



MeridenPatch

THE NEIGHBORHOOD FILES

Vigil Held For Meriden Homeless at Center Congregational

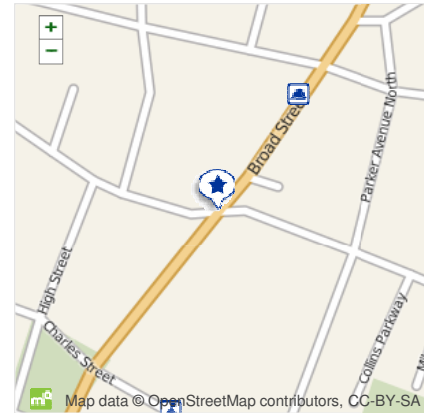
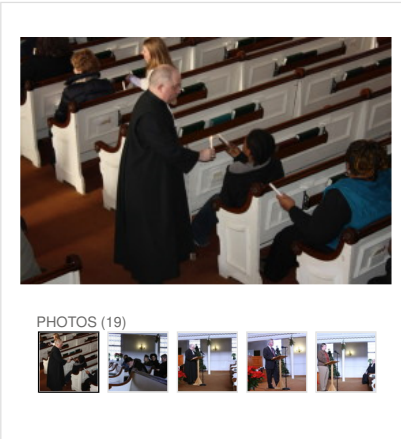
Local residents, community activists, government officials and homeless alike discussed homelessness and lit candles in remembrance of those who have died

By [Lisa DeVito](#) December 23, 2010

Cheryl Badore of Master's Manna, a non-profit community outreach program, food pantry, clothes closet, and resource center in Wallingford stood in front of a crowd at Center Congregational Church on Wednesday afternoon and read a letter that brought most in the audience to tears.

The note was given to her by a homeless man who said he planned to cut himself as a means to be admitted into the hospital as a suicide risk. In it he pleads with Badore to be the person who will come and sign him out after he has a place to stay a few nights.

It was a glimmer of the grim reality that the homeless in Meriden and the greater area contend with each day. And it was the subject of a memorial service held Wednesday at Center Congregational Church on Main and Broad Streets in honor of the City's homeless who have died each year for National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day.



About 50 people were in the audience at the service, including city and state officials, charity workers and people who were homeless themselves. Many spoke about their involvement in the fight against homelessness.

The Rev. James Olson of Center Congregational Church led the proceedings. He started off the event by saying it was fitting to hold such a vigil Wednesday, a day after the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. He said how proud he was of his community in its seemingly never-ending quest to fight homelessness.

Mayor Michael Rohde and State Representative Chris Donovan talked about the government's role in the cause.

"Everyone should have a home. Everyone should have a place," Donovan said.

Donovan was grave when explaining how the current state of the economy is presently affecting aid to homeless prevention groups. He said that this year a \$6 million cut in funds that directly promote anti-homeless organizations and programs was proposed, and overturned. But with continuing dire economic straits, this cut is once again on the table. Donovan encouraged attendees not to sit idly by in silence but advised the crowd to speak out against this drastic cut by writing letters or calling their local legislators and governor.

Kristen Granatek, Director of Prevention and Intervention Services at Meriden's Women and Families Center told a moving story about an anonymous homeless teen who struggled desperately to finish high school – and that few knew she was homeless.

Granatek stressed that those in attendance should, "Consider homeless youth that don't fit our stereotypes and give them the support they need."

Amanda Swan, a nurse practitioner from the Community Health Center touched on just how severe homelessness is – and how it is on the rise. She said she believes that with the recent downturn of the economy that there are many families just a paycheck away from being homeless.

Swan administers medical attention to men, women and children at Meriden's "Shelter Now" each week as part of the Healthcare for the Homeless program (also known as "Wherever You Are"). She said that many patients treated have faced abuse, violence, and mental and physical problems.

She said how proud she is to help those in need and "to remember today those who weren't so lucky."

Badore, the president and founder of Master's Manna said the rate of homelessness is so profound that at certain times there are tents set up with families sheltering themselves in back of her establishment.

There is light at the end of this tunnel, or so believes Agi Erickson, Director of the Homeless Program at Meriden's Community Health Center. When asked how she felt about the problems the homeless face she said she viewed it with "one eye open and one eye crying."

It seems that with every victory, Erickson sees another equally upsetting case. But this cold reality does not appear to make her waver in her belief that she can help end homelessness. Erickson encouraged not only the presently homeless, but anyone on the verge of being homeless to seek out Shelter Now for medical, mental health, and dental assistance.

With the closing prayer, Rev. Olson lit vigil candles held by many in attendance. He encouraged the crowd to speak the name of homeless friends and loved ones that have passed.

On their way out, the Community Health Center gave each homeless person a tote bag filled with hats, gloves, toiletries, chocolate, and gift cards to Dunkin Donuts.

Agi Erickson slipped a gift card to a young woman walking out who, when Patch asked her how she felt about the day's memorial, said: "I am homeless. I hope this never happens to anyone else."

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