

Mission Moment

GOD'S POINT IN TIME

by Bev Thom, Homeless Program Coordinator, Bethel Lutheran Church (Madison)

Recently I did something I have never done before. It was the fourth Wednesday of January, the night that the entire country is mandated by HUD to count the number of people who are sleeping outside, ie. on the street or sidewalk, in a vehicle, in a park, abandoned building, under a bridge/overpass, in a bus, a train station or airport, woods or encampment, commercial establishment such as a laundromat, gas station, etc. This survey is called **Point In Time (PIT)** and is done twice yearly in January and in July. My husband and I were assigned locations by the City of Madison and in our training, we were advised to always be careful and respectful as we approach those whom we seek to interview.



I admit I was a bit unsure of what we would encounter but wanted to help with this enormous process. We were told to look for vehicles that had something over the windows or had condensation on the windows, indicating that a person/people were inside. As we drove through the large parking lot of a business, we spotted such a vehicle. We pulled up alongside and offered a hello several times. Soon the passenger window was cautiously lowered, and a young woman answered. After identifying myself as a volunteer with the Dane County Homeless Services Consortium, she politely agreed to be interviewed for the survey. She was with her boyfriend and had been “living” in their well-travelled SUV, sleeping in this same location each night. That night the temperature dipped to below zero. We conversed from our respective vehicles and in talking, I learned that she and her friend were from southern Wisconsin and were in Madison, seeking work. She shared they both had a history of addiction and were clean for greater than a year. Determined to remain off drugs they chose to stay in their vehicle to avoid potential risky contacts.



After completing the survey, I was able to offer a \$5 gas card and Madison Metro bus tickets (provided by the City of Madison), which they gratefully accepted. In addition, wanting to impart a measure of hopefulness, I told them about our Homeless Ministry at Bethel and invited them to come on Tuesdays where they could receive seasonal clothing, boots, blankets, a warm meal, and more. They immediately responded with gratefulness. I noticed that their demeanor changed, and they sounded less burdened as they promised to seek out our ministry. They politely wished us a good evening. Tears welled up in my eyes as we drove away.

When we climbed into our bed with warm flannel sheets and blankets aplenty, we thanked God for making God's presence known to us through this powerful experience. We offered a prayer for these two beloved of God and all others who are sleeping outside.

Learn more about Bethel's homeless program: [Homeless Support Services - Bethel Lutheran Church \(bethel-madison.org\)](http://HomelessSupportServices-BethelLutheranChurch(bethel-madison.org))