

Introduction to A Simple House of Sts. Francis and Alphonsus

Preface

The Catholic landscape of the United States has a pent-up and growing desire for evangelization. College campuses and many parishes are full of a new wave of fervent Catholics ready to embrace the basic call to witness. In addition, the Church's hierarchy seem rejuvenated and courageous in pursuing missionary work. Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have called for a 'New Evangelization' that will have a different approach and bear more fruit today than 'Classic Evangelization.'¹

There are very few organizations ready to meet this opportunity. A Simple House stands in a near vacuum as a group of

- + non-consecrated lay people living the evangelical counsels,
- + ministering directly to the poor,
- + and overtly evangelizing.

These attributes give A Simple House of Sts. Francis and Alphonsus an important role in the life of the Church. The importance of this role should challenge volunteers to accept the great love and graces God has for us.

Our Identity

A Simple House is composed of part-time and full-time volunteers, and has locations in Washington, DC and Kansas City, MO. The work of A Simple House takes place in the poorest neighborhoods of America, and it includes spreading the gospel through prayer, evangelization, and good works. Volunteers at A Simple House aspire to the evangelical counsels and are formed by the teaching of the Catholic Church.

The Mission of a Simple House is to:

- wonderfully and radically fall upon the cross of Christ for grace and support;
- serve the poor, volunteers, and sponsors by proclaiming the gospel through acts of faith, love, and charity;
- sanctify volunteers through friendship with the Lord, observance of poverty, and obedience to the Holy Catholic Church.

Summary of Our Philosophy

Friendship evangelization is the method we use to spread the Gospel. This evangelization is performed through words, actions, and relationships. We meet each individual on a **personal level** addressing their unique needs.

¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers, Jubilee of Catechists, 12 December 2000

This personable approach also extends to our donors. **Complete Christian almsgiving** encompasses sacrifice, building a relationship, and meeting a need. Encouraging a spirit of sacrifice and friendship between donors, volunteers, and the poor is fundamental to our ministry.

Our motto is to *'wonderfully and radically fall upon the cross of Christ for grace and support.'* This fall must include an obvious reliance upon God's **providence**. We rely on providence by practicing **personal and corporate poverty**. Volunteers do not financially profit from their work, and the organization has renounced endowments and savings accounts. As a general rule, A Simple House tries to have no more than three months operating expenses at any one time and avoids owning immovable property.

Who We Directly Serve

- Adults living in Section 8 or Project housing. Most people we serve are single mothers with multiple children.
- A variety of people who come to our door for help. Most of these people suffer from drug use, prostitution, and/or homelessness.

Summary of Our Regular Ministry

A Simple House serves project and Section 8 neighborhoods in southeast Washington, DC and Kansas City, MO. Our work involves meeting people in their neighborhoods and in their homes, and it is focused upon the parents instead of the children.

A Simple House believes that the best hope of every child is their parent, and there can be nothing better for a child than to have their parent transformed in Christ. This transformation may help a mother or father overcome depression, drug addiction, and self-destructive behavior. In addition, a true transformation makes someone embrace family life and their role as a parent. As an article of faith, we know that conversion is possible for every human, but unfortunately, our society has written off troubled inner-city adults as unreachable. The overwhelming number of families in our neighborhoods are lead by single mothers, and mothers have become the main focus of our ministry.

Home visits are made by pairs of volunteers, and the visits usually include counseling, prayer, bible study, or delivering groceries. We try to include as much prayer and spiritual discussion as possible, but we do not deny our friendship to anyone.

When Simple House volunteers visit someone in their home, a unique honesty and equality results. These visits happen in the environment where the person is most comfortable, and they result in a neighborly and friendly exchange. A living room is a very natural place to share the gospel and struggles. In addition, a person's home environment can give a penetrating insight into the material and spiritual needs of a family. Without home visits, many people would never be reached. Many people have spiritual, physical, or material obstacles that make it very difficult and unlikely for them to visit a church.

Through discussing, observing, and praying about the needs of a family, Simple House volunteers discern if a family needs material assistance or a unique help to meet a specific need. Financial assistance may include rent assistance, bill assistance, food deliveries, baby supplies, and transportation assistance. Unique helps may include taking people to the hospital, moving assistance, helping to clean a house, helping people to receive social services, tutoring, babysitting... etc.. Everyone has unique needs and formal programs are not flexible and informed enough to discern the right response. A Simple House is trying to meet these unique needs by remaining flexible and developing close relationships with families.

A Simple House also uses **general outreaches** to help the neighborhood become more comfortable with our ministry and to find individuals who are the most receptive to our message. General outreaches are religiously focused and require a team of volunteers to minister to the entire neighborhood. They often include distributing religious gifts and invitations to church. Annual general outreaches include delivering Easter bags, school supplies, Thanksgiving bags, and Christmas baskets.

In addition to home visits and general outreaches, Simple House volunteers may invite people to church on Sunday, take people on pilgrimages to the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception or the Franciscan Monastery, and have dinner with neighborhood families.