

FROM PILLAR TO POST

The Homeless Find Help
and Hope in Chicago

You mindlessly pass them on the streets of whichever city you live in, often without a second glance. They can be your former neighbor, a high school sweetheart or a childhood friend. They are military veterans, single parents and children. *They* are the homeless in America – the forgotten people.

According to *The State of Homelessness in America 2014*, a report by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, 610,042 people in the United States were homeless on a single night in January 2013.

But for the homeless in Chicago, there is hope and help and it comes in the form of Franciscan Outreach.

Personal Mission

In 1963, Father Phil Marquard, OFM, a Franciscan friar of the Sacred Heart Province, was working out of St. Augustine parish on the southwest side of Chicago when he came across an article in the local newspaper. The article discussed the dilemma of recently paroled ex-offenders who were not able to leave prison because they had no place to go. Marquard promptly started a halfway house for the ex-offenders with 16 beds, job counseling, placement and access to support groups. St. Anthony's Inn became the first in a series of programs, run by Franciscan Outreach, aimed at serving the needs of the homeless and poor in Chicago.



Volunteer serving guests at the Marquard Center soup kitchen.

As a Franciscan friar, Father Marquard took to heart the message and mission of St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis was sensitive to the needs of the poor, he looked at each person and every creature as God's child, making a connection with them, walking with them and being attentive to those who were marginalized. Marquard carried this same charism to his personal mission of serving the poor and marginalized in Chicago. Whether he was reaching out to ex-offenders, the poor, addicted or homeless, he accepted them for who they were and didn't pass judgment on them; but rather, showed them respect, affirmed their dignity and valued them as people. Today, the staff and volunteers of Franciscan Outreach continue Marquard's mission.

Continuing the Mission

Franciscan Outreach was incorporated in 1976 as a separate 501(c)3 organization, with its tax exception through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Since that time, Franciscan Outreach has continued to develop and operate programs that serve the homeless and include soup kitchens, shelters, transitional housing, job development and case management.

The early 1980s saw the passage of a law which allowed individuals in mental care institutions to be released if they were not considered a danger to themselves or to society. Almost overnight, the homeless rate exploded with the release of these people who had no real way to care for or support themselves. In 1983, **Franciscan House** was opened. "The building had originally been offered to the Chicago Food Depository," explains Diana Faust, OFS, executive director of Franciscan Outreach, "of which Father Phil [Marquard] was the founding treasurer. When the Depository passed on the building, Father decided he would be able to use it as a homeless shelter."

Franciscan House provides 265 beds for both men and women every night during the year. It is made up of three large dorms with one specifically designated for women. The women are allowed into the shelter first, they eat and once they settle in for the night, the dorm door is locked to prevent the men from entering the women's dorm. While guests are required to leave by 6:30 a.m., there are a few exceptions. The doors stay open for case management, job development and if someone needs to use the bathroom or the telephone. The other exception is for those guests in the interim housing program. Faust explains, "We have an interim housing program in which 16 guests can stay during the day in exchange for providing 25 hours of volunteer services a week, for instance, answering the phone or door, helping with the sheets and meal preparation." The interim program also consists of intensive case management services and job development opportunities. The goal of this program is to get people out of the shelter, help them find a job and housing within 120 days. As to whether or not they are always successful, Faust confides, "Sometimes we make that goal, usually we don't; but, we're working with people to help them set that goal and work in that direction."

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In addition to shelter for the night, Franciscan House also provides showers, dinner and breakfast, a medical clinic one day a week and nurses who visit twice a week. There are case workers and a job developer, as well as a spirituality group that is completely optional, and mental health workers who visit the guests regularly.

In 2012, the city of Chicago asked Franciscan Outreach if they would be willing to take over a shelter operated by another organization that could no longer continue to run it properly. "We told the city we didn't have the money to take it on," relates Faust, "however, we let them know if they would fund it, we'd take it on."

The city agreed to fully fund the additional shelter which came to be known as **Franciscan Annex**. The Annex is just under two miles from Franciscan House, and is operated out of a church basement. The Annex has 70 beds for men and is open only during the evening. "This is an area of the city where there's a lot of need for shelter," explains Faust, "which is why the city wanted the shelter to continue in that space. If Franciscan House is filled, we can send them over to the Annex." Dinner and breakfast are also provided at the Annex, where the food is brought over from Franciscan House.

The **Marquard Center** is home to a soup kitchen on the first floor that serves a full dinner to approximately 100 people every night. Dinner service starts at 5 p.m. and the doors close at 6:30 p.m. A free drop off laundry program for the homeless is run out of Marquard Center. Laundry can be dropped off, where it is then washed, dried, folded and ready for pick up the following day. On Mondays and Fridays, those wanting to clean up can come in and use the showers. "The laundry and shower

services are very important for human dignity," relates Faust. The administrative offices for Franciscan Outreach are housed on the second floor, along with the case management offices and the third floor acts as the residence for the full-time volunteers.

The Day Program is part of the City of Chicago Department of Family and Social Services. It is located only a few miles away from the shelter and is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. It not only provides a place for the homeless to go during the day; but offers seminars in life skills, a reading group, an art group and two case managers to help anyone who requests it.

Case Management

The 10 case managers, including the director of case management services, are tasked with providing assistance to guests to help them improve their lives, which could be anything from helping them obtain identification cards to admitting them into substance abuse programs to finding them housing. "The ultimate goal for me, as well as the other case managers," relates Darlene Bell, Streets-to-Home case manager, Franciscan Outreach, "is to get someone housed." Bell continues, "While housing may be the ultimate goal, we provide other services that are just as important, getting clients medical care, substance abuse treatment, identification cards and much more. It may seem like a lot; but, it's not. It's just the right thing to do." Last year alone, 258 homeless persons in Chicago found a home, and the 10 case managers held a combined 26,737 one-on-one meetings with people in need.

Volunteers

Franciscan Outreach has 12 full-time volunteers who live on-site at the Marquard Center and work between the various locations preparing and serving meals, running the shower and laundry programs, working at the shelters and day program. "They are usually young people who come from around the country and the world," explains Faust. "Some have degrees in psychology or sociology, some have volunteered at other shelters but most have some reason to want to be here." Volunteers must be over 18 and make a one year commitment to Franciscan Outreach.

The organization also relies on daily volunteers to help in the soup kitchen, act as dinner servers at both shelter locations, day program volunteers to help with the registry and data entry and fundraising.

Funding

"The city of Chicago provides approximately 23 percent of our funding," explains Faust. "They fully fund the day program and then they also provide some funding for our case managers. That funding also goes towards Franciscan shelter, which is one shelter but two sites." In addition to funding, the city also provides 43 slots of permanent housing for clients of Franciscan Outreach. The case managers screen people for these slots, help them apply, move in, get adjusted and then visit them once a week to make sure they can maintain the housing.

Additional funding comes from foundations and grants, including the Father Tom Fratus Foundation, a supporting foundation which was set up in honor of a Franciscan friar who worked with the poor and considered Franciscan Outreach one of his favorite projects. The rest of the funding comes from small groups, individuals, churches, companies and donations, as well as a variety of fundraisers. As Faust puts it, "We are a very efficient organization with a very well-diversified funding base."

Getting Out the Word

Franciscan Outreach gives their supporters business-sized cards with emergency shelter information on them to pass out to people on the street in need. "Many of the people who are on the streets downtown may not want the cards," explains Faust, "but if you hand them out to 10 people you might reach one or two who are actually in need of this type of referral. And then homeless people just sort of tell each other too, there's a lot of word of mouth on the street." The Chicago police will sometimes drop off people needing shelter or a meal and as Faust admits, "There's no lack of people coming to our shelter."

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From bottom left to right: Volunteer and guest at the Franciscan House shelter. Darlene Bell provides assistance to guests to help them improve their lives and find housing. A volunteer helps make dinner at the soup kitchen. Diana Faust with a guest in front of the Marquard Center in Chicago.



Formula for Success

Success stories are easy to come by at Franciscan Outreach and everyone seems to have a favorite story. What is clear is the number of people who have been helped by the staff. "Our case managers are helping people change their lives on a daily basis," states Faust. "There are people who are sleeping in a bed and not sleeping in the gutter, people who are eating a nice, warm, safe meal. We've really helped people." Outside of helping the homeless improve their lives and eventually find housing, Faust hopes they also find "the respect and dignity in the affirmation that they're a person of value and worth."

Luckily, for the homeless of Chicago, Franciscan Outreach is more than a warm meal and safe bed, it is someone who listens to them, treats them with respect and accepts them for who they are, someone who helps them dream, and achieve, a better future. And that is what makes all the difference in the world. ☀

In 2013, Franciscan Outreach Provided:

260,608 meals

115,339 nights of shelter
(330 available beds each night)

26,737 one-on-one meetings
(between a person in need and a case manager)

258 men and women placed into housing

Stories from the Streets



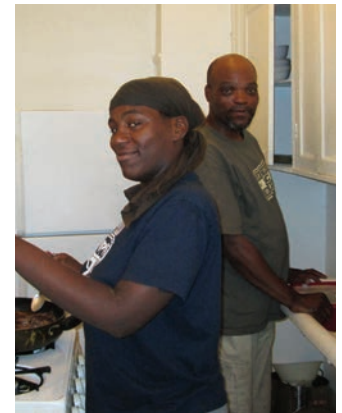
Anthony

Uncertainty. This described Anthony's life for 17 years. Anthony would find work, rent an apartment and when the work ended he would be back on the streets, a cycle that became hard to break. There were times he would start a fight so he would be arrested and have a place to sleep and a meal to eat. His first connection

with Franciscan Outreach was when he walked in the door of the Marquard Center to use the phone. He had heard they allowed free phone calls and wanted to call his mother. Over time, he began to trust and work with the case managers at Franciscan Outreach and with their help he now has a place to call his own. "Anthony's life is changed because of us," states Faust, "he looks healthy and happy now and is living on his own." Anthony recently visited those that helped him at the Marquard Center to let them know his lease was renewed for another year and that those years of uncertainty are now behind him.

Curtis and LaToya

Stable, happy and secure were not words that described Curtis and LaToya. Both had criminal records, drug abuse problems and had been living on the streets of Chicago for quite a while. The last time Curtis was released from prison, he arrived back on the streets to find 'his girl' LaToya sleeping in a doorway with another man. It was at



that point, Curtis decided he had to do something to get both of them off the streets, so they turned to Franciscan Outreach. However, their road was not an easy one. "Working with people, getting them into substance abuse programs and then into housing," explains Bell, "sometimes takes time. Sometimes takes three and four times." At one point, Curtis confided to one of the staff that he believed their dream of having a place of their own was unattainable. He had even been offered a voucher for subsidized housing which he declined because LaToya was not allowed to live with him. Shortly thereafter, they were married, and in 2011 realized their dream of having a place of their own. It's been three years and they are both still doing well, one might even say they are stable, happy and secure.