



Tragically, some of our most vulnerable neighbors die on the streets each year. On **Homeless Memorial Day**, December 21, their lives are remembered. This date was chosen because it is the day with the least amount of daylight and the longest night. It symbolizes the struggle of those who are homeless in our society, and who often live out their lives on cold streets or in dangerous abandoned buildings.

HOMELESS MEMORIAL SABBATH

In New Jersey, Christian and Jewish Houses of worship will mark this weekend as a Sabbath for remembering those who have died and those who live without a home.

In the Christian calendar, this weekend is also a time when we look forward to the celebration of Christmas – a time when we watch and wait for the coming Christ. It is fitting to remember that Jesus was born in the dark of night in a small town, where there was “no room” for him or his family to lodge.

On the street, in the shelter: “Being at the shelter... I was there off and on for about 10 years, trying to survive...when you go there you have to sleep with one eye closed and one eye open. You can't go take a shower because you got to bring everything with you...The papers and stuff were more important to me than anything. A couple times at the shelter I had a seizure. When I would get back from the hospital my stuff would be gone, my bag with medication and stuff, oh man, all my important papers. I had a few pictures in there I will never get back of my kids. Every time I turn around I was always about to get into a fight, you know, protecting your area, it's crazy man.”

New Jersey's “Point in Time Count” attempts to physically count the number of people who are homeless in this state on the day of the

survey. The count notes, however, that the actual number of homeless people in New Jersey is likely two to four times higher.

- ❖ 12,035 persons were listed as homeless
- ❖ 4,117 (33%) of these persons were children
- ❖ 32.4% of these persons attribute their homelessness to loss of job or inability to find work
- ❖ 27.3% of these persons attribute their homelessness to the high cost of housing.
- ❖ 8.2% of these persons are veterans
- ❖ Approximately 20% of homeless children do not attend school regularly. (National Center on Family Homelessness)
- ❖ 6,130 homes in NJ were foreclosed between January and July

In his own home: “To me, now I feel good, because I get a chance to get a roof over my head. I am gaining weight now. I am involved in NA, you know, I go to an AA meeting ... I can sleep better, I can stay on my medication, Being homeless man, you always in danger... I can concentrate on my health now and my medication. I have a regular doctor and. I keep in touch with her. I've been having my grandkids and my daughter back Before, I couldn't have them over, didn't have no safe environment for them. I am happier today. I have a chance to see my grandkids now.” (The stories in the last two boxes are part of the true story of a man who moved from homelessness to housing through a “Housing First” initiative in Mercer County.)

God, Our eternal home, your Christ ended his first night asleep in a manger. We pray that you would surround those still looking for home and shelter with your comfort and strength. We celebrate with those who are no longer homeless, and we ask for your guidance as we, your church, advocate for a society that truly protects and cares for all. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

For more information on Homeless Memorial Day, go to <http://www.njaneh.org/memorial-day/locations/>