

## Ceremony honors homeless who died in Indy

Wintry weather's early arrival has meant homeless residents already have been forced to seek shelter from the snow and cold.

It's a daily game of survival, and those on the front lines in helping the homeless took pause Tuesday to remember the homeless who lost the struggle.

At Christ Church Cathedral on Monument Circle, bells tolled and a candle was extinguished for each of the 36 homeless people who died in the past year in the Indianapolis area. About 200 attended.

"The service is intended to honor and remember them and to also celebrate their lives and celebrate the lives of individuals coming out of homelessness every day," said Michael Hurst, program director for the Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention, which sponsored the ceremony.

The Indianapolis area has about 1,500 homeless people. That number includes about 200 who are chronically homeless, meaning that an addiction or mental disorder prevents them from seeking shelter, Hurst said.

Central Indiana's unpredictable weather takes a toll on the homeless, Hurst said. This month's cold and snow have made life more dangerous than usual for the homeless.

The city has a winter contingency plan during the worst conditions in which shelters put out extra mats and make space for those on the streets.

"No one wants anyone to freeze to death outside," Hurst said. "What I like to say is there's not a soul in Indianapolis experiencing homelessness that doesn't have a place to go that's inside. There's a place for everyone during the wintertime."

The goal is to get the homeless inside, Hurst said. The city has seven outreach teams to check on the homeless during winter.

"Everyone working with people that are homeless I think are acting in good faith," Hurst said. "The outreach professionals came together and sat in the same training as (police) and church folks. Everyone is on the same page, for the most part."

**Call Star reporter Jason Thomas at (317) 444-6087.**