

# Longest Night Vigil Aims To Bring Hope, Renewed Awareness Of Homelessness

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The longest night of the year—December 21—is designated as National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day, and this year marks 33 years of honoring those without homes who have died. In 2023, 49 men and women of the Cape Cod and islands community who were unstably housed were lost. The youngest was 25; the oldest was 88. Most are in their mid-50s to mid-60s. The vigil is meant to call attention to this day of remembrance and to our neighbor's plight. An in-person service will be held at 6 PM at the First Congregational Church of Falmouth on Main Street.

Belonging to Each Other (BTEO), the Falmouth-based nonprofit providing winter shelter and year-round support services for Falmouth men and women experiencing homelessness, is helping to organize the vigil.

After the memorial service a simple meal of soup and bread will be served and people are invited to participate in a sleep-out that will take place on the lawn at the church. For the first time, people are encouraged to sleep in their cars as well as in tents. Gina Torielli, executive director of BTEO, said this reflects a trend that BTEO and other community partners have witnessed—more individuals are now living in their cars. The vigil and sleep-out are meant to raise awareness and show a commitment to changing the stereotypes people hold of those experiencing homelessness. All are invited to participate.

The service will be led by clergy from the Falmouth faith community. Those lost will be remembered with a combination of prayer, music and poetry. Each departed person's name will be read aloud. The goal is not just to remember those lost, but to resolve to create a community where no life is lived or lost in homelessness.