



# FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



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CNS/GIAMPIERO SPOSITO, Reuters

**SCOUTING AROUND:** Pope Francis embraces a boy scout during an audience with more than 80,000 children and adult members of the Italian Catholic Guiding and Scouting Association June 13 in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican.

## A Lesson in Coalition Building Via the Death Penalty

In late May, the Nebraska legislature abolished the death penalty. I'm still digesting those words: Nebraska has abolished the death penalty.



For nearly three years, I've been a field organizer for Nebraskans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty. It's a part-time job, but one I've seldom put completely out

of mind. Being a foot soldier for this cause, I've met some of the greatest people.

My home office closet is crammed with countless fliers to hand out at events. My computer is full of PowerPoint presentations I've given at various venues. I've entertained people who have been spared from death row, exonerated from a crime they didn't commit, in my home, and our guest bedroom has hosted Sister Helen Prejean, the great death penalty opponent, who regaled my husband and me with late-night New Orleans humor over glasses of wine.

I've sustained bedbug bites in the line of duty, at a small-town motel before a religious education conference. I've quarreled with my errant GPS navigation system on a dark country road finding my way home from an evening event. There were times I complained about my job, but every day of it stretched me.

A poster hangs in my office with the faces of each member of our legislature. Nebraska is the only state in the nation with a unicameral legislature, meaning it has a single-house system. We have 49 legislators for the whole state, a small number, but not necessarily an easy number to sway. Each face became an important target, but also a unique individual.

As a Nebraska native who spent a good many years in Alaska, I returned

here a few years ago wanting a job that would satisfy my thirst for social justice. I will always be so grateful that I was hired for this one.

Ordinarily, I'm a person who sees many sides to an issue, a positive but sometimes frustrating trait I call an "on the other hand" perspective. But as I examine the death penalty, I see not one viable reason for execution as public policy.

As we spoke to people around the state who supported the death penalty because "it's the way we've always done it," it was heartening that most people became repeal supporters when they heard the facts.

I'm not going to recount those facts here. That's for another day, another battle.

Instead, I'll express happiness at how much our hierarchical, well-organized Catholic Church did in the battle for repeal when it set its mind to it. Kudos to the Nebraska Catholic Conference and our bishops who stepped up, and to the nuns who helped us.

Who in America is more committed to doing the right thing than American nuns?

But we also had Jewish rabbis and Lutherans bishops and the United Methodist Church. We had conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats.

A simple lesson learned: If you want to see change, get involved. I'll never be able to sit quietly while someone complains about Congress or the state legislature without asking them how many letters they've written, what phone calls they've made. Do you know who your state legislator is, your congressman, your city council representative?

Nebraska's repeal effort became a coalition of the committed, and I was really lucky to be part of it.

— Effie Caldarola

(This column is part of the CNS columns package.)

## Letting Go

As the spring semester closes every year, I find myself facing bittersweet moments. As a college professor and media adviser for the student newspaper, I come into contact with hundreds of students each year. But, there are always a few who touch your heart in ways you never imagined.



I have the pleasure of working with my newspaper staff on a daily basis and when it is press time, we spend 12-plus hours together on Tuesdays. We share details about our lives, we laugh, we stress and we get slap happy in the wee hours of the morning until the paper is ready to send to the printer. I get to know their strengths, their weaknesses, their likes and dislikes. I can sense when they are reaching their breaking point and when they are most productive.

It's not a teacher-student relationship. In the newsroom, we are colleagues. We have mutual respect for each other and we all have the same goal — produce a paper that informs and entertains the campus community.

When the semester ends and one of our "family members" is heading off to a four-year university or entering the job market, it is a difficult transition. I am excited for these eager, intelligent and talented students. But, I also feel lost, as if the nest will soon be empty and a large hole within our family will be difficult to fill.

I want to see them succeed, embrace

careers in the journalism industry and continue their quest for education and life experiences. The selfish part of me wants to keep them close, in the newsroom, forever. This year, saying goodbye hit close to home.

My daughter is entering her senior year in high school this fall and I can't help but worry about when it is time for her to leave the nest. Just as I worry and wonder how my students will survive and thrive on their own, I agonize over how my daughter will make it on her own when she heads off to college.

What if she encounters peer pressure, dating challenges, academic upsets or financial woes? How will she balance a rigorous academic schedule, a social life and a part-time job? Will she fit in? Will she like being away from home more than she likes being at home now?

The worries I have for my daughter are the same worries I deal with every year with my students who are venturing off into the real world. The realization that my child is nearing the age and experiences of my "children" in the newsroom has set in.

But, just as I have faith in my students and pray for their well-being, I know that my daughter will receive the same and hopefully, she will call me and tell me about all of her successes — just as my former students do on a regular basis.

— Shannon Philpott

*Shannon Philpott is a freelance writer and college journalism instructor, but most of all a mother of two teens. You can see her work at [www.shannonphilpott.com](http://www.shannonphilpott.com).*



CNS/RITCHIE B. TONGO, EPA

**PEACE:** Moro Islamic Liberation Front Chairman Al-Haj Murad Ebrahim holds a surrendered rocket propelled grenade launcher during the first phase of the decommissioning of rebel weapons in Maguindanao, Philippines, June 16. During a ceremony attended by Philippine President Benigno Aquino III, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front handed over weapons under a year-old peace agreement.

### Fresh Take: a way to look at faith from a different 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](mailto:cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org) with questions, suggestions or for more information.

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