

Motivation and Philosophy of A Simple House

Simple House volunteers are trying to grow closer to God and become saints. All Simple House volunteers should be motivated by the following three objectives.

1. To live a life without division between faith, labor, and living;

To live a life without division entails that there is no ‘going home’ or ‘getting off work.’ Although it is helpful to have specific times reserved for prayer, we are also told to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thes 5:17). In the same way, there may be certain events related to evangelization, but we should also constantly evangelize. A Simple House is trying to live ministry and Christianity.

Pope Benedict XVI points out:

For what faith really states is precisely that with Jesus it is not possible to distinguish office and person; with him, this differentiation simply becomes inapplicable. The person *is* the office, the office *is* the person. Here there is no private area reserved for an “I” which remains in the background behind the deeds and actions and thus at some time or other can be “off duty”; here there is no “I” separate from the work; the “I” *is* the work and the work *is* the “I”.¹

And precisely because this being, as a totality, is nothing but service, it is sonship. To that extent it is not until this point that the Christian revaluation of values reaches its final goal; only here does it become fully clear that he who surrenders himself completely to service for others, to complete selflessness and self-emptying, clearly becomes these things – that this very person is the true man, the man of the future, the commixture of man and God.²

Jesus calls us to an adopted sonship when he says, *‘whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother’* Mat 12:50. A Simple House is an attempt to pursue sonship through complete service.

Some modern attempts at service have divorced material service and service to the Truth. Volunteers of A Simple House are trying to be generous by giving their most precious possession, the Truth contained in the Catholic Faith. Truth only becomes a person’s real possession when it is experienced. Volunteers at A Simple House gain this experiential knowledge through prayer and charitable works.

2. To implement Jesus’ suggestion to the rich young man;

The rich young man asked Jesus how to obtain eternal life, and Jesus told him to keep the commandments. With this answer, the young man recognized his desire for something more. When the young man asked what he lacked, Jesus told him the secret of being complete. *‘If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me’* Mat 19:21.

Volunteers at A Simple House are trying to keep the commandments and pursue perfection through voluntary poverty and following Christ.

¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. *Introduction to Christianity*. Ignatius Press: San Francisco 1990 p. 149.

² *Ibid* p. 168

3. To follow Christ in simplicity;

A Simple House is an opportunity for volunteers to live a simple religious life that breaks down imagined barriers between the laity and holiness. To the detriment of everyone, priests and religious are often placed upon pedestals. This becomes an excuse for the unconsecrated laity to ignore the universal call to holiness, and the pedestal can become a stumbling block for those trying to balance upon it. A Simple House is creating an atmosphere where unconsecrated laity realize their call to sanctity.

A Simple House is largely influenced by the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi and the Desert Fathers. Francis and the Desert Fathers began following Christ as an experiment in radical discipleship. Many beautiful traditions have grown out of these experiments and born fruit for the church. A Simple House is trying to embrace the spirit of the original experiment while observing reverence for the traditions that have developed from it.

The experimental aspect of A Simple House means that all attempts to help the poor may fail. This experimental attitude should create an environment of humility and faith. God will make plans work at His good pleasure, and when methodologies are found to be unsuccessful, they should be humbly changed.

A Simple House believes in the following principles:

✦ Prayer and the sacraments as the essence of our relationship with God;

Simple House volunteers try to live a rich sacramental and prayerful life in order to develop a deeper relationship with our savior. Every day, full-time volunteers attend mass, pray morning prayer, and pray evening prayer.

Full-time volunteers are also expected to set aside time for reading the bible, and other meaningful devotions, books, and prayers. Spiritual direction is also strongly encouraged for every Simple House volunteer.

✦ Allegiance to the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church;

We believe that the Catholic Church is the apostolic guide for Christians. Following the guidance of the Catholic Church entails obedience to sacred scripture, the Magisterium, the Catechism as an official statement of the Magisterium, and the diocese in which we live. We never do anything contrary to the guidance of the bishop with regards to his diocese or the guidance of any pastor with regards to his parish and parish boundaries.

The bylaws of A Simple House of Sts. Francis and Alphonsus include the following section, "Bishop's Veto – The leading Bishop of a diocese may veto any decision of the Board that relates to work within his diocese."

✦ Friendship and the personal nature of evangelization;

God has willed that we know Him through each other. This statement is more than a platitude. Human relationship is a necessary precondition of conversion and salvation.

Man comes into the world via a man and woman and is raised in a family and community. God even uses the family to explain himself when he takes the names Father and Son. The bible was written, printed, translated, and distributed by our fellow men. Our

fellow men administer the sacraments and preach to us. Even prophets who enjoy a special communication with God read scripture, worship in community, and were raised by a family. The Gospel was meant to be transmitted through an infinitely complex human web of relationships. In conjunction with family, friendships are the most powerful human relationships through which the good news is transmitted. A Simple House believes that the most effective evangelists of history have worked through friendship evangelization.

Friendship evangelization does not try to argue someone into the Church. It strives to love them into the Church. When Christ is an intimate friend, it feels natural to introduce another friend to Him. If Christ is not a friend, the evangelist is talking about someone they do not know and an awkwardness results. Friendship evangelization starts by developing friendship with Christ and ends with a natural, effective, and loving evangelization.

So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us. (1 Thess 2:8) Friendship evangelization is the essence of the New Evangelization, and it is also historically the first evangelization. It fights nothing; it builds the Kingdom by calling people to be more.

✦ The three parts of almsgiving;

A charitable act can have three parts that please God. The sacrifice of the giver is a denial of self which pleases God. The interaction of rich and poor with love, appreciation, and thankfulness blesses both parties and pleases God. And finally the alleviation of suffering is good and just in God's eyes.

Most charity fails to capture even two of these three aspects. Modern charity can be obligatory, faceless, not God-centered, and received with entitlement.

A Simple House tries to honor all parts of almsgiving by:

1. encouraging donors and volunteers to give for their own good and to develop a consciousness of giving;
2. allowing volunteers to visit the homes of the poor, letting the poor know that donations come from the goodness of Christians who love them, and letting donors experience the appreciation of the poor through newsletters, volunteering, and friendships;
3. diagnosing the immediate and unique needs of the poor and meeting them in ways that institutional charities cannot;
4. being an all volunteer organization, to allow a large part of every donation to directly benefit the poor.

Building relationship between the rich and the poor is difficult because our society has put a great social and physical distance between the rich and the poor. Our newsletter and the way we incorporate donors into our work as part-time volunteers is designed to help bridge this distance. Our work cannot be meaningfully simplified by statistics nor can it be understood by someone who is taking a quick glance. A reflection is required to understand the significance of this work. A Simple House uses newsletters to assist in this reflection.

Almsgiving is a means to render one's heart to God. In this sense, our fundraising should try to touch someone's heart and inspire them to give. It is unchristian to be emotionally manipulative or to hide the truth when asking for donations. In addition, it is not God-centered to try and get donations through hobnobbing or personal favors. A Simple House is committed to inspiring donations with the right intention.

✦ Spiritual poverty as the largest problem facing the poor in the United States;

Southeast Washington, DC is a place where:

- + there is enough food but children go hungry because of neglect,
- + cars are not stolen for profit but for joy riding,
- + people understand that drugs ruin lives, but they use them anyway, and
- + women are prostituting themselves without pimps or physical coercion.

This is also a place with few missionaries and many children. These are characteristics of spiritual poverty.

There is a temptation to become engrossed in the idea of a political solution to the problems of the inner-city. The study of social welfare, welfare economics, and sociology all focus on the political aspect of the problems. Every political solution is fundamentally a material solution, but materials do not seem to be lacking in the inner-city of Washington, DC.

Jobs, treatment for addiction, and food are available, but it's as if something mysterious stands in the way. The poor have experienced a great loss of hope which leads to self-defeating behavior. It has been called 'a situation that defies a solution.'

Political solutions, even when they incorporate sociology and psychology, are always fundamentally material solutions. The real problem is a spiritual problem, and to provide material goods without friendship or spiritual support only continues the problem. If our society was a troubled car, a tune up or replacing a few parts wouldn't hurt, but it also wouldn't fix a car that needs a complete frame-off engine restoration by a loving mechanic. Anything less is a patch. When man tries to restore himself and his own society, he is merely building a tower of Babel. It ends in confusion and miscommunication. Man and society need something beyond themselves and the entire material realm. They need a savior.

Putting hope and faith in other solutions results in failure followed by disillusionment and psychological burnout.

When someone loses hope, they lose interest in their own welfare and their family's future which causes behaviors resembling a slow suicide. They need to be convinced to live! This is a hard job, and A Simple House is trying to reach some of the hardest cases.

✦ Observance of voluntary poverty;

Observing poverty involves a sacrifice and faith in God's providence. Poverty is not a goal in and of itself. It is not a moral rule or commandment. Poverty is a means to develop a closer relationship with Christ. The sacrifice of property is emphasized in the Old Testament by the idea of burnt offerings and in the New Testament by the apostolic life described to the rich young man,³ by Jesus' responses to the objections of those hesitant to follow,⁴ and by Jesus' praise of the widow's pence.⁵ Holy sacrifice is an act of love.

Dependence upon divine providence requires prayer and teaches humility. This is illustrated throughout the Old Testament, and it is especially obvious in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Israel's salvation was won by an invasion of frogs, bugs, and bloody water. This pattern continued with the parting of the Red Sea and the manna from heaven. Everyday, the Israelites literally asked the Lord for their daily bread, and they could not claim

³ Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21; Lk 18:22

⁴ Mt 8:18-22; Lk 9:57-62

⁵ Mk 12:41-44; Lk 21:1-4

credit for their liberation or their survival.⁶ In the New Testament, providence was emphasized in Jesus' packing instructions for the twelve and the seventy,⁷ in His advice against anxiety,⁸ and in the petition for our daily bread within the Lord's Prayer.⁹

The motto of A Simple House is to 'wonderfully and radically fall upon the cross of Christ for grace and support.' Corporate and personal poverty are both necessary to consciously live in God's providence and make a meaningful sacrifice.

A Simple House lives corporate poverty by being completely run by volunteers, avoiding the ownership of fixed assets, not having a savings account, and trying to spend one third of its money every month.

✦ The principle of subsidiarity balance with the principle of solidarity.

The principle of subsidiarity is usually applied to the interaction of nations, organizations, and the family, but the principle of subsidiarity has many applications to the internal workings of the Simple House community and A Simple House's ministry with the poor.

The principle of subsidiarity is summarized by Pius XI encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*.

A community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good.¹⁰

Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them.¹¹

When the principle of subsidiarity is not honored within the Simple House community, responsibility and authority is not honored. This is most clearly seen in abuses of the directorship system. Each director has proper authority and responsibility for their directorship area. When the principle of subsidiarity is violated with regards to a volunteer's directorship area, it hinders their human development and it creates an inefficiency. The problem of violating subsidiarity within the directorship system could be called 'micromanagement.'

The same principle of subsidiarity must be honored in our relationship with the poor. Healthy relationships are formed when the person being served does what they can properly do. This includes individuals helping themselves, and at times, a person from the ministry neighborhood will serve Simple House volunteers. When the principle of subsidiarity is violated during ministry, the human development of the person being served is obstructed, an unhealthy and unsustainable dependency may result, and the person being served feels disrespected. The problem of violating subsidiarity within a ministry

⁶ Ex 7-16; Dt 8:14-17

⁷ Mt 10:9-10; Mk 6:8-9; Lk 9:3 & 10:4

⁸ Mt 6:24-34; Lk 12: 22-34

⁹ Mt 6:11; Lk 11:3

¹⁰ Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*: (1931), par. 184-186

¹¹ Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno*: (1931), par. 203

relationship could be called “babying” someone, and in many cases, it resembles answering fire drills.

The principle of solidarity is usually applied to the interaction of different classes within society, but it also applies to the Simple House community and ministry. The principle of solidarity should be balance with the principle of subsidiarity within our community and with the poor.

The Principle of solidarity is followed when man honors the fundamental equality of all men, and the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church explains it.

Solidarity highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity.¹²

This equality recognized in the principle of solidarity creates the possibility of brotherhood and friendship between all men.

When the principle of solidarity is honored within the Simple House community, volunteers help other volunteers with tasks in a spirit of humility. If a director needs help or would greatly appreciate help, another volunteer should help.¹³ This form of solidarity is especially relevant when a volunteer with a larger set of responsibilities or a higher directorship helps a volunteer with a lower directorship. For example, the General Accounting Director could help a Local Accounting Director with a tedious local accounting task; a House Director who assigns cleaning duties could choose the least desirable cleaning duty; the General Director could help a House Director during a vacation or crisis.

Simple House volunteers practice solidarity with the poor by living in the conditions and neighborhoods they live-in, believing that everyone is equal in the sight of God, and offering them the same authentic friendship and dignity that is offered all other acquaintances. In addition, Simple House volunteers may occasionally help clean someone’s house or give them help performing their own proper duties. Solidarity is not only material help. According to the Catholic Catechism, “Solidarity is an eminently Christian virtue. It practices the sharing of spiritual goods even more than material ones.”¹⁴ The better the principle of solidarity is practiced the truer friendships become.

¹² *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church*, 2004 par. 192

¹³ In some cases, helping a director may not truly help a director. If a director needs to learn a good work ethic, it is often not true help to assist the director.

¹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Second Edition*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1997 pg. 1948