

Bells toll for missing women

By Brock Weir

The usual cacophony of traffic and construction in Downtown Aurora was punctuated precisely 374 times this Sunday, and will conclude a further 748 times this week to remember 1,122 lives.

Trinity Anglican Church sounded the first round of 374 bells this past weekend, heralding a week of remembrance for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. A further 374 bells are expected to peal on Wednesday afternoon before the final 374 beginning this Sunday at 10.15 a.m. to mark National Aboriginal Day.

This effort is part of an initiative marked with the hashtag #22days aimed at honouring the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which recently concluded its report on the devastating impact the Residential School system has had ? and continues to have ? on Canada's First Nations.

#22days is being marked by many Anglican churches across the country, says Rev. Canon Dawn Davis of Trinity, in honour of each indigenous woman and girl classified by the RCMP as missing or murdered between 1980 and 2012 and to ?show solidarity with the Indigenous peoples of our country in their cry for justice.?

Rev. Davis said she hoped the show of solidarity would inspire people within the community to support the initiative in their own way.

?Every intentional action that individuals, congregations and diocese take in this initiative is important, powerful and useful,? she said.

In a statement originally circulated by the Anglican Journal, Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, contrasted the ?wonderful sound of the bells? ringing out from churches across the denominational divide, to what these peals represent.

?The bell is rung to call people to worship, to welcome the newly baptized, to announce the newly married and to mark occasions of community celebration or mourning,? he said. ?For those who have died, the bell is tolled. To ring the bells is, first and foremost, an act of remembrance. To ring the bells is to pray for their families. For some, there has been some consolation in receiving the body of their daughter, sister or mother, to hold it with love and bury it with dignity. For others, there has never been, and may never be, an opportunity for such closure. They live in the anguish of a hope continually pierced by despair.

?To ring the bells is to call attention to this national tragedy and a trend that shows no signs of reversal. To ring the bells is to honour the demand for a national enquiry. To ring the bells is to stand in solidarity with Indigenous communities in their cries for increased policing, protection and emergency health care services, for increased provision for safe houses, and programs for counselling.?