

The Open Door

SPRING
2009

From the Director



Fr. Eric Schimmel, C.S.C.

We have come to the season of Lent: a time of prayer, conversion, and a time to look at our lives to see how we can better conform them to the Lord. As I enter this holy season of reflection, it is hard to believe that I have been the Director here for two months.

I feel blessed that the leadership in Holy Cross allowed me to spend six months here working with Frs. Bill and Duane, Br. Richard, and the rest of the Core Staff before becoming the Director. In those six months I learned a lot! I assure you, the learning continues as Director.

In my time here, I have come to see how much we depend on our volunteers. Without you, we would not be able to serve the many that we do. André House has been blessed with an overwhelming outpouring of help during the Christmas Season and winter months for both the Soupline and the Clothing/Donations areas. Thank you to all who have helped! We pray that this enthusiasm for service will continue throughout the upcoming summer months when filling these areas with volunteers becomes more of a challenge, but the demand for our services does not decrease. Please keep us in mind especially in June, July, and August. If you are interested in working either in the Soupline or Clothing/Donations, please contact Teresa Hipp, our Volunteer Coordinator, at 602-255-0580 x302 to schedule a time to help serve our guests.

With Fr. Bill's departure to his new assignment and Fr. Duane's resignation from the Core Staff (see Fr. Duane's article in this edition), the workload for the remaining staff has increased dramatically. The existing Core members have responded extraordinarily well to these additional responsibilities, but I believe that this also presents an excellent opportunity for others to step forward. Our staff should not be the only ones blessed by having the opportunity to serve in the Clothing Closet, helping with Showers, or doing the Laundry. Therefore, one of my goals as Director is to increase the number of "special" volunteers here. Perhaps you may be interested in helping on a regular basis in the Clothing Closet, with the Showers, or the Laundry. Perhaps you may be interested in covering the Women's Transitional Home on a regular basis, which requires minimal effort - arriving by 9:00 PM, talking with the guests staying there, ensuring everything is OK, sleeping there overnight, and making sure that all are off to work, etc. by 8:15 AM.

These special volunteer opportunities are not for all. I know that many of you may not be able to assist in these ways because you are at work when we offer these services. That is OK. But if this Lent you feel God tugging at your heart to do more, there may be something here for you. We would love to have more friends here volunteering in these ways on a regular basis. If you can help with the Clothing Closet, Laundry, Showers, or the Women's Transitional Home, or if you have questions about these volunteer opportunities, please contact me at 602-255-0580 x 301.

One thing we can all do is to pray. Believe me when I say that I feel the support of your prayers every day. For those prayers, and for all that you do to help us to serve our brothers and sisters here at André House, thank you. Know that we are praying for you as well.

God bless,
Fr. Eric

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You Can't Help but Learn...

-by Fr Duane Balcerski, C.S.C

You can't help but learn at André House:

That every day is the unraveling of a mystery;
 That every opportunity to serve is a privilege;
 That we become more aware of our blessings each day;
 That there is much need for give and take every day;
 That the present situation in our country is affecting ALL of us;
 That there is no end to the generosity of our volunteers and benefactors;
 That each year our Core Community brings unique gifts to the ministry;
 That the more we give away, the more we receive;
 That we can never outdo the generosity of God in our lives;
 That God is the beginning and end of the whole of our mission;
 That if we are willing to look and listen, we will receive more than we give;
 That we become more acutely aware of our human limitations every day.

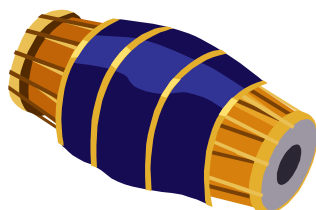


Fr Duane Balcerski, CSC

Given that last statement in learning, I feel that it is important for me to inform our extended community of André House, including benefactors, volunteers, former Core Members, and those who continue to support us in every way, physically, financially, materially and spiritually, that I discerned the need to resign from the Core Community and have done so as of 1st January, 2009. Recently I have become more aware of my own human limitations, and even with the desire to labor with all of my energy and desire, it has declined to a point where I cannot accept the responsibility of trying to do any one of the jobs at André House fully and completely, without having to call on the help of others who are already involved in other aspects of our services.

I am deeply grateful for the time that I have spent as part of the André House Core Community, for the witness of the volunteers, for the generosity of the benefactors and donors, for the commitment of the young Core Community to give one and sometimes two years of their lives in the service of others, for the professional contributions of Teresa Hipp in the office of the Volunteer Coordinator and Ted Dunne who keeps everything working at our Hospitality Center, the Resident houses and the Staff house, and for Building Joe - who keeps us all on our toes. I have been blessed deeply in the 7+ years that I have spent at André House, and I intend to continue to participate regularly in its ongoing ministry and mission.

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Hope in “The Zone”?

- by Michelle Carr



Michelle Carr

In the popular film *The Shawshank Redemption*, an elderly man who has been incarcerated for most of his adult life writes to his closest friend that “*Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.*” I would consider myself to be a pretty firm believer in the resilience of hope. Therefore, I appreciate this line’s succinct encapsulation of hope’s ability to persist even in life’s darkest hours. While my faith in hope has generally provided me with a source of light during trying times, it has recently caused me some puzzlement. This is because during my first months at André House, I began to wonder whether my trust in faith’s strength was severely misguided.

Cocaine. Gang violence. Alcohol abuse. Each day at André House I witness people engaging in self-destructive behavior unlike any I ever encountered prior to last August. I initially interpreted this conduct as symptomatic of a lack of hope. I doubted that any individual who truly believed in the prospect of a brighter tomorrow would so greatly compromise her capacity for

self-improvement. I struggled to reconcile my faith in hope’s perpetual existence with its apparent absence from “the zone,” the turbulent neighborhood in which André House operates. However, as time progresses, I am realizing that my preliminary understanding of the struggles I see here each day was incorrect.

In our dining room is a box in which our guests can place prayer requests. The staff often prays for these intentions during our daily group reflection. These small slips of paper serve as enormous windows into the thoughts of their writers. Our guests ask us to pray that they can triumph over their addictions. They ask us to pray that they can heal their broken relationships with family members and other loved ones. They ask us to pray that they can overcome whatever physical, psychological, or emotional obstacles they perceive to be holding them back from a healthier and more prosperous future. To me, the very act of writing out these intentions is evidence that hope is present in the hearts of our guests, even when its existence is not easily detected.

Throughout this newsletter, there will be appeals to our supporters for a litany of things, from donations of clothing items to eager volunteers. I would like to add one more request to the list. Please pray for our guests. It is my belief that they are hoping that you will and that they will be grateful that you did.

✪



Serving a Grumpy Christ

-by Steven Cottam



Steven Cottam

Not too long after I had come to work here at André House, I was working with Father Bill in the shower room. He was explaining to me about his philosophy and about the work, and about what kept him dedicated to the ministry after so many years. "It's because here, doing the work we do, it's so easy and obvious to see that it's Christ we serve in our guests," he said. At that moment, a very angry guest came around the corner. Upset at having been denied a shower that day (the shower list for the day was already more than full), he screamed, swore at me and Bill, flipped us off, and stormed away. I turned toward Bill and raised an eyebrow, questioning the validity of what he had just said. He smiled



and said, "Hmmm... well, sometimes Christ is grumpy."

I believe what Bill said. I fully believe, just as Bill did, that it's Christ we serve in our guests. Most of the time it's easy to remember this, easy to see the image of Christ on the faces of the kind and decent guests that we serve. But sometimes the harsh reality of what that means doesn't line up with what I expect it to, and serving Jesus ends up being a little different sometimes than I tend to envision it. When I give him clothing, Jesus often forgets to say 'thank you.' In fact, a lot of times, Jesus is very critical of the clothing selection we have available. And that's just the beginning of serving that mischievous rascal. Jesus has gotten really mad at me a number of times while I have tried to help him. Jesus got drunk once and started a fight. One time at dinner, Jesus spat on Liz. Matt caught Jesus trying to sell drugs in the parking lot once. Jesus has gotten really mad at me at dinner several times, often asking me to "take it outside." On almost any week, Jesus will threaten at least one of the staff. Saying that Jesus is "grumpy" isn't even the half of it.

So what do we do? Do we ban Jesus? Do we close our doors and say, "Jesus, you had your chance, and since you couldn't play nice, well, you can just eat elsewhere." Could you say that to Jesus?

It is not in serving the happy, smiling, grateful Christs that our faith is really put into practice, but in serving the grumpy Christs. Feeding the hungry and clothing the naked is part of our ministry; but so is forgiveness, and patience, and reconciliation. It's the second half that I find to be the more challenging, and rewarding, part of our ministry. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matthew 5: 43-48

At André House, we send our goulash down upon the just and unjust alike. We pray for those who persecute us, and we also give them blankets and let them make long distance phone calls. If we only fed the righteous, well, we wouldn't feed anyone. For that matter, if André House accepted only the just onto their Core staff, I certainly wouldn't be working here. During Lent, as we reflect upon the mystery of Christ's suffering and death, let us reflect upon the true depth of Christ's sacrifice. Christ didn't just suffer and die so that beautiful, friendly, nice people could be saved. He died also for the ungrateful and the grumpy. He came for the lost. He didn't sacrifice himself for the fake poor that we have built up in our head, but for the real poor that we encounter every day. *Cont'd on next page.*



Don't Call Me a Saint

-by Lacy Gregor

Since beginning our work at André House, the core staff and I have received a myriad of praise from family, friends and volunteers in regards to the work that we are doing. People often say, "I just don't know how you do it day after day," "you guys are saints," or "I could never do that!" It seems that some believe there is something innately holy about us, which allows us to do the work which André House requires. In receiving these well intentioned compliments, I am reminded of the words of Dorothy Day. She once said, "Don't call me a saint. I don't want to be dismissed that easily." The truth is that working at André House does not come easily or naturally to many of us, and there are days when we struggle. Yet somehow Our Father gives us the grace to continue.

A few short years ago, working at André House was nowhere in my radar. In fact, until the spring of 2005, I had never even been to André House. At the time, I was working at the All Saints Catholic Newman Center, as the Youth Minister for high school students in the parish. One Sunday morning I taught the students about Catholic social teaching and our call to minister to the poor and marginalized. Following the lesson, the students and I made several dozen sandwiches, which I planned to donate to André House that afternoon. I had never actually been to André House at the time, but I had heard about the great work being done there and figured it would be an excellent place to donate the sandwiches.

I drove from Tempe to downtown Phoenix, and as I entered *The Zone*, I felt terrified. Everywhere I looked I saw the homeless. Some were sleeping on the ground, some were sitting in their wheelchairs reading, and others were talking and laughing with friends. As I approached André House, I was unsure of where



Lacy Gregor

exactly to deliver the sandwiches and began to panic. I drove up and down 11th Ave and Jackson several times - very fearful, unwilling to roll down my window and ask someone for help. I was too scared to get out of my car, and eventually, without ever delivering the sandwiches, I drove home.

Looking back, it's hard to remember what exactly I was so afraid of. Did I think the guys in wheel chairs were going to attack me? Maybe the guys laughing with friends were making fun of me? Who knows? What is amazing to me is how far I have come since then and what God has called me to. I am clearly not a saint, nor do possess many saintly qualities. I am often clumsy, weak, inarticulate and awkward, yet somehow in all of my brokenness, the Lord finds ways to use me for His glory. During my time at André House, the Lord has been teaching me that we don't need to be particularly holy, qualified or intelligent to help build His Kingdom. We simply need to say "yes" to His call. We are called to rise above our fear and can begin by simply *getting out of the car*, looking around, and seeking what it is that God is asking of us. ☩

Grumpy Christ,

Contid from pg 4

I have to go now. A man was in the office a few minutes ago, getting pretty upset at me. But now he's in the bathroom and needs some toilet paper, and I need to take it to him. Did I mention the man was Jesus? Would you deny Jesus some toilet paper, after all he's done for you, just because he's a little grumpy today? ☩

Just Listen

by Elizabeth Diedrich

What do you do at André House? It is a question I hear at least once a day. "Well, we have dinner every night and coordinate showers, laundry, clothes, phone calls, work boots, blankets, and have two transitional houses." Something like this tends to be my usual response. Yet, this answer seems to lack our true ministry. The most difficult, rewarding, and important task the staff performs also is the simplest. We listen. Every day, often when we are tired, impatient, and busy, we are called to sit down, focus, slow our pace, and just listen.

Most days we hear the good things. A man I had never spoken with before came up to me the other day to say he finally has health insurance. I often get to hear the joy in a guest's voice when one makes a phone call home to loved one. One day at Mass a woman came up to us and said she just got a place to stay, and we were the first people to hear about it. At dinner one evening a man came up to me to announce he got off parole early and was going to make it home for to his family for Thanksgiving. Other days I hear a guest going around telling everyone that will listen that he has made it to 90 days of sobriety. Yet, probably my favorite thing to hear is when a guest comes to say thank you and good-bye, because, for whatever myriad of reasons, he is leaving André House.

Still, some days listening is more difficult. When I listen to a man who is scared to go back to jail, I find it difficult to relate. When I can hardly hear through the sobs of a woman who is afraid her husband might hurt her 'really bad' next time, I just want to tell her to run away. When an 18 year old asks for a place to stay because her pimp kicked her out for not making enough money, you just never want her to leave your sight. When a seven year old tells me her father always protects her when they camp outside every night, I just have to step away and cry for a moment. When a man comes up and says, "I just got out. I have been in jail for the past 25 years," how do I explain how the world works?

We work in a place where the problem of homelessness is obvious - yet along with this are the added dimensions of prostitution, mental illness, prison time, substance abuse, and domestic violence. As I see and hear of these things every day, I must continually remind myself that these things should never be considered normal or acceptable. Through my limited life experiences I am called to try and find the best way to comfort and alleviate the stressors of the guests we serve.

On some days I think I succeed. I find the right words in a way that another can understand, and other days the words I say are lost or sometimes even no words ever come. Yet, really what I say and do not say have nothing to do with other people's situations. I am not called to solve other people's problems, and I am certainly not skilled enough to counsel. I am just called to be present. I am called to bear witness to the lives of the people I see every day. I am called to never forget their stories - to uphold the lessons I learn from them. Every day, I am called to sit down, focus, slow my pace, and just listen. ✪



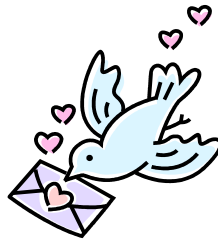
Elizabeth Diedrich

Just Listen

Mailing List



Do you want to be removed from the mailing list? (STOP!)



Does your name or address need to be corrected?



Are you reading a friend's copy of *The Open Door* & wanted to be added to our mailing list?



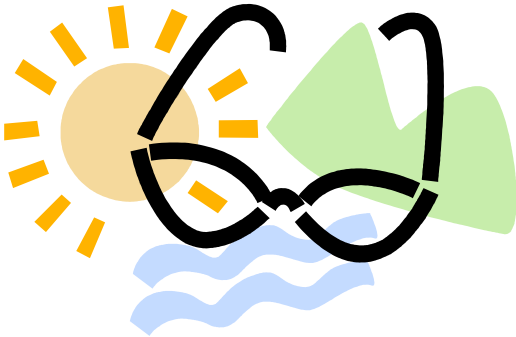
If any of these are true, please use the enclosed envelope and **send the mailing label on this newsletter** with either the changes that need to be made or the word, "Remove," on it. The list will be updated before our next mailing.

If you would like to be added to the mailing list, please call Teresa Hipp, Volunteer Coordinator, at 602-255-0580. If you leave the information on the voicemail, please leave a phone number in case there are questions. Thank you!

****André House's mailing list is not sold or given to any other organization****



Do you need Community Service Hours?



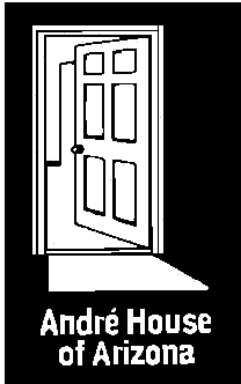
André House will be in great need of volunteers during June, July & August. As the snowbirds head home, the school groups break for the summer and people head off to vacation, we will have many service opportunities in the Soupline. Beat the rush to get your service hours in for next Fall by coming in and helping us this Summer! Call to schedule your time or if you have questions...

Teresa Hipp, Volunteer Coordinator
 Phone: 602-255-0580 ext 1
 Email: coordinator@andrehouse.org

(no drop-in's, please)



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The Open Door



**Join us every First
Friday for Mass and
a Potluck Supper at
Polk at 6:30 pm**



André House Needs: Spring Focus Items!

- * Bottled water (cases of individual bottles)
- * Sunscreen (especially travel sizes)
- * Phone cards (for long distance phone calls)
- * Men's Jeans (especially sizes 30-38)
- * Men's & Women's Underwear (average sizes)
- * Deodorant
- * Men's tennis shoes (sizes 8-13)
- * Cough drops, ibuprofen, vitamins, etc.

