André House is a house of hospitality in Phoenix, Arizona. Our mission is making God known, loved and served by feeding, clothing and comforting the most vulnerable among us, offering dignity and hospitality to ALL who pass through our door, guest and volunteer.

On March 16, 2020 we closed our main dining room and cut back on some of our services for those experiencing homelessness. We released all of our volunteers. Our Core staff, support and administrative staff and CSC Priests and Brothers have been providing essential services as well as evening meals six days a week for up to 800 people. ANDRE HOUSE CHRONICLES OF COVID has posted daily on our face book page. Here are some of those moments.

**March 18**
Fr. Dan referred to it as our 1st André House picnic. We made it through the first day and first outside meal service. We have a very small staff so we continue to figure out the absolute necessities including running this meal service each evening. We served almost 700 meals last night. Styrofoam containers, Grace's spaghetti and incredible meat and veggie sauce, bread and butter sandwich and a fruit. We will be adjusting a few things.

A few comments from guests during the day:
"What the heck is going on? Corona Virus? Isn't corona a part of the eye?"

Most people when told responded with a wow and an immediate ask "What can we do to help you. we're here with no where to go. What can we do?"

We continue to count our blessings.

Today.... Rain.... new plans on how we serve our meals.

That's it until tomorrow.
March 19, 2020
Yesterday, as we left the building it was raining hard. Folks were lined up, vying for the opportunity to sleep on a mat on the floor of the St. Vincent de Paul dining room. It was serving as weather relief shelter. CASS Shelter had to reduce it's numbers because of emergency regulations. And the dining room could only allow 40 people because of those regulations. Hundreds sleeping in the rain. No tents. The day at André House was a learning experience again. New menu to go. Bagged. Hot Dog in a bun wrapped in foil. We made our own squares. Piece of fruit. Condiments and napkin. Hard boiled egg. Yep. 650 hard boiled eggs cooking in one huge pot. No we did not peel them after they were cooked. Bag assembly line. Distributed off of the loading dock because of the rain. Water table under the solar panel overhang. As if the cups were capturing the rain. Sanitize Sanitize Sanitize
People got clothing, took showers, used the restrooms. No complaints. We could use prepackaged cutlery. packaged snacks. Lots of both. Makes things simpler. We have to simplify so we can sustain.
Best guest quote of the day "You know, this ain't what you think this is....you're messing this up... I mean people are buying toilet paper.." - a man who did not finish his sentence, shrugged and walked off.
Prayers

March 21, 2020
Friday we were closed. A moment of rest and regrouping. The permanent ongoing schedule happened. Hopefully done in a way that we can sustain. Had to let go of clothing closet. Will distribute socks, and a few emergency items along with hygiene items from the porter station. The Holy Cross Priests at Casa Santa Cruz are sheltering in place. They picked 300 oranges off their trees for us to utilize. Fortunately for us they are also making hygiene kits and possibly assembling our forks and napkins. We hear there is lots of gabbing going on during the process. Fr. Bill delivers and picks up. Our admin staff got to work from home. We have to remember this is gonna be a marathon not a sprint.

March 23, 2020
We are blessed to have a donor who we refer to as "chicken man." He remains anonymous except to us. He used to serve fried chicken on the street. When the lid clamped down on street feeding we talked to him about what we did and how we served our food. Since that time he regularly brings Walmart fried chicken for 600, on Sundays. We were thrilled to see him last night as he delivered boxes and boxes of fried chicken. It helped us so much. We had something extra to put in the Styrofoam container we were distributing to our guests. Sunday: Chili, rice, an orange and a piece of fried chicken. We are still able to serve minimal but nutritious meals. As one guest said, "Thank you for an awesome meal. This place is a blessing!"
Count your blessings.
March 26, 2020

Last night, Wednesday, we served 817 meals. In one hour. The lines wrapped around the building all the way down 11th Ave. There are a lot of new faces in this line. We are blessed at this point that we are able to serve a meal with substance. A real meal. Most likely the only decent meal of the day. We want to keep doing that. Last night was the first night we served a take out dinner we purchased from a local restaurant. We served a pasta meal from Cibo Pizzeria. We were prepared to run out at some point and we had Tuesday night's leftover spaghetti in the oven ready to go. Then we ran out of that and pulled cold but yummy turkey pasta meals from the big fridge. We do everything according to food safety guidelines so our guests are assured of their meals quality. The day services at André House continue as usual. Folks need to use the restroom. Only a few people can be let into the building at a time. It can be frustrating especially when folks don't quite understand what is going on. One man who was asked to wait exclaimed "I hope you crash and burn!" But another guest, Rocky, proclaimed "we are gonna get through this and at the end of everything we will be bigger and stronger and better... as long as we stick together." When you think about it, our guests on the street already know how to do this. They have been in survival mode for so long. They have been helping each other when no one else would. And now they are sticking together. They need each other. There is no ability to isolate yourself or practice social distancing when you are living in a tent on the street. And more folks are sleeping on the street due to the emergency guidelines just put in place by the state. So our guests do what they have always done, survive, in a fairly gracious way. We can all take a lesson from them. Yes Rocky, we will get through this. As long as we stick together.

March 27, 2020

Willie Lee Birdsong

White Tanks County Cemetery. Weekly Interment of those individuals without family or means of burial. Members of André House are performing Rites of Christian Burial as well as praying over each of the 14 individuals. One particular person was part of our Andre House family. A very special guest who had been on the street many years and was part of our daily life at André House. This was his obituary notice as it appeared in February:

Willie Lee Birdsong Phoenix - 60, of Phoenix, AZ passed away January 7, 2020. If you have any information regarding this person, please call Legacy Funeral Home. He was not claimed. But he had a family. André House and those who shared his life in the Zone were his family. We thought we should give Willie a proper remembrance. A eulogy of sorts. Parts of this were taken from a piece written by Core member Grace.

"Things people should know about Willie:
He kept everything in his hat - his social security card, a few dollars, his ID, scratch tickets, anything - it went in his hat. The next thing you should know is that he was a frequent hallway napper. He would fall asleep on one of the hallway benches nearly every afternoon. This of course was problematic with his method of hat storage, because as soon as his head sleepily tipped forward, the contents of his hat were scattered across the hallway floor.
Pecan Pie was his favorite. We spent Thanksgiving dinner together, and I may have snuck into our back-up supply to get him a couple of extra pieces. During dinner, we chatted about California, where he spent most of his life, and his children whom he loved very much.
"Fish Spaghetti" was not his favorite. On Christmas Eve, I tried to bring a piece of my home state, Rhode Island, to my new home here in Phoenix, by serving the "Seven Fish of the Sea" Feast. A Christmas eve tradition for many Italian families including my own. Willie was not at all a fan. That night, he called me crazy for trying to serve people "fish spaghetti," and he didn't care one bit if it was a family tradition. We settled our differences that evening with a joyride through the parking lot on his new wheelchair.
Willie enjoyed whenever we played cards in the office during a calm shift. Although he never played, he made sure to tell me when I played the wrong cards, or grunt and shake his head in disgust. Most importantly, Willie had many nicknames. I often referred to him as the grumpiest man on Earth. I called him Grumpy, but ironically that usually got a smile out of him. Among other core staff members, I called him my adopted grandpa. Many others in the André House community shared this sentiment, as he was called Pops by nearly everyone who knew him.
"We will all miss his warmth, his hallway naps, and his grumpy grandpa comments."

Willie was laid to rest surrounded by his family. By those who loved him and shared the journey of his life on the street. We love you Willie. You are forever our angel.
April 1, 2020
Food Bank
Tuesday morning. Staff pulls into the covered parking area in front of St. Mary's Food Bank Agency Shopping building. Organizations across the city come here to acquire donated and low cost food items that help them achieve their mission. Every day our core staff go to the food bank early am to find treasures and staples to aid in the creation of the evening meal for 650 we serve that night. Usually a decent sized group of non profits like Andre House roll through the large doors in an organized but all at once manner. You are allotted one hour to gather what you need. There is usually an abundance of items and one is able to gather what is needed in a timely fashion.

In the days of COVID obstacles prevail. Our time has changed slightly, each agency only has 1/2 and hour to get in and out and very few agencies are allowed in the shopping area at one time. Social food bank distancing. Then there is the line outside. Waiting. A line of large agency carts that have been sanitized after each use. Calmly stationed, socially distanced apart. Front line responders from each agency (yes these agencies who are feeding the poor are on the front lines) these responders man these carts, some stacked with large coolers to hold refrigerated items, and plan their strategy to get in and out with what they need in an expedient and safe manner. The wait is longer than usual. Our Core members will miss the 9AM mass for our staff. Their time comes. They move quickly through the big doorways and their mission is soon accomplished. There was no fruit available but they found yogurt and the bread needed for bread and butter sandwiches. Perfect. Tuesday night takeout meal will consist of wonderfully yummy spaghetti with meat and veggie sauce, salad, a bread and butter sandwich and YOGURT! Perfect.

We are blessed that the food bank is continuing to supply us with some of the things we need to create each evening meal in a nutritious manner. We appreciate the lengths that they have gone to guarantee a safe environment for all of us who need them more than ever.

We are grateful for the years of partnership. Now, more than ever, we are all in this together.….. YOGURT!

March 31, 2020
A New Normal? What is normal?
So many people are talking about “the new normal.” At Andre House there is a normality of schedule that has been changed to facilitate the basics that are needed. The basics that we can achieve without volunteers. No volunteers. That is our new normal. Just for now! Just for awhile.
Our volunteers stabilize us. They continue to come, year after year, even as the core staff changes and new and old faces of guests come through our meal line. Since it is Tuesday, we thought we would share an ANGELS OF ANDRE HOUSE story from our regular Tuesday volunteer, Arnie. Arnie is the creator of the spaghetti dance that all must participate in before the meal starts. He is also “line one spaghetti.”

“About two years ago something happened to me while serving on the now famous "Tuesday Spaghetti Night". For about a period of one year, each week on Tuesday night I always served, and became very friendly with a 65-year-old guest by the name of George, and his 28-year-old son Brian. Each Tuesday I would look forward to seeing and serving George and his son Brian. They were both very patient, kind, and friendly guests. On one Tuesday about after meeting them, I encountered George in The Spaghetti Line, only Brian was not accompanying his Dad as usual? I asked George where his son was, and all of a sudden, he broke down in tears? I had one of the other Volunteers stand in for me on the line, and I went around the counter to comfort George. He told me that he and Brian went to sleep together on the street the night before, and when morning came George awakened to the sight of his son Brian having passed away? I sat with him in the main dining room, and spent about 45 minutes holding, and comforting George as best I could. It was a difficult situation, but I’m grateful that I was at that place, at that moment to help another human being at a time in need and being there so he didn’t have to be alone.” — Arnie Meltzer
**APRIL 19, 2020**

Sunday Blessing

During the time before COVID weekend mornings were filled with Breakfast Club. Groups would alternate on Saturdays and Sundays providing breakfast for hundreds of guests. Depending on the group the food would be brought in or made in our kitchen. The food was served in our parking lot by loving volunteers, there was song, prayer and coffee. Yep a nice hot pick me up cup of coffee. That model was stopped in the middle of March. No more gatherings. Folks still needed breakfast. With all the groups still wanting to make breakfast for all those individuals they have served for so little by, The take out model emerged. Each group would deliver their food the evening before or early the morning of the breakfast. Then it is up to the Core Staff and staff to serve. This morning it is a wonderful sandwich and other goodies. All in a brown bag lovingly decorated and a wish for safety. Folks line up around the building. They receive bag and most importantly, COFFEE if they wish.

As Julia extracts each hot cup of perk from the Cambro she asks, “cream and sugar?”

This is love in action.

We hope you have an opportunity to practice love in action, in whatever form it maybe manifest, during this time of COVID. Blessings upon you this Sunday morning.

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**APRIL 15, 2020**

A Year of Service

They are six individuals. All with different backgrounds and future plans. But at this moment in time they live in community. The glue that holds them together is their deep commitment to humanity. To the under served. To those who otherwise would keep invisible. From early AM services until the last evening meal is served and all is cleaned up, their main focus is on those who are their guests. Those experiencing homelessness in the center of Phoenix. The Zone. And now in the age of COVID, these individuals driven by their humanitarian passion seek sustainability. How do you provide all the services that have always been and create and serve the meals every night when the virus has taken away your ability to engage volunteers or serve a meal in a dining hall. Do you let this COVID stop you from reaching out with love to those guests who have always offered their hearts in spite of the fact that they live on our streets. They have big hearts. They have lots of needs. And the Core staff at Andre House are determined to make sure they still have services, relationship and someone they can turn to.

Julia, Andrew, Mike, Grace, Sam and Alexandra are committed to all of the people in “The Zone”. The open door of André House, a house of hospitality, has made a few adjustments to remain sustainable. But the strength that is keeping our doors open is powered by these six core staff. COVID is not what they signed up for. But maybe it is. To be able to grow beyond yourself in a time of stress and challenge, creating solutions and immersing one’s self in defense of humanity is priceless. The joy and laughter that weaves its way through all of this is part of the glue that holds it all together. And then there are the lessons of the Holy Spirit. There have been many and all have been received with such grace.

We at Andre House are so blessed to have Julia, Andrew, Mike, Grace, Sam and Alexandra here with us this year.
A Tomato Grows

The parking lot at André House is bare bones. Concrete, concrete, concrete with metal beams supporting solar structures and heavy block walls encasing it. Metal benches, railings, stainless sinks and fountains all allowing sustainability.

And then there is the tomato plant. It was discovered recently when someone was able to pause for a second and see.

How did it get there? Whose sandwich contained a thick tomato that spit out seed filled juice when chomped down upon? Are there tomatoes growing across the street in the St. Vincent de Paul garden?

Did the wind inadvertently whip up and blow a seed that had been given off by a tomato that had dropped to the ground and slowly gave up it's essence? Or did Tuesday Spaghetti night Core staff leader, Grace, plant it lovingly as to assure we had tomatoes to make sauce with?

We will never know. What we do know, this tomato plant is a sign of hope. A sign of renewal. A sign of a life to come that may look different. Something that defies all the odds as it still grows. And soon again it will thrive. We see our guests this way. Somehow they landed here. We watch as they defy all odds and with a little love and hope they grow in strength and move into a new and better future.

They have been doing this for a long time. The circumstances that surround all of us now may not seem quite as daunting to them.

They live in "survive."

We thank all of you for your continued prayers and support. It provides light and hope for all of us.

A tomato grows.

Reinforcements are arriving

It is time. Staff are spread thin and weary. Hospitality, the most important part of our mission, the one on one attention we strive to give each guest, is lacking. There is no time. And we have no idea how long this Covid era model of André House will have to be sustained.

Fortunately we are blessed to be unconditionally supported by The Congregation of Holy Cross. They are sending us Priests!

Fr Brendan McAleer CSC, from King’s College, Wilkes-Barre, PA, Fr Karl Romkema CSC from St Ignatius Martyr Catholic Church, Austin, TX, Fr Ryan Pietrocarlo CSC from St Adalbert Catholic Church, South Bend, IN and Fr Chris Brennan CSC from University of Notre Dame, South Bend, IN, will gradually be arriving over the next week.

Are you ready, gentleman? Porter, Kitchen Duty, Door Monitoring, Clothing Closet, Showers, Food Distribution, Drink Table, Forks and Napkins, Outside St. Francis Room Serving, Dishwashing and if you have any free time –Donation sorting, all await you with open arms! We do too. And our guests look forward to your energy, spirit and kindness.

Oh yes, there are all those face masks that need to be handed out. And did we mention charging about 100 cell phones a day for our guests? Welcome to André House!

CORE STAFF 2020

Julia Blois
Andrew Cece
Grace D’Antuono
Alexandra Lesnik
Mike O’Sullivan
Sam UFuah

ANDRE HOUSE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Fr. Dan Ponisciak, CSC
Br. Richard Armstrong, CSC
Fr. Bill Dorwart, CSC
Br. Joseph DeAugustino, CSC

Ted Dunne
Jay Minich
Debbie Shane
Meliah Smith
Ash Uss
Elizabeth Wunsch