

## **Traveling Companion: What's in your bathroom?**

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Since Hurricane Katrina, we have had to make many adjustments; from spacious homes to crammed FEMA trailers; from a predictable routine to chaos; from pristine views to thrashed beaches; from convenient places to empty spaces.

Having lost our rectory in the hurricane, we found ourselves crammed into a construction site trailer. We graduated from a room with a view to a modular building. Our present office building is more spacious, more soundproof and of course, more private. Along with its three offices and small meeting room, we inherited a rather equally spacious multi-purpose room.

Basically, this multi-purpose room serves initially as a bathroom but has become the chat on the frat. Of course, it does have a toilet. The sink is built for Lilliputians. The vanity case is empty because we don't take headache into or out of the room.

What makes it interesting and conversational is its collection of necessities that should not occupy a bathroom. What's in the bathroom? Well, it has mops and buckets, brooms and burlap; paper towels and paper plates; office supplies and snack supplies; chopping blocks and first aid kits; donated DVD's and kids picture books; thrash cans and canned food; bug spray and hair spray; Clorox and detox supplies; tool kits and thrash kits; electrical supplies and personal hygiene supplies; empty refrigerator and empty coffee pots; unopened vacuum cleaners and toiler bowl cleaners; Christmas decorations and magical markers

If any of the office staff is looking for something. The answer is simple: "Check the bathroom!" Visitors who use the bathroom are enamored by its size and its capacity to be a variety store. We listen to fun loving comments and chuckles from parishioners and visitors who tour our offices.

Now, when we go into our office bathroom, we may be entering for all kinds of reasons as we enter a storehouse of surprises and ablutions.

The whole experience reminds me of the kind of jungle our lives have resided in since the hurricane. We live in unfamiliar places with unfamiliar faces and things. We live mixed up lives, filled with mountains of unresolved issues. We sleep in strange beds, devoid of memories and comfort. Trustingly, we listen to people who promise to build our homes with a catch – our money first. We adopt a "hurry up and wait" attitude with others we trust. Promise are made and rarely executed; teasers are offered but little progress is accomplished.

I am amazed at some of the comments I hear from people who have just moved back into their refurbished homes or into strange homes build on familiar slabs. So often , I hear people say: "It is not the same house anymore. Everything is different. It has no memories, no personality. It is just a house."

Like Elvis, we are "all shuck up." Now, we get used to no routine and even less ritual. Predictability is a word in a dictionary. Familiarity is unfamiliar. Comfort levels are heightened states of alert. Familiar places are ghostly encounters. Roads are pre-historical pathways. Stores – those who open – are open in different places. Car tags are from different states of consciousness.

Yet, the unfamiliar produces its own surprises. We continue to discover our ever deepening and challenging faith. We continue to discover our own resilience; that people care; that strangers come and become friends; that historical has less to do with age and more to do with survival.

So, maybe the next time I am looking for a paper towel, or paper clip; a garbage bag or a hammer; a letterhead or a snack; a key or a piece of duct tape; an ant feed or an air freshener, I will enter my multi-purpose room which "officially" happens to be my bathroom.