

Traveling Companion: Dear Fr. Landers

Fr. Michael Tracey

Sometimes, I feel like a Fr. Landers with all the emails I get from people with questions, problems and struggles they are experiencing. I am not complaining about it but see it as an email ministry. Of course, persons who ask questions through the medium of email probably feel more comfortable using that means because it not only grants them a certain anonymity but it also allows them to trust sparingly until they feel comfortable revealing their deepest fears and struggles.

I received such an email this morning. It was from someone who hadn't emailed me before. It read as follows: "Hello Father Tracey.

I am a student and I have a problem that I, hope you can help me with. I have been dating a guy for 3.5 years and we are engaged. We are living together more or less because I needed someone to move here with and share expenses with. We don't have sex because I believe it is wrong (before marriage). My parents are strongly against us getting married because we have different educational backgrounds. He stopped at the 10th grade (which was not his fault because he has a bad mother that never encouraged him). I have helped him accomplish many things. Basically I helped him dig out of the hole he was living in.

My parents say we are too "emotionally bonded". He "NEEDS" me too much. They don't want to support something that they feel won't last. They say they can see the problems that we will have if we get married. I am 21(22 in Aug.) and I am currently not ready to get married. But when the time comes I will know it. They say I'm too young to know who I would want to marry. He is 25. My mom said if I wanted to marry him that she would not be there and that hurts me so much. She said it would put a wedge between us. I don't want that to happen. The opinions of my parents mean so much to me and I don't know what to do. I love him so much and we know the relationship is not based on sex. I can feel it in my heart, and it feels right to me except when my parents give me their point of view. I am being pulled in two different directions. I know it would hurt him terribly if I told him I don't want to marry him anymore.

Doesn't it matter that I am happy? Of course we argue sometimes and not every moment is hunky dorey but overall we get along great and I know he loves me so much.

Please help me father. My Dad told me in order to get married in the Catholic Church we would have to go through some counseling. He said it would open my eyes. I know they love me and want the best for me but why can't they just accept the fact that I am happy with the way things are! I am so confused!!! PLEASE HELP!!"

As I sit staring at the screen, I wonder what should I tell her. Should I tell her to respect her parents' wishes and wisdom? Should I tell her to go with her "heart?" Should I ask her if she feels good about him because she "rescued" him and "helped him accomplish many things as well as "helped him dig out of the hole he was living in? Should I ask her to entertain the thought that, because she has now "rescued" him, he may not become as dependant on her and the relationship may become more complicated? Should I ask her about herself? How she met this person? What attracted her to this person initially? Does this person show initiative and how does she feel about such? Should I ask her about her parent's expectations of her? Where they are grounded?

I have a feeling that my response to her will be a series of questions to help her probe more deeply her own feelings, those of her parents, and of her live-in boyfriend. I sense that I will be hearing from her again.