

WHITE FLAG WRAP-UP – The Church of The Good Shepherd

The Church of the Good Shepherd's first winter serving as a primary White Flag emergency shelter for unhoused men officially ended on March 31. The White Flag program is coordinated through Wake County's Continuum of Care agency with funding for staff and logistical support from the county and the City of Raleigh. White Flag nights were activated when the forecast called for overnight temperatures of 35 degrees or below.

Raleigh experienced many more cold nights this past winter than is typical. This winter was not just longer, but also had a greater number of consecutive cold nights – one nearly unbroken stretch of 18 nights in December and a second stretch of 29 nights between January 11 and February 13 – with two back-to-back stormy weekends with severe ice accumulation in the forecast.

We practiced radical hospitality for our guests with safe overnight accommodations, a hot evening meal, and coffee in the morning. Our faithful Mennonite partners served dinner every Monday night, and volunteers shared setting up sleeping mats and distributing bed sheets, greeting, and check-in. What a wonderful way to welcome guests to our shared space in Shepherd's Hall. Below is a snapshot of the White Flag program and our participation:

Month	#Days Active	#Guests	Average Daily
November	5	461	92.2
December	18	1597	88.7
January	20	1680	84.0
February	7	615	87.9
March	4	304	76.0
Total	54	4657	86.2

Our guests were dealing with complex issues exacerbated by their lack of resources. Mental illness or chronic health conditions resulted in job loss, followed by the loss of housing and possessions. Some were also battling addiction to alcohol, prescription medications, or street drugs. Their circumstances did not matter as our job was to keep them alive during the bitterly cold nights when they had nowhere else to sleep. Our wonderfully dedicated volunteers made guests feel welcome and taken care of, and helped to ease a difficult load for White Flag staff members.

Church members, friends, and St. Michael's Church provided generous financial resources. Christ Church and Church of the Nativity supplied home-cooked meals, which were deeply appreciated by our guests. If you have friends in these parishes, please let them know what a vital resource their meals were in feeding 90 hungry men the nights we hosted. Divine treats were provided weekly by Yellow Dog, located on Person Street. Homemade bread, sweets, and rolls kept showing up at the exact right moment. What a lifesaver they were every week.

While not easy, this is a vital ministry and one CGS embraced. We laughed and prayed together and felt deep gratitude for our own circumstances. The White Flag volunteer community also benefited from getting to know one another better and appreciating our shared commitment to serving the unhoused citizens of our city.

We will keep you updated as plans for the 2026-2027 White Flag season take shape!

With great appreciation,

The White Flag Steering Committee

Gwynn Prince, Chair; Dan Harris, Beth Hahn, Brother Paul, Katie Chimenti, and Esther Hall

WHITE FLAG WRAP-UP – First Baptist Church

FBC's second winter serving as a White Flag emergency shelter for unhoused women officially ended on March 31. The White Flag program is coordinated through Wake County's Continuum of Care agency with funding for staff and logistical support from the county and the City of Raleigh. As of November 1, White Flag nights were activated when the forecast called for overnight temperatures of 35 degrees or below.

As we all know, Raleigh experienced many more cold nights this past winter than is typical. FBC hosted **62 White Flag nights** between November 10 (the first activated night of the season) and March 18 (the final activated night) – 52% of 119 nights. In comparison, last winter we hosted 46 White Flag nights between November 29 and March 4. This winter was not just longer, but also had a greater number of consecutive cold nights – one nearly unbroken stretch of **18 nights** in December and a second nearly unbroken stretch of **29 nights** between January 11 and February 13 – with two back-to-back stormy weekends thrown in! Nightly guest counts averaged **74 women**. Counts between 80 and 92 accounted for 37% of White Flag nights.

FBC guests ranged in age from teens and early twenties to middle-aged and older. (Women with children were hosted at the Salvation Army.) There was a mix of native North Carolinians and newcomers to the state. Some guests stayed at FBC just one or two nights, but many were with us most or all the nights that we hosted, which allowed us to chat and learn about one another. These women were dealing with complex issues exacerbated by their lack of resources. Many had previous lives with jobs in corporations, law firms, or real estate agencies. Mental illness or chronic health conditions resulted in job loss, followed by the loss of housing and possessions. Some were also battling addiction to alcohol, prescription medications, or street drugs. Thankfully, most of the women were taking advantage of services such as Oak City Cares and the Women's Center, and a few even obtained housing during their time with us. All the guests were so appreciative of the hospitality offered to them through FBC.

Before, during, and after all 62 White flag nights, FBC volunteers assisted White Flag staff by setting up cots and supplies in the fellowship hall and lobby, prepping hot drinks, setting out and serving meals and snacks, and breaking down cots and supplies in the morning so that the building could transform from a shelter back to a busy church with not only weekly worship services, but meetings, rehearsals, a daycare center, and a preschool. Over the course of the winter, **63 volunteers served 569 hours in total**. Most volunteers were from within FBC and our White Flag partner Community United Church of Christ, while several signed up after learning about the program from news reports or walking by the church and seeing the women in line. Some volunteered once, or a few times, and many others volunteered just about every time a White Flag night was activated.

Many other generous White Flag supporters (some also volunteers) donated meals, snacks, cocoa, tea, knit caps, gloves and mittens, water bottles, hand warmers, feminine hygiene supplies and health kits. The clothing ministry supplied additional essentials such as coats, socks, and shoes. These donations helped to defray FBC's costs and made our guests more comfortable. Financial donations from within and outside FBC earmarked for White Flag enabled us to purchase meals, coffee, cocoa packets, tea, sugar, creamer, a percolator, and many other supplies that were not provided through the Continuum of Care. These wonderfully dedicated volunteers and supporters made guests feel welcome and taken care of and helped to ease a difficult load for White Flag staff members.

It is a privilege to be part of this program that fills a critical need in our community. We will keep you updated as plans for the 2026-2027 White Flag season take shape!

With great appreciation,
Holly Cook, Holly Ivel, and Leah Reed