

André Yandl

- Memorial Service
- Chapel of St. Ignatius
- March 2, 2019
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

The Chapel of St. Ignatius on the Seattle University campus is the right place to celebrate the life of André Yandl. He loved the chapel and used the showing of it to friends as an excuse to get them onto campus so he could have lunch with them. Perhaps there is something about the mathematical proportions of the architecture of this chapel that appealed to this mathematician. He loved it also because it was in the leaky Quonset huts nearby that he first taught. And it was here that the lives of his colleagues were celebrated by this man who was the quintessential good colleague. I don't know if he reflected on it, but this is the chapel of the students of Seattle University. They are the ones for whom it was built and who make it holy by their presence and lives. There was no one who more loved students and more gave himself to them generously, affably, helpfully, encouragingly as did Professor André Yandl. So let us celebrate his life here, remembering him, being thankful for him, grieving him, praying for him and his family, and allowing his life to inspire and encourage us.

I chose the readings for this memorial service in conversation with Shirley and Kris because both readings are mathematical and say much about André. The widow has only one portion of flour and oil and yet, with the blessing of God through the prophet, the jar of flour and the jug of oil do not run out for a full year during the drought and feed the widow, her son, and the prophet. That's a great formula: one plus one equals 365×3 ! Now there is a mathematical miracle! And in the Gospel Jesus, in concern for the crowd that they might not falter from hunger after having come out to hear him, takes five loaves of bread and two fish, feeds five thousand people, and has the disciples pick up twelve baskets of leftovers. Now there is a miraculous mathematical formula if there ever was one: five plus two divided by five thousand equals 12 squared!

Isn't André Yandl perfectly represented by these scriptural passages of miraculous math? He never ran out of time or energy or delight to help students in the classroom, in his office on the third and fourth floors of Bannan, in the athletic center, even in his home. His jar of flour and jug of oil never ran out or went dry. It was never a zero-sum mathematical formula for him. He loved students, he delighted in helping them, he thrilled to see them understand the basics and the logic and the elaborations of math. Anyone who hosted "math parties"—whatever they are—for students in the basement of his own home was a professor and a man of inexhaustible love and delight in students and of confidence in what they could learn for life from math. One student said, "He provided me with an organized thought process that extends into my life as well as my other classes." A devoted alumna says, "André is the person in my life who believed in me the most." His son, Kris, says that what his father really did was to use math to teach critical thinking. Kris should know, having taken a course from his dad while Kris held hands in class with his girlfriend! André probably saw one plus one, plus marriage, equals grandchildren! Only at the very end of his life, after his stroke three years ago, was André not able to do math, and was frustrated by that, because he knew in his mind that he could still do it. His jar and jug

of care for students, love of them, help of them, delight in them, and time given to them, never ran out. No wonder he was the very first professor at Seattle University who was elected by the students themselves to receive the “Associated Students First Outstanding Faculty Award” in 1981. Students know great teachers and they know teachers who care for them greatly.

André—whom a friend remarked had something of the same humility as Jesus—also was a multiplier like Jesus, not of bread and fish but of something more important to feed at least five thousand students and through them basketsful of others. How did he do it? He did it by encouragement. The power of encouragement came from his own life. When he emigrated from Algiers with his sister Josette to Wenatchee he was only 18 and did not speak English. But a teacher in the Wenatchee High School spotted his ability in math, which he had loved since he was a child, and encouraging him, helped to get him into more advanced courses at Wenatchee Community College. Then, when André was at the University of Washington, married to Shirley and working full time, when he said “it was becoming too much for me and I was ready to drop out”, a professor took the time to get him a fellowship. This encouragement made all the difference or else, as André said, “I often wonder what would have happened to me if he had not taken the time.” Encouragement of students became the miraculous formula for how André multiplied the impact of his teaching, time, and friendship with students. He loved students asking him for help, even putting himself in places where they could more easily ask for help as in The Chieftain or over in the gym where he played racquetball and where he was the Faculty Athletic Rep. He made himself available to students, even spending countless hours of his supposed retirement sitting over coffee in the Collegia encouraging students in the places where they hung out. He was not a false encourager. He once remarked, “We have two types of students. Some are not as well prepared. My attitude is it is nice if they know it, but if they are not prepared I help them to learn.”

The likely five thousand encouraged students whom André helped to learn over his 55 years at Seattle U. know what he did for them. But then, if we take those five thousand and imagine whom they, in turn, impacted by their lives, with their critical thinking, believing in others after the example of their math professor believing in them, giving a similar encouragement in schools, in families, in businesses, in communities, in churches, in homes, then we can imagine that the multiplication was indeed overly abundant even beyond those whom he encouraged here.

In the end, we celebrate and honor and grieve and pray for and thank a devoted husband and brother, father and grandfather and great-grandfather. We remember and are inspired in our own lives by a joy-filled, humorous, down-to-earth, steady, good man. He is a legend among us, a legend among other legends who made our university and our mission to be what it has been and still strives to be. André, who was born and baptized in his French Catholic family in Algiers, lived faith in a practical way by loving others. In this way he walked with God who is love and whose one commandment to us is to love others. At the very, very end André was breathing his very last breath in the bedroom in his own home, accompanied by Shirley alone. He was breathing through an oxygen mask. We cannot be sure what he could hear and what he could understand. The last words he heard before Shirley said to him, “Now you can go and meet Mike”—their son who died last year—were the words of the 23rd Psalm which she recited to him, seeing a tear roll down his face. Let us listen to those words which were spoken to him and are spoken to us. Let them console us in his dying and encourage us in our living:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
Beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.
He guides me in right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side
With your rod and your staff that give me courage.

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes;
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.