

Traveling Companion: Where have they all gone?

Fr. Michael Tracey

I was walking down the side aisle before Saturday evening Mass when he stepped out of his seat and said, "Can I ask you a question?" "Sure." "Where are all the young people? I never see any of them at Mass?" Taken aback by his question, I said that many people come to our Sunday morning Mass and not usually to Saturday evening Masses."

The gentleman then continued, "When we went to the Back School, the priest would come and check and see if we were at Mass. If we were not, he would hit us over the head with a book. The next Sunday, we would make sure we were in church and we sat in the front seat to make sure that he saw us there."

Recently, I came across Chicago Willow Creek survey about people's spirituality. The survey indicated that one in six persons are stuck in their spirituality and that 25% of them have considered leaving their particular church.

The survey suggests four main reasons why people are stuck in their spirituality. First of all, 27% are afflicted with various addictions which include gambling, alcohol, pornography and overeating. Secondly, 16% suffer from inappropriate relationships; for example, physical affairs, and negative influence from others. Thirdly, 48% are caught up in emotional issues which include depression, anger and constrictive feelings. Finally, 89% do not make their spiritual lives a priority. Instead, they prefer television, the Internet, emails, movies and shopping.

Much has been written about the Generation Xers; those born between 1964 and 1979. Now, much more is being written about a newer generation, known as the Millennials; those born after 1980.

Both generations were raised in a computer age; an age when, if you had a question, you "googled" it on the Internet and educated yourself. Rarely, did such searchers seek out answers from books, from organized religion or from older adults. Many who did seek out answers on line may also have sought out New Age answers to their questions. Instead of approaching organized religion for answers, they found their gurus elsewhere. They were less interested in organized religion and more interested in a spirituality.

Over the years, my email ministry has grown. Many seekers email me with questions about their spirituality or some troubling issues they may be facing. Emails appeal to them for several reasons. Initially, they can remain anonymous, reserving trust and possible vulnerability. Secondly, they can reveal very little about themselves or their struggle as they try to discern if someone is open to respond to them. Thirdly, while often surprised by my email answers, they begin to trust someone more, and gradually reveal more and more of their real struggle. Trust builds and so does transparency. Rarely do the email exchanges lead to face to face encounters but they do lead to some kind of resolution of personal conflicts.

Many of the Millennials have their own space on sites like facebook and myspace.com. Many use such spaces to connect with others, to share a story, an insight, to belong to a community without walls. Such sites allow people who are disconnected, often from themselves, to connect with others; to look for acceptance, direction or some wisdom which will guide them.

I just created a blog which will facilitate a different kind of interaction with and among internet surfers who may be searching for some food for thought. The blog will provide some insights, some suggestions which may help people on life's journey. On a deeper level, the purpose of the blog is to be a kind of spirituality blog, which will allow people to get in touch with their own spiritual journey and glean some insights along the way to help them continue on their journey.

The title of the blog is the same as the masthead for my regular Gulf Pine Catholic columns – Traveling Companion. The blog address is <http://traveling-companion.blogspot.com>. Readers are welcome to join us as Traveling Companion bloggers.