



The Weathervane

A weekly E-Newsletter from KCC

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Homeless Awareness 2011 *A Reflection by Frank Lenox*

Members of the Kingston Congregational Sr. High Youth group joined members of the Peace Dale Sr. High group to conduct a twenty-four hour sleep out vigil for the homeless and to support the Welcome House of Peacedale. The core of the group was 6 youth and 2 adults, but the night was marked with shifts of friends and members who made the experience memorable. Meals were not planned; instead, we relied on the generosity of visiting groups who were made aware of our homeless state.

Nevertheless, we ate well - potato soup, slices of bread, and pizza in the evening, fruit and bagels in the morning, and copious amounts of hot chocolate. The conversations gave me reason to stay awake; but exhaustion gave way to fitful naps in a chair; and the chill of a dying fire woke me from dreamless sleep. Dotted with rain and snowfall, the night dragged on.

The experience provided the opportunity to raise awareness of homeless people in South County, but also allowed us to understand homelessness in the context of our own lives.

For myself, I came to appreciate a few basic privileges. With each bathroom break, I would shed several layers of clothing to alleviate the weight and restrictions from so much clothing.

Continued on Page Two

This I Believe....I Think

Join us on Monday in the Fire Place

Room for a discussion about

God

Jesus

The Holy Spirit

The Trinity

Explore your beliefs, listen to others

Learn something new

Challenge yourself

Comfort yourself

**The purpose is to come together in
honesty, open and respectful dialog**

and explore faith together

See you there!



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Page 2

Continued from Page One

The sub-freezing temperatures demanded many layers; but there was a certain irony stemming from the fact that I had had plenty of sub-zero clothes to begin with. When washing my hands, I would enjoy the smell of scented soap knowing that at least my hands did not reek of smoke and odor. And I enjoyed the hot liquids that provided a warmth that radiated outward.

The night provided some bright points. We were visited by Paul, Chris and Eddie (all guests at Welcome House) who engaged the youth in conversation about what it's like to be homeless... a stark realization that the homeless who live and work among us are not easy to identify. And always, the perseverance of the youthful spirit provided hours of entertainment. A harmonica and a Rubik's cube are great prompts for the adolescent mind

.Morning broke with the realization that there was no breakfast and bodies began to stir. The fire barrel was the center of attention, as if it alone would nourish us. Fortunately, our first visitors brought fruit and bagels and a 'box of joe.' I kept myself occupied by cleaning up and restoring order; a common practice for those with many possessions. As we began to count down the final hour, we joked by asking, "Who wants to stay another night?"

Continued in Next Column

Once at home, I sought to restore my routines to reassure myself that I was not without a home. I walked my dog - a true companion, but a luxury nonetheless. I then showered and rested in my own bed. I thought about the homeless men we met and how our lives are not so different. I began to view the homeless as victims of circumstance. One unforeseen outcome (e.g. a lost job, a divorce, an illness) initiating a downward spiral that is propelled by despair and a community lacking empathy. Like a single bounced check, the situation is compounded by fees, resulting in more returned checks, and the impact of these events bankrupts us, literally and emotionally. What if one of my children were diagnosed with a life-threatening illness that demanded all of my resources? Our work, our homes, our possessions are like a house of cards. What prevents it from collapsing are the relationships we form with family and friends who support us in our darkest hours.

