

THE OPEN DOOR

FROM THE CORE COMMUNITY OF ANDRE HOUSE

SPRING 2019



BEING HUMAN Fr. Tom Doyle, C.S.C. Director of Andre House

All our volunteers are incredible. But we have a shorthand for a subset of our Andre House volunteers. We refer to them as “super-volunteers”. They are the people who show up at Andre House every week whether there was frost on their windshield or the asphalt is melting on the street. These super-volunteers come every Monday to debone the turkey, make sure there is either hot coffee or cold tea for the 600 dinner guests. They love on the physically disabled in our St. Francis dining room. One comes in at 6:00 AM on Tuesdays and dices 40 pounds of onions and begins the 10 hour ritual of making the spaghetti sauce savory. Super-volunteers come during the day and make sure that each shower is cleaned and sanitized before the next guest begins. They assist in stocking the clothing closet and even provide fashion advice to guests when requested. They come in to sharpen our knives and help deep clean the walk-in cooler. They assist our guests in the office with hygiene kits and whatever else a person needs even if it is mending a seam in a guest’s pants. They sleep overnight in our men’s transitional house once a week. They sort through and organize the tons of clothing in our basement to determine what is useful and what will be shared with other not-for-profits. They help a physically handicapped guest by tying her stocking cap on her head, buttoning her coat and sharing a hug before she goes out into the cold, dark night. Collectively our super-volunteers contribute more than 5,000 hours annually.

Our beautiful Core Team and Staff know most of our guests by name. And in a similar way, I’ve watched our super-volunteers build personal relationships with one another and our guests. The word “compassion” comes from the Latin root *passion* (suffer) *com* (with). One cannot experience or express compassion unless they are daring enough to expose some intimate part of themselves. Some of the most iconic moments at Andre House are when our volunteers share a part of their soul with our guests; where giving and receiving flow in both directions.

The former Dean of the Notre Dame Business School once said to me, “Fr. Tom, perfect people are soooo boring.” At Andre House, we come to realize that none of us are perfect. Each of us has our trials, imperfections, wounds and limitations. And it is for this very reason that Christians believe that God sent his Son as human.

One of the founders of Andre House said to me candidly, that after he moved on, he realized that he wanted to create a place that wouldn’t reject anyone . . . not even him. At Andre House we experience the paradox of exposing human imperfection. Imperfections are the cracks that allow love to penetrate. And we celebrate how God, guests and volunteers transform and bless those who serve as much as those who are being served.



SHARED HUMANITY Ash Uss *Advocacy and Partnerships Coordinator*

“Humanity: the quality of being human” I always knew of the word “humanity” as an adjective. To me, it described a way of being that embodied compassion and kindness to others. I never really recognized that “humanity” also referred to the general state of being human—the reality that in spite of our vast differences as people, there are some things we share by simply being humans on the same planet, by breathing the same air.

When I was on the Core Staff at Andre House, I questioned humanity on a pretty daily basis. Why are there so many people who are experiencing homelessness? Why are there so many people who lack access to basic needs like water and restrooms? Why are people experiencing homelessness treated poorly, without dignity or grace? Why is it so easy for us to make assumptions or generalizations about people in poverty? There are 1.6 million people in Phoenix, and why does it feel like there are so many people who could care less about our guests?

In spite of the profound moments of grace and compassion I witnessed as a Core member- I don't think I ever stopped questioning humanity. The “whys” persisted in my mind as racing thoughts; they ran through my brain the moment I laid my head on my pillow to sleep for the night and lingered well into the next morning as I sipped my coffee. My discomfort transformed to rage and I wanted to know why the 6th largest city in the United States offered roughly 500 shelter beds for the more than 6,000 people experiencing homelessness in Maricopa County.

My restlessness about the state of homelessness in this city will never diminish all that I learned about presence and accompaniment in my time on the Core Staff. I will always make time to be with our guests- to go to Denny's with Richard or help people set up their government cell phones. Part of me will also always feel called to be in community alongside people on the margins of our society. But an even greater part of me feels moved to remind people of our duties to one another as human beings.

All faith traditions point to a sense of generosity and compassion for the poor. In Catholicism, we are invited to walk the path of Jesus- to be charitable and loving to the poor. The Buddha teaches us to use our wealth for others and to care for our global community. In Islam, the Qur'an expects people to invest money into society and remember that we are all creations of Allah. I am eternally perplexed and frustrated by the failure of our city to care for our guests. Where is our humanity?

In July, I transitioned from the Core Staff into a new position as the Advocacy & Partnerships Coordinator here at Andre House. We often think of advocacy as a form of community organizing. I know when I think of advocacy, I think of my experiences at the Women's Marches in New York, Boston and here in Phoenix. I think of writing letters to elected officials to tell them how strongly I disagree with their decision to close the Overflow shelter. I think of policy changes and people (mostly men) in freshly dry-cleaned suits making decisions that they themselves have little to no understand of. As Andre House's Advocacy Coordinator, I see advocacy differently. **Advocacy is about education; it is a diligent and persistent effort to remind people of our shared humanity.**



Since starting my job, I have worked with a remarkable team to complete 100 interviews with people who are unsheltered.

The individuals we interviewed come from diverse backgrounds and walks of life. Beyond the shared experience of sleeping outside, substance use, mental illness and trauma are common threads throughout the interviews. The people we've interviewed are often labeled as "service-resistant." This is a common phrase in the homeless services field to describe people who refuse services, people who "prefer to be homeless and sleep on the streets." I've encountered some really interesting trends in this data. One of the more significant things I've learned is the fact that more than 85% of respondents describe housing or shelter as a goal. Without being prompted, almost 85 people have articulated their goals of housing- people want to make positive changes for their lives.

Andre House will always be a place that tries to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable of people who are experiencing homelessness. I'm confident that because of our selfless Core staff and astounding volunteers and donors- we will open our doors for services as long as there's a need in this city. But we are asking others to open theirs as well. As we prepare to work with the City Council and advocate for the development of a low-barrier shelter to shelter the 2,618 people who are unsheltered in Maricopa County, we are called to remember the fact that we are all part of a shared humanity. We are also challenged to be enraged by homelessness. I pray that you will join us in asking our city and elected officials- why aren't you doing enough? Our guests haven't given up on themselves, so why have you?

If you are interested in becoming a part of our Advocacy efforts, reach out to Ash Uss at ashu@andrehouse.org, or visit the Advocacy page of our website www.andrehouse.org to sign up for Advocacy Updates.

"I ended up homeless from being hit. I had a Harley Davison and the guy broad-sided me and broke my pelvis in two places."

"HOW DID YOU END UP HOMELESS?"

"Mental health problems and having trouble with people and panic and anxiety disorder."

"My dad passed away and my family abandoned me and I ended up out here. My mom dropped me off."

" Uhm, my house burned down. "

"Well that's a good question. I was down living in Central Phoenix and lost my job as a waitress and once I got injured and had cellulitis surgery, I had to see a podiatrist and have surgery in the hospital for my cellulitis, at the same time, happened to have two kidney stones passing at the same time cause I have a chronic kidney disease. Once I did that, I didn't have anywhere to live and it just, everything just unfolded from there. I didn't have money for rent, started living on the streets."

WHERE HAVE YOU STAYED?

"Shelters, uh, motels, the streets- literally like the park or just camped out on the street. And what is it like? It sucks. It's hard. Like it just, you know- there's no uhm, there's no uhm stability."

"I sleep in an open area where I'm safe and only get at least a few hours of sleep where I don't oversleep to be a deep sleep where something bad can happen. So, I manage just enough energy to lay down and rest."

"Uhm I stayed mostly in the streets, underneath bridges, out in random fields, behind like business complexes at night. Hotel a few times but that gets really expensive."

"I have stayed in the overflow multiple times usually just when it rains because they'll let anyone sleep when it rains. What I liked about it was it was a place to sleep and stay dry and to use the restroom, cause when you are outside homeless, that's not always an option and sometimes you have to hold it."

"The biggest reason I won't stay in a shelter is being what little property I do have, is to have an employee lock it up but I'm like it's hard for me to trust someone with my belongings just to go after, I didn't put too much of my belongings but it's just enough to keep my mind motivated to get a place and then there's... I won't stay at shelters because of like - open showers, showering with multiple people and being wide open with the visual of other people's privacy being exposed. When I was in Utah- there was a shelter there where they just, they just have groups of people going into a room and they spray you down with a hose instead of an actual shower with privacy."

"Well, I stayed in a shelter a couple nights. I woke up, a guy was dead beside me and I freaked, it spooked the crap out of me! I didn't stay there no more, man. And it freakin' took forever to get the guy out of there, it was freakin' ridiculous. Man, that scared the crap out of me."

"I mean some of us would just love to be able to sleep for a couple days without having to worry about the cops moving us, or without having to worry about someone hurting us, or you know? Thousands of different things can go wrong, especially when you're out there at night by yourself. ? Just to be able to sleep for awhile, I'm just so tired all the time."

"No shelter or housing. There have been a couple of places, it's funny though that people will tell you about how to get a job. I'm like (laughter) a couple people will come up to me, like an officer rolled up on me around Harman Park Library, he was with a case worker of some sort that was talking to me about putting people into a homeless archive, um, just to keep everyone, I don't know, in a system showing that they're homeless. And the lady was like "Well we will give you this resource and he's going to talk to you about how you can get a job without an ID" because I'm struggling with my ID. And I was like "Oh, that's great" but um I need shelter first because if I'm sleeping behind a dumpster and I have to wake up at 6 in the morning but I can't sleep because, you know, it's freezing and people are dumpster diving and someone is doing drugs over there... I'm like 'You're going to expect me to get a job, maintain a job, and keep it? I don't think so.' It's just funny though because a job comes after shelter. If I don't have shelter then I am not looking for a job."

. . . ABOUT HOMELESSNESS and LIFE

"I thought this was just the movies, like, I didn't know this kind of world really existed. And people sit there and say such horrible things about the people out here and you come out here and you realize, it's not, it's just people trying to live. They've either, exhausted their time at the shelters, can't get into shelters, don't wanna be in them for whatever reasoning but they're just people just like everybody else."

"Uhm, homelessness, well. I didn't ever know what it was until now. And it's hard. And you know- out here in the zone is even harder because, it's different you know? In a shelter, you have to follow rules. You have to do things that are, you don't think you have to do - but you have to do. No. I wanna get a job. I wanna get my teeth fixed, like how Nelson got his teeth, I wanna get my glasses, cause I need a job. And that's the only thing that's holding me here. I don't have a pretty smile, so nobody will take me in you know, and without having glasses, I can't see the boards. I can't see the register, so that messes me up."

"My goal is to be righteous and positive all the time. Keep a clear head. Talk to people with the utmost respect and tell the truth. Uhm, I can't say where I wanna be in 3 years because there might not be a 3 years for me- I'm not saying this world, I just can't tell you what to expect. I can only tell you what I know and what I want. . . to be a truthful and righteous person. That's it."

"I've never done anything for my children- anything at all. And I just want to be able to leave them something (starts crying) so they know that I haven't been away from there for all this time for nothing. Even if it's just a raggedy old house on a third and three quarters of land, anything, anything so they know that I wasn't away from them this whole time doing nothing."

"WE just want nice people to understand us and hear us. Not many people listen to us out there and want to hear our ideas."



"In want my own place, um, with a car, and a job. And uh, happy. Cause once I do get a place, uh I mean I will do what I ain't do to ever become homeless again".

"In my own apartment. Yea. It gets hot out here. It gets hot. At my age, the sun is not good, you know what I'm saying."

"Uhm, I would like to see me gain employment, put my baby in daycare and save up so that I can get my own place".

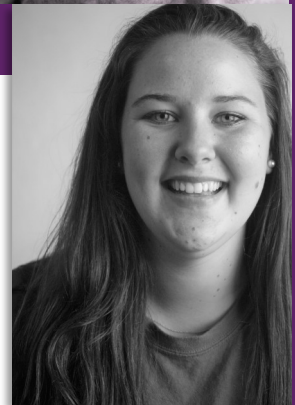


FAITH LOST FAITH FOUND Lexi Swagler Core Staff

A few phrases that I hear all the time nowadays are 'I've lost my faith in humanity' or the opposite 'This has restored my faith in humanity'. Human interactions have always astounded me, how people are able to do such terrible things to each other, treat their fellow society members so poorly. People tend to focus on the negatives and dwell on people's mistakes, faults, and imperfections. Focusing on the awfulness of the world is very disheartening and can easily lead to a loss of hope. Everyday at Andre House I can find many examples of where humanity has failed us, and there are some days I find myself overwhelmed with the devastation our guests endure. It can be a real struggle to see people in pain and suffering every day. However, I learned a long time ago that I can't focus on the pain and suffering whether it be my own or others.

I must search and find the positive and beautiful, or else I wouldn't be able to survive. Whether it's a guest giving the last of their tobacco to another because they overheard they were looking for a cigarette, a guest who has been working day in and day out to get a job and finally comes to me with tears in their eyes exclaiming that they finally got a job, or a guest who's been on the street for years finally getting housing and having a place of their own, all of these things bring humanity to life. I've found that finding these and having a positive outlook truly does help to keep others, and myself hopeful. Being at Andre House for over half a year has taught me so much about people and how every interaction we have with others is important.

There are many things we need to do as a society to help each other, but first and foremost we must be kind, and genuinely care about others. I've seen how often we, as a society, fail each other every day. Too often we view people as criminals, addicts, or simply less than rather than as human, and that is our main issue. Taking the humanism from a person makes it that much easier to discard them and forget they even exist. Seeing each person as a human-being rather than their past actions is imperative to hospitality and humanity. This is something that I make sure to do every day and will keep with me for the rest of my life, not just while at Andre House. Not losing faith in humanity starts with the individual and how we interact with other people, and making it a priority to remain kind.





THE DEPTHS OF HUMANITY

Lauren Schmidt Core Staff



When encountering people experiencing crisis, severe mental health problems, drug/alcohol addictions, and immense loneliness, it can be extremely disheartening. It often times leaves me feeling helpless and frustrated for the people that I serve—wondering if their lives will ever get any better. I find that at the lowest moments the Lord restores my faith in humanity through the guests. There have been many times where I have been outside in the lot and a guest will ask for food and another guest will immediately give some of their own. I've also witnessed a guest ask for a clean shirt and another guest give them one out of their bag. These moments are what I believe to be the hidden gems of Andre House.

Being surrounded by the guests at Andre House, I'm probed to look into the depths of humanity. I believe we must first realize that every human person deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. Not only because we are made in the image and likeness of God, but even more so because each soul carries Jesus within them. Often times, I go throughout my day unaware that when I encounter another person, I'm truly encountering a unique piece of Christ. I tend to get caught up in the day-to-day grind of what needs to get done and what others are asking me to do for them. I forget to stop and take a moment to breath and receive the gift of the person in front of me. I get so upset when I let those precious moments slip through my fingers, but that is why I challenge myself and now I challenge you as well to stop and receive the gift of the person in front of you; to love your neighbor as the Lord has loved you.

What is the Love of the Father but unconditional? This is the love we strive to give at Andre House. Although it's far from perfect and we fail constantly, the Lord's grace is always there to fill where we are lacking. Many times I didn't think I could make it throughout the day, but I would ask for a specific grace and the Lord would always grant it to me. We are His hands and His feet; He will always provide the grace we need to serve His children.





IT DON'T MAKE NO SENSE: *a reflection on the nature of plates, bowls, things mixed and dappled*

Luke Brennan Core Staff

Labels are tricky at Andre House. Sometimes the labels say things like: "DO NOT THROW AWAY." Easy enough. Sometimes labels say: "PLATES" but the cabinet in question is full of bowls. Whether plates can be bowls is a whole discussion on its own - which would be fun to pursue! - but for now, let's acknowledge that it was confusing if the cabinet was for plates or bowls.

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Recently, we've seen a lot of police men on the block. Not fun.

"Nobody likes to see a police man driving behind them."

-A local police man

There's tension in the air when policemen drive down the street. People turn away. People ask what they're here for. People pack up their bags and walk away. People go inside Andre House. People get arrested: trespassing, drugs, "mouthing off."

To better understand the presence of police, we invited a police officer to talk with us before starting work in the morning. We sat in the conference room and talked. I wanted to hate him.

He was nice, though. He was straightforward and honest, and he had a sense of humor. After thirty minutes of hearing him talk about our guests, I trusted him. He seemed to get it, and he had way more experience of people living on our street than I did. He had been working in "The Zone" for longer than anyone in the room - besides Brother Richard of course. The policeman told us how people would ask him to send the homeless "away." When he asked where they should go, they would simply respond: "just away."

We were all frustrated with that answer. It was hard to hate him after that.

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White Tank is a mountain in the valley. White Tanks is the county cemetery nearby. People are buried at White Tanks cemetery when they are left unclaimed by family or friends. Inmates, supervised by sheriffs, perform most of the physical work of the burial. I stood with Aidan, Father Eric (former Andre House Director), and two seminarians (Andrew and Tyler) as Father Eric presided over the funeral. We did four funerals. The fourth was for a baby. It took us some time to tell which side of the baby's box was the head and which was the feet. We wanted to be sure to place the baby correctly into its grave. Fighter jets flew over us at various points in the funeral service. Luke's Airforce Base is right next to White Tanks Cemetery. The jets that flew overhead were bone-shaking loud. There were a lot of planes that flew over during the funeral for the baby.

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Andre House isn't black and white. It's quite a mix, really. Plates can be with bowls. Policemen are scary and mean and reasonable and kind. Fighter jets rip and roar over the funeral for an unclaimed baby. At first, the mix was jarring. It didn't make sense. (Plates DO NOT belong with bowls!) Then again, being human doesn't make much sense either. We are covered with the icky muck of our mistakes and at the same time filled with some pure spark of life and goodness. It feels like a contradiction. But there's a holiness to such things mixed and dappled.



# HOLY WEEK and EASTER SCHEDULE 2019

## HOLY THURSDAY APRIL 18

### **CELEBRATION of the LORD'S SUPPER**

**Andre House 9:30AM**

*We will begin the day with the Mass of the Lord's Supper. This will be the only Mass celebrated on Holy Thursday.*

### **WASHING of the FEET**

**Andre House 4:30PM—6:30PM**

*In remembrance of the humble act of Jesus and his call to humble servitude, each Holy Thursday the Andre House community gathers and washes the feet of our guests. Before and during the nightly dinner service we invite our guests to have their feet washed. Those who chose to participate will sit down and remove their shoes and socks. We will wash their feet in a basin of warm soapy water, dry them, apply lotion and/or foot powder and provide a warm pair of socks. This is an intimate moment where we have a unique opportunity to serve our guests by taking care of their tired feet.*

*Visit [www.andrehouse.volunteerhub.com](http://www.andrehouse.volunteerhub.com) to sign up.*

## GOOD FRIDAY APRIL 19

### **STATIONS of the CROSS Downtown**

**State Capital Parking Lot 5:30PM**

*Please meet at the State Capital Parking lot on 17th Ave at 5:30PM. Beginning at the Arizona State Capital, commonly known as "The Zone", a present day Calvary for many. Along the way stops are made at many places that provide services for people experiencing poverty and homelessness, including CASS (the county shelter), the Lodestar Day Resource Center, St Vincent de Paul, the Human Services Campus and of course Andre House. Stops are also made at various government entities. At each Station we reflect on Jesus' road to crucifixion and pray for justice and peace in the world.*

*A SIMPLE DINNER at Brother Richard House, 1203 W Polk, will follow the Stations of the Cross.*

## EASTER SUNDAY APRIL 21

**MASS - 11AM**

**Brother Richard House 1203 W Polk**

**Potluck Brunch - NOON**







André House  
of Arizona

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