



FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



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CNS/PAUL HARING

Pope Francis greets the crowd as he arrives to celebrate the closing Mass of World Youth Day at Campus Misericordiae in Krakow, Poland, July 31.

I Have Met Hope ... in Person

In July I traveled to Serbia, Greece and Lebanon to review the refugee situation now that the borders to



Northern Europe are closed. While the flow of people has diminished, it has not ceased. Migration is now largely dependent on traffickers who charge individuals 4,000 to 6,000 euros to facilitate illegal

crossings.

Most of the refugees I met in Serbia were young Syrian men in their 20s who were desperate to find work. They were weighed down with the responsibility to families back home who liquidated their belongings to pay for their journeys. Depending on their route, many encountered beatings and confiscation of everything they had. Broken arms and legs attested to this gratuitous brutality and cruelty.

Nevertheless, amid this deep suffering, a spirit of goodness and resilience broke through.

In Lebanon, I met a woman, herself a trafficked victim, who awoke from an accident without memory and missing one leg. Yet she gave thanks for the leg she does have and devoted her energy as a volunteer at a shelter for abused women.

After four years, she joined the staff to build not only the capacity of the ladies for a trade, but also their spirit to imagine and have confidence in a new life. On her days off, she brings home-cooked food to the inmates of a prison. As she told me, there was no other place she would rather be.

The detention center for illegal workers in Lebanon is situated inside an underground garage with no sunlight and minimal ventilation. Five hundred to six hundred detainees are held, sometimes for up to a year, in seven cells so crowded that occupants had to take turns alternating between sleeping and standing.

My first instinct, amid the heat, odor, darkness, sight of people caged

and people being booked, was to flee. Yet serving this detention center are nine women from Caritas who provide social and medical care 24/7. The majority of them are in their 20s and 30s.

They move without hesitation into the cells to offer care; their boom boxes broadcast music after 2 p.m. when most of the guards go off duty, and they host celebrations with foods and games on special days. "Angels" I call them. We met with the colonel of the center, who not only praised these women but also formulated a memorandum of understanding that would guarantee Caritas' long-term presence.

I am happy to say a new above-ground detention center, brightly painted and with dignified accommodations, will open in September. In it is a wing for the Caritas operation. Somehow in the most oppressive physical environment both guards and volunteers found a way to honor the humanity of those being detained.

A woman who fled Kosovo for Serbia 20 years ago spoke of leaving with nothing but a Bible, the only possession her mother believed they needed as they would be in God's hands. She endured hardships of working without formal papers but noted the kindness of people who took risks to hire her.

Since then, she has retrieved her documents with the help of a CRS partner, Balkans Migration Center, and now owns a business. I asked if her mother was right. She nodded without hesitation: God accompanied them.

A Muslim refugee from Syria who is now living and working in Athens with his family said that if it were all up to him, he would name his newborn daughter "Caritas" for the assistance and kindness his family had received from Caritas Greece. His wife did not quite buy into this, but what a sentiment!

Yes, I have met hope ... in person. Let us be hope, with God's grace, for each other.

— Carolyn Woo

(Woo is president and CEO of Catholic Relief Services. This column is part of the CNS columns package.)

Taking Advantage of the Blank Slate

Every semester, as a college professor, I get the opportunity to start over, refresh and take advantage of a blank slate. I can reinvent the wheel, combine ideas from previous semesters or utilize what has worked in the past to create a better learning experience for my students.



It's a new start for me every 16 weeks, but in reality, we don't have to wait for new semesters, new jobs or new relationships to take advantage of a blank slate. We have the opportunity to reinvent the wheel if we are willing to take that leap.

As I was contemplating what to change for the fall semester, I changed gears recently and made a list of what I would like to change about my life, my daily routine and my relationships in order to improve not just my teaching, but also my quality of life.

I'd like to refresh my faith and become more active in my parish community. I would like to concentrate more on quality time with my children versus quantity, especially when they are rarely home and consumed with athletic, academic and social activities. I would like to dig deeper into my family and personal relationships with

loved ones to decrease the efforts to "fit in" a dinner here or there and instead focus on making relationships more of a priority amidst the chaos of life.

The wish list is long and a bit overwhelming, but it is a start. Just as we are often encouraged to make career goals, there is something refreshing about re-evaluating life goals and determining how we can make the most of a blank slate now and then.

We often find ourselves in a rut — whether it is spiritually or emotionally — and finding ways to seek out guidance from our faith doesn't take much time or effort. Our actions to change aspects of our life that are unfulfilling takes minimal effort when we have a faith-filled guiding force on our side and a faith community supporting us.

I have often been guilty of just accepting that life is the way it is. However, upon considering what it is that I need to feel consumed by my faith, I can take the steps to change the ordinary rut and find peace, happiness and the benefits of that blank slate. And, even better, I don't have to wait for the start of a new semester to make my faith a priority.

— 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.



CNS/JACLYN LIPPELMANN, Catholic Standard

World Youth Day pilgrims hold candles during eucharistic adoration with Pope Francis at the July 30 prayer vigil at the Field of Mercy in Krakow, Poland.

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 with questions, suggestions or for more information.

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