

Mystery Priest at Accident Scene Hailed as an Angel

Emergency workers and others in eastern Missouri are not sure what to make of a mystery priest who showed up at a critical accident scene Sunday morning (Aug. 4) and whose prayer seemed to change life-threatening events for the positive.

Even odder, the black-garbed priest does not appear in any of the nearly 70 photos of the scene of the accident in which a 19-year-old girl almost died.

No one knows the priest, and he vanished without a word, said Raymond Reed, fire chief of New London, Mo.

"I think it's a miracle," Reed said. "I would say whether it was an angel that was sent to us in the form of a priest or a priest that became our angel, I don't know. Either way, I'm good with it."

Carla Churchill Lentz, the mother of the teen who was critically injured, said emergency workers have told her there is no way her daughter should have lived inside such a mangled car.

"I do believe he certainly could have been an angel dressed in priest's attire because the Bible tells us there are angels among us," she said.

Katie Lentz, a sophomore at Tulane University, was driving from her parents' home in Quincy, Ill., to Jefferson City, Mo., where she has a summer internship and planned to attend church with friends. The Mercedes she was driving collided with another vehicle on a highway near Center, Mo. The accident crushed Lentz's vehicle into a ball of sheet metal that lay on the driver's side, Reed said.

Reed's team and emergency workers from several other jurisdictions tried for at least 45 minutes to remove the twisted metal from around Lentz. Equipment broke and the team was running out of choices. A helicopter waited to carry Lentz to the nearest trauma center.

Though Lentz appeared calm, talking about her church and her studies toward a dentistry degree, her vital signs were beginning to fail, Reed said.

"I was pulled off to the side by one of the members" of the helicopter evacuation team, Reed said. "He expressed to me that we were out of time. Her condition looked grim for her coming out of that vehicle alive. She was facing major problems."

At that point, Reed's team agreed to take the life-threatening chance of sitting the vehicle upright so that Lentz could be removed from it. This can be dangerous because a sudden change in pressure to the body can be critical, he said.

That's when Lentz asked if someone would pray with her and a voice said, "I will."

The silver-haired priest in his 50s or 60s in black pants, black shirt and black clergy collar stepped forward from nowhere. It struck Reed as odd because the street was blocked off 2 miles from the scene and no one from the nearby communities recognized him.

"We're all local people from four different towns," Reed said. "We've only got one Catholic church out of three towns and it wasn't their priest."

Reed and the other emergency workers were on their knees. The priest of about medium build, maybe 6-feet-tall, stood above them.

"This priest approached Katie and began to pray openly with

her,” Reed said. “He had a bottle of anointing oil with him and he used that.”

Another firefighter who had been watching said it appeared as if the priest also sprinkled Reed and two other emergency workers nearby with oil.

Everything happened quickly after that. Twenty emergency workers pulled together and sat the car upright, Churchill Lentz said. Katie Lentz’s vital signs improved and a rescue team from a neighboring community suddenly appeared with fresh equipment and tools. Lentz was removed and rushed to the hospital.

With Lentz gone, the rescue team prepared to clean up, Reed said. “We all go back to thank this priest and he’s gone,” he said.

Initially, they assumed he had to get to his home church to lead Sunday services. But then they looked at their photos of the scene.

“I have 69 photographs that were taken from minutes after that accident happened – bystanders, the extrication, our final cleanup – and he’s not in them,” Reed said. “All we want to do is thank him.”

The Facebook page of Lentz’s mother indicates Lentz is on the mend despite suffering two broken femurs, a broken tibia and fibia, broken left wrist, nine broken ribs, a lacerated liver, ruptured spleen and bruised lung.

Churchill Lentz said her daughter has undergone two surgeries and will undergo two more, but has been upgraded from critical to serious and is doing well.

“She sustained a lot of injuries, however, her face is beautiful, her teeth are perfect, she is sunshine, and everyone who’s contacted us ... they are all saying the same

thing, she never cried, she never screamed, she would just say, 'pray for me and pray out loud.'"

Melanie Eversley writes for USA Today.

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