



# MASSACHUSETTS HOUSING AND SHELTER ALLIANCE

INITIATING SOLUTIONS TO END HOMELESSNESS

July 2009

Dear Friend:

Fr. Bill McCarthy died on July 24, 2009. He was eighty-two years old. As many of you know, Father Bill's Place in Quincy was named after him because of his care and advocacy for the homeless poor. Please read about Father Bill's life and commitment to ending homelessness in the news articles below.

I had the opportunity, honor and joy of being able to work directly with Fr. Bill for many years. The full extent of his charity, kindness and compassion is a story that may never be fully told. His direct help and assistance extended far beyond the homeless to ordinary, everyday people from every walk of life. As a Catholic priest, he seemingly embraced the concept of *alter Christus* and took very seriously the human person before him and the gospel demand to love and serve our neighbor.

In addition to this compassion, he also had a deep sense of justice that he brought to his work with the homeless. He was a driving force in the effort to emphasize housing the homeless poor and truly believed that Fr. Bill's Place could one day really close. All those who knew him will miss him. Those who truly knew him will remain committed to the vision of ending the scandal of homelessness and shelters in our community, state and nation.

Sincerely,



Joe Finn  
President & Executive Director



# Father Bills & MainSpring

NOBODY SHOULD BE HOMELESS

July 27, 2009

**The People's Priest:**

**Rev. William "Father Bill" McCarthy**

I had the pleasure of working side by side with Rev. William "Father Bill" McCarthy for the past thirteen years. What I realized right away was that he was the "people's priest." He was always true to the mission of God, and never let political pressure for an unpopular issue influence his path, his beliefs or his faith.

He was someone who taught a community how to "love thy neighbor" and take care of a person when they are struggling. He never judged the individual and believed in people, even when they didn't believe in themselves.

He showed me the kind of courage you need to care for everyone who comes to your door. He taught us that when faced with great challenges, our belief in God's work will move us forward, even when we find ourselves without the resources and answers to the crisis.

When the only teen shelter on the South Shore was threatened with extinction, he miraculously raised the funds in one week to keep it open. There was another house he saved from closing whose members had fled domestic violence. These are just few examples.

Through the years, thousands of people have been assisted by Father Bill's Place because he never took "no" for an answer. Now that he has been called home, we must remember how he showed us to work together to make sure everyone has a place to call home.

To all of us, he has been a great leader, a great priest, and a great friend. I promised him that we will work hard every day to realize his dream of "taking the sign down" at Father Bill's Place; because nobody should be homeless.

God Bless You, Father...

John Yazwinski

President & CEO

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## Father Bill's Place founder remembered as tireless advocate for the homeless

By LANE LAMBERT

Sat Jul 25, 2009

QUINCY - When visitors came to see him at Father Bill's Place, the Quincy homeless shelter he helped start, the Rev. William McCarthy often pointed outside to the sign with the shelter's name on it.

"I look for the day when we can take that down," he'd say.

The man known to many simply as Father Bill didn't live to see that day. He died Friday morning at a nephew's home on Cape Cod at age 82 after two years of failing health. Even in the last weeks of his life, he was still doing what he could do to reduce the problem of homelessness.

Born to Irish immigrant parents in Haverhill and ordained as a Catholic priest in 1952, the Rev. McCarthy had friends and admirers ranging from shelter guests to the late Thomas Flatley, the billionaire Milton real estate developer who called him "the salt of the earth."

For Massachusetts housing advocate and former Father Bill's Place director Joe Finn of Quincy, the Rev. McCarthy was a man of deep, matter-of-fact faith - "a very generous human being with an intense awareness of the need of people around him."

Nationally known homeless advocate Philip Mangano called the Rev. McCarthy "a modern good Samaritan" who tended to the immediate needs of those on the street and worked to get them into secure housing and a stable life.

"He saw them not as 'the other,' but as his neighbor," said Mangano, director of the federal Interagency Council on Homelessness in President George W. Bush's administration.

As pastor at St. John the Baptist in Quincy and later the face of Father Bill's Place, the Rev. McCarthy was tireless in his efforts to raise attention and money for "those who aren't recognized," as he put it in a 2007 Patriot Ledger interview.

Terse and persistent, he would not hesitate to push wealthy donors like Flatley for additional donations, even after they had handed him checks for \$50,000 or \$60,000. When he went to city hall to press his case, he usually parked his aging car in the mayor's reserved space. No one objected.

Finn, now a Quincy city councilor, said the Rev. McCarthy was an early advocate for dealing with poverty and housing as the root cause of homelessness, "not as a matter of charity but as a matter of justice."

At the same time, Finn said the Rev. McCarthy never lost sight of the immediate needs of those who came knocking at the church door for help.

Once, at St. John's, another priest on staff discovered that all the mattresses had been removed from the rectory's guest rooms. The Rev. McCarthy had given them to a family that had just found a place to live but had no furniture.

The Rev. McCarthy said he never considered another vocation. A graduate of St. John's Seminary in Brighton, he was assistant pastor in Chelsea and Dorchester before becoming pastor at St. John's in Quincy in 1977.

He opened the emergency shelter that became Father Bill's Place in the winter of 1984 with a few cots in the church basement as overflow beds for the Salvation Army's shelter. He quickly discovered that did not sit well with all his parishioners.

"If you want to be popular, don't start a homeless shelter," he said.

In 1988, the Quincy Interfaith Sheltering Coalition opened a permanent shelter in the ex-Registry of Motor Vehicles building on Broad Street. By that time there was no question about whose name would be on the new shelter.

The Rev. McCarthy retired as an active priest in 1995, but the shelter remained his unofficial parish until the end.

Before injuring his hip in 2007, he made the hour commute from Cape Cod to the shelter every week. In early July, he was soliciting support for the shelter's annual Food Fest fundraiser July 28.

"He was always talking about making that last call," said John Yazwinski, the executive director of Father Bill's & Mainspring.

## Rev. William McCarthy was 'everybody's priest'

By Lane Lambert

Jul 25, 2009



GREG DERR/ The Patriot Ledger

QUINCY 1/9/07 FATHER BILL , STILL GOING STRONG  
Father Bill McCarthy who has turned 80, has spent 55 years in the priesthood . A champion of the homeless father Bill still stops in at Father Bill's , a homeless shelter which he started in a former RMV office in Quincy. The shelter houses dozens of homeless men and women each night keeping them off the cold streets and providing an opportunity to get back into the mainstream of society.

QUINCY - By the time the guests and staff at Father Bill's Place shared a lunchtime moment of silence Friday for the Rev. William McCarthy, people from Quincy to Washington,

D.C., were already telling stories about the man many knew simply as "Father Bill."

At the shelter, Andie Jermain tearfully recalled how the Rev. McCarthy helped find an apartment for her and her daughter, so they would not be homeless anymore.

On Capitol Hill, U.S. Rep. William Delahunt saluted him as a friend to the poor and powerful as well as "a force of nature" in pursuit of help for the down and out.

In the hours after the Rev. McCarthy died Friday morning at 82, it quickly became clear just how wide his circle of friends was, from the highest places to the low.

"He was everybody's priest," said John Yazwinski, the executive director of the Father Bill's and Mainspring shelters.

As guests and shelter workers consoled each other Friday, Jill Crosby recalled the Rev. McCarthy's patience through her struggles to move from the street to a sober, stable life.

"He never gave up on me," she said. "He would go to the wall if he knew you were trying."

Crosby and others smiled at the memory of seeing the Rev. McCarthy join homeless, recovering alcoholics for cigarette breaks outside the shelter.

Delahunt and former Quincy mayor Arthur Tobin were among those who saw another side – his ceaseless efforts to raise money for Father Bill's, the shelter's clients, and in later years the rooms and apartments the Quincy Interfaith Sheltering coalition bought and leased for clients like Crosby.

"You knew when he called, it was going to cost you," Delahunt said. "And you knew you could never say no."

Yazwinski remembers the time when the Rev. McCarthy sat down for a french-fry lunch with homeless teenage girls at another social agency's program in Weymouth. The house's owner wanted to sell, and the Rev. McCarthy wanted to know what would happen to the girls if the program closed.

He decided then and there that the Quincy Interfaith Sheltering Coalition should buy the house. He made some calls and before long the agency had \$150,000 for the purchase.

The Rev. McCarthy once told Quincy city clerk Joe Shea why he liked to buy big, wide-bodied cars – not for a comfortable ride for himself, but because they could hold more turkeys to give away during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.

Back at Father Bill's Place, Jill Crosby said anyone who knew him could tell a similar tale.

"We're not gonna be the same without him," Crosby said.

## Father Bill was truly the angel

By Bella English, Globe Columnist | July 26, 2009



From left: John Yazwinski, the Rev. Bill McCarthy, Jim Wells, and Scott Wahle at last year's 14th annual Father Bills Food Fest and Auction at Marina Bay in Quincy. (Bill Brett for The Boston Globe/ File 2008)

Most people don't have buildings or bridges or parks named after them, until they die. The Rev. William McCarthy, known around the South Shore simply as Father Bill, had a building named after him years ago, long before he developed health problems that led to his death Thursday night at age 82.

Father Bill's Place in Quincy is very much like its namesake: a simple building with a big heart. It opened its doors 20 years ago; before that, McCarthy had let homeless folks stay in the basement of St. John's School; he was pastor at the church. Neighbors began to complain, so the priest began looking for another space. He found one near the animal shelter on a dead-end road - no neighbors to complain.

Though he was proud of the shelter, his goal was always to take the sign down and close the doors. He had hoped he was just filling a gap until a more permanent solution came along. It wasn't to be. In fact, from one Quincy shelter for homeless men in 1988, the organization McCarthy helped build now includes a network of shelters for men and women, families, teens in trouble, battered women, and veterans. There's transitional housing, until the "guests," as he always called them, get on their feet. There's a work-training program, a health care program.

Nearly two years ago, Father Bill's merged with MainSpring, a Brockton social services agency; today, Father Bills & MainSpring is the go-to organization for homelessness south of Boston.

"Father Bill's has gone from a \$3 million operation to \$13 million," says Jim Wells, a board member who chairs the annual Food Fest and Auction every summer at Marina Bay. That first event 15 years ago netted \$3,000. Last year, it raked in \$330,000.

Wells, one of legions who think Father Bill walked on water, recalls the fifth annual fund-raiser. "The skies over Boston Harbor looked like something out of 'Ghostbusters.' There were huge black clouds, and we all thought the worst storm ever was coming." McCarthy went over to a corner with his Bible and began saying prayers. "The skies cleared and parted, and we had a bright red sunset," says Wells. "How did we go from a hurricane one moment to the calming of the skies?" It is, for Wells and others who know McCarthy, a rhetorical question.

If McCarthy had connections in high places, he also had plenty of earthly connections and put the touch on all of them for his various projects. Arthur Connelly, chairman of South Shore Savings Bank in Weymouth, was one of many supporters who McCarthy called his angels. Once, when Connelly was leaving a funeral, his friend told him to hand over his wallet, quick. Why, asked Connelly. "If I don't get it first, Father Bill will," replied his friend.

Years ago, at St. John's, the housekeeper told McCarthy the bed linens were missing. "I gave them away," came the reply. "I also gave away the furniture in Room Four." A parishioner wondered why the priest never wore the warm cashmere coat she'd given him that had belonged to her late father. He had given that away, too.

Illness didn't prevent McCarthy from fund-raising. He got in trouble last year when recuperating from hip surgery in a nursing home after using a prohibited cellphone to call donors. A few weeks ago, as he lay in a hospital bed, he had a friend hold the phone to his ear so he could make calls to his angels asking for one last round of money.

Asked about his shakedowns some years ago, McCarthy shrugged and replied: "I get on the phone to people I know can afford it."

Nor did fighting neighbors, politicians, and businessmen who wanted the homeless out of the way faze him. A teen shelter in Weymouth nearly closed when the landlord wanted to sell it to a condo developer; McCarthy raised \$227,500 to buy the property and renovate it.

Most shelters won't accept those who appear drunk; Father Bill's created a special unit for them, with Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Ten years ago, he battled neighbors and city councilors who protested a home for unwed mothers who had no other place to go.

"Certain city councilors were fighting with Father Bill, and the archdiocese was putting pressure on him to back off," says John Yazwinski, the executive director of Father Bills & MainSpring. "He didn't back off. I think he walks the walk better than anyone I've experienced in my lifetime."

A few years ago, McCarthy semi-retired - he always put the emphasis on "semi" - to the Cape to live with his nephew, but he continued making regular trips to Quincy to check on his projects. And he continued to call on his angels.

"He'd call and he'd say, 'Twenty-five thousand isn't enough; I need \$50,000,'" chuckles Wells. "He saved so many lives from alcohol, drugs, and homelessness."

On his 80th birthday two years ago, friends threw a party for McCarthy at the Lantana in Randolph. He allowed it under one condition: that they charge, with the proceeds going to benefit Father Bill's Place. "I don't care if they come to the party or not, as long as they give money," he told me.

Recently, as he was failing, he still made calls to get people to attend his 15th annual Food Fest. It is Tuesday at Marina Bay. Father Bill wouldn't care if you came, just as long as you write a check.

# The Boston Globe

## Rev. William McCarthy; built network of support for homeless on South Shore

By Emma Stickgold, Globe Correspondent | July 27, 2009



The Rev. William McCarthy was better known as Father Bill to his numerous supporters. (Suzanne Kreiter/Globe Staff/File 2005)

As he noticed more people coming to his church's doorstep in the late 1970s and early 1980s needing a place to stay, the Rev. William McCarthy, better known as Father Bill, made a few phone calls.

Within a few weeks, one of the area's first shelters was created.

Aptly named Father Bill's Place, it was the start of a network that would eventually serve homeless veterans, battered women, and teens tossed from their homes. As this network took root throughout the South Shore, the longtime pastor of St. John the Baptist in Quincy took heat for bringing in a population that was less than popular in some areas. Just as he persuaded hesitant abutters that 'love your neighbor' was more powerful than any not-in-my-backyard sentiments, he had a way with potential donors that led them to hand over thousands of dollars to cover the costs of keeping his various projects running.

"Very few people say no to me," he told the Globe in 2007. But he also did not say "No," to anyone, reaching into his pockets to help families buy sheets or fix a boiler.

A parishioner once asked him why he never wore her late father's cashmere coat that she gave him. He explained that he had given it away. "Someone came to the rectory door and needed it and I didn't."

From the beginning, the idea was to create housing - not shelters - that provided a more permanent solution, to help people find work, and to take in people who were suffering from drug addiction and alcohol abuse, even after similar facilities turned them away.

"We're not in the business of warehousing people, like those huge shelters," he told the Globe.

Father Bill died Thursday at his home in West Yarmouth. He was 82 and had suffered health troubles, including lung infections and a heart attack.

He was semi-retired, living in West Yarmouth with his nephew, and still said Mass for the homebound on Cape Cod. He was calling donors until about two weeks before he died.

What began in the basement of St. John's School in Quincy became an agency that sheltered more than 1,600 a year. A house in Quincy aimed at serving veterans was established, teens had a place of their own in Weymouth, and victims of domestic violence found beds confidentially throughout the area.

"I wasn't the most popular guy then," he recalled at a 2006 fund-raiser in Quincy. "Nobody wanted it in the area. I guess they found out the homeless weren't so bad after all."

For more than a decade, the annual Food Fest and Auction, held each August, has provided a substantial amount of money for the organization. While the state has provided funding for several dozen beds, Father Bill asked anyone and everyone for help.

It was "Begging," he said. "You have to ask."

Sam Rounseville, a Quincy realtor who often appears as "Uncle Sam" at area events, recalled running into Father Bill after making a deposit at a local bank.

"He said 'Hi, Uncle Sam, how are you?' " Rounseville said. "I said 'Great!' 'Oh really?' he said, twinkle in his eye."

Before leaving the bank, Rounseville had given him \$500.

Father Bill was once asked by a police officer whether he had a gun permit. "For what?" he asked. "Because you hold up everyone you see," the officer joked.

He was recovering from hip surgery at a nursing home when he was caught making calls from his cellphone to talk with regular donors.

A native of Haverhill, William R. McCarthy graduated from St. James High School in 1945 and St. John's Seminary in Brighton. He was ordained as a priest in January 1952.

His first assignment was St. Rose Parish in Chelsea, where he worked for 11 years. He then was pastor of St. Gregory's Parish in Dorchester for 14 years. He went to Quincy in 1977, where about 3,000 worshipers attended each week, while Christmas saw 10,000 and Easter required an extra tent outside to handle the overflow. He stayed there until his 1995 retirement.

"He could help anybody that walked in the door - it didn't matter who they were - Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, with no religion," Rounseville said.

In 1984, he pulled together fellow religious leaders and social service agencies to provide an emergency shelter - the Quincy Interfaith Sheltering Coalition. The following year, the former nurses' dormitory at the Quincy City Hospital became available to him and others. While at St. John's, he persuaded Quincy officials to give the church use of a former Registry of Motor Vehicles facility. Donors, whom he called "angels," helped expand the shelter in 1997, and when a Weymouth teen shelter was on the brink of closing, he got a donor to pay for its purchase.

"The goal is to get them back into life, not just feed and clothe them," he told the Globe in 1997.

Shelter residents could use voice mail to stay in contact with potential employers. Permanent homes were found for people. Jobs were, too.

"People appreciated his honesty and candor," said John Yazwinski, executive director of Father Bill's Place, which merged with MainSpring in Brockton in 2007.

Rather than thinking about it in terms of asking for money, "he thought he was saving lives every day, and he was always right to the point, and he did it with great humor, and he wasn't bashful at all," Yazwinski said.

"I get on the phone to people I know who can afford it," Father Bill explained to the Globe in 2002.

And it worked. The organization's budget grew from about \$3 million a year to \$13 million.

"He was what I would call the people's priest - every day it was an honor to get up and work with him," Yazwinski said.

When times got tough at the shelter, Father Bill's advice to colleagues was simple: "Just pray things get better."

Father Bill leaves two nephews and several grandnieces and grandnephews.