



Throughline of Holy Cross Alumni Leadership, Service Helps Evolve Boston's Landmark Pine Street Inn

From co-founder to current board chair, New England's largest homeless services organization addresses the complex, evolving issue with Crusaders in key roles. *BY SANDRA GITTLEN*

In the late 1960s, Monsignor Frank Kelley '63 was assigned to a parish in Dorchester, Massachusetts, where he witnessed the toll of alcohol abuse and addiction on the men of Boston. At the time, the Pine Street Inn, which is now New England's largest organization providing emergency shelter, street outreach, job training and permanent housing, had just been co-founded by Paul Sullivan, a counselor in recovery from alcohol addiction, who was drawn to the work.

Monsignor Kelley teamed with Sullivan and other Boston priests, and helped evolve Pine Street into one of the most progressive and successful models for helping the housing insecure in the U.S.

"Paul taught all of us to consider the individuals who stayed with us as our guests," Monsignor Kelley says. "They were never 'patients' or 'clients.' And so all of us learned early to respect our guests."

Monsignor Kelley also kicked off a legacy of board leadership by fellow Holy Cross alumni, which has spanned 50 years and continues this summer, as outgoing board chair Patrick Jones '73 hands his gavel to Lorn Davis '90.

"At Holy Cross, there was a sense that you were supposed to make a contribution, that this is what God wants me to be doing. All Holy Cross graduates share this common purpose," says Monsignor Kelley, who last served as the organization's board chair 25 years ago.

Davis agrees, noting that homelessness is a critical area in which to affect change: "The face of homelessness in Boston is a lot broader than you think, and there are a lot of different reasons that people find themselves without a place to stay. There but by the grace of God go I."

Monsignor Kelley, Jones or Davis have seen Pine Street through its many



(opposite, left to right) Lorn Davis '90, Monsignor Frank Kelley '63 and Patrick Jones '73 have helped guide the evolution of Pine Street Inn from its beginning to today. *(above)* Pine Street Inn staff and guests head from the original Pine Street location in Boston's Chinatown to the current iconic "tower" building in the South End. *(left, top)* Volunteers serve food to guests in 1971. *(left, bottom)* Every night, an outreach van travels city neighborhoods, hoping to convince those on the street to come inside.

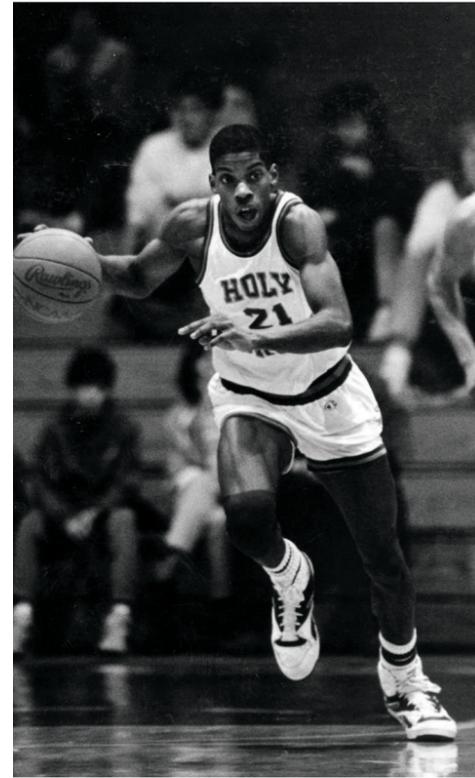
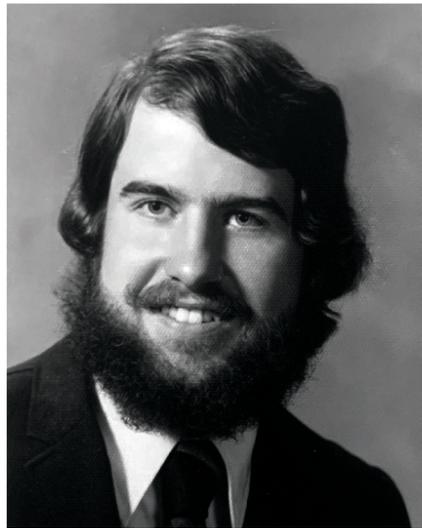
iterations, including the addition of a women's shelter, the increase in behavioral and mental health services and workforce development programs, and its current focus on housing, with 37 residences and new projects across the city. They are using their education and experience to guide the organization, which now provides services to more than 1,400 individuals daily.

'Three hots and a cot'

In Monsignor Kelley's first years at Pine Street, the mission was clear: Provide meals and a bed for the several hundred men who were landing on the streets at night after drinking too much. "They were either

going to come to Pine Street or the jails downtown, also known as "The Tombs," he says. "We quickly figured out how to give them what they needed: food, shelter and safety or, as we called it, 'three hots and a cot.'"

In the early '80s, the organization expanded to offer services to women experiencing homelessness. At the same time, the state government had started to release men and women from mental institutions, which meant they often ended up on the street. Although the Pine Street team had extensive experience helping those battling alcoholism, they were unprepared to deal with the complexity of mental illness,



according to Monsignor Kelley: “The numbers [of people needing services] more than doubled. We suddenly became the largest mental institution in the state and we almost lost control.”

The pressure that came with many guests in a small space led the group’s leadership to pursue its greatest mission: permanent housing.

At the same time that demand for Pine Street’s services was increasing, the housing bubble was taking hold. Older area residents and families who could no longer afford their rent or mortgage began showing up in meal lines.

“Classically lower income people were

being shut out of the Boston housing market,” Jones says, and credits the nonprofit for being quick to respond. “Pine Street is always learning and trying to meet the challenge.”

In fact, the organization’s keen awareness of its population’s needs is what drew Jones into service: “I saw it as a great organization that was addressing an incredibly difficult problem. As a sociology major at Holy Cross, I learned that the line between being housed and being taken care of and not at risk was

a very thin line when you introduced any modicum of alcoholism, addiction or mental illness. And if you didn’t have social or familial support, it was easy to tip over into homelessness.”

The meal lines at Pine Street, he says, were an example of this reality: “Former colleagues and other people you knew would be in line for a meal.”

Jones became part of the leadership team that began to pivot Pine Street from the idea of providing shelter to providing

housing. “Shelter is not a good place, it is temporary. Housing is where stability can really be achieved,” he says.

Meeting people where they are

To start people on the road to housing security, Pine Street first has to find them and bring them in for triage. Every night, an outreach van traverses the city’s neighborhoods, hoping to convince those on the street to come inside, with no demand that guests get sober. It was on those rides that Davis saw the powerful ways that Pine Street Inn makes a difference in the effort to end homelessness and furthered his commitment to support the Inn.

“Some people accept the invitation, some do not,” he notes. “We meet people where they are. It is an eye-opening experience.” What surprised him most is the face of homelessness in Boston: “If people close their eyes and think of someone who is homeless, they wouldn’t picture many of the people we meet. There are folks who may be gainfully employed and have families, but they just don’t have the means to have a permanent place to live and call home.”

“If you are on the street, you don’t know night from day, you don’t eat well, you become susceptible to diseases like tuberculosis,” Monsignor Kelley says. “Most systems were not built to deal with this population.” He adds that with housing insecurity often comes isolation: “Being an individual is dangerous. Your humanity gets beat down. God made us to live in community and not as individuals.”

While permanent housing is the ultimate goal, some Pine Street guests need services to help them adapt to and sustain independent living. For instance, behavioral and mental health counseling and job training are key services offered.

One of the more well-known programs, the Food Services Job Training Program, runs in partnership with Ninety Nine Restaurants. Company founder Charlie Doe visited Pine Street and realized that a properly trained workforce could be

a win-win for Boston: Help the housing insecure and provide a pipeline for much-needed skilled kitchen workers.

“Charlie told us, ‘You know, you’re really not going to help anyone here unless you get them a job and get them employed,’” Monsignor Kelley says, adding Doe launched the program himself. “He went out and raised the money, and then built an industrial kitchen for us.” The one-year program has over 100 graduates annually and is a destination for restaurant managers in need of employees, he adds.

Getting those experiencing homelessness into homes

In 2019, Jones, as board chair, helped lead the largest capital campaign effort in the organization’s history, raising more than \$50 million for Pine Street’s 50th anniversary. The focus since has been set on investing on a broader scale in housing across the city, bringing the organization’s number of units to over 1,000.

“Strategically, we realized that we do not have to be a real estate developer to achieve this mission,” Davis says. “We have brought other partners along with us to optimize the deployment of capital, including those to handle design, development and construction. We are delivering the wrap-around services that allow housing to work for our guests.”

Davis says he is honored to follow in the footsteps of his fellow Holy Cross alumni and to help Pine Street fulfill its mission.

“My mother used to tell me if you get involved with an endeavor, leave it better than you found it and don’t leave without people knowing you had been there,” he says. “Fr. Kelley and Pat have met that standard. Under their stewardship, Pine Street has evolved from providing ‘three hots and a cot’ to delivering a comprehensive range of services, including housing, emergency services and workforce development to 1,400 guests each day. I will strive to meet the standard they have set in supporting Pine Street.” ■