

Hard to find

Following Sunday morning Mass, a visiting couple approached me and, following an introduction, said, "This is a hard place to find." I knew immediately what he meant and I replied, "It is not that we are hard to find, it is just that we are hard to get to."

Of course, I was referring to the ongoing reconstruction of our city streets and Beach Blvd. which runs in front of our church.

The Beach Blvd. has been closed since January 12. Our schools were informed that it would be closed for sixty days and that diversions would be in place to facilitate drop off and pick up of school children.

Since then, our city has been a Dust Bowl City, a City of Potholes, a labyrinth; a city where ATV's are more at home than SUV's; a city where the rock group, U2 would be most at home singing "The Street with No Name."

It is almost impossible to give people directions to get anywhere because that "anywhere" might be a dead ended street with either a "Detour" sign; a "Road Closed" sign or a "Construction Zone" sign. It is a city in which a GPS is as useful as a Band-Aid after open heart surgery. Washing a car or vehicle is a waste of time. The strength and agility of shock absorbers is tested daily. Presently, we are more suited to dirt bike races and mystery tours.

During recent voting, people complained that a journey, that ordinarily took five minutes to a polling place, took them twenty-five minutes. Schools have had to be flexible in starting time as parents drive through a maze of streets hoping that eventually they will find their children's school. People try to console themselves by wishfully saying, "It is going to get better." Part of it is a glimmer of hope and the other part is an attitude of resignation. Everyone seems to ask the question, "When?" and nobody seems to know the answer. Some of the projects are city projects, others are state projects. People wonder if both hands can or do communicate with each other.

Now, almost four years after Hurricane Katrina, one wonders if, because of some latent depression, people resign themselves to an attitude of resignation rather than a legitimate anger that demands answers, results and deadlines. Has depression led to, not only an acceptance that people have no control over their surroundings, but a paralysis that renders them helpless and without a voice?

People say that we need to get people to come back into our community again so that we can continue to build, grow and heal. Often, such a plea is peppered with a wonderment as to why would people want to come back; come back to a constant construction zone with no end in sight.

Some people take a nostalgic approach to things. Wanting to turn back the clock to pre-Katrina days and their preconceived Utopian days is not an option. Still, others find themselves rudderless and like dead people walking.

Frustration can lead to resignation. Lack of control can lead to indifference. Constant battles with construction can lead to opting out. Lack of progress and answers can lead to a voiceless, silent majority and a sense of powerlessness.

The sight of a young man standing in front of a tank in Tiananmen Square in China shows the power that one person can make a majority. Persistence is the antidote to powerlessness. None of us is really powerless because power resides in the willingness to stand alone until the community and eventually world becomes committed to making a difference.

Some people will continue to say, "It is going to get better" while others will question our definition of "better." When things get better, will there be an ownership, pride and acceptance of the betterment? Some people will say that, once our recovery is complete, it was all worth it, it was a success. But, then again, how do we define success?

In the end, it is not the things we do that count. Instead, it is the way we do the things we must do that makes all the difference.

The next time I meet a visitor at church who says to me, "It is so easy to get to your church," I will thank him.