

Early morning walk highlights homelessness awareness

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By Cole Merkel
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Interfaith leaders, local politicians and community members walked this morning from St. Andre Bessette Roman Catholic Parish (formerly the Downtown Chapel) to First Unitarian Church in the second annual Walk for Homelessness Awareness.

Paul Schroeder of JOIN and the New City Initiative, and co-organizer of the walk said the event was important as an opportunity for leaders from faith-based organizations, non-profits and civic leaders interested in ending homelessness to come together around a common concern.

Schroeder said and his co-facilitator Barbara Willer organized to walk to highlight three demographics of homelessness in the city, adult, youths and children.

“What we wanted to do was broaden peoples’ mental map,” said Schroeder, explaining the route the group took as it walked. “We wanted to highlight some of the good work that is being done.”

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The group made stops at the Bud Clark Commons and O'Bryant Square (home of Potluck on the Park) where it heard statements from City Commissioner Nick Fish and representatives from the homeless youth continuum.

“Thanks to the people here today, we the people of Portland invested \$29.5 million of our tax dollars to make sure that everybody has a safe and decent place to call home,” said Fish of the recently completed Bud Clark Commons.

“In the first five years of our 10-year plan to end homelessness, we have moved 7,000 people from the streets to home. No other city can say that... And that is because we have a unique coalition here in Portland and it's reflected here today. It's our faith community linking arms with non-profits, business and government and we've got a pretty good thing going. We know how to get results and we have been consistently investing in long term cost-effective strategies to get people to a better place,” said Fish.

On the first leg of the walk from St. Andre Bessette to Bud Clark Commons, the group passed Sisters of the Road Café and p:ear. Here, individuals were asked to remain silent, in order to listen the sounds of Old Town early in the morning. On the second part of the walk, from Bud Clark Commons to O'Bryant Square, the group passed Central City Concern's Old Town Clinic and New Avenues for Youth. During this time, individuals were asked to share their story with a person they had never met before.

On the final movement from O'Bryant Square to 13 Salmon Family Day Center at First Unitarian Church the group passed the location of Communion in the Park and Outside In. Here, the group was asked to reflect on what it had seen, heard and learned from the experience.

“The faith community is already providing a tremendous amount of support to the county. All the emergency shelter beds of shelters for children in Multnomah County are housed by the faith community,” Schroeder said. “I think that supportive relationships are one of the most important ways that the faith community can work with the county and the city to help people transitioning back to housing.”

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