

Greensboro Urban Ministry's shelters expect busy night

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GREENSBORO – Greensboro Urban Ministry's Weaver House and winter emergency shelters have housed record numbers of homeless people this winter.

As the cold weather persists and another storm made its way through the Triad Tuesday, the ministry was expecting another overflow night.

The ministry's executive director said the first crisis he expected to deal with this winter was the struggling economy.

"Now this winter, the second crisis on top of that was just that we've had a very harsh winter and we've had a lot more people come in, a lot of the traditionally homeless folks who are very reluctant to come in from outside have come in," said the Rev. Mike Aiken.

That's made for record numbers of people looking for places to come in out of the cold.

"Last night we had 100 people that are staying in our regular beds, which in this room we have room for 84 men and 16 women," said Aiken. "And on top of that we had 61 additional people."

Eric Coble stayed at the ministry's Weaver House for the last eight nights.

"This is a good place to be as far as most of the guys and the ladies here," said Coble. "They're trying to stay warm and this facility does house a lot of people. it's a very nice place."

To handle the overflow at Weaver House, mats were placed on floors wherever there was space.

"We've got people on the floor in our chapel area, in our waiting area, up in our emergency assistance waiting area," said Aiken. "We're using all of our space here."

For the second consecutive winter, Greensboro Urban Ministry has enlisted the help of seven churches, including Grace Community Church and FaithStep Ministries to help shelter the overflow numbers of homeless.

"[They] are keeping anywhere from 10 to 20 people each night at those shelters," said Aiken.

That includes people like James Gero, who planned to spend the night at Mt. Zion Baptist Church, another one of the churches operating winter emergency shelters.

"It gives me a place I can go to until the housing vouchers come through," said Gero. "It's a place out of the weather. I mean it's a blessing."

The winter emergency shelters will provide emergency shelter for the homeless until April 1.