

I want to spin a little on the circuiter's life and I suspect it won't be difficult for those of you who aren't circuiting all the time to make the connections. I'm becoming increasingly aware of the times the devil enters my life when I'm circuiting. He marches right in after I've waited all morning to see the right person --but that person doesn't show up. He appears when my car breaks down and I have to postpone seeing someone crucial in the next town.

It's always at moments like those that the devil loves to remind you of the plain crumminess of the circuiter's life. Last Monday I'd exhausted all my ideas for an in-kind room for the night. When the host group meeting was over at 10:00 P.M., there I was with no place to sleep. I was very offended to spend the night in my car and I was equally offended that the next night I had no trouble at all in-kindng a room.

Through all of this it has come to me that if there is such a thing as a home for the circuiter, the car is my only home. I want to tell you about the '69 Rambler with 108,000 miles. It has a perpetual gas smell which varies only from mildly annoying to disturbingly noticeable. When the car began circuiting, the driver's door didn't even have a latch which meant that only a wire kept the door closed. Last week the starter died. Upon its replacement I learned that the flywheel needed immediate replacement (a six hour job) or the starter would collapse again. Now that car is my only home!

We've already been joking about my diet of peanuts, cheese and sunflower seeds -- with a vitamin pill thrown in! That wasn't so bad until I read the menu provided in the in-kind hotel room. One night I was particularly affected by the variety of smells coming from the restaurant as I headed toward the elevator. This is just to say that from a human point of view the circuiter's life is ridiculously and absurdly crummy.

Lately, however, I've begun to look at the circuiter's life in another way. The job of a circuiter is two-fold: sustaining care and by that I mean sustaining the care which is within the circuiter; and engaging care or engaging the care which is out on the circuit waiting to be called forth and used.

Do you remember what it was like for the disciples when Jesus sent them out on the road? They were to take only a stick, sandals and a coat -- but no break, no pack and no money. When I go out on the circuit, I take only three things of importance: a suitcase, a box, and a briefcase. There are alot of items in my suitcase, but the most crucial of all is my decor. Before I do anything else in my room at night, I set up that decor. How else can you symbolize that although you never sleep in the same bed two nights in a row, you are in the same room every night?

And my briefcase -- there is nothing practical in it except for a few pencils. However, my journal is there. My collegium notebook is there and so are the Estimates and the Order Polity document. That briefcase contains only spirit tools for the journey.

And lastly, my circuit file box. I had a great afternoon last Sunday. I must have used thirty different file folders and labels. But I got my file box neat and organized. It holds all my county town folders and in addition it holds material from Area Council organized by task forces and talks from the summer. In the midst of the terror inside as I was getting ready to start that second week of circuiting, that box helped me get out the door. I was ready for the chaos and demands of the new week.

That's all you need: a suitcase with decor, a briefcase with your spirit tools, and a neat circuit file box.

Something has shifted my image of my car. The Order Polity Document last week reviewed for me the traditional images of Orders -- teaching, service and contemplative. We have received gifts from all three of those. Relative to contemplation, I now see that my car is my monk's cell . . . and what you do when you're in the car can sustain that image for you.

My fellow circuiters have revealed that they sing alot in the car just as I do. I was delighted to hear that. I don't even wonder any more what people are thinking seeing my singing away in the car as they pass me on the highway. How do you mark your time as you travel in your car? As you spend hours and hours a week in a car, how do you give significance to every hour? You have to figure that out for yourself. In all the man-years since 1971 I have used the Canonical Hours as my way of doing that. The particulars of how you do that are not as important as just finding a way to do it. Only then can your car remain a monk's cell.

One image that sustains my care is that the Lord promises the manna you need one day at a time. Another way to say that is that the time design of your day guarantees that each day stands as a complete, fulfilled day. For me that means getting up at least two hours before I'm to head out the door, and I hold Daily Office and Collegium. I've always been a little impatient with people who think you can't do Daily Office with only two or three people. A colleague impacted my life forever last year with her image that you make sure you have a victory every day by 10:00 A.M. I take special delight in those days when I've had a victory by nine! Every day you need to have some way--perhaps in the evening--of celebrating and appreciating the day's greatness.

These are some of the ways I've discerned to remind myself that I have no life now except that of the circuiter. The only real life I have is out on the road. If you sustain the care within yourself, then you have a chance to engage the care that is abounding out there on the circuit.

Recalling Niebuhr, one of my first reminders about engaging care is that Those Who Care are already present in the circuit. Not only that, they are present in every town we have targeted for Town Meeting. One man would hardly let me leave his office after the business of the visit was completed: "I've spent all my life caring for this town. I'd do anything to help it." There was an incredible bond of care bridging the gap between the outsider and the local man at that moment.

The second thing I've discerned is that there is no such thing as people who don't care; there are just people whose caring has been blocked. They are paralyzed only because their care has been turned off. You know that's true when a perfect stranger confides in you, saying things like "I guess I care for this town because my Dad always cared for this town. He spent his life doing things all the time for this town."

The third thing I've seen is that we are offering a concrete hope to be caring once again. We are inviting men and women to once again be human beings with care overflowing.

Our task is an incredible privilege to participate in. I'm convinced it is a holy task. It is the kind of task St. Paul did. His travelling from town to town to create churches was no more significant than our visiting communities to set up Town Meetings.

Ours is an eternal task. I've felt so close these days to John Wesley who travelled hundreds of miles every year on horseback and to St. Francis, who spread the word from town to town. It's the same task they did that we are doing now. And it will go on and on.

Also, it's the one and only task. There is no other task in all of history. I've been delighted to recall the stories about St. Teresa. Do you remember how she would gather a few women and go to a community in the evening? They would choose the worst, the most rundown house, clean it up and move right in -- all before daybreak. And Teresa would have another house established before anyone knew what was happening! That's the only task there is -- to get a few to decide the yes about Town Meeting and hold it before anyone quite realizes what's happening.

In his life as an archeologist in China, De Chardin found himself for months at a time out in the desert and wilderness with no bread and wine to celebrate the Mass. It didn't take him very long to realize that the very land he stood on was the bread, that his very daily toil and sweat was the wine. Well, circuiters, your geography is your bread which the Lord gives you every day to feast on, and your travel and your sweat is your wine. And more than that, it is good.

--R. Bruce Williams
House Church Witness
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