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It's a day to remember homeless people HOMELESS FACTS

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BY AMY FLOWERS UMBLE

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The Rev. Larry Haun took a rare sick day Monday.

Even so, that night he helped at the cold-night shelter for the chronic homeless. He tended to a man covered in mud and so cold his eyes were glazed.

That man, who periodically seeks help from the shelter, had two requests: a cab to get to work the next morning and to pray for Haun's health.

Every day, across the country, homeless people like this die, said Haun, lead pastor of Fredericksburg Baptist Church. His congregation has an active homeless ministry at its downtown location and members help out at the cold-night shelter hosted by the Bragg Hill Family Life Center.

In fact, this man, unless he finds regular shelter soon, won't live very long. At 51, he's already surpassed the life expectancy of an average homeless person by a year.

In the Fredericksburg area, seven homeless people have died in the past three years, Haun said.

He buries them with simple funerals. Cremations are sometimes donated by Covenant Funeral Home; sometimes burial plots paid for by church members.

Today is Homeless Persons' Memorial Day, a time to remember people who died because they didn't have shelter.

The national date "provides some dignity in death to people who were often forgotten in life," said John Lozier, executive director of National Health Care for the Homeless Council. "It reminds us all of our shared humanity and our shared mortality and should prompt greater resolve to end the national disgrace of homelessness."

For Haun, the event provides an opportunity to remind people "that we have neighbors in need."

He hopes the day puts a face on the homeless.

"These are human beings; these are God's creatures," he said. "Here's a man, with his eyes matted together with cold, who wants to work tomorrow and who asks, 'Can I pray for you, Larry?'"

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Micah Ecumenical Ministries works with the chronic homeless in the area. The group of eight Fredericksburg churches provides a weekday hospitality center, tents, sleeping bags and a cold-night shelter. There are two ways to assist the group:

Tonight, 5-9 p.m., 15 percent of proceeds from purchases at 10,000 Villages in Central Park will go to Micah.

Or send donations to Micah Ecumenical Ministries, Box 3277, Fredericksburg Va 22402.
700,000 to 2 million: the estimate of homeless on any given night in America.

50: the average life expectancy of a homeless person.

78: the average life expectancy of an American.

561: homeless people counted in this year's point-in-time count in Fredericksburg.

National Health Care for the Homeless Council and Meghann Cotter, executive director of Micah Ecumenical Ministries

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