

# THE OPENDOOR

From the Core Community of Andre House

Holiday Issue 2017

All Hearts Come Home for

## An Andre House Christmas



Each of us is an Innkeeper  
 who decides if there is room for Jesus  
 May the Miracle of Christmas  
 Fill your Heart and Home  
 With Joy and Peace



*Seasons Blessings from our Andre House Family*



*Laurena J Minick*  
*Bro. Richard C. S.B.*  
*Fr. Louise J. Lindsey Myer*  
 Miranda Hurt ☺ *Casey Whitehead*  
*Al Z* *Del Deen* *Ash Uss*  
*Erin Clapp* *Emeka Iboje*

# Coming Home for Christmas

*Fr. Tom Doyle, CSC Director of Andre House*

People ask if I am ever afraid at Andre House. The honest answer is no. I stepped into a powerful culture where there seems to be an invisible shield at our threshold where disagreements can happen inside our property that almost always stop short of violence. Every time hostility appears, one of our regular guests steps in to break up a scuffle and their words are always the same: "This is God's House! We don't do this in God's house." Only once have I been hit. I was passing out dinner tickets at our front gate last summer when a scuffle broke out in the street between two women. I did what I told staff to never do, I darted toward the altercation and got too close. I got clocked by an elegant right jab on my right cheekbone. Not long after the woman dashed off, I recognized it was my fault. She thought I was coming to attack her.

I hadn't seen this woman for five months until yesterday. The staff fetched me from the office because a woman wanted to speak to me. As I approached I recognized the wiry woman, with the right half of her face tattooed, as the person who hit me. We sat down on the curb and she began to cry as the first words came out: I am so sorry . . . it was a bad day . . . I didn't know who you were . . . please forgive me . . . I only have a few months to live.

For the rest of the conversation, we held hands. I learned she is sleeping behind a Circle K off Camelback Road. I learned that someone stole her blankets.

I learned she has two kinds of cancer as she struggled to draw each breath. She was baptized. She had grown up in a gang family and started smoking methamphetamines at age nine. And that everyone calls her Darci, but her name, real name, is Mary. Mary was despondent because there were so many people she needed to apologize to but didn't have a way enough time to complete them. How could Mary possibly make things right?

Because of a miracle two thousand years ago, what Mary cannot do, fix, or complete has been gifted to her. Who could have imagined that a tiny child, born in a manger more than 7,000 miles from Phoenix and twenty centuries prior, would gift to Mary what she most wanted but could not possibly accomplish on her own? As eager as I was to invite Mary back to Andre House dinner that night, Jesus Christ, the author of Christmas, is delighted to take her into His family and His heart.

If the most battered and hardened people in our country can find safety and forgiveness in an old warehouse in central Phoenix, then it cannot be beyond our imagination that the proper walls of our own homes, and the meeting rooms of our elected leaders can be dwelling places of inspired hospitality.

No matter what roof you are under for the celebration of Christmas, our prayer for you is that you experience the gift of being invited to the Home of Christ, who can do and fix and complete any good thing that you cannot do on your own. And we pray that your home and our home be a place where everyone be extended a warm welcome back for Christmas.





## The Place Where God Once Led Me

*Kristen Masloski* Core staff 2006-07 and AHB Board of Directors

The very first time I ever stepped through Andre House's doors was nearly twelve years ago, on my winter break at King's College. There were two service-focused trips running that January: an all-female trip to a women's resource center in Spokane, Washington, and a co-ed trip to Andre House. I wanted to go on the Spokane trip, as I enjoyed the time I had previously spent in the Pacific Northwest and hoped to go back. However, when I arrived at the question on the application where I could indicate a trip preference, I distinctly remember something stopping me as I tentatively held my pen in position to make an "X" in the space marked "Spokane." I remember thinking the odds were very much in my favor for Spokane, but I had heard good things about Andre House from people who had previously gone on the trip, so I indicated "no preference" and waited.

Today, I consider that hesitance to be one of the defining moments in my life: a moment when I said yes to God and trusted completely in His will. Despite the odds, I was one of five women chosen for the Andre House trip, and from the moment the plane landed in Phoenix, my life's path completely changed trajectories. I returned to Andre House over my spring break that March and moved to Arizona that July to begin my year as a Core Staff member.

My move to Arizona was supposed to be temporary, but it soon became permanent.

Andre House was so much more than a job or a year of service to pad my resume: Andre House became a home, not just for me, but for so many guests, volunteers, and former staff members. Andre House became the place where I spent my holidays, the place where my faith in God grew stronger, and the place where I was challenged to become a better person through good times and bad. Even though I am no longer part of the Core Staff, that sense of welcome and encouragement is still very much present, and every time I turn the corner onto 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue, I know I am coming back to the place where God once led me and continues to lead me: *home*.

## Christ of the Breadlines

*Margaret "Bouf" Manning* Core staff 2007-08

This year marks ten years since I spent a year at Andre House in 2007-2008. I began the year excited about the work but nervous and unsure about living so far away from my Connecticut home. It didn't take long for my heart to feel at home at Andre House. I quickly developed great relationships which eased my nerves and increased my excitement. In the few years following my time at Andre House, I led college service trips and visited Andre House with my husband, but now that I have a family and live in New Jersey, trips to Phoenix aren't so easy.

But these past few months I've been thinking a lot about the people I encountered at Andre House: the guests I came to care so much about, the volunteers who welcomed me into their homes, my core staff mates who kept me laughing all year. What I carry in my heart the most, though, are the lessons learned and values instilled from that year.

My husband, Patrick, and I recently bought our first home. We hope that it provides the hospitality that St. Andre Bessette lived out, rooted in our faith. A place where people can find a listening ear and enjoy a warm meal, maybe even provide shelter for refugees or individuals facing homelessness. Hanging on the wall in our kitchen is a framed print of *Christ of the Breadlines*, an image of Jesus waiting in line to receive food. A reminder that we don't just

welcome our friends and family into our home, we welcome and serve Christ.

It's true that hearts can find a home at Andre House, but when you live 2400 miles away, you make space in your home and heart for Andre House. As we prepare for welcoming the Christ-child at Christmas, may we look to Brother Andre's hospitality as our guide. St. Andre Bessette, pray for us.



Years ago, during my interview to be on Core Staff at Andre House, one thing was made clear to me: as a member of Core staff I would agree to be fully present during the holidays. These are important and busy times and this meant not going home. As an independent 25 year old - that sounded fine. I could handle that, no problem. Sure I would miss my family but there was an occasional holiday I had missed before - an Easter or two because I couldn't fly home from college or a Thanksgiving that I spent with a friend. But I had no idea what the holidays would really be like at Andre House.

From Thanksgiving time through the New Year I was overwhelmed with the volume of generosity from the Phoenix community. All the donations around the holidays meant more work for the core staff. However, in moments of reflection, I realized these donations are often what sustains Andre House throughout the entire year. So, while it didn't always feel like it at the time - more work was a good thing!

By the time Christmas arrived we were spiritually and physically tired. The "newness" of being on Core had worn off for me. Seeing the struggle of homelessness, illness, addiction and suffering was exhausting. Little did I realize how much I would actually *want* to go home. I woke up Christmas day acutely aware this was the first time I had not woken up at my parents house on this day. Breakfast and presents weren't waiting for me. I went to the building for the dinner prep where there was so much energy and activity, but this Christmas was just very different. I remember passing out tickets at the gate, cold and actually trying not to cry each time someone thanked me for my work and "sacrifice". I had no idea it would be this hard to be away.

I struggled through dinner and we went to the Polk house to celebrate Christmas with the men living there. We had prepared gifts for them so everyone had something to open. Something practical and something fun. It was in this gathering that I finally started to feel comfort that day. Some men had children and families they missed and hadn't seen in too long. Others had no one they were still connected to and this community was a welcome and necessary one. We were all together, though displaced from where we really wanted to be. But I was there by choice. A choice I didn't know would be so hard, but no less by choice. And next Christmas I could almost guarantee

I would again be with my family. These guests were not displaced by choice. They no doubt wanted their Christmas and their whole situation to look different than it did. But it was in being together that this displacement felt a little easier. For me, my comfort only continued that night as we later celebrated together as a core staff, giving each other handmade and heartfelt gifts. A gift I have intentionally kept for the past 13 years.

There is so much comfort we take for granted until we feel displaced. And Christmas time is a curious time of feeling both comfort and displacement. We are often reminded simultaneously of what we have and what we long for. This is true even for the Holy Family. The Tradition tells a story of a family who were taken away from home at a highly inconvenient time. They struggled to find a place to rest and were shown a small but sufficient amount of hospitality in a stable. This is a story of a God who willfully displaced Himself so that we could understand Him, ourselves and our world a little bit more clearly.

Andre House's mission is to have an open door for all those who are seeking basic needs. For many this is food and clothing, but for all of us, the true basic need is belonging. I found this on so many levels in my time at Andre House and it is why I think I will always feel at home there. It is a place that is so rare because of the people it brings together. Those serving and those being served find in one another something we are all hungry for - community. This is true of the nervous high school kid wiping down tables, the skilled veteran volunteer "chef" and the guest in line trying to work out their feelings of fear, shame and momentary relief. I think Andre House is one of the special places in the world where we can actually admit our hunger without fear of judgement.

I don't get down to Andre House as much as I would like. But I carry it with me everywhere I go and I think I will always feel a familiar comfort every time I walk through that parking lot, smell the pit and see the kitchen buzzing with important work, the work of community building and feeding one another.



## Making Our House a Home

*Andre House has a history of welcoming individuals experiencing homelessness into our home and treating them with dignity and respect. We consider these individuals our guests. We are inspired by St. Andre Bessette, CSC, who was known for offering a welcoming presence to the afflicted, hope for the discouraged and healing for the sick. We look for ways to improve our home in order to accommodate the needs of our growing number of guests. What can we do to make them more comfortable, provide better services, keep them safe, provide more shelter from the elements and create an environment of hospitality and inclusiveness? We are always looking for new solutions.*

*Because of all the support and blessings bestowed upon us during the year, we were able to make quite a few "home improvements"! We installed new water fountains for our guests as well as hand washing stations, so lots of hands can be cleaned before dinner. A heavy duty metal awning and new railings were installed in the ramp area next to the building, providing shelter from the elements and a safe environment for guests as they enter the building. New solar panels were installed on our roof as well as on top of a newly covered parking area, enabling us to decrease our energy footprint as well as providing more shade during the hot summer days. The inside of our house has a new dropped ceiling and more palatable lights in the dining room. The dividing wall in the center of the dining room has been removed, opening up the area and making it a more inclusive environment.*

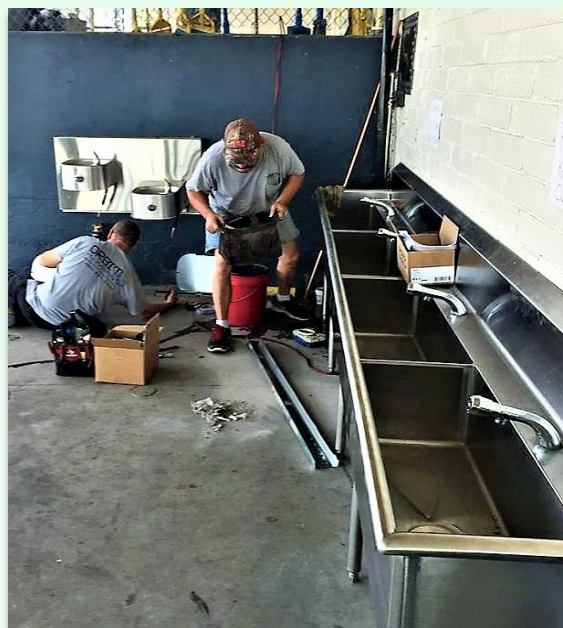
*At the end of October, we had the honor of serving our 5 millionth meal in this home we call Andre House. We will continue to welcome all into our home who may be in need as long as there is a need. Our door is always open!*



*Solar panels covering entire roof*



*Ted Dunne overseeing the new awning install.*



*Install of custom made handwashing station*



*test run*



*completed awning and safety railings providing outside guests safe shelter*



*new dropped ceiling and lighting fixtures on south side of dining room*



*removal of center dining room wall creates open dining experience*

## All Hearts Come Home for Christmas

*Leslie Pechkurow* Volunteer and AH Board of Directors

The holiday season can be a time of joy, togetherness, and faith-filled love, but for many Christmas can bring on even more struggle and hardship. For Andre House Christmas is a reminder that poverty and homelessness do not relent or get “vacation” for a few days. In fact, the holiday season can often mean more work, more preparation, and more heaviness felt in the heart. But that doesn’t seem to stop the Andre House family from persevering.

We often think of Christmas and the New Year as a time to spend with loved ones and family. Trips are planned, tickets are bought, and preparations are made for loved ones to travel home. In the Andre House community many do not have this opportunity to make it “home” for the holidays. Many staff, guests, and volunteers alike are not able, for one reason or another, to reunite with family or loved ones during this time. That’s where the work really comes in. Andre House knows and understands that it serves as “home” for many both during the holiday season and throughout the year. Yes, folks can rely on Andre House for food, showers, laundry, and other services, but what really serves hearts is the warm welcome to everyone to come home to Andre House each and every day. This becomes especially important during the holidays when tunes of “I’ll be coming home for Christmas” echo on radio stations and throughout stores into people’s thoughts.

Andre House has a long history of serving hearts and will continue to be that welcoming embrace to those who are a part of its community. As Andre House carries on God’s work each and every day, may all those who walk through the doors feel that they can call this place home. And may this Christmas season bring all of those hearts home to Andre House.



*welcome to our home and our 5 millionth meal served*



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**DONATE AND APPLY TO YOUR 2017 STATE TAX REFUND!**



**\$400**

Provides **320** homeless and  
low-income individuals  
an evening meal

**\$800**

Provides **640** homeless and  
low-income individuals  
an evening meal

*For those who live in Arizona, Andre House is a qualifying charity for the AZ Charitable Tax Credit. For each dollar the charity gets, the donor gets a dollar for dollar reduction of Arizona State tax. Individuals filing- \$400 Joint filing-\$800 Donate online at [www.andrehouse.org](http://www.andrehouse.org) by check: Andre House PO Box 2014 Phoenix, AZ 85001-2014*