



MEDIA ADVISORY/REQUEST FOR COVERAGE

December 19, 2018

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**PITTSBURGH MERCY'S OPERATION SAFETY NET®
HOSTS CANDLELIGHT MEMORIAL SERVICE
TO REMEMBER PERSONS WHO DIED
WHILE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN 2018**

Annual public vigil set for December 21, winter solstice & longest night of the year

WHAT: [Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net®](#), an innovative, award-winning medical and social service outreach program for persons experiencing homelessness, invites the public to attend its annual candlelight memorial service to remember the individuals who are known to have died while experiencing homelessness in Allegheny County in 2018. The service will include a reading of the names, brief remarks, musical selections, and a prayer.

WHO: The public is invited to join [Pittsburgh Mercy](#) and [Bethlehem Haven](#) leadership, physicians, nurses, care managers, social workers, volunteers, community partners, and others who are concerned about social justice for persons experiencing homelessness. Sharon Sumansky, Homeless Services senior manager, will welcome the public to the service. Opening prayer will be led by Dave Lettrich, director of Bridge to the Mountains. The Rev. Michael Wurschmidt, rector of Shepherd's Heart Fellowship and executive director of Shepherd's Heart Veteran's Home, will be the guest speaker. Dr. Jim Withers, founder and medical director of Operation Safety Net, will deliver brief remarks. Musical selections will be provided by Rising Voices Youth Choir. Bill Connolly, Pittsburgh Mercy Mission director, will offer the closing prayer.

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WHEN: Friday, December 21, 2018, at 7 p.m.

December 21 is the first day of winter, the winter solstice, and the longest night of the year. It is also National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day.

WHERE: Fort Pitt Boulevard at Grant Street, Downtown Pittsburgh

There, beneath a busy highway overpass, a memorial wall of bronze plaques commemorates the 165* individuals who are known to have died while homeless in Allegheny County since 1989.

**This number is subject to change between now and the end of the year.*

WHY: Each year on December 21 – the first day of winter, the winter solstice, and the longest night of the year – the [National Coalition for the Homeless](#) and homeless service providers throughout the United States host public events to call attention to the plight of people who have died while experiencing homelessness. Pittsburgh is among more than 150 U.S. cities to take part in National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day observances.

According to the National Healthcare for the Homeless Council, the average age of death for a person experiencing homelessness is 50 years, compared to 78 years for a person who is not homeless.

[Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net](#)[®], a member of [Trinity Health](#), serving in the tradition of the [Sisters of Mercy](#), has organized a public vigil in Pittsburgh every year since 1998.

Donations of new men's and women's hats, gloves, boots, and thermal underwear will be collected for distribution to individuals at the [Winter Shelter](#). Monetary donations in support of the shelter and Operation Safety Net's important work in the community are welcome at www.pittsburghmercy.org. When making a donation online, please designate the gift for Operation Safety Net. For more information about giving opportunities, please visit www.pittsburghmercy.org, or contact Pittsburgh Mercy Development at Development@pittsburghmercy.org or 724-934-3537.

About Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net[®]

[Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net](#)[®] is an award-winning, innovative medical and social service outreach program for the unsheltered homeless population in Allegheny County. It strives to address the circumstances which undermine the behavioral and physical health of persons served by creating avenues for people who are homeless to access the medical and

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social services that are necessary for them to improve their quality of life. Since its founding in 1992, Operation Safety Net has reached thousands of individuals where they live – in camps along riverbanks, in alleyways, or beneath bridges and highway overpasses. In 2017, we served more than 1,600 persons experiencing or at risk of homelessness. We helped 579 of them to obtain safe housing. In doing so, Operation Safety Net not only assists with providing health care and affordable housing, but also offers this vulnerable population hope, dignity, and a sense of community. Operation Safety Net is part of [Pittsburgh Mercy](#) and [Trinity Health](#), serving in the tradition of the [Sisters of Mercy](#). To learn more, or to make a donation in support of our important work in the community, visit www.pittsburghmercy.org.

About Pittsburgh Mercy

[Pittsburgh Mercy](#), a member of [Trinity Health](#), serving in the tradition of the [Sisters of Mercy](#), is a person-centered, population-based, trauma-informed community health and wellness provider. Pittsburgh Mercy, home to the region's only Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic, is also one of the largest nonprofit organizations and employers in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Pittsburgh Mercy includes Bethlehem Haven, McAuley Ministries, Pittsburgh Mercy Behavioral Health, Pittsburgh Mercy Community Health, Pittsburgh Mercy Intellectual Disabilities Services, the Pittsburgh Mercy Parish Nurse & Health Ministry Program, Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net®, and Pittsburgh Mercy Family Health Center. Together, these Pittsburgh Mercy programs and their 1,700 employees serve more than 33,000 individuals annually at 60+ locations in Southwestern Pennsylvania. To learn more about [Pittsburgh Mercy](#), or to make a donation in support of its important work in the community, visit www.pittsburghmercy.org.

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