

# THE OPEN DOOR

FROM THE CORE COMMUNITY OF ANDRÉ HOUSE    SPRING/SUMMER 2022



Photo credit – Laura Ziff

*“ It is in the desert where I have come face to face with  
hiddenness of Jesus...”* Ruby Briones

# A Message from our André House Board of Directors

*Dear friends and supporters of André House,*

*For almost 40 years André House has faithfully served people experiencing poverty & homelessness in the central Phoenix area. We would like to express our sincere gratitude & appreciation to our many volunteers, donors, partners & friends who supported us during this time. The André House mission is to Make God Known, Loved & Served by feeding, clothing & comforting the most vulnerable among us, offering dignity & hospitality to ALL who pass through our door, guest & volunteer. We are guided by our values of advocacy, community, compassion, dignity, gratitude, hospitality, servanthood & spiritual growth and we try to live these values daily.*

*Unfortunately a few months ago Fr. Dan, our Executive Director & Board Chair at the time, was accused of sexual misconduct by an adult member of the André House community. Immediately after, and prior to an investigation by independent outside counsel (identified by the Congregation of Holy Cross), Fr. Dan was removed from his position at André House. Based on the evidence & information obtained through that investigation, including statements from the parties involved, it was concluded that Fr. Dan abused his authority as Executive Director and priest by engaging in sexual misconduct. In addition to being removed as Executive Director & Board Chair, he has been removed from the ministry & will not be allowed to perform priestly functions. He will not be returning to André House in any capacity.*

*This situation is most unfortunate & challenging for the André House community. First & foremost, our heartfelt thoughts & prayers go out to the victim. We will do our best to help in the healing process, including providing the opportunity for outside counseling. Our support also goes to our staff, and especially our Core staff, who experience the daily struggles of our guests. Their reflections in this "Open Door" newsletter are an inspiration to all of us. Their ability to see light even in the most challenging circumstances has and always will be a blessing to the entire André House community.*

*We would like to share with you the following additional actions & plans by the André House Board of Directors in response to this situation:*

- Jay Minich, the André House Director of Finance & Administration, was appointed as Interim Executive Director*
- We started a search for a permanent Executive Director, who will be a lay person (not a member of the clergy).*
- The Congregation of Holy Cross is committed to appoint a Pastoral Director (likely a priest) to André House who will report to the lay Executive Director*
- The Executive Director & Board Chair roles are now separated. Greg Herrle, a current André House Board member, was elected as the Board Chair*
- We are reviewing, and plan to improve where necessary, André House's internal policies & procedures*
- André House staff were provided the opportunity to access outside counselling for emotional & spiritual support as needed*

*We continue to be committed to serving our guests and we will do our best to make André House stronger. The André House mission & community are not, and should not, be defined by any one situation. We ask you to join us in continuing to make God known, loved & served in our community and we thank you for your continued support.*

*Please contact Jay Minich, Interim Executive Director, if you have any questions. Jay can be reached at [jminich@andrehouse.org](mailto:jminich@andrehouse.org).*

*Sincerely,*

*André House Board of Directors*

*Megan Agliano*

*Br. Richard Armstrong, C.S.C.*

*Tom Crotty*

*Kathleen Downey*

*Mike Hanosh*

*Greg Herrle*

*Todd Kallmyer*

*Rev. William Lies, C.S.C*

*Rev. Brendan McAleer, C.S.C.*

*Mike Smith*

## Belonging

“Today, if we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other—that man, that woman, that child is my brother or my sister.”  
 —Mother Teresa

Jesus has moments, Jesus is labeled, Jesus is doubted, and Jesus is a light.

**Moments.** One beautiful moment comes to mind that inspires me to love better. Many of our guests get around the zone (the blocks André House is located on) with a wheelchair. One day after closing the building, one particular guest, Will was having difficulty walking and needed to walk to the shelter across the street to get a bed for that evening. Monica, another guest (who lost one of her legs last year and uses a wheelchair as her main source to get around) overhears Will struggling to move. Without hesitation she offers to sit on the ground and give up her wheelchair. Never have I seen so much love with one act of kindness than I had that night. I believe that remarkable moments like these happen with our guests everyday. These moments somehow, maybe by the providence of God, allow us to form a community with our guests. To call these moments (of listening, conversation, laughs, and story sharing) “life giving experiences” would be an understatement. Sure, every encounter may not be perfect. Arguments may happen and tensions may arise BUT this in no way overshadows how each interaction is an opportunity to receive our guests just as they receive us in our brokenness and just as Jesus receives us all.

**Labels.** Sadly, our guests endure societal labels every day. Not good enough, weak, dangerous, and often said to choose a life of experiencing homelessness. When I hear this, I can’t help but think of how Jesus was labeled. I can only imagine it was something similar to that of our guests. However, all labels are erased here at André House and Christ tells us to come as we are. Imperfect, experiencing suffering, and fragile. These are our truest forms. If there is anything that the guests have taught me, it’s to walk through this open-door André House offers and recognize that I belong to the guests and they belong to me.

**Doubt.** Undeniably there are times of struggle and uncertainty at André House. Every time a fight happens, every time a guest shares how they suffer, every time we see injustice. The guests, volunteers, staff, and core have been damaged as a community this year. Personally, I have struggled physically, emotionally, and spiritually most of all. This year has been one of spiritual perseverance and continues to be so. There is nothing like when a guest shares how they ended up at André House or doubts that they will make it through the night. At first when guests would tell me this it caused me to doubt that Jesus was present for our guests, and I questioned why He was letting them suffer. However, what I didn’t recognize that I do now is that I was hearing accounts of the guests’ suffering from Jesus himself through our guests. That I was listening to the voice of Jesus and looking into the eyes of Jesus.

**Light.** Something the guests I have interacted with don’t know is that they have been my source of spiritual guidance throughout this year. Through the moments (good and bad), through all the labels, through times of doubt, they are my light. Ten months ago I arrived at André House. I have watched this place slowly grow from one that is so foreign and unknown to a place of Spaghetti dinner’s, water fights, story sharing, growth, consoling, circle up’s, Cha Cha’s tea, Monday morning food banks, coffee at 5:30 AM, and overall a place of encounter. As I look forward to my last two months I think how wonderfully blessed I am to be a part of a community where we can ultimately say that we belong to each other.

**Guests have moments, Guests are labeled, Guests are doubted, and Guests are lights.**



It's no coincidence that André House is in the desert. Life here is truly an experience in the desert in all the senses of the word. It's heat and dryness are not only endured externally but fully experienced internally as well. The desert is a place of dryness. Where things may seem hopeless and a lot of perseverance and hope are required to trust in what cannot be truly seen or known. The desert is also a very intimate place. A place of vulnerability. Where one is very susceptible to being wounded but also where one cannot escape from the loving gaze of another. The desert is a place where one may be stripped of a lot of things but also a place where the most essential things are revealed. The desert is a place of blinding darkness but also of blinding light.

It is in the desert where I have come face to face with hiddenness of Jesus. He doesn't always make himself seen or known. And when he does, his presence and beauty are not always what one may expect it to look like. Jesus's face is not without blemish. Jesus's face is bloodied, cut bruised and crowned with thorns. When looking upon his wounded face, we look and may think that this cannot who he says he is. At first it is frightening to look upon his wounded face as it provides no sense of comfort or consolation. But over time one comes to see how beautiful and incredible it is that Jesus does not reveal himself as a perfect human being. Instead he is wounded and looking for the care of others. But it is his very self-revelation as wounded that doubt of his very presence often enters the human heart among the darkness of our lives and the lives of our guests. We expect Jesus to just break through like a shining light but instead there is nothing. This experience of seeing Jesus's wounded face and silence among the noise of our lives is what makes this place a desert. But I believe it is a mistake to interpret his silence, hiddenness and woundedness as any form of abandonment of us on his part or any form of blindness on ours. I believe it is more complex than that. Just because he is wounded, does not mean he is not strong. Just because he is silent, does not mean he is not speaking. And just because he hidden, does not mean he is not present. André House has taught me that multiple things can be true and fully experienced all at once. Both darkness and light are lived here and each are experienced in their fullness.

We all dwell in this place of paradox, of "both, and". Where suffering and joy can be experienced all at once. André House is a place where this reality is magnified and experienced in an extreme way. When we're crying, we're laughing. When we're dancing, we're mourning. When we're empty and have nothing left to give, we're in turn so abundantly full. Where Jesus' face is no where to be found yet, where it cannot be missed.



On a recent trip through the basement at André House, I came across a shirt that reads:

## "HUMANS...God's Disguise".

This very simple phrase summarizes how I believe in regarding everyone whom I encounter in my life. At André House, God takes on many disguises, some of which fool me more than others. For example, God's not fooling anyone when Felicia greets me every morning with a big smile asking, "Where's my hug??" and telling me how nice I look. There are other guest interactions though (usually when someone breaks a rule or is unkind or disrespectful), when I get caught up in the drama of a situation and get

tricked into forgetting who is behind the disguise. If I'm not careful in these moments, I'll find myself becoming angry or judgmental. On a good day though (usually when I'm remembering to slow down and breathe), I can be loving toward and recognize the divinity in a person who is hurling obscenities at me after I just caught them smoking blues in our bathroom without being blinded by their disguise. Our mission isn't to judge our guests any more than it is to judge God. We say that our mission is to make God known, loved and served. This is what we strive to do. I believe we exemplify this mission by making our guests known, by loving our guests and by serving our guests!

In the interest of making our guests a little more known, I sat with a few of them and asked them to tell me how they experienced God or Love or Jesus at André House. Here's what they had to say:

### ARTRELL

As far as love goes, André House exhibits what love is to me. Your love, your kindness and patience is unconditional. There's no limit that you wouldn't go through to help a person. You guys will bend over backwards and go out of your way to make sure an individual is straight and has what they need and I like that. That's for real for real.

### DARIUS

When it comes to God, he has helped us at André House. Not necessarily financially, but spiritually. Through André House, God provides us with clothes, food and resources in order to help us set up for our own home. The love I experience here is unconditional.

### FELICIA

I experience love by the volunteers helping us and reaching out to us in every way they can. They are always looking out for us. God is the way and the truth and the light. I believe if you continue to put your trust and faith in him, you get good results. I really am happy with what y'all do for us. I appreciate the services, showers, clothing and things that are available to us. I might not always show it, but I do appreciate what you do for us. That's all I got to say.

### DALLAS

I have experienced the best love at André House that a person could ever want, and I am a child of God. I love André House. I'll never give up on André House. I try to speak to people at André House who are doing wrong there (drugs on property and drinking on property) because I've been one drinking on property myself and have gotten caught and now I am changing. God is the best and the people at André House are marvelous. I respect them to the fullest. I thank God for where I'm at right now...he blessed me with my recent housing and my two beautiful Chihuahuas.

### RYAN

Growing up from a young age (around 8 years old) and having Christ in my life, I learned that the Lord will provide for his children ten-fold when we are doing something for someone else and expecting nothing in return. Christ has shown his love in many ways through volunteers at André House. It's a God centered place where I feel welcomed with open arms. I volunteer here and I see God's love thru other people in many different forms every day. His light shines bright through the people that work and volunteer here at André House!



The summer before my freshman year of college, I was assigned by my university to read the novel *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson. If you don't know who Bryan Stevenson is, you should. Bryan Stevenson is an American lawyer, social justice activist, law professor at New York University School of Law and the founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative. Brian Stevenson accepts all people, fights for what is right, and pushes himself and his clients to become more than one could ever imagine.

Being invigorated by Stevenson's novel, I knew that I had to learn about the injustices of the world if I had any chance at ever alleviating just one of them. This idea led me to Campus Ministries' Service Break Experiences (SBE). On my first SBE in 2016, I came to André House. I broke out of my comfort zone, listening to all the guests stories and how they got to the point they were currently at, showed me how to give back a piece of human decency to those who deserved it the most. I went on three more SBEs during my college experience, but my time at André House always stuck with me the most.

In 2019, I graduated from St. Edward's University and went on to teach Special Education, but André House was still there, always nagging at me. I came back to André House Spring Break of 2021 and solidified my decision to do a year of service. Now that my time is almost up, I still look to Bryan Stevenson's words as a way to guide my beliefs.

Bryan Stevenson said, "I'm not persuaded that the opposite of poverty is wealth. I've come to believe... that the opposite of poverty is justice."

I have come to learn that this is completely true.

*There is no justice that an 18-year-old with Autism celebrates his high school graduation at André House.*

*There is no justice that over 1,100 people sleep on the streets of the Zone every night. This doesn't even include the number of people sleeping in the shelters at the Human Services Campus.*

*There is no justice that in 2020-2021, the "Transient" death count for Maricopa County was 550 people, with 353 unhoused people passing away in Phoenix alone.*

*There is no justice that a grown adult woman, screaming for her mommy, gets checked by the paramedics multiple times in one day and is not taken to the hospital.*

*There is no justice that when we finally take her at the end of our workday, she is kept in the hospital for days because of multiple blood clots they find.*

*There is no justice that people have to wait in line for every aspect of their life. They have to wait to eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They have to wait for someone to give them cold, clean drinking water. They have to wait to receive every hygiene item people use on a daily basis. They have to wait to get clean socks and underwear. They have to wait to use a landline phone that barely works. They have to wait to shower. They have to wait to talk to someone about getting their driver's license, social security card, and birth certificate.*

Things need to change, they have to change. I don't have the right answers, I don't know what the solution is. What I know is that I want justice for the guests of André House, for every unhoused person that has to face the reality of living on the streets.



## WHERE LOVE AND SUFFERING COINCIDE

KARLEE BRADLEY CORE STAFF

André House is a very special place. It's a place where love and suffering coincide, where light and darkness argue, where hope and hopelessness fight. It's a place where there can be so much joy but also so much sadness. It's a place that makes people feel like home but also where people feel so alone. André House is a place that has given me so much life but also has taken so much away. It's a very special place to me.

Being on core staff at André House is pretty complex. My job requires me to not only run all of the services that we offer to those unhoused in the Zone, but above all, it requires me to be hospitable to people. That means that I'm supposed to welcome people as they are, love people for who they are, and stand in solidarity with those that we serve. And that's what I do. (CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED) That's what called me to André House. I felt called to serve those experiencing homelessness in the Zone, but sometimes that can be hard to do with a smile on my face when the reality of the overwhelming suffering here sets in.

To be completely honest, these past two years on core have challenged my faith. Many times I have felt hopelessness almost win in overtaking hope. When Jesus is supposed to be present here, there are so many times I cannot find Him. There are so many situations in which I really question how Jesus can be here if he allows my friends to suffer so much, to have so much trauma. Where is He when the number of people experiencing homelessness in the Zone keeps growing at a horrifying rate? Where is He when someone steals Felicia's glasses or Dwight's dentures or Doug's size 13 shoes or John's cane or Frank's walker or peoples' phones and tents and important personal belongings? Where is He when people are denied housing because of a past felony that isn't supposed to define who they are? Where is He when the police throw peoples' belongings away for not being able to move them on clean-up day or ticket people for not moving? Where is He when someone is arrested for something they did so long ago, especially after they had been doing so well? Where is He when people come out of rehab doing so well but are dropped back into the Zone where they immediately return to their old habits? Where is He when people feel the need to turn to drugs and alcohol to cope with the trauma they endure living on the streets? Where is He when people can't take their medicine like they should, making their mental illness take control of them? Where is He when there's another overdose, another fight, another stabbing, another shooting? Where is He when unidentified people, people I don't know, Toni, Robyn, Black Boy, Lee, people who are loved by other members in this community die on the street, in a tent? Where is He when the executive director—a priest you're supposed to be able to trust—causes harm to the André House community by committing acts of sexual misconduct upon a community member? Where is He in this place of so much suffering? How can He let this happen? Why? Why?



But at the same time, I know that hope is all around. I know that "Jesus" is all around. I know it by the way our guests make me smile, make me feel loved, make me feel at home. I see it when my friends get housing and no longer have to sleep on the streets through another extremely hot summer. I see it when Lisa says "Thanks for the smile!" to me after finally taking our masks off after a year without smiles. I see it when guests rush to help someone up who had fallen from their walker. I see it when guests refer to each other as their family. I see it when Monica gives up her own wheelchair to William and Lee, leaving her sitting on the ground with only her arms to get her around. I see it when guests ask how my mom and brother are doing a month after they've visited. I see it when Stephanie goes out of her way to help Joel who is blind get around. I see it when we find a single 4X shirt or 14 sized shoes in clothing closet for the people who need them. I see it when Walter teaches me dominos and I get to share joy by playing Money and Earl. I see it when OB plays piano and Mikey raps along to the beat while other guests enjoy in the audience. I see it when A brings me a drink from the dining room at front gate, when Jayare makes me a plate of food, when Darlene gives me a necklace, when Allen lends me his favorite book to read, when Virgil offers for us to take his beloved dog Sweetheart home with us whenever we want, when Nick buys me fried rice, when Felicia wants to take me to get coffee, when Chris helps me in showers, when Demonte offers to help clean bathrooms with us, when

Dallas helps us whack trays, when Lay helps us in pascente, when Lamar helps me take donations. I see it when guests tell me thank you for just doing my job, when guests give me a hug, when guests tell me they love me. I see it when guests dance to music together, when guests play basketball or football or frisbee together, when guests ride bikes together. I see it when guests offer their own belongings to someone else who may need it a little more than them at that moment in time. I see it when guests stick up for one another. I see it in the love that is shared here at André House.

It's the love here that keeps this place going. It's the love here that makes me remember there's light in the darkness. It's the love here that never lets hopelessness win. It's the love here that has filled my heart these past two years. And it's the guests we serve who make me feel that love.





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