



# FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



December 15, 2016



LIZ QUIRIN

People present flowers to Our Lady of Guadalupe at a liturgy Dec. 11 at St. Damian Church in Damiansville. Dec. 12 was her feast day.

## A New Perspective at Christmas

For a brief moment when we're born, we're the youngest person on the planet. Then, we grow older.



Every moment we live is nothing more than tomorrow's history. Babies born today will have no memory of the events we witness firsthand. Whether it's the 2016 election, or the Kardashians or the "Hamilton" phenomenon, they will look back on these events the same way you look back, if at all, on George W. Bush and Al Gore, "The Simple Life" or "Rent."

No one knows this better than Emma Morano. As the oldest person in the world at age 117, she has more firsthand knowledge than anyone else alive.

World Wars I and II? As an Italian citizen, she witnessed them firsthand.

Television, movies, radio? She knows what it was like to see and hear them for the first time.

Indoor plumbing and electricity? She remembers a world where they didn't exist.

Think about the people in your life who are also living time capsules like Emma. Your parents can tell you what it was like to be your age 30 or 40 years ago. Your grandparents can look back 50 or 60 years or even more.

What was the music they liked? What were the clothes they wore? What aspects of everyday life taken for granted today did they live without? What were the trends that are now embarrassing?

What we overlook is more than our relative's lives. We often fail to realize they are more than our connection to their youth; they're a connection to the family who came before them.

Consider the age of many great-grandparents. Many are in their 80s or even 90s, born in the 1920s. Much changed in their lifetime, but they likely remember a lot of that history from hearing stories when they were children. What do they recall?

Someone born in the 1920s had grandparents born in the later part of

the 1800s. These grandparents might have heard stories of people who witnessed the Civil War firsthand. Those born in the 1920s had older family members who remembered hearing about the first flight of Wilbur and Orville Wright, and they personally knew how the world changed with the Great Depression.

All of this probably bores a lot of people, but to me it's amazing. It's a connection to history. It makes the past come alive. Our grandparents' grandparents' grandparents lived through the Revolutionary War.

Now, turn that around. Our grandchildren's grandchildren's grandchildren are going to ask some questions of their relatives. How do you think they will answer these questions?

Did you ever hear what it was like in a world without the internet?

How did the change of optimism to fear after 9/11 affect how people cared about each other?

How strange was it to watch entertainment while staring at a wall?

My questions imagining the future are probably all wrong, just as much as the questions Emma Morano would have asked before she lived through what we see as the past.

This Christmas, take a few minutes and think of this perspective as a gift from me to you. When you gather with your family, ask about the holidays of their childhood. Ask who they gathered with every holiday. Rediscover traditions lost over time and understand how they are a connection between yesterday, tomorrow and today.

Right now, for this brief moment, Emma Morano is the oldest living person on the planet. When someone else takes her place, our last living link to the 19th century will be gone. That's why it's so important to take time to truly know those you love.

Trust me, your children and theirs will thank you.

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— Erick Rommel

(This column is part of the CNS columns.)

## Blending Families With Faith

A few years ago I heard the term "blended family" for the first time. It reminded me of the term "melting pot" and it didn't seem to have a positive connotation.

A melting pot requires people of various cultures to mesh into similar beings, which robs them of their own individuality. To me, the term "blended" indicated the same. I thought that it symbolized that when two families merge as a result of marriage, they blend into one or the other's way of functioning.

I will be part of a "blended family" when I marry my fiancé next summer. Between the two of us, we have two girls and two boys stair stepped in age from 16 to 19. For the past three years, our children have grown close, and we have meshed as a family in many ways. But, we also have very different traditions that are important to us as individual families.

At first, I was fearful that when we "blend" together, those traditions would be lost or we would have to opt for their tradition over ours and vice versa. My fiancé and I have both been single parents for many years and we have developed patterns and routines with our children that we don't want to disrupt. In fact, this is exactly why we decided to wait and get married until three of our four children would be in college so as not to disrupt this harmony.

However, I experienced a light bulb moment about the beauty of blended families while planning out this year's Christmas celebrations. My children

are accustomed to attending church on Christmas Eve and opening presents Christmas morning. His children are accustomed to opening presents Christmas Eve and attending services on Christmas morning. How do we "blend" what is natural to both families to preserve holiday traditions?

I realized that we have so many options to open our hearts and our faith to each other by celebrating both. We can blend traditions, create new ones or split the difference so that our children are comfortable and our lives are complete with everyone together. We have our faith, we have our teenagers welcoming each other as siblings with grace, and we have traditions to share and new ones to create.

Ironically, when we asked our children how they wanted to spend their holidays, they didn't have much of an opinion and expressed interest in just doing something together. They didn't feel as if they were losing anything by blending activities as a family. In fact, as budding adults, they seemed happy to have two parents who cared about their input.

Blending doesn't require us to throw away what we have established with our children individually. It gives us an opportunity to further develop our faith with just a few more people in tow who we have grown to love as our forever family. It's not a melting pot. It's a collection of individuals that we are privileged to join together.

— 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/THAIER AL-SUDAN, Reuters  
A Christian fighter displays a holy card in his vest Nov. 21 in Mosul, Iraq. As Christians in the Middle East look back on 2016, they wonder if there will be much to celebrate amid mounting challenges, particularly for those displaced by conflicts in Iraq and Syria.

### 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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