

Reverend Dr. G. Kenneth Carpenter  
MASH Annual Dinner and Fundraiser  
Mystic Seaport – The River Room  
May 1, 2015

I begin with a reference to the great debt that we all owe to those who made MASH a reality. From the very beginning, when a women slept for three nights on the steps of the Union Baptist Church, Mystic Area Shelter and Hospitality, Inc. (MASH) has been dependent on the efforts of caring people that turned a dream into reality. Past presidents of MASH come to mind: Mark Santucci, Billie Ward, Beth Stewart, Natalie Billing, Neil Kluepfel, Jeff Anderson, and our current president Mike Mondello. Original board members were the beginning sources of strength and were with MASH when our first fund raiser was a yard sale in front of our housing units at Colonial Manor in Groton, CT. Former executive directors Lynda McCrea and Lisa Tepper Bates brought us into the present. While addressing the social service changes that impact housing issues, Denise Collins provides leadership that enables MASH to achieve new levels of success that utilize the most effective and compassionate methods of addressing homelessness. We are fortunate to have her as our Executive Director.

Thank you for tonight, you have honored me with this recognition as the founder of MASH. However, the true beginning of MASH took place on the steps of the Union Baptist Church on three nights in July 1997. A homeless women slept on the church steps and left an envelope containing \$1.00 during the worship service on July 20, 1997. She wrote this note on the envelope: "Thank you for your overnight blessings. Fired from job after receiving a raise in wage rates. I need to speak to Dr. Carpenter this morning." After this sentence she drew a smiling face. In the space on the envelope for her address she wrote "homeless".

This event began the organization we know as MASH, Mystic Area Shelter and Hospitality, Inc. After reading the words on the church envelope I arranged for clergy, social workers and local town directors of social services to meet and the birth of MASH became a reality. It began on the steps of the Union Baptist Church, and within a short period of time we started collecting clothing and furniture in the fellowship hall for the homeless.

On a lighter note, my wife Trudy suggested that we donate our washer and dryer to MASH. Volunteers picked up these two items and delivered them to the fellowship hall of Union Baptist. Later that week, two men stopped by our home to return Trudy's lingerie, she had left it in our donated dryer! One of the men said the way they found the "interesting clothing" was that when they went to pick up the electric dryer it was too hot to handle. They said that they knew something was not quite right because the "hot" dryer had been unplugged for days! They went on to say this explained why the senior minister of the Union Baptist Church always had a smile in his face, to say nothing about the new image of the minister's wife!

I have two envelopes from this homeless person that I have given to Denise Collins. One was dropped in the collection plate on 6/15/1997, over one month before this same women became homeless. The first envelope gave a street address on Greenmanville Ave. in Mystic, CT, a donation to UBC, and a note that congratulated my wife, Trudy on receiving her doctorate. A little over one month later she was homeless. This homeless person gave the first financial donation to MASH and expressed

thanks for the shelter the porch of the church provided her. The generosity of this woman was the financial beginning of our organization.

It is important to note that this homeless woman came to a church in her time of need. Sadly, nine churches close for good each day in our country. That is approximately 63 churches closing their doors forever each week. This fact should cause us to reflect on the great loss to our culture when churches die. People are not attending and supporting churches like they did in past generations. We are losing a valuable cultural, social and spiritual resource because churches are being forced to close their doors. MASH exists because the churches of the Mystic Community gathered together and responded to the needs of the homeless. I ask you to value the place of worship in your memory, it can be a source of strength to those in dire need.

While addressing a group of potential givers, Karl Menninger, founder of The Menninger Clinic said, "I don't know you or what you want to be. But I do know that the only ones among you who will be really content in this life are those who learn how to give of themselves to those in need".

In a society where too many people go through life with catcher's mitts on both hands, it is refreshing to recall that a homeless person gave to MASH in the midst of her need not her abundance. Then again she may have had more in her homeless state than the affluent who do not understand the great joy of giving to those with less! It is said that here are 10 rules for addressing the blues in life. Rule #1 is to do something for others. Repeat that rule 9 more times!

Denise Collins, our Executive Director, and her staff know that, as they care for the homeless, it is the mandate of MASH to honor the dignity of those in need. In caring for the homeless it is good to recall the Hebrew term Tzedaka which means "righteousness not charity." Denise Collins, Kathy Keller, Marlynn Benker, Noreen Zupnik and Trisha Shah remind us that it is a privilege not a duty to help others. It is not just what MASH does, it is how MASH does it that sets us apart.

Several years ago a fellow clergyman, Rabbi Carl Astor, gave me a copy of The Eight Degrees of Giving by Maimonides (1135-1204). He was a rabbi born in Spain and one of his greatest contributions to meaningful life was his description of various levels of giving. He asked all who would listen, how well do you give of yourself and your resources? To what degree do you understand the joy of giving? These are his Eight Degrees of Giving:

1. You give but you do so grudgingly.
2. You give pleasantly but less than what is needed.
3. You give but only after a needy person asks.
4. You give before being asked.
5. You give and the receiver knows of your gift, but you do not know the receiver.
6. You give and the receiver doesn't know of your gift, but you do know to whom you have given.
7. You give in such a way that neither you nor the receiver knows the identity of the other.
8. You assist another by taking him into your life, helping him to find employment, health and contentment so that he will not need help from others. This is the highest and most difficult form of giving.

MASH maintains that the 8<sup>th</sup> level of giving, according to Maimonides, should be our standard as we help those in need.

Thank you for honoring me this evening. Truly we are all involved in a worthy cause. Karl Menninger was correct about true happiness being a gift given to those who give to those in need. My closing words are prompted by the great Roman poet better known as Horace. In 23 BC he reflected on his life of literary success as it compared to the successes of the great builders of the Roman Empire. As he gave credit to the military might, the political power, and the engineering success of Rome, he concluded that the immortality of literature, actually his literature, would outlast all of Rome's greatness. History has proven him right. He wrote the following in his third book of Odes:

*I have erected a monument more lasting than bronze and taller than the regal peak of the pyramids...*

*I shall never completely die...*

I suggest to you that Horace's words "I shall never completely die" apply to what you have done to support MASH. Your generosity is going to outlast the empty efforts of those who seek only their selfish goals. When you go beyond serving yourself you build something immortal, something that is going to outlast the temporary and shallow achievements of vanity. Like Horace's poetry, your generosity to MASH will outlive you. Your caring support of MASH enables all of us to claim like Horace "***Non Omnis Moriar***": I shall never completely die.

Thank you for tonight and thank you for your support of MASH.