



# FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



August 29, 2013

## Faith Journey Takes Her Overseas

My name is Jessica Trout. My faith journey started at St. Joseph's in Freeburg going to PSR and occasional Masses. I got involved in youth group in high school, and then headed to St. Louis University, followed by a semester in El Salvador, a summer in Nicaragua, and two years with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in the Federated States of Micronesia teaching at a Catholic high school.

I headed back to Freeburg for a year, and then moved to New York City to get my master's from Columbia University. Now I am job searching in Washington, D.C., or New York City working to improve social policy, especially education, international, or child and family policy. Needless to say, with all this moving, my faith went through quite a few shifts as well.

I went from a child who was indifferent to God, to a youth with a blind passion and love for God.

In college I questioned everything I had believed. Thankfully, my youth group helped me to form a strong foundation but I still had major resistance to conversations about Jesus, Bible readings and Church teachings.

In St. Louis I was forced to step outside of my sheltered world and see poverty, domestic violence, homelessness and mental illness among other issues.

Seeing injustice in the world, I was infuriated by the church I knew as a youth. El Salvador and Nicaragua furthered that rage as I witnessed raw, desperate poverty against entitlement and ignorance.

Luckily, all of my undergrad experiences were guided in some way by St. Louis University and Jesuit Spirituality. College was the first time I really learned about Catholic Social Teaching in regards to the oppressed; giving dignity to all people, working for social justice, solidarity etc. Some of the Jesuit teachings, meditations, and their general presence during my undergrad kept me from turning away from the Church and my faith completely.

At the end of college, I still was unsettled with my faith. I wanted to find some answers to injustice in the world and how God fit in the world, so I applied for the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and was sent to Micronesia.



Wow did that stir things up. After 10 p.m. college Mass, going to Mass in Micronesia was horrible! Yet, the challenge of living for two years on an island 13 miles in circumference, in a culture 180-degrees different from ours, forced me to turn to God.

I would go to the roof of the school we lived in and lay watching the sunset or looking at the stars and the palm trees blowing in the breeze. I would start by praying, asking God to help me through the events of the day, help my students and the country, and to give me the strength to get through my very difficult volunteer service.

Most of the time I was so exasperated that I would lay there and just say: "God, you sent me here. I have no idea why, but I'm here, so take all that I don't understand and can't change, and do with it whatever you do. I cannot do this alone." Then I would just lay there and breathe, feeling more peace, and closer to God than I ever had.

Lying on that roof I realized, I don't have to have all the answers to faith, poverty, or my own life. I just have to find peace in what I can't control. Let go and let God become astoundingly real in Micronesia.

Now, I have regular power, electronic distractions, and all of New York City, so finding that peace is harder, but I know it's there. I know my faith is stronger now, even if I don't always feel God the way I did lying on that roof in the evening. The foundation was laid, and it grew. Faith takes time and goes in phases, but each phase creates new growth.

— Jessica Trout



Both photos are from a time when Jessica was in Canton El Cedro in El Salvador running an after-school program. The photo above is Jessica with Fabricio another child from the program.

## Going to a Catholic University the Best Thing That Happened to Me

I suppose the first thing you should know about me is that I come from a strongly Catholic family and I firmly believe that a solid, grounded Catholic education is one of the most important gifts a person can receive.

Not surprisingly, when it came time for me to pick a college, I was ecstatic to attend a university where I could foster my faith with peers as excited about Catholicism as myself.

To put it bluntly, I was greatly disappointed.

As it turns out, my university is far from — Catholic. Unfortunately, space restrictions do not allow me to fully explain what I mean by such a statement, so I will only briefly touch on some of the negative aspects that most greatly affected me.

To start, pluralism was so heavily emphasized that it seemed the needs of Catholic students were often neglected, and those Catholic resources that were provided by the university seemed to contain teachings that were significantly watered down. Students and faculty relentlessly promoted open-mindedness, and it felt like they shut me down for my beliefs. I've had people who know absolutely nothing about me treat me dispassionately and look at me with disdain simply because I am a practicing, law-abiding Catholic. It's not a bad school, it just didn't seem to be a very effective breeding ground for my blossoming Catholic mind.

Needless to say, as a student dedicating four years to the study of Catholic theology, I was angry. I was so upset, in fact, that I nearly transferred.

And praise God that I didn't. Now, heading into my senior year, I see how overwhelmingly blessed I have been. I'm extremely grateful that

I experienced a severe letdown and such strong resistance in college.

If I want to pursue my dream as a theological speaker, I'm going to have to learn to foster healthy relationships with people who strongly disagree with me, even — and especially — when their actions are far from reciprocal.

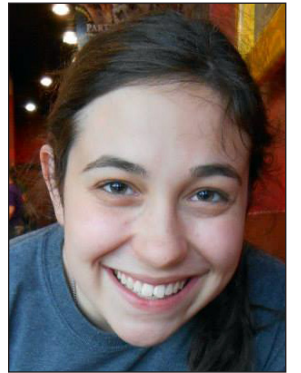
After all, it's better to have reality mow me down in the relatively stable environment of college than in my first year on the job.

I've learned to acknowledge that tragedy and beauty inevitably accompany one another. I've grown to understand how people on the other sides of arguments think, what their logic is, and exactly why I disagree with it. Most of all, I've fallen in love with my school all over again. My fantastic, challenging, and imperfect school.

Being a Catholic in a not-so-Catholic school was an enormous challenge and while it's definitely not for everyone, I've discovered that shying away from the obstacles God confronts us with can be even more hazardous.

After all, as it says in that one Big Book, gold is proved worthy in fire (1 Peter 1:6-8). Through this fire, I fell deeply in love with God's plan for me, for God, and my incredible calling — whatever it may be. And I wouldn't change that for the world.

— Forest Hempen



Forest makes a presentation during a REAP retreat on chastity.

### This page for, about and by young adult Catholics in the diocese

This is an online-only page dedicated to young adult Catholics, their interests, their needs, their challenges and their faith.

We're tapping into young adults who have been active in their parishes and who have reached out in faith to begin lives of their own.

To make sure this page is about you and what you want to see, we need your input. Send us your story ideas, your concerns, your hopes and your stories of faith.

Email us at [cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org](mailto:cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org) with questions, suggestions or for more information.

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