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News

Homeless remembered in Middletown on longest night of the year

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MIDDLETOWN—The homeless, homeless advocates and local and state leaders congregated in the sanctuary of the Church of the Holy Trinity to remember the homeless who have passed away.

The memorial service was held Wednesday, the first day of winter and the longest night of the year. The day was chosen to drive home what the homeless face each day, especially in winter—long and cold nights, nights that are all too often the cause of their demise.

“Last year, the number of homeless increased to such an extent that people couldn’t be accommodated (in existing shelters). There was a concern people would freeze to death. This church offered its space as a warming center. They prevented people from freezing to death,” said Howard Reid of the Middlesex County Coalition on Housing and Homelessness.

Reid said the focus of MCCHH’s 10-year plan to end homelessness is “a true community effort to make sure people have homes. No one deserves to be homeless.”

Mayor Dan Drew observed that “in this season of good will, the homeless lack the things the rest of us take for granted.

“On a cold winter night, there are up to 3,318 people in shelters, and that number is increasing daily,” he said, before proclaiming Dec. 21 as Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day.

State Sen. Paul Doyle gestured toward a shopping cart covered with black plastic to keep its contents dry.

“Here before us is a carriage that belongs to one of our friends and neighbors. This is all of his belongings. This is all of his possessions,” he said. “In these difficult times, it’s up to each of you to continue to support the homeless and housing.”

“We are here today to remember those who passed on but more importantly to remember those still with us,” said Carol Walter of the Conn. Coalition to End Homelessness.

Walter shared here experience with the recent power outages as a hint of what the homeless face every day.

“After the power comes on, we’re quick to forget the hardship of keeping warm, wondering where our next meal is

coming from. Most of us don't realize people face this every day. We're here today to make sure no one forgets those who passed and those who haven't."

Michelle Waldner of New Horizons, a women's' shelter, called attention to the women and their children who are forced from their homes because of domestic violence.

"Some people endure abuse because they think it's better than being homeless. We currently have 70 women and 33 children with us. My wish this year, my hope, is they find a safe place they can call home," she said.

The service began with a prayer by the Rev. Margaret Minnick followed by a candle lighting of the Advent Wreath by Steven Ling, assistant priest at the Church of the Holy Trinity and priest of Trinity Church in Portland and Bro. Thomas of the Order of St. Benedict.

After the remarks by invited guests, Azure Smikle of the Leadership, Empowerment, Advocacy Development Program, told of her experience of being homeless, then said "I am one voice. There are so many,"

A microphone was passed around the sanctuary where guests stated their names. Following that, a number of mostly homeless persons came to the altar to light candles in memory of their friends who have since passed away.

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