

Pastor's Column

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Trading Places

"Father Michael, thanks for being with us this weekend! It was great to have you. When our Father Michael returns, I am going to talk to him to see how we can help you build your Church."

This was the comment of a woman who approached me after one of the three Masses that I celebrated at St. Peter Claver in New Orleans, our Sister Parish, last weekend. And it was a response to my homily in which I shared with them our almost 23-year history as a Parish-in-formation now on the brink of building our permanent place of worship.

These words capture well the warm hospitality and the generous spirit of the people of St. Peter Claver. After all that they have been through in the past two and a half years trying to recover from the catastrophic aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, while many of them are still displaced and living with other relatives, and many still existing in small FEMA trailers next to their gutted homes, there is a desire to help others. After they have been messed over by Insurance Companies and all levels of government who try to find ways not to help them, after they have experienced Hurricane Katrina related illnesses and deaths of loved ones, there is still a desire to help others.

Their call to live the Gospel propels them beyond themselves and their needs and moves them to consider the needs of others. That is one of the many contradictions that we live when we walk as Disciples of Jesus! That kind of contradiction is what brings healing and salvation, so contrary to what the world offers. Caring about the needs of others, while still in great need themselves, is the path to healing, the path to personal "wholeness and sanity" in the face of societal fracture and "insane" governmental response to the needs of the people. They know the road well!

My response to this lady was that you have already helped us! When you opened your lives to us, and allowed the people of St. Thomas More to walk with you in your pain and sorrow, you made a difference in us. Your example deepened our faith, and brought us closer to Jesus.



For those who went to New Orleans last year, I know how moved you were by your experience and by the faith of the people of St. Peter Claver. And you brought back with you a "spirit" that has moved through our faith community of St. Thomas More, and has strengthened all of us in many ways.

In my homily, I told the people of St. Peter Claver that I was there with them for the weekend simply to say "Thank You." "Thank You" for strengthening the faith life and the "spirit" of the many faith communities and civic organizations that have reached out to them and were accepted with open arms by them to walk with them not only in their joys, but also in their pain and sorrow.

I encouraged them to remember that whenever they were feeling discouraged, whenever they were losing hope, whenever they wanted to give up the battle, that they needed to remember that their witness is strengthening the faith walk of so many people across the country, in ways they may never know. They are making an enormous difference in the lives of so many, in so many ways. St. Thomas More is just one beneficiary of their goodness and generosity!

The lady who spoke to me after Mass doesn't realize, but she and all the others of St. Peter Claver have already helped St. Thomas More build our Church.

I received a Christmas card this year from Larry and Betty Dorsa. The note in the card said that I should not be discouraged by the amount of time it is taking as we move through the process of building our permanent worship space. They said, "Father, the buildings will come. We already have our Church!"

My visit to St. Peter Claver reaffirmed my faith and has strengthened me as we continue on our journey as the Faith Community of St. Thomas More.

We are already Church! The buildings will come...

F. Mike