Helping the poor and homeless in the time of COVID-19

BY MICHELE D. MANISCALCO

Under Monday’s executive order from Governor Charlie Baker, non-essential businesses were ordered closed and Bay State residents were urged to stay home. Grocery stores have limited hours and big-box stores have reduced staffing on the sales floor.

Social distancing of at least 6 feet from other people is the rule. All well and good for those who have homes, but what becomes of those who don’t have stable housing and a living wage?

The South End News approached the neighborhood’s shelters, including Pine Street Inn (PSI) and the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) run Woods Mullen and Southampton Street shelters as well as service providers such as Project Place, Rosie’s Place, the Women’s Lunch Place, the Salvation Army, and Boston Health Care for the Homeless (BHC). Some organizations did not respond by press time.

PSI, the largest homeless services provider in New England, provides emergency shelter, permanent housing, and meals to over 2,000 people per day. Given the dormitory-style accommodations in the shelter and the fact that guests vary in physical health and mental health, it is a challenge to maintain a safe social distance and to ensure prescribed hygiene practices among guests.

According to vice president of marketing and communications Barbara Trecman, PSI is continuing as many of its services as is safely possible with practical modifications such as screening guests with assistance from BHC before they enter the shelter each night, and guests showing symptoms of COVID-19 are referred to another location for quarantine.

Once admitted, guests are

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The Salvation Army facility at 1580 Washington Street has moved all of its food distribution, both meals and food pantry packages, outside the building to avoid contact, and only essential staff are permitted inside the building as of Friday, March 20, according to Major Kimberly Smith.

Food pantry packages are being distributed by appointment on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with emergency provisions provided as needed on Wednesdays. Smith said that the facility is being cleaned frequently and staff wear gloves and are complying with prescribed sanitation measures.

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COVID-19 preventive measures provided by state and federal officials. In terms of the number of meals being served, Smith observed, “As of late February, we had seen a decrease; however, over the last week, we have seen an increase. We suspect the number of clients is the same, yet people are fearful and cautious to come and receive the services.”

Clients are being asked not to bring their children when they come to food distribution. Smith added, “We are limiting contact to try to have zero contact, which is the opposite approach we normally take.”

Project Place is continuing its mission of offering low-income and homeless residents education and job skills and job search training by switching from in-person to online sessions and lessons. Project Place director of development Katry Dirks reported that staff are calling and emailing current and former clients several times a week to support their work searches and staff and volunteers are conducting mock interviews with clients by phone.

Project Place Enterprise participants were offered two weeks of paid leave from their job placements during the virus restrictions, although some who prefer to continue working on-site are doing so to maintain the physical social distance. Dirks spoke proudly of Project Place’s recent efforts to give participants without access to smartphones or a tablet, such as providing donated Chromebooks and “learning bags,” backpacks containing materials on resume writing and job search skills, and self-care tips such as managing stress.

In the Work Ready class, most students are using Google Classroom, with three daily lessons on paper, while PP is continuing to enroll new students. Dirks shared a March 20 comment from a participant that read, “I wanted to thank you for your support through this hard time. Project Place has been one of the most useful resources I’ve ever had in my life. Project Place has helped me so much in good times and its hard. And for that I wanted to say thank you because I don’t know if I could do anything without your help. Even though the facility has been shut down, you have found ways to continue to work with us from home and stay connected. Thank you for checking in on me and answering all of my questions. Even though we aren’t physically at Project Place, the amount of support and communication is the same. That is something I was scared of not being consistent in the beginning, but was proven wrong. So thank you once again, Victoria, and thank you, Project Place.”

In a telephone interview, Project Place executive director, Suzanne Kenney talked about the Coalition for Homeless Individuals (CHI), a coalition of 40 organizations that work together to ensure that individuals who need feeding are fed and the facility has been going strong. CHI, which began with a core group of 6 or 7 organizations, including Project Place, St. Francis House, FSI and others, has been having weekly conference calls including representatives of all 40 CHI members with officials from the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and other state agencies to discuss how to adapt programming to the COVID-19 guidelines and the needs of the homeless service providers.

Kenney said, “Lynda, Barry Bock from BHCHP, Karen LaFrazia from St. Francis House and I initiated CHI because the needs of homeless individuals across the state are pretty diverse. Citizens of Project Place are trying to get a job to support themselves and their families. We are all part of a continuum to help people transition out of homelessness.”

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What you need to know

Submitted by the City of Boston

On Monday, March 23, Governor Baker issued an emergency order requiring all non-essential businesses to close, including retail stores, restaurant take-out and delivery, and parks will remain open for passive activities (no groups or sports).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW
- All City of Boston playgrounds and tot lots have been temporarily closed. Parks will remain open for passive use, but we encourage everyone to practice social distancing while in the park. Maintenance in our parks will continue.
- All Boston Public Schools are closed from March 17 through April 27. Read the press release. With schools closed to students, the City will continue to provide free breakfast and lunch meals to all Boston students. View a map of meals sites for children and youth. Locations for public library locations are closed until further notice.
- All Boston Centers for Youth & Families pools, gyms, and fitness centers are closed. By this Wednesday, March 18, all BCFP programming will be suspended. Only select BCFP centers will be open for youth meal distribution during school closures.
- Starting on March 17, the city is suspending all regular activity at construction sites in Boston.
- Starting on March 17, the MBTA is reducing its services. Visit the MBTA website for more information.
- Governor Baker issued an emergency order limiting gatherings to 25 people and prohibiting on-premises consumption of food and drink at bars and restaurants, beginning on March 17 and effective through April 3. The Governor's order will take effect in Boston on March 17. Read the City of Boston Licensing Board announcement.
- The 2020 Boston Marathon has been postponed until Monday, September 14, 2020. For more information, please visit the Boston Athletic Association (BAA) website.

Crime

Firearm Recovered During Traffic Stop in the South End

Submitted by Boston Police Department

One less gun: At about 1:45 AM on Sunday, March 15, 2020, officers assigned to District D-4 (South End) made two on-site arrests and recovered a loaded firearm in the area of 399 Harrison Avenue in the South End.

While on patrol in the area of the aforementioned location, officers observed a motor vehicle operating without the headlight illuminating. Officers activated their emergency equipment and conducted a traffic stop in the area of 399 Harrison Avenue. Officers approached the vehicle and spoke to the operator and the rear passenger, the front passenger seat remained unoccupied. The operator stated that he did not possess a valid license to operate.

Both occupants were removed from the vehicle, and officers subsequently recovered a black Beretta 9mm firearm loaded with seventeen rounds of live ammunition, located underneath the front passenger's seat. Further investigation led officers to discover the firearm had been reported stolen out of Pennsylvania. Both occupants were taken into custody.

Officers arrested the operator and the rear passenger. Both are expected to be arraigned in Boston Municipal Court on charges of Unlawful Possession of a Firearm, Unlawful Possession of a Loaded Firearm, Unlawful Possession of Ammunition, and Receiving Stolen Property.

Advice on Pets, Life, Love

BY MONICA COLLINS

Dear Dog Lady,

I have written on the matter of "comfort dogs" in no-pet buildings (condos and rental apartments). I have letters from my doctors supporting my need for such a dog, because of my medical condition (atrial fibrillation), however, I expect push back from some board members even though we have had three comfort dogs in the condo for fun.

There is much literature on the subject and growing. I would like a document mention and support presented upfront from when I make my case. I very much enjoy your columns and value your comments.

—Robert

Dear Robert,

You refer to "comfort dogs," which are technically known as "emotional support animals." These are not "service dogs," specifically trained animals that assist people with disabilities. Service dogs enjoy rights under the law; emotional therapy dogs do not. Still, these recommendations made for emotional therapy pets in pet-averse housing with the proper certification. You are doing the right thing by getting letters from your doctor: you should also check out the American Journal of Cardiology, which conducted a study showing how pets are linked to the heart's ability to handle stress. This article would be an important document to show the condo Board considering your own heart condition.

Proactively work with the condo’s Board to determine what type of dog (large or small, breed or mixed) is preferable. Let them know you take this very seriously. Continue to do research. There’s plenty to read about “emotional therapy dogs” on the Internet. Finally, you must answer the Board members who will reasonably care for the animal. Make it easy for them to embrace your emotional and healthy needs to live with a pet.

Dear Dog Lady,

We adopted an eight-month-old yellow Labrador retriever from a rescue family after the young daughter became allergic. Our Lab liked to snuggle and bite my hand, and would tug on my shirt or pant legs. So when I was playing with him I put on comfy clothes. His barking was always gentle and really didn’t hurt. He finally got over it and turned into a great friend. "Lou," the realtor who complained to you about her nipping dog, should just play with the pup and, as you said, keep calm.

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Remembering Vin McCarthy, political trailblazer

By Sue O'Connell

Vincent “Vin” McCarthy was a news reporter’s dream: a well-connected and inquisitive source who was reliable and endlessly quotable. But reporters had to work for the information they needed, as it often came couched in multiple digressions, anecdotes, and monologues punctuated by his bouts of laughter. McCarthy was a great storyteller—especially when he was the subject of a story.

This 1999 Bay Window interview, for instance, perfectly encapsulates what McCarthy was all about, as the attorney and long-time activist wound off on a host of experiences, such as the confusion that ensued when a right-wing attorney, also named Vincent McCarthy, surfaced to challenge Boston’s domestic partner ordinance. “He thinks he’s doing God’s work and I know that I’m doing God’s work—the liberation of gay people is one of the great works of God in the 20th century and it cannot be stopped,” said McCarthy.

Then he discussed his ill-fated marriage to a woman: “When we met each other on our first date we had eight or nine shots and sodas apiece. She talked about being a tomboy and I talked about being a sissy...It was love at first sight.”

From there, McCarthy turned to his “life after life experience” on a hospital operating table in 1979: “I was in this black box with a white light and I went, ‘Fuck this, I don’t want to die yet,’ and I sat up on the table and I started talking.”

He also opened up about his then-current battle with Barrett’s Esophagus, which is often a precursor to esophageal cancer. “The nature of this illness that I am currently dealing with is that I could be dead within 12 months. The other side is that it is more than likely that I will beat it. But if I beat it, I will be one of the few who beat it.”

But McCarthy’s most revealing comment was his certainty about one side effect of his illness: “Something will come out of this crisis. Something good will come out of it.”

Indeed, the thought of McCarthy’s life was channelling hard life lessons and challenges into activism and advocacy on behalf of vulnerable people. As a result, he left a long and admirable legacy of social justice work when he passed away Jan. 29 at age 79.

After presidential candidate Bobby Kennedy was assassinated in 1968, McCarthy, who managed Kennedy’s campaign

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Living Through This Moment Together

REV. IRENE MONROE

In a responsible response to the coronavirus outbreak, also known as COVID-19, church and worship services across the globe are canceled. Traditional Bible study has gone online. Services are watched on Zoom, and old videos of singing church choirs have popped up in my inbox. Our global engagement with one another right now is social distancing while staying connected, revealing our acts of spiritual communion.

This pandemic doesn’t call for pandemonium, petty divisions, political stragglers, or panic buying. We are all in this together. Our collective concern should be about saving lives and not the momentary spending of our lifestyles.

This global crisis highlights how we are bound in shared humanity. And as such, we are to take seriously medical historian and epidermiologist expert Howard Markel advise: “Coronavirus is a socially transmitted disease, and we all have a social contract to stop it. What binds us is a microphone – but it also has the power to separate us. We’re a very small community, whether we acknowledge it or not, and this proves it. The time to act like a community is now.”

The act of inclusive community is a difficult concept and lived reality to actualize. Markel’s words that we should act like a community are heartful, particularly in this time of polarization we witness on local, national, and international levels. This “us versus them” mentality infects places like even our churches that by their very existence and ethos mean community.

For example, on March 15, I was invited to be the guest preacher at a United Methodist Church. However, I didn’t preach because of COVID-19 warning to remain out of congregate settings, avoiding mass gatherings, and maintain distance (approximately 6 feet or 2 meters). For months the pastor and I had been finalizing plans for us to come out to preach and celebrate with the church its upcoming 15th anniversary as a Reconciling Congregation in March. UMC Reconciling Congregations welcome people of all gender expressions and sexual orientations. In his letter inviting me he wrote the following: “Given the proximity of this year’s observance to the next UMGC General Conference vote re: LGBTQ+ legislation in Mar 2020, it is important to us that we invite a preacher who can encourage us during a tumultuous time in our relationship with our global connection and, to be honest, in our congregation’s own internal connections.”

Just minutes after my phone call ended, my smartphone flashed the Associated Press headline: “Methodists propose split on gay marriage, clergy impose.”

I let out a long sigh of despair, thinking, why are we LGBTQ+ people of faith loving a church that doesn’t love us. On March 15, I looked forward to delivering a homily about healing our “tism.”

The proposed schism to be voted on in May at the General Conference in Minneapolis would divide the church’s third-largest denomination worldwide. While the current UMCG will allow LGBTQ2 marriages and clergy, the impending split will create a new “tradi- tionalist Methodist” denomination, allowing outright discrimination and demonization of LGBTQ people in the name of God.

“This is an issue facing all people, allowing each part of the Church to remain true to its theological understanding, while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity, and respect of every person,” the proposal, “PROTOCOL OF RECONCILIATION & GRACE THROUGH SEPARATION” stated.

In the sermon I didn’t preach, I wanted to convey that it is not enough just to look outside ourselves to see the places where society is broken. It is not enough to talk about institutions, churches, and workplaces that fracture and separate people based on race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation, and not see these prejudices and bigoted acts in ourselves. We cannot heal the world if we have not healed ourselves. So perhaps the most significant task, and the most challenging work we must do first is to heal ourselves. And this work must be done in relationship with our justice work out in the world. This pandemic we are experiencing shouldn’t divide us as a community, a nation or a world.

In Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” he was struggling to change a nation. King was disheartened to receive criticism from clergy he considered to be his colleagues and on the battlefield toward justice with him. However, King understood the interconnectedness of human life and the intersectionality of oppressions. His world view of global community resonates in these words: “In a real sense all life is interrelated. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I cannot help but feel that the impetus I have for what I ought to be when you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be... This is the interrelated structure of reality.”

Let us be united in this struggle together not only heal ourselves of our indifferences toward one another but also to heal a world fighting to save its life.

We have never been where we are today as a nation, from natural disasters to international attacks, hate crimes and unmentionable acts of violence, to now a health pandemic.

In honoring the actuality of all human life, let’s care for ourselves and each other.

McCarthy
Continued from page 5

in Massachusetts, was among a group of supporters who mourned the grief and found in the group the Robert F. Kennedy Children’s Action Council, an organization dedicated to uplifting disadvantaged and at-risk youth.

When McCarthy entered recovery from alcoholism in the early 1970s, he started doing probate court legal work for the newly-opened homeless shelter Pine Street Inn — the beginning of a near-50-year tenure of service to, and support of the organization and its mission. "Vin, in particular, really understood what life was like for others," Pine Street Inn Executive Director Mark Almeida said. "He was the most authentic guy." The court hoped his presence could help others understand the city’s insides. "We know what it’s like to come in and have that sense of your life going sour," he added.

Vin Almeida worked as an advocate at the prestigious firm Hale and Dorr (now known as WilmerHale) in the early 1980s, McCarthy, who grew up in Brighton and graduated from Harvard Law School, did the unthinkable: he came out publicly as a gay man. Not surprisingly, he then turned his attention to gay rights advocacy, becoming a co-founder and early board member of the Human Rights Campaign, co-founder of the Massachusetts Lesbian and Gay Bar Association, and chair of the Massachusetts Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth under Gov. William Weld, and a member of Harvard AIDS Institute’s (HAI) International Advisory Council, among many other involvements in our community. McCarthy maintained close friendship and co-parenting relationship with esquire Mary Crosby for the remainder of his life; they were jointly honored with Lifetime Achievement Awards for their community service by the Family Pride Coalition (now the Family Equality Council) in 2004.

As the coronavirus pandemic tests our societal bonds, I’ve thought a lot about McCarthy, his legacy, and what his life means for us all.

Rest in peace, Vin McCarthy.

Dog Lady
Continued from page 4

favorite cheesy close for substitution. Her dog nibles at her because the dog considers her the “mom.” My dog stopped nibbling at me when he was around 15-month-old. We also took him for 12 weeks of training which was great for all of us.

Dear Bill,

Your feedback provides overwhelming evidence that assuming puppy behaviors cause and exist with training and aging. Your Lady grew up. So did you. Bruna for taking your pup to training classes and for realizing the exercises helped you as much as your dog.

You are excited of the important patience when dealing with a young dog. You also remind us to keep an elastic outlook and juicy chores. Nobody can expect the new dog to be perfect.

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