

The roles of homeless: Churches, United Way hold simulation

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HIGH POINT – Sandra Crouch isn't actually a homeless, 85-year-old man who lives on \$552 a month, but she got to experience what it was like to be just that on Thursday evening.

The Main Street Coalition of Churches presented a Homeless Simulation, facilitated by the United Way of Greater High Point, at First Presbyterian Church. The event was designed to show people what it's like to live below the poverty level and other difficult circumstances, such as being unemployed or a single parent with multiple children, according to Paige Mone', vice president of marketing and communications for the United Way.

"Each person is assigned a role which could be anything from a single mother with two kids trying to figure out how to navigate the social security system to a homeless person looking for a job," she said.

After the participants, made up of members from First Baptist Church, First United Methodist Church, First Presbyterian Church and St. Mary's Episcopal Church, received their roles, they were given limited resources on which to live, including artificial bus passes and money.

By the middle of the game, participants were running from room to room, which contained banks, a utility office and a food bank, trying to balance their lives on the limited funds they had.

"This is very enlightening," said Ray Koontz, who was assigned the role of an unemployed person. "It really shows what people go through every day."

"This is very frustrating," added Jim McNeill, about his role as an unemployed person as well. "I'm trying to find a job, but I can't find work. Everywhere I turn, they send me to someone else for help."

Crouch said she attended the event because she wanted to know what every day life was like for people who struggled.

"I was interested to see what things are like in extreme poverty," she said. "We do several things to help the needy at my church (First Baptist Church)."

Paul Siceloff, chair of the Main Street Coalition of Churches, said the event allows the churches to determine what type of outreach projects they will pursue in the future.

"Through this guided role play, you are taken into the depths of being in deep poverty and challenged by

what you can do to take care of yourself and family,” he said. “All four of the churches will take what we’ve learned tonight and put it into action.”

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