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Memorial service to pay tribute to dead homeless

By [Laura Crimaldi](#)
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They may have died without a home, but on the streets, they are not forgotten.

More than 160 homeless men and women will be remembered today at an annual interfaith memorial service at the Church on the Hill in Beacon Hill.

“Some died of violence. Some died because of exposure to the elements. Some just died from the stress of homelessness,” said Michael Bancewicz, director of community initiatives at the Church on the Hill as he arranged tea lights on the altar to be lighted in memory of the 163 lives lost.

The Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance compiled an unofficial list of the dead by collecting names from homeless shelters statewide, said spokeswoman Erin Donohue. Clients at the St. Francis House day shelter in downtown Boston made cardboard tombstones painted with flowers, birds and designs honoring people such as “Jimbo V.” and “Pamela G. Gypsy,” who was well-known in Copley Square.

“Jimbo V., he was a fixture at Park Street station,” said Bancewicz, who met Jimbo while volunteering for Ecclesia Ministries. “He was just a real special dude that everybody liked.”

Karen LaFrazia, executive director of St. Francis House, said the service is a solemn reminder of how homelessness can mean life or death. “When people see people on the streets panhandling or sleeping under a gray blanket on the Common, don’t just dismiss it as an eyesore,” she said. “When we dismiss them, they die.”



Erin Donohue, spokeswoman for Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, sits near a display of cardboard tombstones in memory of homeless people at Church on the Hill in Boston yesterday. (Staff photo by Mark Garfinkel)

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