

## **DIANE MORRISON TRIBUTE**

**David Kilgour**

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It is an honour to be part of this last-day-on-the-job tribute to Diane, who has been an important part of the lives of all of us here today and so many clients of the mission, whom she loves. Her heart for mission clients is legendary. She practises love-based leadership, which is difficult and requires daily risks by those who opt for it.

Our family benefited from her teaching skills and empathy even before she began at the mission. She was teaching at South Hull School (Gatineau), where our children attended, in 1990, when she first began to volunteer at the Mission.

As you know, one of her first volunteer tasks was washing dirty walls. She donated two days a week until becoming an administrator in 1991 with what she describes as “severe pay cut.” In Kelly Egan’s excellent column in the Citizen about her this week, he quotes Diane saying, “Nobody would talk to me” when she began volunteering. How things have changed. Someone noted recently that so many people want to talk to her every day that it takes her up to half an hour to get from her car to her office.

When Rev. Don Anderson left in 1991, the board appointed Diane as the first female executive director of the Mission. Laird was hired in February 1993 and he became chaplain, Operations Manager and IT. Before long, the board was relying on both of them for advice on many matters. Her optimistic reports about the transformations of many men who came to the mission were and remain deeply moving to all who read them.

Her successes with clients had many good consequences. One was that the donations increased enormously after she and Laird began. I gather the donations to the mission in 1993 were about \$360, 000; last year, revenues from all sources were in the \$7 million range-for which its clients are profoundly grateful daily for the wide range of transforming programs now provided (kitchen training, education upgrading, substance abuse). Another was the building of her beloved Mission Hospice, still the only one for the homeless anywhere in Canada.

I asked an employee of the Mission recently what he thinks the secret of Diane’s success is. “Treating every staff person as important,” “working as a team”, and “speaking to everyone” were among the responses.

The Mission has become the gold standard for faith-based and other NGOs in Ottawa and well beyond. I recall, for example, looking a few years ago at some job descriptions and criteria for performance assessments. Both were excellent. From 17 employees when they began, there are now about one hundred. Working conditions, pay and benefits have improved a great deal.

You all know a lot about the wonderful person we are celebrating today. She believes that her energy and spark comes from her spiritual faith. The legacy Diane leaves is one of hope, integrity, compassion and humanity-all rooted in her Christian faith. My prayer is that the mission can build on that solid foundation as it chooses a successor and begins a new chapter. Thank you.