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In my first year of seminary, I had a deeply impactful experience being able to participate in the “Red Doors Retreat” within the homeless ministry at St. André Bessette parish in Portland, Ore. This was a retreat where we seminarians for a day were able to work alongside volunteers in serving and being present to those homeless individuals, whom the volunteers called their “guests.” We were able to serve them breakfast, help them with finding supplies, and just being present to them. What was really significant to me was that their ministry for the homeless was within the actual parish building. As you walked through the parish doors, on the left side was the church with the sanctuary, and on the right was the door to enter the area where their ministry was.

After we were done volunteering we were able to attend daily Mass alongside the volunteers and some of the guests we had just served. Receiving the Eucharist alongside the volunteers and the guests, right after we had worked and served together, was a vivid image to me of what being Church is. As Pope Francis said to a group of Catholic associations in May of 2013, “We cannot become starched Christians, too polite, who speak of theology calmly over tea. We have to become courageous Christians and seek out those (who need help most).”

There was real courage from the whole ministry and team of volunteers to be the prophet, priest, and king we all are called and baptized to be.

This was an amazing experience that helped me realize much more clearly what pastoral ministry is: a true accompanying of encounter with our brothers and sisters in Christ who need it the most, fueled by a love of God found in the Eucharist and in the Church, as Body of Christ.