



# FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



February 25, 2016



LIZ QUIRIN

**MERCY WITH A SHAVE AND A HAIRCUT:** Not one of the Corporal Works of Mercy but welcome nonetheless, the St. Vincent de Paul Mobile Kitchen parked under an overpass in St. Louis to offer Sunday breakfast, and a second bus offered shaves and haircuts. Just because someone is homeless doesn't

mean they want to avoid personal hygiene. Here, Stephane Avalos cuts a guest's hair as busdriver, Mike Suarez, watches. Stephanie and friend Bianca Pacheco, offered their services and brought personal hygiene bags they put together for the mostly men who stopped in.

## A Martyr for the Faith

Have you ever heard of Father Stan Rother?

His is not exactly a household name, and until I'd read a compelling new book about him, I didn't know that this farmer from Okarche, Okla., just might become the first U.S.-born male saint.



Often, heroes are born from hard times, and a real testing ground for heroes in

the 20th century came amid the violent struggles in Central America. This is where Father Stanley Rother, a priest who served in an Oklahoma-sponsored mission in Guatemala, found sanctity among a poor, remote Mayan congregation.

He was brutally murdered by a death squad allied to the government there in 1981. Before his body was returned to Oklahoma, his flock loved him so deeply they kept his heart to venerate.

In Central America, oppressive regimes controlled by the wealthy controlled all the land and resources. They met resistance from insurgents determined to make life more equitable for the poor who lived in abject poverty. There was violence on both sides.

Many right-wing Americans suspected the insurgents might be communists. Even the church was divided, as is evidenced by the life of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who began his career a defender of the wealthy Catholics in El Salvador and ended his life murdered by government forces for his defense of the poor.

Father Rother was apolitical. His commitment was to the Gospel, and because of that, his life, devoted to the poor, was a red flag to the oppressors.

We're still feeling the repercussions of those violent years. Today, thousands of Central Americans flee the gang violence and anarchy left behind in the wake of wars. Desperate pleas for sanctuary in the U.S. often fall on deaf ears.

Father Stan Rother was the lanky son of a loving family in the German-American enclave of Okarche.

In John's Gospel, Nathaniel asks derisively about Jesus, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Maybe some might ask the same thing about Okarche. If Father Rother isn't a household name, Okarche certainly isn't.

And yet, Okarche was a seedbed of vocations to religious life and the priesthood, and as solid a place to grow up as any Norman Rockwell setting.

Even in grade school, Father Rother struggled with academia. He was asked to leave his first seminary after failing to learn the Latin he needed to study philosophy.

But a prescient bishop sent him to another seminary, and eventually this modest farm boy who grappled with Latin mastered the Tz'utujil language of his indigenous Guatemalan flock.

In Maria Ruiz Scaperlanda's book, "The Shepherd Who Didn't Run: Fr. Stanley Rother, Martyr from Oklahoma," Father Rother emerges as a man immersed in his people, traveling hard miles to pay visits, offering Masses at remote sites, regularly welcoming a beggar to his dining table.

As the political climate deteriorated, violence closed in ominously.

Father Rother's life prompts the inevitable question, Why didn't he leave? Understandably, many priests and religious did, knowing their lives were in imminent danger. Father Rother did return to Oklahoma briefly.

But like another martyred hero, Jesuit Father Frans van der Lugt, who remained in Homs, Syria, long after the Jesuits urged him to flee, Father Rother stayed.

Not everyone is called to remain as he did. But he had a clear vocational sense of what God asked. Like Jesus, who set his face to Jerusalem knowing death awaited him, Father Rother was a man who knew what he had to do.

His case for canonization is now in Rome, and it will be up to Pope Francis to decide whether to proclaim him a martyr for the faith, which leads to beatification.

— Effie Calderola

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

## The Fall of the Stubborn Bull

Those who know me well often describe me as stubborn. I've never been able to wrap my head around this accusation. I'm independent, I insist, not stubborn. Clearly, these two can go hand in hand.

While coping with a sciatic nerve that impacted my ability to walk this week, my stubbornness and need to remain independent was tested. I needed help. I hated asking for it or accepting it. I was stubborn.

It is not easy to accept help from others, especially when you are used to going it alone. I have raised my children as a single parent, I have provided the income for our entire household and I have managed to balance a full-time job and personal responsibilities, on my own.

At least that's what I thought. I haven't. My family has always come through and helped me in small ways that made a huge impact. My older sister knows what I need before I even have to ask or say a word. My mom somehow knows when we are running low on milk or cheese and it magically appears in my fridge. My aunt texts me daily to provide an inspiring phrase or quote to start my day.

All of these actions, prayers and thoughts from the people who love me have helped me along the way. Not one member of my family has ever threat-

ened my independence. Instead, they have encouraged it, and they have been the backbone of it from day one.

When I woke up on Sunday morning and couldn't walk because of the overwhelming pain in my right leg, my first thought was "I don't have time for this." I had 20 teenagers convening at my house later that day for the Superbowl and I had dips and desserts to make, a house to clean and pizza to pick up. I was stubborn and insisted on dragging myself downstairs to get started. But, as always, my family saved the day.

My mom arrived with the pizzas right in time for the party. My sister showed up with chips, dips and soda to supply to our guests. My children ran the vacuum and actually cleaned the bathrooms. I didn't have to ask for help. It was there. It has always been there.

I feel extremely blessed to have a family that is in tune with what we need. I have a family who prays for my children and me every day. I have a family who, despite challenges throughout the years, continues to grow closer to each other. They have embraced my independence and more importantly, ignored my stubbornness. I'm not too stubborn to admit that I need them. I will always need them.

— 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/DIEGO AZUBEL, EPA

**DEATH PENALTY:** The shackled feet of a bombing suspect in Bangkok, Thailand, are seen as he is escorted by officers and prison personnel to Military Court Feb. 16. Pope Francis asks world leaders for a Jubilee Year moratorium on the death penalty. "Even a criminal has the inviolable right to life, a gift of God," he said Feb. 21 after reciting the Angelus with visitors gathered in St. Peter's Square.

### 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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