

Keep on Movin' Rev'rend

Having been brought up in an environment where the Clergy were seen as an integral part of the community, especially in times of need, I'm amazed at how this seems to be a rapidly changing reality. I was trained, as were the police, the highway patrol, firemen, etc., that when a priest sees an accident, he is to stop in order to assist. This may mean merely standing aside and praying. It may mean an encouraging word. It may mean comforting a family member, it may mean anointing the sick, and it may mean the Last Rites - including a Confession.

My last four encounters since moving to where I now live have been: "keep on mov'in Rev'rend," "Get away from the Crime scene - immediately," "That is a violation of HIPAA," and "we don't need no help."

My concern is, where do the spiritual needs of a victim, of a traumatized family member, or a distraught person play into the contemporary culture where Clergy are all too marginalized and profiled - being cast into a negative light by the actions of a few?

As I train young seminarians, priests, and deacons today, I wonder what I should teach them about cooperating with those with whom they were formerly team mates? I used to teach clergy how to cooperate with other people in the fields of helping people in distress. Are Clergy still "partners in ministry" with the police, firefighters, and EMT's or are we "in the way?" Simply volunteering to be a chaplain does not necessarily make us partners with those helping professions. Countless people die today without the spiritual consolation that could have been provided.

Maybe we simply live in a culture where the word is, "Keep on movin' Rev'rend" or is it "Keep on movin' Jesus. We don't need no law suit here." I contrast that with my recent meetings in Moscow in Russia where crosses are being erected everywhere, churches are being reopened, religious articles are sold at malls, and priests are constantly being asked by people on the streets, public officials, and students for a blessing. I had to stop whatever I was doing - quite joyfully - in order to give the blessing. This experience in Russia reminded me of my happy years in a small town in Western Pennsylvania where I was asked to bless new businesses, anoint people in need of healing on street corners and hear confessions in taverns.

I wonder what would have happened if the current circumstances of our culture had been employed in the Parable of the Good Samaritan! "Keep on movin."