



Advocates, city leaders honor departed homeless

by tony lee / metro boston

> email this to a friend

DEC 22, 2006

BOSTON — Joe Finn had a feeling his ailing homeless friend might die. But he never thought it would happen with nobody around, in the dark of night and on the steps of a library in Quincy.

That was 10 years ago, but Finn, executive director of the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, is reminded of his friend's fate each year as "the longest night" arrives with the winter solstice.

That came last night, hours after 163 homeless victims who died on Massachusetts streets were honored in the 17th Annual Interfaith Memorial Service at the Swedenborgian Church in Beacon Hill.

"Part of the tragedy was that he laid there for 24 hours," Finn said of his late friend. "That's how desensitized we've become to the homeless."

Yesterday brought sensitivity back in the form of song, poetry and the reading of names of each victim from the last year. While at times uplifting, sadness and frustration were also evident in the crowd.

"There is often a family looking for [a homeless relative]," said Jean McCarthy, an outreach worker who recognized many of the names read. "It's heartbreaking that family reunions happen too late."

Homeless advocates, city leaders and clergy from all major faiths took part in the service, one of many that happened across the country yesterday. Some saw it as a chance to rail against a country that allows so many to die without a roof over their heads.

"For us to not live out the years God planned for us because of homelessness, we as a nation have a lot of work to do," said Minister Don Muhammad of Muhammad's Mosque of Islam #11.

For many, that work is never more important than when "the longest night" signals the start of another winter.

"We are gathering to celebrate those who died without an address," Finn said. "If we leave it at that, it becomes our problem. We are called to act."