

Traveling Companion: Reach out and touch someone

Fr. Michael Tracey

I received a handwritten letter in the mail today. The writing on the envelope read: “Fr. Tracey, Our Lady of the Gulf Ch. Bay St. Louis, Miss 39520

I opened the envelope and discovered a half-page sheet of a yellow pad with something written on both sides.

The letter began: “Fr. Tracey. This is a note to reach out and touch someone completely unknown to me, done, on an impulse for no specific reason. With that disclaimer in mind, I’ll continue.

About 2 a.m. Mon. morning, CNN had a piece on your area and your church and all that is involved, in their edited fashion. Anyway, I decided to drop you a line and perhaps take your mind off the overwhelming problems you and yours are confronted with just for a few minutes.

I should add, this is a first for me. The frustration and impatience you’re dealing with must be more than I can imagine. I have little to offer other than my interest and good will and, of course, hope for the future – I don’t want you to think I’m a ‘coo coo.’ I’ll say so long, and if there is ever the time, drop me a line and let me know of your progress or lack of same etc. sincerely, Elaine.”

Elaine’s note from Yerington, NV, really touched me. So many people have come to me since the “CNN Reports” by Kathleen Koch on the special on Bay St. Louis since Hurricane Katrina. Their comments have been interesting, “We say you on CNN the other night.” “You are now going to be famous.” “Can we have your autograph?” “We liked what you had to say about faith on the CNN newscast recently.”

I have been amazed at the calls and notes I have received from people who saw the special on Bay St. Louis but, of all the comments and calls, Elaine’s stands out for several reasons. First of all, she took the time to “reach out and touch someone completely unknown.” Secondly, Obviously, the program touched her deeply, even though there were only fleeting glimpses of me during the program. Thirdly, she simply wanted me to know that maybe a personal note from a complete stranger might brighten my day. It did.

Today, also, I received a box from a little girl named “Rachel” – a second-grade student at a public high school in the Chicago area. The picture was her class picture with her light blue, frilled dress and white bow in her hair.

Her letter read, “Dear Fr. Michael, I am Rachel and you came to my church and talked about the people who were in Katrina and I decided to give away some of my old clothes, toys and books. I was going to save some of my books for my children but I thought this was more important. I just had my eight birthday and we had a magician come and we still had some tricks and hats left so we decided to give them to the Katrina kids. My thoughts and prayers all go to the people that were in Katrina! Warm Regards. Rachel.”

When I open Rachel’s box of “goodies,” I discovered some neatly folded clothes, books and some tricks from the magic show at her elementary school.

I felt humbled that a smiling eight year old girl would take the time to give up things she treasured as well as things that brought some magic to her life and that she was willing to share them with some less-fortunate children affected by Hurricane Katrina.

I know that, because of Rachel’s generosity, there will be generous smiles and twinkles in the eyes of the children who will benefit from her generosity.

So, now, some people know that it is the thoughtfulness and generosity of people like Elaine and Rachel who brighten our day, our lives and our future.