

New Haven church without walls serves homeless

By Mary E. O'Leary, Topics Editor

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NEW HAVEN -- Don Coviello makes the trip in from Milford every Sunday to worship in the Chapel on the Green.

The outdoor service aimed at the city's homeless, where they can get something to eat and enjoy the camaraderie of a church community in addition to an Episcopal service, is what spirituality is all about, he said.

"This is a real church," said Coviello, as he and his grandson, David Rivera, 15, participated in an art project, a special feature offered by Sarah Hovick and Evie Lindemann before the service this week.

The Chapel on the Green was celebrating four years in existence, and hasn't missed a single Sunday except when Tropical Storm Irene came through last year.

It is part of the programs sponsored by the Trinity Episcopal Church.

"They are ministering to these people who would not have the experience of the Eucharist right outside. Some people feel strange about coming into church," Coviello said.

As another example of the church's unique ministry, Coviello, 73, said one of the priests at the church on Ash Wednesday passed out ashes to people as they waited for the bus nearby, and then got on the bus to offer ashes to any others who wished to partake in the Lenten ritual.

"The outreach is terrific. Feeding people who are hungry, giving them warm clothes, then worship," Coviello said.

Coviello and his grandson sat with a about a dozen people as Hovick directed them on the art project. She is a graduate student at Albertus Magnus College in its art therapy program, while Lindemann is her teacher.

The week before, another group of participants put designs on tiles. This group painted them and they will be used to decorate a cross that will be used on Sundays from now on to better identify the space as a worship area.

In addition to the homeless, there were several students from the Yale Divinity School who came to help out.

Among them was Jamie Maury, a social worker who was in the Army for 20 years before that, who is now on his way to a new career at age 68 as an Episcopal priest. He came to New Haven with his partner, who is a student at the Yale Architecture School.

"We're two old guys going back to school," Maury said.

Hovick said more than two dozen people so far have participated in the project. She is interning at the Veterans Affairs medical center in West Haven.

"We're here through blizzards and everything," the Rev. Kyle Pedersen said of the commitment to the project.

Zachery Schatz was pleased with his work as he colored the tiles. Once homeless, he is now here to help others.

"I advocate for the homeless," Schatz said.

Luz Colville of the Catholic Worker House in the Hill, one of the coordinators of the Chapel on the Green, was offering flu shots to those who needed them.

The project attracts between 50 and 150 people each Sunday.

"It's a real mix of people. We like to say we welcome the housed and the unhoused," Pedersen said.

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