



FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



April 24, 2014

Be Part of Creating a Safe Space for All Teens

What's the most important thing a teen can have? A smartphone, a driver's license, or a date to the prom?



A magic wand that does your homework when you wave it?

I would argue that the most important thing a teenager can have is a safe space, where he or she feels free to share feelings, hopes and dreams without

fear of ridicule or recrimination.

This can be found in a physical item, such as a journal, or it can be a class or club where the person feels accepted and understood: the school newspaper, theater, forensics, or the football team.

One of my most important safe spaces as a teenager was my church youth group. My youth minister was supportive and encouraging. We always felt safe asking questions about what it was like to be Catholic in a secular world.

A friend who is a youth minister recently told me that the teenagers she works with have stopped talking in class and at retreats. They wouldn't talk in small groups or share their feelings about faith with the other kids. At first, she didn't know why. They would voluntarily silence themselves in a way she'd never experienced. Worried, she took the teenagers aside, one by one, asking them why they were so quiet all the time.

The answer was telling: The teens were scared that their classmates would surreptitiously film their comments about their Catholic faith and religion, and put them online for the ridicule of the entire school. It had happened before and the teens were afraid of it happening again.

Instead of participating, their response was to remain silent, to disengage and to drop out of the conversation.

Mobile devices have created a world in which no space is safe at a time when teens need safe spaces the most.

I was teased in front of a class of 20. I can't imagine what it would be like to grow up in a world where I'm teased by the world. It would be terrifying to be muffled and silenced because technology provides a means to violate crucial trust, privacy and safety.

This isn't just cyberbullying. We don't need crazy government conspiracy theories because we already are living in a surveillance state, one we control and police all by ourselves.

Some people would say that the answer would be to shut off mobile phones entirely, to take them away. I'm not sure that's the right response. In the right hands, a mobile phone can change the world for the better. The technology is here and it is not going away. What we need is to learn how to be respectful and responsible users of technology.

Teens need to be courageous. Now is the time to engage with the world, to speak up and talk about all of the ideas and questions bubbling up inside of you no matter what your friends are doing with their smartphones.

Don't let fear control your life. Don't engage with mean texts and don't share videos meant to hurt and bully. Bullies like having an audience. Don't be a part of creating a mean audience, in person or online.

If you're part of a support group for teens, be more aware of how technology affects their lives and be ready to give them strategies to better deal with problems. It takes a little more work to create safe spaces these days, but it's absolutely necessary.

— Karen Osborne
CNS column

Parenting Requires an Underlying Faith in All We Do

Recently, I came across an article that outlined a national survey of 1,200 parents, conducted by LifeWay



Research that concluded that faith is not a significant part of parenting for many adults.

Although I'm not a fan of the validity of many surveys, the results were interesting and thought

provoking. According to the survey, parents defined traits of successful parenting as children with good values (25 percent), children who develop into happy adults (25 percent), children finding success in life (22 percent), children who are deemed as "good people" (19 percent), those who graduate from college (17 percent), and those who live independently (15 percent).

Ironically, according to the survey, being godly or having faith in God was only mentioned by 9 percent of the parents surveyed. The survey concluded that parents have instead put an emphasis on guiding children to a social morality and toward a "happy" life versus spiritual development.

The interpretation, in my opinion, fails to acknowledge that faith can be a very important factor when parenting children to have strong values, seek happiness and find success in life. As a parent, I want my children to graduate from college, live independently and ultimately, view themselves as successful; however, when I'm doing my best to teach them values and guide them through the tasks to achieve their goals, faith must be a present at all times.

For example, my daughter is a

worry wart — always has been from day one. She is a sophomore in high school and goes into panic mode when mounds of college brochures fill our mailbox. She wants to plan out her life at this very moment, even though she is only 15, and ensure she will be successful. As a parent, I want her to be a kid, yet I also want her to dream, make goals and strive to achieve them.

Our discussions about college and life in general begin with prayer. I pray every day that I can provide her with the opportunities — both emotionally and financially — so she can attend the college she chooses. I pray that God will lead her on a path that makes her happy, helps her utilize her skills and help others in the process.

I've taught my children to work hard, think about the well being of others and ways we can serve the underprivileged — all with faith guiding us along the way. I've told my daughter that we will work through the college applications, weigh the options and ultimately make a decision that feels like it is driven by our faith.

My own mother has always told me that when I can't fix a problem or I'm struggling with a challenge — whether it is work-related, relationship-based or all about parenting — that I need to put it in God's hands. She has reminded me time and time again to put the names of those who have hurt me in the Bible and let God handle the rest.

I try to teach my children the same. Faith guides those lessons on success, happiness and values. So, even though this survey accounts for each parent's parenting strategies, what it fails to mention is that faith overlaps everything we do as parents. And I hope it always will.

— Shannon Philpott

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Learning About Self, Learning About Faith Part of the Journey

I leave the United States to journey the Camino de Santiago, also known as the Way of St. James or just "The Way"



on April 24 but actually start walking on April 27 (which is also coincidentally the canonization day of Pope John Paul II — Pope John Paul II once said: "Have no fear of moving into the unknown. Simply step out

fearlessly knowing that 'I am with you therefore no harm can befall you'; all is very, very well." Very appropriate for the first day of a pilgrimage, don't you think?.

They say that your camino starts the moment you step out your front door, so technically my camino begins in Red Bud, Illinois ... but from there I travel to Madrid, Spain (via plane) then Paris, France (via plane) then Bayonne, France (via train) then St. Jean Pied de Port (via bus). In St. Jean I will

register as a pilgrim, spend the night in a hostel (hopefully meeting other pilgrims), and then walk through the Pyrenees Mountains over the France / Spain border all the way to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. From St. Jean to Santiago, I will walk a total of 780 kilometers, which is 485 miles.

To prepare for all of my walking, I've been, well ... walking! And hiking. I've walked the country roads of Red Bud near my family's home and in Forest Park near my St. Louis apartment. I've hiked through Tom Sauk State Park and Hawn State Park and all over the Ozark Trails. I've walked with my sisters, my friends and my co-workers. I've made many trips to purchase gear, worn in my boots, and fitted my pack. I've also been praying: daily rosaries and "the pilgrim's prayer" — the camino is just as much a spiritual journey as a physical journey, if not more so.

You might wonder how I discovered the Camino, and it is actually a funny story: My sisters and I were hiking the Wicklow Mountains in Ireland over our spring break in April of 2012. We were in the middle of our first day, a little unsure of our path and even

more unsure of how far to our next destination, when an elderly but spry Irishman joined us on the trail. You probably won't believe it because it's so cliché, but his name was Paddy. He walked with us for quite awhile, chatting away, when he asked us what we were doing on the Wicklow Trails. I explained that it was a vacation and asked what he was doing on the trail; he said that he was preparing for a big trip he had coming up: the Camino de Santiago. I asked what the Camino was, and Paddy was aghast, exclaiming: Aren't you Catholic?! I am indeed and told him so, and he responded: "All good Catholic's know about the Camino de Santiago!" And he left it

at that. A little while later we parted ways and my sisters and I made it to our first destination to rest for the night. We continued our Wicklow journey and returned home the following week. As I looked through my pictures of our trip, I came across a picture of Paddy and remembered what he had said about the Camino. I googled the Camino and was immediately hooked — at that point, I knew that I would someday walk The Way myself.

I am keeping a blog while I'm on the Camino; nothing too special, just a daily update complete with a picture or two: jenaonthecamino.blogspot.com.

— Jena Hollinshead

Fresh Take: a way to look at faith from a younger perspective

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

We want to give young adults something to "chew on," to think about when they're looking for something more than an on-line horoscope

or the latest star news.

This page offers columns we believe will interest our young adults. Let us know.

Email us at cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org with questions, suggestions or for more information.

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