

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort from The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

Winter has settled into Northern California, its chilled breath and icy fingers reaching deep into the bones of all of us who live here. For some that means the creaking of arthritic joints increases while for others it may mean little more than adding a scarf or pair of gloves to their fashion ensemble.

For all of us, though, it means seeking out a little more warmth to ward off the cold. Perhaps you throw on a heavier jacket, toss an extra blanket on the bed, or throw an extra log into your fireplace.

I have an oddly-shaped house which is mostly heated by a central furnace and partially heated by a gas stove. Even on the coldest of nights, I can count on being able to keep my living space cozy for myself and my family.

Yes, you and I have the great blessing of living indoors and being able to afford to keep the heat going. Our risk of hypothermia or frostbite from one of our region's cold nights is low. But what about those who live on fixed incomes who can't afford to bump their heat up during the winter? Or those who live outside, on the streets and in the hidden places around us? What happens to people who don't have heat when the winter winds wail in from the wilderness?

According the CDC, extreme weather is a significant cause of death here in the United States. As we see on the news week after week, earthquakes, fires, and floods devastate homes, displace residents, and kill those who are caught unawares. And in the dog-days of late summer, even here on our redwood-shaded coast, there are those overcome by high temperatures and increased humidity. But both of these pale in comparison to the number of people taken by the cold.

Ten times as many people die from cold weather than do from the violent storms and other disasters which fill our news reports. The main difference in the victims is that those who succumb to the chill tend to be the poor who cannot heat their homes or apartments properly and the homeless who have or believe they have no place to go.

In Hans Christian Anderson's classic story, The Little Match Girl, a poverty-stricken child lights matches and pretends that the tiny flame each one produces can actually keep her warm. As the story progresses the reader is aware that she is being claimed by hypothermia while she fantasizes herself into warmer and warmer situations. Those who find her frozen form

the next morning feel pity, but they had refused her kindness while she lived and there is little evidence they will treat others differently as a result. Can we do better?

We live in one of the richest counties in the world, filled with modern conveniences and contrivances. Yet the number of people left out to freeze increases nonetheless. We can stop this, and we should.

Handing a couple of bucks out a car window doesn't help anyone, but handing out a clean, dry pair of socks or a warm pair of gloves can. Offering blankets, a cup of hot coffee, or a warm meal can. Helping fund agencies which provide services that get or keep people off the streets goes a long way. The Rescue Mission has beds, many area churches run cold weather shelters, and my own beloved Salvation Army provides clothing, food, and even helps with gas and electric bills to keep people from losing what little protection they might have.

You can make a difference in whether someone lives or dies this year. Will you?

Grace and peace to you. This has been Lt. Roger McCort for today's KINS Community Comment.