

Traveling Companion: “The name of your pastor”

Fr. Michael Tracey

Thank God for answering machines! They are both a blessing and a curse. Some people love to hate them and others cannot live without them. An answering machine in a parish is an essential necessity especially for Christmas, Easter and Ash Wednesday schedules.

On the answering machine, we usually list the schedule of Masses – both daily and weekend and then give an emergency phone number. On Monday evening, we received an interesting message on our answering machine’s first line.

A gentleman’s voice begins: “Oh! Good! I hope you’re taking a message. Yeah! Listen! You really need to have the option of being able to dial ‘zero’ and get an operator. Ah! You give out a phone number if this is an emergency. Well! What about if you want to talk to a live person to ask a question that’s other than a Mass schedule?”

I think you need to start off with a live person and then go to the Mass schedule if that’s what’s needed. But, if all you do is give a Mass schedule, you really aren’t being of service to people who call for so many other reasons. And, for that matter, if it is an emergency, wouldn’t that person need the emergency phone number right off the bat? Should they have to wade through all the different Mass times?

So, you really need to change that around because you’re not really being of service to the community.

In fact, I’m looking at the Yellow Pages right now and it gives the times of Masses, for God’s sakes! But it doesn’t have the answer to the one question I wanted to have answered – the name of your pastor. I’ll call the school.”

When the call came in late on Monday evening, I was still in the office. I listened to the message as it was being recorded on the answering machine. I noted the phone number when the answering machine picked up the call. The Caller ID simply indicated it was a “Blocked Call.”

I waited to see if the emergency phone line would ring. It didn’t. Obviously, it was not an emergency that he discover the pastor’s name.

Sometimes, I get suspicious of “Blocked Calls.” So often, they indicate a sales call or an incoming fax from some outfit trying to sell something we really don’t need.

The next morning, when our secretary checked the answering machine for messages, she was dumbfounded by the rambling message left on the machine. It brought a chuckle to the rest of the staff and we even played it for any visitors who happened to drop by during the day.

Presently, I am taking his rambling suggestions under advisement. I am anticipating placing the emergency phone number first on the outgoing message; then I can include the times of Masses for anyone who indicates their call is not an emergency call, just a call inquiring about the times of Masses. On second thoughts, I may entertain his thought about leaving off the times of Masses and refer the listener to the Yellow Pages as he suggested. Then again, what if the person calling does not have access to the Yellow Pages?

His suggestion about having a “live person” starting off the message might be a little more complicated. I will have to see if that is technologically possible.

His other suggestion about being able to dial “zero” and get an operator might also be complicated. This would mean enlisting the service of a real answering service rather than an answering machine. Still, I foresee a problem here. Obviously, we do not have the privilege of having such in our area. Still, I wonder, how important the name of the pastor might be. Could it be seen as an emergency?

I simply say, “Thank God for answering machines” as well as the times they bring a chuckle to our lips.

Finally, I want to assure the gentleman who called that if he is still interested in knowing the name of the pastor, all he needs to do is find the author of this article.