in Canada. Maybe if we could open our eyes to see violence in all its forms upon our children, then our compassion would be more sincere and in keeping with the prophet Amos' wish to let "justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."



Mike Rees from Acton does some excavation work.



Architect Patrick Coles examines drawings.



Peter Buns, Clody Arnold and Jerrrie Soeck discuss the town hall registration project.



Andy Mills does some carpentry work in the town hall.



Jerrrie Soeck of Acton works in the old kitchen area of the town hall.



Bob Coats wears a face mask while doing work in the town hall.

This week thru the lens

Speyside School

Parents-trustee discuss fears, concerns

Parents of Speyside school students were assured last week the school is in no danger of immediate closure, at a special meeting with area residents and Halton Board of Education trustee Dick Howitt at the school. Howitt explained a study group must be formed by the board before closure of a particular school is looked at. The board, he said, voted not to form a study group at this time, and instead, a committee may be formed which will look at overall declining enrolment in North Halton and what should be done about it. Meeting organizer Pam Sheldon noted the parents were happy with this news after being assured of parental input on the committee. Howitt told the residents there will be two taxpayers from each school being examined on the committee, one of which will be a parent.

The committee will look into all alternatives of school closure, and all reasons. For example, Howitt told the 25 people attending, future enrolment projections, facilities, neighboring schools, community support / involvement, age of school, etc., will all be considered in the report. Other alternatives such as boundary changes, closing of middle schools, etc. will also be examined he noted. Sheldon noted the residents' collective sigh of relief at this news, but warned some parents may still not accept the report should it conclude Speyside school should be closed. She said there still could be a fight to keep the facility open. However, she did note that parents of children in rural schools want their children to keep going to rural schools, rather than have them bused to urban schools. She explained Lime-

house students would probably rather go to Speyside school than a school in Georgetown or Acton. Parents, she said, want their children to remain in the rural environment. Another bone of contention at the meeting was the dwindling resources at the school, both in supplies and the librarian. As a parent/volunteer, Sheldon said she had heard a lot of grumbling about the half-time librarian being cut to one quarter time, and being shared with another school. While taxes are going up, one woman at the meeting said, the class room is getting less and less. Sheldon contended a baby boom is happening now which will affect the schools four or five years from now. Parents at the meeting felt the school board's statistics of projected declining enrolment were loosely acquired,

and not reliable. Howitt noted it is the policy of the school board that funds for supplies, and librarians are allocated on a per pupil basis, and because Speyside has a low enrolment, funds are lower. It was his understanding however, that Speyside received additional funds because of their size, he said. The trustee noted it is also up to the principal to allocate the funds received. Speyside students are enjoying a lower Pupil/Teacher Ratio (PTR), which schools across the region are crying for, but unfortunately, they are also going through the disadvantages of a small school with less resources. Parent volunteers are a temporary measure which can be undertaken and encouraged for the librarian problem.

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