

Heartbeats

The Company of St. Angela in the 21st Century

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Hospitality – Creating Free and Welcoming Spaces

“Hospitality means the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. Hospitality is the opening of an opportunity to others to find their God their way. The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover their own songs, speak their own language, dance their own dances, free also to leave and follow their own vocations.” These words from the late Henri Nouwen describe the spirit of hospitality with which Angela Merici lived. They describe as well how those who share her charism and spirit are about lives of hospitality today. We are happy to share some of those stories in this issue of Heartbeats.



La Hospitalidad

Sr. Karen Schwane spends one morning a week at the Greyhound Bus Station in San Antonio offering hospitality and assistance to migrants and asylum seekers.

St. Angela Merici, a woman of hospitality, is my model and companion when volunteering with the Interfaith Welcome Coalition (IWC) at the Greyhound Bus station in downtown San Antonio. I began volunteering in February, 2019, after an intense orientation followed by “on the job training” with a wonderful veteran coordinator and an alumna of Ursuline Academy in San Antonio.

The migrants or asylum seekers we serve, mainly from Central America, have been detained mostly at Centers in the Texas cities of Dilley (moms and children) and Karnes (dads and children), and sometimes from towns close to the border with Mexico.

Upon arrival at the terminal, we greet them with warm smiles and lead them to the ticket counter to procure the ticket purchased by a family member or sponsor. We then guide them to a section reserved for them and decipher for them their complex bus ticket, copying pertinent

info onto an 8 X 10 paper: listing cities for bus changes, departure and arrival times, and circling the locations on the map of the U.S.A. on the back. This paper with our explanations gives them a sense of security. We give each family a backpack with travel aides, a blanket, water bottle, snacks, stuffed animal, coloring book and food for the trip. They are so grateful for these tokens of care and concern. The anxiety that we can see at the beginning gradually disappears and turns to smiles, realizing their trip will be manageable and soon they will be “home.”



—Karen Schwane, OSU

No Longer Strangers but Friends

Sisters Jean Hopman and Madonna O'Hara volunteer regularly with "Room at the Inn" in St. Louis.

“Room at the Inn” is a temporary, emergency shelter program for homeless women and families. It empowers participants to create solutions to their homelessness through education, referrals and case management. Our parish began partnering with “Room” in July 2019, and we have volunteered since then, serving in several capacities: setting-up air mattresses, tables and chairs; greeting guests; providing hot food or cleaning-up the next morning.

What keeps us going back are the people—both our guests and fellow parishioners. The volunteers strive to make the experience as personal as possible by creating a welcoming atmosphere in the rectory basement, asking the guests what they like to eat, joining them for meals and games, and encouraging leadership for group activities. We work in teams and the growing community spirit is felt beyond our monthly service. It's a blessing

to offer hospitality to these families at a challenging time in their lives and to be aware of their efforts to

work toward providing greater stability for their families. Angela's advice to her leaders echoes for us: “Regard yourselves as ministers and servants, reflecting that you have more need to serve them than they have to be served by you.” (*First Counsel*)

—Madonna O'Hara, OSU and Jean Hopman, OSU



A Place of Welcome

“Angela's Piazza” is a drop-in center for women in Billings, Montana. Ursuline Sisters Mary Dostal and Pat Funderhide have ministered there as the center's co-directors since it opened in 1998.

As daughters of Angela, we chose to name this place of ministry Angela's Piazza. Her spirit expressed in the words “Make your homes and your lives like a piazza where everyone is welcome” is core to our ministry. This

spirit of welcoming and accepting each person who walks in our door is our important focus.

Since many of the women and children coming to Angela's Piazza are experiencing trauma, rejection and, for some, racism, we create a welcoming atmosphere in our

homey building. Those who come are usually in crisis, and we are there to listen and reflect back to them their beauty and worthiness. In this process they begin to imagine a more peaceful way of living. Those who join

our programs – support groups for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, etc. – discover acceptance from all in the groups. Along with the programs where women deal with heavy personal issues, we offer socials such as a Halloween party, Christmas party, summer picnic and a spa afternoon. Programs for girls are also offered which provide opportunities for them to engage in sharing, laughter, crafts and games on a weekly basis, getting to know one another better. Through the programs and socials at Angela's Piazza, community building happens which for some is a first experience of belonging.

—Mary Dostal, OSU and Pat Funderhide, OSU



“Welcome the Sojourners in your Midst”

Sr. Jeanne Cashman is the retired founding Executive Director of Sojourners' Place in Wilmington, Delaware.

Like so many others who “mean well” to help the homeless, I had thought more was best and getting folks off the streets was all it took to solve the growing problem of homelessness. A few weeks after agreeing to open in an abandoned firehouse what soon became the largest emergency shelter in Delaware, I had an epiphany of what it would take to **really** help the homeless. At that moment, a mentally ill woman who had slept in the shelter the previous night became distraught because we had washed the sheets on her bed with the hundreds of others

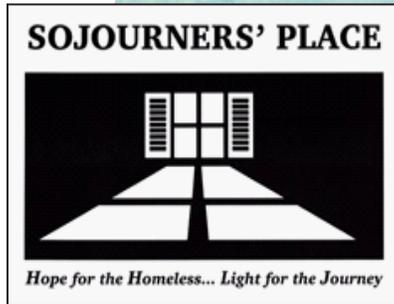
we laundered daily. That experience and others taught me that emergency shelter, while a temporary fix, really doesn't change anything. So I set about doing what had

to be done to **make change**: acquiring property, and raising money, awareness and support.

We named the new endeavor **Sojourners' Place** after the biblical injunction to Israel to “welcome the sojourners in your midst,” and provide them with “whatever they need to continue their journey.” This focus of our program from its start in 1991 as Delaware's only full-service shelter for homeless adults included substance abuse and mental health counseling, education and job training, life skills, and so much more. In our open and caring atmosphere, competent staff members and volunteers also help develop relationships among residents where they learn to support and encourage one another. Being able to stay until ready has empowered over 1800 sojourners to move into the wider community with jobs and housing.

Hospitality, as St. Angela lived it, went far beyond an open-armed welcoming attitude towards others. It was something as wide as compassion and trust, and as deep as “tough love” and hope for a future made possible by real change from its roots. And so it is with Sojourners' Place as it nears its 30th year.

—Jeanne Cashman, OSU



“Room at the Table”

Musician Carrie Newcomer's song, “Room at the Table,” is a wonderful musical expression of the hospitality to which living in Angela Merici's spirit of hospitality invites us. You may find the song at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92OM5bdQ4N4>.

For Pondering . . .

How are you being invited to be a person of hospitality and welcome in your daily life?

How do you find yourself responding to these invitations?

