



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**OPERATION SAFETY NET<sup>®</sup> TO HOST CANDLELIGHT MEMORIAL SERVICE  
TO REMEMBER HOMELESS WHO HAVE DIED**

**Remembrance set for December 21, the longest night of the year**

In memory of those who lived and died on our streets,  
We believe you are no longer cold, hungry, lonely or frightened.  
May you watch over us from a warm, caring home above.

~ Operation Safety Net<sup>®</sup> staff and volunteers

*Source: The Memorial Wall plaque at Grant Street, under the Monroeville overpass*

PITTSBURGH — With the holiday season upon us, Christians around the world prepare their hearts for the celebration of Christ's birth and are called to show compassion to those less fortunate.

Each year since 1990, on Dec. 21, the winter solstice and the longest night of the year, the National Coalition for the Homeless has sponsored a National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day to call attention to the plight of the homeless. On **Monday, December 21, 2009, at 6 p.m.**, the greater Pittsburgh community will put names and faces to the issue of homelessness in Pittsburgh and remember the 11 individuals who died while living on the streets of Pittsburgh in 2009. Since 1991, 116 individuals have died while living on the streets of Pittsburgh.

(MORE)

**Operation Safety Net to host candlelight memorial service Dec. 21 to remember the homeless**

Organized locally and hosted annually on Dec. 21 since 1998 by Operation Safety Net<sup>®</sup>, a legacy program of the Pittsburgh Mercy Health System, a candlelight memorial service is held at the south end of Grant Street, where Grant turns onto Fort Pitt Boulevard, under the Monroeville Exit overpass. There, a wall of plaques commemorates those who may have been forgotten in life and serves as the backdrop to the annual ceremony. Each plaque contains the name and the year the individual died.

“We unite on this day and at this special place to remember and give dignity to the individuals we have cared for over the years, particularly those who are no longer with us,” says Dr. James S. Withers, founder and medical director, Operation Safety Net (OSN). “We gather in celebration of their lives and to honor and pay tribute to their memory.”

Dr. Withers founded Operation Safety Net<sup>®</sup> in 1992 to serve the medical and social service needs of approximately 1,500 individuals in Pittsburgh who are unsheltered and homeless. Today, services have expanded from the initial street outreach to mobile van services, case management to secure benefits and food stamps; shelter, transitional and permanent housing, as well as ancillary services such as legal services.

While the annual candlelight vigil honors the memory of those who have passed away during the year, it also pays tribute to those who are surviving against great odds as well as recognizes volunteers who give their time and talent to understand and serve this vulnerable population. The service also provides an opportunity to share and celebrate these life stories.

The National Homeless Person’s Memorial Day Service in Pittsburgh is free and open to the public. Donations of new men’s hats or gloves, as well as monetary donations to the program are graciously accepted.

For more information about the candlelight memorial service, contact Operation Safety Net<sup>®</sup> at 412-232-5739.

To learn more about Operation Safety Net<sup>®</sup>, visit <http://www.pmhs.org/operation-safety-net/index.aspx>.

(MORE)

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To learn more about the National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day, visit <http://www.nationalhomeless.org>.

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**About Operation Safety Net ®**

Operation Safety Net ® (OSN) is a health, housing, and supportive service to the street homeless population of Pittsburgh and surrounding communities. Established in 1992 by Dr. Jim Withers, OSN serves 1,500 individuals who are unsheltered and homeless. Services are delivered by teams of volunteer clinicians who walk the streets and travel via a mobile medical van and provide health care. OSN is a legacy program of Pittsburgh Mercy Health System, part of Catholic Health East, sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy. In addition, OSN is the leading provider for the Allegheny Engagement Network and the Allegheny County Severe Weather Emergency Shelter. For more information, visit [www.pmhs.org/operation-safety-net/](http://www.pmhs.org/operation-safety-net/).