

## **Don Boucher devoted his life to helping those in need**

In December of 2010, I attended a meeting on homelessness at Channing Memorial Church. The last of five speakers, a tall, good-looking guy with a beard, said something I thought was, well, maybe not crazy, but pretty far-fetched. He said the most successful way to get chronically homeless people off the street was to move them into an apartment of their own and then provide them with social services.

I muttered a number of things to myself, like, "Yeah, they'll trash the place in no time." But in the question time afterward I tried to be polite. I pointed out that "some of the chronically homeless might not be able to live independently in an apartment." The speaker, Don Boucher, gently refuted that with some facts about Housing First, the program he was touting, and how successful it was proving to be in Providence and elsewhere in the country.

Not entirely convinced, I met with Don after the meeting, and that began a seven-year friendship that ended, for me, at a breakfast I shared with Don less than a week before he died on May 7.

During those years, I learned what an amazing guy he was. The obituary in this newspaper mentioned some of his roles – social worker, pastor of a local church, candidate for the Newport City Council, and member of the Zoning Board of Review – but what really impressed me was something else.

Don was a strong Christian who practiced what he preached. No sanctimony, no phoniness. He gave of himself to everyone who needed help, including some who were shunned by just about everybody else. In his last conversation with me, he talked about the opioid crisis and how excited he was about seeing progress in the lives of some of the men he was working with.

Before we got up from the

breakfast table, Don told me how happy he was to be back working on the Island after commuting, for a time, from Connecticut and the Boston area. He said, "I'm really enjoying being able to spend more time with my wife and family."

What a loss! Especially for his wife, Esther, and his many children, but also for our whole community. Some people just make life richer for all of us.

**Roland F. Chase, Newport**

*NDN 5/12/18*