

THE OPEN DOOR

FROM THE CORE COMMUNITY OF ANDRÉ HOUSE

FALL 2019



'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.' (Revelation 3:20, New American Bible)

LIVING VOWS

BR. JOSEPH DeAGOSTINO, C.S.C.

Pastoral Associate, André House

My perpetual profession of the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience were for me the culmination of a ten-year journey in initial formation associated and within the Congregation of Holy Cross as a religious brother. As our constitutions state, "We pronounce our vows in a moment, but living them for the sake of the kingdom is the work of a lifetime", thus the journey is far from over and requires a conscious affirmation each and every day as I strive to allow God's will to be done.

Leading up to my final vows and as well in the aftermath I have found my prayer and reflection particularly drawn to moments of divine providence and hospitality throughout my life. Providence inasmuch as if not for particular moments, both joyous and disappointing, my life and path thus far would probably not have turned out as it has. Had I successfully been able to enlist in the Navy out of high school I would not be here. Had I not received a call from a Holy Cross vocation director to still come on a retreat after I had canceled, I would not be here. Had I not switched to the Society of Brothers and spent time serving the poor in downtown Portland, Oregon, I would not be here. Thus, each of these and many other moments are intrinsically linked to hospitality in that I was blessed to recognize, albeit not always easily, invitations from others as Christ in turn inviting me. Formation and transformation are lifelong processes that all of us are called to engage with faithfully and honestly. In this particular time of my life Christ has knocked and invited me to be a part of the ministry and hospitality found here at André House in the Holy Cross tradition.

All of us at André House desire to answer each knock, each and every question and query with the care and compassion of Christ in relationship with all others. To be hospitable is not to judge as to what brought an individual to a particular moment or situation but rather to be with each and every person in their moment. This is not to say that rules are thrown out the window at the behest of total hospitality, but rather that in conflict and vulnerability are we still called to strive to be Christlike to others and recognize the inherent child of God before us. In every instance we strive to do the right.

In Holy Cross I professed vows as a brother forever offering my life and my life's work still to come, the moment was extraordinary, and yet each moment is a living confession of the vows and it is not always rosy. In Holy Cross I find my most perfect self, my place among my confreres with whom I wish to live and die. Just as St. André opened the door to many, may each and every one of us strive to open the door in joyous hospitality to those who knock. How does God offer hospitality to his children? God sent you.



Recently, I had the chance to travel to visit my parents at the Jersey Shore. It was a blessed time away as I was also able to witness Br. Joe DeAgostino, CSC profess Final Vows in the Congregation of Holy Cross. Bro Joe is serving with us here at André House. At the end of my trip, as I've felt near the end of all of the trips I've taken over the years, I've longed to return "home."

Home is where the heart is...Home is where your mother is...there are lots of phrases to describe what "home" actually is and thinking and reflecting on my first eight weeks as the new Director of André House has led me to write these thoughts on the word, "home."

As a Holy Cross Religious, my reflection on the word "home" is varied. Of course, home for me is certainly where my parents are in Philadelphia, PA, but I rarely am able to get to Philly as much these days. Over the last ten years as both a seminarian and a Holy Cross priest, my home has moved throughout the country. I called Northern Indiana home while living and studying at Moreau Seminary in South Bend, IN and later as Associate Pastor at St. Joseph Church also in South Bend. For a year of my seminary formation, I lived in the mountains above Colorado Springs, CO as a novice thinking, praying and discerning how God was calling me to follow Him. As a finally professed religious and Deacon, I called central Texas home in the city of Austin at St. Ignatius Martyr Catholic Church. And now, I call Phoenix home serving our guests at André House.

But what is home for those we serve here at André House? For many of our guests, we are their home. I find it fitting that the name of our ministry is André HOUSE. To be a house brings with certain qualities and characteristics. It must be a place where one feels secure and safe. It also must be a place where one's basic needs are met – where meals are shared. Home means something completely different to our guests than it does to you and to me who have actual homes – brick and mortar – to live in. Where is home for someone who lives and sleeps on the streets? Thinking about home may bring

up memories and thoughts that people don't want to remember. Broken relationships, addiction and substance abuse, mental illness have all played a part in making one's idea of home complicated. Many of our guests have not had contact with family in years and as a result do not associate "home" with where they are from or grew up. Many of our guests have travelled from place to place to place and so have not called anywhere home.

But, perhaps André House is that home. It is a home that has people within it who love. Our Core Staff are so devoted to the people they serve. Our full-time staff work behind the scenes through love in supporting the mission of André House. Our volunteers give freely of their time to minister to our guests out of love and we would not be able to do what we do without the generous contributions of so many. However, none of this would be possible, without the love of the one who loved us first – the Lord Jesus. André House is Jesus' house. He welcomes our guests through each one of us. He works through us in serving our guests because He loves. He engages His people through our celebration of the Eucharist each morning and it His love that we share with each other. Love is what makes a home – and Jesus' love makes a home of hospitality.

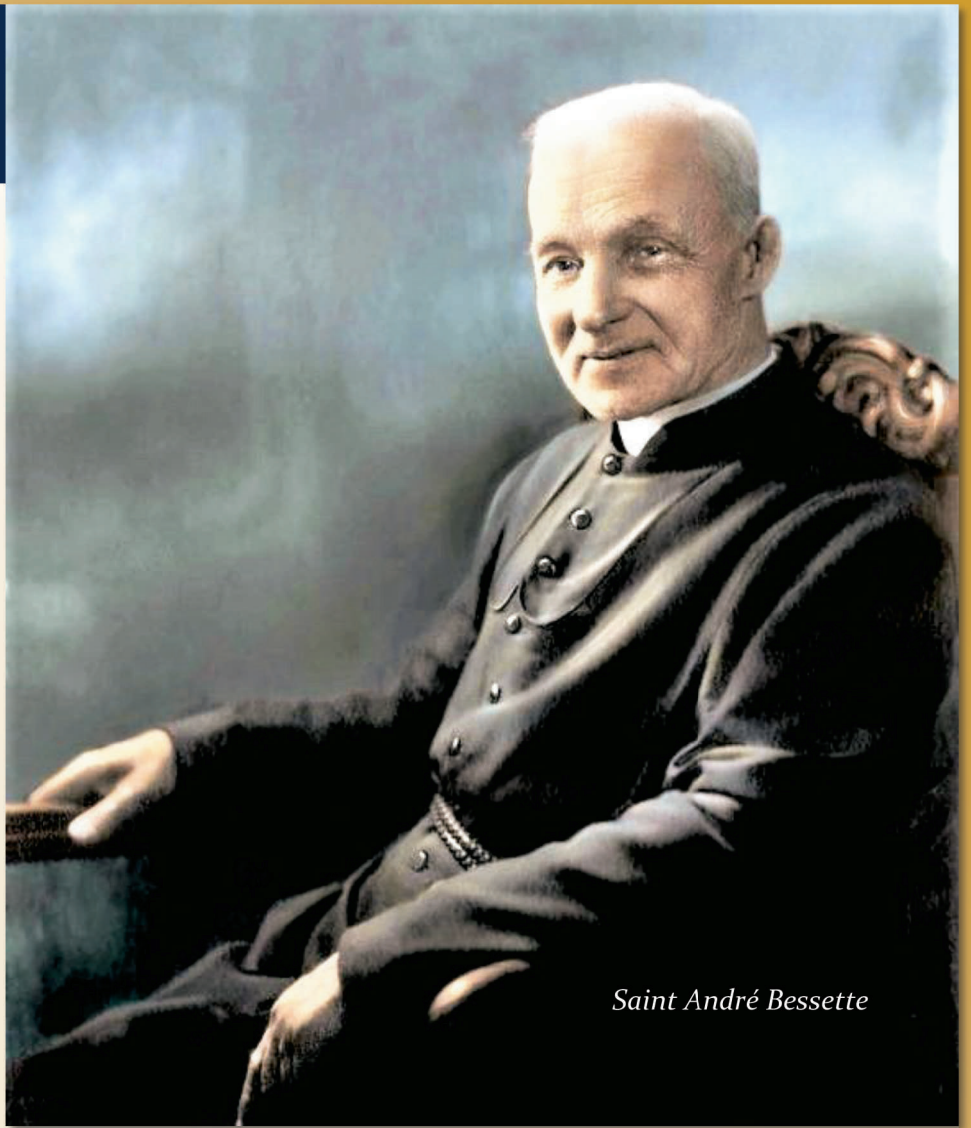
From the First Letter of St. John, "God is Love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. In this is love brought to perfection among us...we love because He first loved us."

Over the last eight weeks, I have grown in my knowledge of how André House is a home to so many. I've also learned how André House is a home to me. It is a beautiful community that I am blessed to call my home for the foreseeable future and I hope to continue to share the Love of God with all who call André House their home.

MAKING GOD KNOWN

FR. BILL DORWART, C.S.C.
Spiritual Director, André House

Saint André Bessette, a Holy Cross Brother, was a receptionist at a school in Montreal, Canada. His job there was to welcome visitors, helping them find their way – to an office, a classroom, an individual, etc. within the institution. As time passed, however, he did much more than direct their steps through various corridors and offices. Rather, he provided personal guidance and direction to generations of students, as alums would bring their children and grandchildren to meet this holy man and in this special place of spiritual growth and discovery. As a Holy Cross religious, Brother André prayed that his efforts might make God known, loved and served. And indeed, God worked through his servant empowering him to serve as a spiritual counselor and healer who helped men and women discover how to navigate some of life's most challenging storms. As he welcomed them and pointed them in a direction, people moved on with renewed strength and fresh hope. Often crutches and tears were left behind.



Saint André Bessette

André House in Phoenix is named for St. André because it is a place of hospitality and healing where the Holy Cross religious and colleagues seek to make God known, loved and served – holy ground where a concern for the dignity of every human being as God's cherished child directs every effort. While it's our job to provide food, clothing, showers, etc. to help the visitor along the way, we also desire to assist guests as they recognize their own gifts and possibly discover the deeper longing in their lives – maybe discover renewed strength and fresh hope.

When I arrived at André House nearly two years ago, Betty ruled the streets. With a professional wrestler's demeanor and a sailor's vocabulary, no one crossed her. A regular drug user and dealer, she was occasionally cuffed and taken away in a police cruiser. Usually, two or three days later she would be back in her position of power in the streets. Then, one day she was gone.

Last week Betty was back. I hardly recognized her. She was out of character; well-groomed and serene. When I welcomed her, she told me that it was good to be back and that her life had dramatically changed. After her last stay in jail, she entered a recovery program and has been clean for months. During those sober months away she had found not only housing and a part-time job, but had also discovered a new sense of self and purpose. She said that she wanted to return to André House because this is the special place where she has long felt welcomed, and often challenged to tap into her better self. A gifted person and a strong presence, she'd been told that she had much to offer. She said: "God has been so good to me; I have been blessed. This place has been a blessing for me. And now, I think it's time for me to help others discover their better side."

By the grace of God, a different posture, a different vocabulary is being revealed – renewed strength, fresh hope. We pray for Betty that former crutches and tears may be left behind.

During my time here at André House, I've been keeping a journal in which I've recorded poignant memories, names of people to pray for, and the lessons learned in a day. Some of the lessons so far include: Jesus has many faces, if you're going to accidentally call the cops on the wrong person they better have a good sense of humor, seek mercy, and that ice cream can't fix everything but it can help in most situations. However, there's one that has become more and more evident as time passes: that explaining precisely what a hospitality center is can be quite challenging. I'm often faced with questions from friends, family and volunteers - questions that are more than welcomed, but difficult to answer. "A hospitality center? Oh so is it a shelter?" No. "Is it a place for people to hang out during the day then?" In a way, yes. "It sounds like a really special place." Well, I sure think so. In fact, I've started referring to André House as the Disney World of Phoenix.

Now, I've only been here for two months as Core Staff, and I've never actually been to Disney World, but based on what I've heard I don't think I'm that far off. Disney has a whole bunch of characters running around, and I think it's fair to say we've got some, too. Disney's got pixie dust, and we've got wings on our building. Many people will claim Disney is their favorite place on Earth, and speaking on behalf of Core Staff, André House is one of ours.

However, it's what I once read in Bob Goff's *Everybody Always*, that makes the semblance the most evident. He writes "I know God lives everywhere, but I bet He spends a lot of time at Disney World. It's a place where no one uses big words and what anyone does for a day job doesn't matter. It's a place without titles and status and where no one is stuck being who they were unless they want to be."

In both places no one is stuck being who they were unless they want to be. At Disney, anyone can walk into a castle and pretend to be a prince or princess who lives there. Kids and adults alike can forget worries from the outside world, and enjoy their time there.

Here, it is my hope that whenever someone walks through the front gate they feel safe and comfortable enough to be whoever they want. It's my hope that guests and volunteers alike can forget perceptions of the outside world, and know that here they are treated all the same.

That is what makes André House the Disney World of Phoenix. You won't hear many big words or titles. It doesn't matter what anyone does for a day job, or if they even have a day job! Plus, I think God spends a lot of time here in our little corner of Phoenix. In fact, I bet He really likes it here because none of those things matter.

Maybe it's magic or love that ties these two places together, I'm not sure - I think probably a mixture of both. But more than anything, I think it's hospitality. It's meeting people where they're at. In my experience thus far, that's had many different forms. Sometimes it's as simple as providing a safe space for people to rest, finding the perfect pair of shoes, or offering a big plate of spaghetti on Tuesday nights. Other times it's a bit more complex: giving a ride to the hospital following last night's traumatic events, being a shoulder to cry on, or seeking to understand someone's outburst while they're experiencing severe withdrawal.

Sometimes our hospitality is met with graciousness, other times it's not, and that's okay. That's the thing about hospitality - there's no picking and choosing. We open the door to all and with that we open ourselves to love, loss and many lessons. We all want to feel heard and valued, no matter our brokenness, no matter our joys and sorrows. We want to be met where we're at. A hospitality center is the place where this happens.

It is the place where dignity and love come first and where it doesn't take long to spot God hanging out at our very own Disney world. We may not have pixie dust, but we've got many people with big hearts, and I think that's pretty good.



LOVE IN ACTION

ALEXANDRA LESNIK Core Staff, André House

What the heck is hospitality, anyway? One concept of hospitality that has stuck with me is that hospitality is love in action. Surely, love in action is all around at André House. I do my best to show love to guests, to volunteers, to visitors, to other staff. But, more importantly, I see actions of love everywhere I turn, everyday, by all types of people who walk in the door. I see love in Marissa helping another guest put on a diaper after an emergency shower. I see love in Denise as she checks in on me when she can tell that I have had an especially bad day. I see love as a seasoned regular shows the ropes to someone who is entering André House for the first time. I see love as Winnie and Jack have my back while a man is yelling at me across the parking lot. I see love in volunteers as they smile across the soup line, spend hours preparing a nutritious meal, and simply sit with guests. I see love as Kevin buys four flavors of Polar Pop for Jessie as she is in crisis and just wants a soda. Love radiates out of André House; it is within the very fabric. André House *is* love in action.



Love in action is hospitality is André House, but love in action is also *hard*. Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement, often referenced a quote by Dostoyevsky: “love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams.” Even the woman who is my greatest model for how to live out hospitality admitted that it was hard. Loving people and being loved by people hurts. Love in action must be present just as much in the tough times as in the uplifting ones. Sitting and crying with Gary as he talks about the death of his son, assuring him that it is not his fault and that he is *good*—that is love in action, too. So is the deep pain felt after Daniel’s passing, a week after speaking to him about his suspension from André House. So is maintaining positivity in the face of some of the most creative insults I have ever heard. So is the worry associated with every new black eye, every relapse, every day not seeing a regular guest and wondering if they are in jail, in the hospital, or dead. It’s harsh, it’s dreadful, and it is something that I could not have dreamt up if I tried. Admittedly, sometimes I am harsh and dreadful, too. I find love hard to give. My words become snippy, I forget about promises that I made, my temper grows short and my patience is tested. I drop the ball. I drop the love. In these times, I try



to remind myself that hospitality is a practice, one that is never done perfectly. None of us can promise to live out flawless hospitality, performing actions of love at all times, but we can promise to make a commitment to it, to love in action. If we create a culture of hospitality in our own lives, then we can influence cultures of hospitality in our community, in our country, in our world. In moments where love feels good, in moments when it hurts, and in moments when it’s hard, hospitality lives. In André House, hospitality lives.



During Thursday dinner one evening, I was running around making sure everything was going smoothly. I went outside and a fellow staff member directed my attention to a guest, Amy, screaming in the corner of the parking lot, “Can you go tell Amy to stop doing whatever the heck she is doing over there?” I don’t see Amy often, but I’ve known her to get agitated and difficult to deal with. I was not eager to face Amy’s nonsensical screaming, but there were one hundred other guests who preferred some peace and quiet.

Amy saw me approaching and directed her ranting towards me immediately. I will spare you the exact verbiage. Just know that she was very upset. I was focused on getting her to be quiet; However, Amy was focused on being heard. I had no choice but to sit down and listen to her rant about people who were ruining her life. Before long she got closer to the heart of the matter. She had lost everything: her family, friends, beauty, possessions. I began to see that her senseless ranting probably had more sense to it than I first believed. After speaking for a while, she looked at me said, “I should just kill myself”.

Now, I would like to say I quickly answered, “No!” Somebody wiser might have been ready to give an account of universal human dignity or say something encouraging. Unfortunately, I just sat there. The problem was after listening to Amy, her story hit me. I had heard Amy rant and scream before, but I brushed it off as attention-seeking. I have heard (and seen) many of our guests horror stories, but most of the time I was too focused or busy to really be phased.

Truthfully, I certainly would not want to live Amy’s life. I would not be able to shoulder the weight of her daily suffering, her loneliness, her vulnerability. Yet, her stare begged for an answer. Then, all at once, an answer came. Out of the darkness came an answer; namely, Amy. I saw dark brown eyes, a hooked nose, greased hair, and I heard her funny high-pitched voice. I saw Christ in Amy.

There was no great voice from above, no flashing lights, simply the glow of Amy’s face seen in a new light. Present before me, through her wonderful features, sat every defense for human life. There was a something – something (or someone) that made sense - in the middle of all this suffering and pain; namely, Amy. And I did not have to give any kind of account or defense of her value. It was evident as plainly as it was evident she was sitting in front of me. Of course, she should not kill herself – she is a child of God.



We talked about her past for a while. I asked her what she was grateful for at that moment: “I got my limbs”. I answered, “Yes you’ve got your head, shoulders, knees and toes”. And she joked, “Yeah, but my heads’ not screwed on straight”. After some chuckles, I invited her in for dinner. She came back and joined everyone coming for dinner, smiling a little more. I could not do much, but I believe offering her hospitality convinced her - even just a small amount - that she was loved.

I left Amy a little fuller than when I met her. I guess I never really spent too much thinking about the value of my own life. Or at least never got anywhere thinking about that question. But somehow, I had seen and believed that Amy was a child of God. In a way, I knew - even a tiny bit - that applied to me as well.

Obviously, this is difficult to describe. There is a gospel passage that I believe communicates what I’d like to say. Jesus, after his resurrection, appears to Thomas - the apostle who refused to believe he truly had risen. He stands before Thomas and invites him to literally “reach” into his wounds, so that he may believe. What a visceral and messy image! But a beautiful one (See the incredulity of St. Thomas in Caravaggio’s painting). This, I believe is how the poor offer us hospitality. Jesus invites Thomas into his suffering, and it is through the wounds of Christ’s crucifixion that he comes to knowledge of the resurrection. So too, the poor humbly invite us into their suffering, the weight of their daily cross. This is my hope - the hope that Amy showed me... If we have eyes of faith, we may see - in the poor and the suffering - the risen Christ inviting us to know Him and His love.



OUR BLANKET

FR. TOM DOYLE, C.S.C. Transition Administrator, André House

My father was a country doctor for 51 years. He wore many hats. While driving on a Montana highway in our Buick station wagon in 1972, we came upon a car wreck. We stopped. Dad ran back quickly assessed and returned to inform us to make room in the back because we will be transporting the injured driver.

As dad was extracting the driver, his three sons argued about whose blanket would go underneath to comfort the injured man. When dad and a good Samaritan carried the patient toward the Buick, I retracted the offer of my blanket. The driver was a bloody mess. My little brother Mike's blanket was covered in blood and urine after the driver was dropped off at the hospital.

Hospitality, in both a secular and religious sense, is not easy. Whether we are preparing for a neighborhood BBQ, or creating a space for an agitating in-law, hospitality requires a decision followed by work.

In some respects, being hospitable is binary. We decide whether or not we are open to sharing our space, and then find a whatever way necessary to accommodate the ones we welcome. In the Jewish tradition, Abraham welcomed three strangers into his tent near the Oak of Mamre (Genesis 8:1-8) Abraham ran to the door and bowed himself to the earth. In the Christian tradition, Jesus provided refuge countless times to the sinner and outcast. Jesus touched people that no one dared to touch.

More than forty men and women have died slowly and alone outside on the streets of Phoenix in our summer's heat. There will be more than 6,000 people sleeping on our streets tonight in Maricopa County. It is a subhuman existence. Our community has the resources but doesn't have near sufficient beds to accommodate these brothers and sisters of ours.

André House strives, each day to extend radical hospitality. Former CEOs, people with PhDs and others who grew up without education or family support arrive each day at our door by the hundreds. Sometimes they are smelly. Occasionally they

are acerbic and aggressive. But the vast majority are good people who have no resources or support network.

Whether we belong to a religious tradition that demands hospitality of us, or we ascribe to the patriotic sentiments engraved on our Statue of Liberty, "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore . . ." our community is challenged to be openly hospitable.

André House and our neighbors at St. Vincent DePaul and the Human Services Campus are spearheading an effort to provide a few hundred more beds for the people who have no shelter. We are being met with resistance from elected City leadership, whose primary argument is "Phoenix has done its share." Not only is that sentiment untrue, it is also inhospitable, narrowminded and shortsighted.

We ask that you please write your Phoenix City Council Member and our Mayor to plead on behalf of those who are vulnerable. We are not asking the City to provide the blanket, but rather only the permission to allow us to share ours. Please use your voice and ask our elected leadership to share OUR blanket with those who in desperate need on our streets.

For more information on how you can
help
please contact Ash Uss at
ashu@andrehouse.org



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