

THE OPEN DOOR

From the Core Community of André House Holiday Issue 2019



May your HEART be filled with the JOY and blessings of new BEGINNINGS this Christmas Season!



Joseph...
Anthony...
James J. M...
William...
alexandra...
Leslie...
Kenneth...
John...
Aidan Byrnes
Tom...
Wilfredo...
Rev. Daniel...
Fr. Bill...
Melina...
Fr. Deane...
Theresa...
Greg...



Waiting

Fr. Dan Ponisiak C.S.C. Executive Director André House

What is your routine? It's a

thought experiment. Think for a minute of what your daily routine looks like. Write it out on a piece of paper. You might wake up in the morning to the alarm you set the night before, turn the coffee maker on, take a shower, eat breakfast, brush your teeth, get the clothes out of the laundry, iron your clothes for the day, go to the gym or for a run, drive to work, take a lunch break when you're

hungry, drive home from work, help your kids with homework, have a meal with your family, tuck your kids into bed, read a book, scroll through Facebook, set your alarm, wash...rinse...repeat...

Whatever one wants to call it, we all live life a particular way. We wake up in the morning and enter our daily routine. For those who live on the streets, routines are formed as well just in a very different way. One might be awoken in the middle of the night and scolded for sleeping in a particular place on the streets forcing a move to another location. Once you are settled again, your shoes are stolen while you sleep or you lose other belongings. The long trudge to the "zone" in downtown Phoenix then begins early before the sun comes up and you wait outside the gates of Andre House before they open. You then wait for a number so you can get a new set of clothes. You wait for breakfast or for lunch at St Vincent de Paul. You wait to take a shower or to use the restroom. You wait for a bus pass or to use the phone. You wait and wait and wait...your life in many respects is simply playing the waiting game.

The difference between my routine and our guests' routines is time. How do we

spend our time? For the most part, I can plan out my day to avoid waiting. If I make the decision to get into my car during rush hour traffic, inevitably, I will wind up waiting in traffic. If I head to the grocery store or to Costco around 5pm, I will wind up waiting at the checkout counter. But, I can also try to avoid waiting as much as possible by planning ahead, by shopping later at night when there are less crowds. I can also choose how to spend my time – going to the gym, eating when I'm hungry, doing laundry and even how to spend my time leisurely. Our guests certainly can choose how to spend their time, but they are constrained to certain times of day to do things. They can use an actual restroom when restrooms are available. They can take a shower from 1pm-3pm on specific days at André House. They can scroll through Facebook but only if they have a charged cell phone and a Wi-Fi signal. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are all on a particular schedule. In lots of ways they have no choice, but to wait.

In many ways there are no ways around the waiting game. André House needs to have a schedule of services so we can offer our guests a routine of when to expect to be able to visit the clothing closet and to take a shower. But, one of the reasons we renovated our bathrooms just last year was to avoid causing lines to use the restroom. The worst thing for people is the need to use the restroom urgently and not being able to. Are there more ways to reduce waiting times? Probably, and we continue to look at avenues for supporting shorter wait times.

But, perhaps the next time you find yourself complaining about waiting in a line at the airport or at a concession stand, think of our guests who wait in lines all day every day to receive their basic needs. Perhaps offer a prayer for our guests who spend so much of their time perpetually waiting...

Phillip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Phillip said to him, "Come and see."

John 1:45

Come and See *Sam Ufuah Core Staff*

Pigeons drape the rooftops and paint the sidewalks an anemic grey here at André House. Their voices, though only six-inches off the ground, rise up to the heavens with a persistence that's borderline annoying. It's the sound of large raindrops that have forgotten how to splash. It's the sound of a soft succession of coughs that don't know how to escape the trachea. It's the sound of a stigmatized group pushed to the fringes of society.

"Those flying rats are disease-ridden," Charles informs me. He sits me down to an honest conversation on pigeon-ology, a subject he is well acquainted with. Every fiber of his being is focused on convincing me that pigeons are the literal spawn of the devil. They have no place in this society other than to be a tack board for slander, vitriol, and disgust. I listen with rapt attention. He delivers his concluding remarks in dramatic fashion—hand on my shoulder and finger pointed at a flying rat. "And *that*, my friend, is why you should stay away from these bottom feeders."

The bench crackles and clacks as he gets up to leave, satisfied that he's converted another unbeliever. I look at this space we've carved out at André House and can't help but draw parallels to the life of the pigeon.

My brothers and sisters paint the sidewalks with life. Their voices rise up against the backdrop of misplaced fear and biases to paint a picture of Christ on the margins. It's the sound of a people who have forgotten they, too, are lovely. It's the sound of a pain too large for human arms to wrap around. It's the sound of those crying out in the desert, but who will hear them? "The foxes have dens and pigeons have nests, but my brothers and sisters have no place to lay their heads" (Matthew 8:20).

In his *Tattoos on the Heart*, Gregory Boyle reminds us: "The Beatitudes is not a spirituality, after all. It's a geography. It tells us where to stand." We stand in a corner of the world where trash lines the streets; where friends are splayed on the sidewalks in sleeping bags; where one gets familiar with a peculiar smell that can only be described as the "André House funk." It is a place where pigeons and humans alike can eat their daily bread. A place where Uber and taxi drivers double-check with their passengers that this is the right address.

Most importantly, it is a place where Christ chooses to dwell time and time again. We reach into a depth of grace that penetrates externalities and beholds the miracle of being. We enter God and re-enter the world with new eyes for the imperceptible.

We may find family, friends, and acquaintances asking, as Nathanael did to Phillip, "**What good can come out of André House?**" Let us gently respond, "**Come and see.**"

A Few Words of Hope *Randy André House Guest*

In every person's lifetime there are several new beginnings, my life is no different.

My name is Randy and I used to be one of the homeless down at the corner of 12th and Madison. Most of you may refer to that area as CASS. I became homeless after a failed suicide attempt approximately 3 years ago. I learned very quickly to keep my mouth shut and turn the other cheek.

Since I came to in a hospital bed, I have been clean and sober. This is not my first time in recovery. My new beginning starts with me living a life clean and sober. I attend 12 step meetings, I read the literature a.k.a. the Big Book of AA, Hope, Faith and Courage for CA, and as many of the pamphlets as I can. The problem isn't drugs or alcohol, it's an inability to live successfully on life's terms. This is due to a lack of coping skills to handle life when things aren't going good at all. How to look at life differently and accept things for being the way they were meant to be and being accepting that. I can't change people, places, things or situations but I sure can change the way I handle and deal with them. Going to 12 step meetings is a way for people, like me, to get together and talk about our day, our week and how good things have been and how bad things have been. Talking about life with another addict or alcoholic helps remind me how my life used to be and how I don't want it to be again. Insanity is defined as doing the same thing over and over again but expecting a different result. Not again.

One of the biggest similarities that successful, recovering addicts and alcoholics have is a connection with a Higher Power of your understanding, my Higher Power today is God. I know at this point some of you are thinking, "Oh no, here comes the religious pitch. People need to understand the difference between religion and spirituality. Once the spiritual malady was being worked on and fixed, the obsession of the mind and the craving of the body went away. Fix the spirit and the body will follow. (continued)

Keeping a good conscious contact with your Higher Power of your understanding is the biggest key to living a life clean and sober. The drugs and alcohol were not the problem, the problem was me and my inability to deal with life without getting loaded or drunk. All of that was fun in the beginning but it changed from being fun to becoming a necessity. The fun left and the addiction took over and believe me when I say that addiction takes you to places and puts you in situations that can and will kill you. I've been to jail, I've been in rehabs and I will not let addictions kill me.

Is my life perfect today, hell no, There will always be good and bad in life, that will never change. The only thing I can change is me. Old behaviors will not go away overnight. It takes time and a lot of work however I would not trade my worst day sober for my best day loaded. I hear people say that they can't do this or can't do that. That is nothing more than a cop out. It's simply a choice to do things differently. If you are struggling with a life of addiction and wanting things to change the only thing you have to do is change some things and I promise you, life will get better. Living a life clean and sober is not an easy thing to do and the pitfalls in life will challenge you almost daily. Stick with it through the bad times, call people when life really sucks, talk to a stranger on the street if you have to. Whatever you choose to do, please don't get high or drunk. Let's all be better humans and treat each other with love and respect. That's the way God intended life to be. So let's make God and ourselves proud to be alive and remember to do the next right thing. Thank you for participating in my recovery and allowing me to interrupt your day with just a few words of Hope, Faith and Courage.

New Beginnings

*Michael O'Sullivan
Core Staff*



At last I had my new beginning,
Leaving behind the countless innings,
Pop ups, grounders, tees, and chew,
My soul was itching for something new.

André House for a year of service?
Piece of cake, I ain't even nervous!
I packed my bags and I got on that plane,
What a wonderful life, I won't ever complain.

Well smack in the face, life got hectic real quick,
Dinner for five-hundred? I was hardly equipped.
Showers, and laundry, and bathrooms, and clothing,
My head was slowly, but surely, exploding.

I was angry and doubtful, asking 'why am I here?',
Oh, God, I am stressed - can I do this all year?
With fiancée and family thousands of miles away,
I'd be lying if I said I wasn't counting the days.

But there was renewal, a breath of fresh air.
I am blessed with a core staff that really does care.
For they love me and push me to live life with joy.
We are in this together, so we may as well enjoy.

First there's Sam, what a smile,
Always flossing, no doubt.
This man is to be a doctor,
You'll never see him pout.

Then Grace, what a star,
She's on top of her game.
Doing research in her spare time,
She is destined for fame.

Alexandra, the boss,
Don't let that sweet smile fool ya.
She's a friend to everyone,
Which brings me to Julia.

A soft-spoken woman,
But, girl, can she sing.
She's a gangster on the inside,
Yes, her heart's made of bling.

And last, but not least,
It's Aidan with the beard.
He's a goofy space-pirate,
And a friend for all years.

Well, this is my family, and our new beginning,
When our spirits are troubled, we keep each other
grinning.
And throughout this year, we share life, love, and
laughter.
Because we're only here once, and don't all know
what's after.

One thing's for sure, we'll have our own new beginnings.
But as for right now, my heart sure is singing.
I'm surrounded by people who love me and care.

So thank you, my friends, for this meantime we share.
Alexandra, Sam, Aidan,
Julia, and Grace,
Cheers to the core staff,
Keep it elky, my peeps!

Take Pause

Julia Blois
Core Staff



During a few Decembers of my childhood, my aunt took me to see performances of Langston Hughes' *Black Nativity*. The event is a stunning enactment of "the Christmas story in dialogue, narrative, pantomime, gospel song and folk spirituals". Brilliant voices bounced into my ears and wanted to pour out of my mouth - the overwhelming beauty clad in robes of white, faces of the choir glowing in candlelight. My favorite part of the show was the scene in which Christ is born. Joseph beats on a drum the rhythms of Mary's labor as she mimes this glorious new beginning. She squats deeply, and reaches her arms to the heavens with faithful endurance. It is long. It is loud. And He is born! The mother turns, her belly disappears, and there is a real, live baby in crying her arms.

As Christians, we are infatuated with the nativity story. When the Christmas season approaches each year, I think about that scene and imagine what this time was really like for Mary. I know she was faithfully excited and felt supremely blessed, but she was probably also a little bit scared. She was doing something absolutely miraculous and most human - something that is hard and messy and uncomfortable. Something she had never done before, ultimately far from home in a place dark and smelly.

The nativity is the ultimate new beginning. At André House, I have come to recognize that other new beginnings, too, are similarly beautiful and challenging - and they take time. So often in our lives we coo over the babe in swaddling clothes, but forget to acknowledge the labor, and the nine months before. I give Mia a hug when she yells to me across the parking lot that she has thirty days of sobriety. I hadn't thought much of asking her to leave for the day when withdrawal made it hard for her to keep her cool. Or when she passed out at front gate because sometimes staying hydrated is less important than getting a fix. I dance with Martin as he jingles the keys to his first apartment after having slept outside for years. And then think back to when he came into our clothing closet looking for a shirt and tie to wear to his housing briefing. And how many times he came into the office first thing in the morning to get a bus pass in order to check out an apartment. And when he asked if he could store his birth certificate in my mailbox so that it wouldn't get lost or stolen before he could secure his voucher. And how many years and minutes of this journey I didn't bear witness to.

Like in the dance of birth I was so entranced by, most all fresh starts, changes, and new ventures in our lives are born out of labor. They gestate. Our guests work so hard every day to achieve their new beginnings as so many things work against them. This year, as we celebrate the birth of Christ and remember His humble beginning, may we remember Mary's labor. And may we take pause enough to meet our brothers and sisters where they're at with open eyes, ears, hearts, and doors.

Begin Again *Alexandra Lesnik Core Staff*

In my time at André House, I have become fascinated with images. So much happens here—I always say that there is a lifetime in every day at André House—and there are rarely words to encompass all that I see and feel. Often, I wish that I could take snapshots with my eyeballs so that I could save moments in my mind forever. These are the images of new beginnings that I have held onto:

Ten strangers sit, surrounded by elk, in the backyard of a house in Pine, Arizona to learn about André House and to talk about our ministry.

Begin again.

We walk into our first day at the building, learning how to run a meal service, to manage clothing closet, to porter in the parking lot, to give and receive love.

Begin again.

Matthew shows off the keys to his new apartment. His first home to call his own in his 60 years of life. Finally, after two years experiencing homelessness.

Begin again.

Marissa sits in a cafe, applying to jobs, making a resume, ready to make a move.

Begin again.

Samantha enters the office, looking for resources on her first day ever experiencing homelessness.

Begin again.

We scrub the toilets and mop the floors, preparing to welcome our guests for another day.

Begin again.

Alice walks into the kitchen of André House for the second week in a row with a big smile, committed to volunteering weekly after her first introduction through her job.

Begin again.

Father Tom gives the Eucharist to a guest and they take it into their body. Another First Communion in the parking lot on a Wednesday morning.

Begin again.

Nick opens up the gate as I drive the cargo van into the lot. "Good morning, Alexandra," I hear as I peak at his smiling face in the rear view mirror. The day is beginning. A lifetime is beginning.

Begin again.

Collaboration co-created by Monica Martinez André House guest and Grace D'Antuono Core Staff

When a new baby is born into the world and it's the beginning of a life. When someone thinks they're going to die tomorrow, but they don't then it's a chance to live again. Every new day is a new beginning.

When four years of college come to a close and it's the beginning of a life lived beyond a classroom. When a year of service begins, and it's the chance to learn again. Every new day is a new beginning.

New beginnings here are showers, shelter where people can have a bed to lay on a night and not be out on the street, everything is always changing.

New beginnings here are new friends, a new place to call home and people to share it with, everything has changed from just months ago.

We have new staff here so, it's a new beginning for us because we get to know you guys and you guys get to learn from us.

We have new roommates and coworkers as a part of core staff and new relationships developing with guests, all with whom we get to learn and grow.

Every day is a new beginning. Every day we close our eyes and wake up - it's a new beginning. We all wake up and what happens to us today is today. Tomorrow is a new start. Sometimes it's tough because people don't wake up and understand that. They don't realize that in life. For me, before I got diabetes life was okay, but now I have it and it's not okay. Every day is tough because I don't realize that sometimes. Or I do and sometimes I can easily see myself not waking up, but I want to. I want to see my kids graduate, I want them to know I love them with all my heart.

Every day is a new beginning. Every day we close our eyes and wake up - it's a new beginning. We all wake up and get ready for a full day of coordinating services: overseeing clothing closet, running showers, organizing laundry, and leading meal service. Sometimes it's tough because we're exhausted, because one of our guests got arrested the night before, because it's so easy to get caught up in the numbers and the rules of each job. Sometimes, I don't even realize it. Other times I do, and I try to re-center my focus on our guests. I want to grow deeper with people, I want them to know I love them.

If I had a chance to have a new beginning for anything in my life it would be to be back with my kids again and to be the mom my mom and dad want me to be - to get my life together and to get myself clean. I don't want to be homeless and only think about myself, I want to be thinking about others. That's how we're supposed to be, to be thinking about others right? I want to be one of those people like you, who you come out here and do things for people, and give people things, and you get to know people, to get to know people's birthdays and holidays. I want to do that with my kids and with other people.

If I had a chance to have a new beginning for anything in my life it would be to seek Christ more fully in each person. Sometimes I have great first encounters with our guests, other times I am in a bad mood or feel rushed to clean and close up a service. I don't want to be hurried and only think about the things I need to do, I want to be thinking about others. I want to get to know people, to celebrate their birthdays and holidays. I'm not perfect, but there is grace in each new day and I can work towards being fully present with others.

New beginnings in the past have been my kids being born, all the years I was not with my family and maybe the chance to be with them. Now at André House, my new beginnings are that I get to meet new people. Or one day I didn't have anything and now I have something. Or someone who made me laugh, someone who was interested in what I have to say, or someone who made me feel wanted - we can just laugh and do whatever. That's a new beginning.





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