

Traveling Companion: There goes the neighborhood -

Fr. Michael Tracey

Recently, I moved into a new neighborhood in Bay St. Louis. It was both a new adventure and a comical experience.

Initially, people queried me, "When are you moving into the neighborhood?" I presumed they lived in that neighborhood because they referred to it as "the neighborhood." I answered them with a guesstimate and they seemed satisfied. Others satisfied their curiosity by asking, not a question, but making a statement. "I hear you are moving into the neighborhood." I nodded my head in agreement with their observation.

Good friends reminded me: "This is going to be a new experience for you." I agreed with them. They pressed further. "Now, you are going to be out among us, in our neighborhood and will have to meet all your neighbors. This is going to be exciting for you. You will no longer be tied to the church. You will be one of us, living among us." My friends were excited about the potential and implications of my new venture. I looked forward to it with excitement.

One parishioner, who lives a few houses away, volunteered: "We will have to have you over for supper one night. Now, I will have to start cooking for my husband if we are to have you over for supper." Obviously, her husband who works almost a hundred miles away, usually arrives home much later than the usual supper time.

One of my new neighbors, who are also parishioners, made me feel welcome in many ways. I had some homemade cookies on the kitchen counter when I arrived the first night. But their two teenage sons had a different kind of welcome for me. When they found out that I was moving into the neighborhood, they said to their parents. "We thought that we would get a nice family with some young women and look what we got, a priest." At least, they had a sense of humor or resignation about their new neighbor.

Another neighbor, further down the street, who is not Catholic but married to a Catholic, expressed her concern in a fun, loving way by indication, "there goes the neighborhood. We will be subjected to all kinds of wild parties from now on."

A few days later, I could not resist returning the compliment when I saw her in the car line at the elementary school, dropping off her daughter for school. I simply said to her, "I will give you a chance to recover from the shock of having me as one of your neighbors. I will hold off for a while on those wild parties." She smiled and moved on.

One afternoon, I went by the house to show it to a friend. While we stood outside beside the garage, one of the neighbors came over and introduced herself and welcomed me to the neighborhood. She knew I had moved into the house the night before. She reminded me that it seems I arrive last in the evening and am gone before 6 a.m. in the morning. I pride her in her observation. Some friends said she reminded them of "Mrs. Kravitz."

As I sit in my house and write this article on my laptop, I look around at the scant surroundings. I have a recliner, courtesy of the former owners of the house. I have a bed, courtesy of my neighbors. Eventually, the house may become a home; may move from being a resting place to being a heart-warming place; may move from barrenness to a place filled with memories and, hopefully, may become a haven for hungry souls.

Maybe, now that Easter is in full bloom and we experienced new life, new birth, new hope, new promise; then I will discover the right moment to have one of those "wild parties." Then, people may have to resign themselves to accepting that the neighborhood will never be the same again.