

Saturday, October 14, marked the date of the Fall Gathering of the Presbyterian Women in the Presbytery of Milwaukee. The location was Sun Valley Presbyterian Church in Beloit.

The welcome was delivered by Kathi Ewing, with a background on the Sun Valley congregation, a community which seeks to be closer to God.

A worship service followed. The devotion was led by David Ewing, pastor of Sun Valley church. David's message was on the dark places in our lives and how God can turn the darkness into light as bright as day.

Kathi introduced Tammy DeGarmo, Executive Director for Project 16:49, a non-profit organization serving Rock County's unaccompanied homeless youth. Sixteen hours and 49 minutes is the time between school ending one day and starting the next. Tammy shared some sobering statistics on the population their non-profit seeks to help. Eighty to 85% of the youth they get are couch surfers, going from home to home to stay overnight, not really having a permanent address. Fifteen to 20% of the youth sleep on the streets or in abandoned buildings; some live in cars. Leaving an unsafe environment is a big reason for youth to become homeless.

The young women who are in the program get healthcare and counseling, housing, food, clothing, safety. The program tries to get participants off addictions, which are often used to numb the pain and trauma of being homeless. Project 16:49 partners with many resources in the community to help those in their midst. Their mission is to empower Rock County's unaccompanied homeless youth to take action to achieve their goals.

Robin House is the cornerstone of the program. It is a transformational living arrangement which feels like home. Young women between the ages of 18 to 21 are served. This prevents the women from going into the adult homeless system. There is a high success rate: 94% of program graduates are still attending school; 96% are exiting into safe and stable housing environments.

The women of the congregation showed the quilts they had made for Robin House. The freewill offering was dedicated to Robin House.

Lunch followed, and the sharing of a blanket project for Robin House residents.

The day closed with devotions and benediction.

Photos follow.

