



FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



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CNS/BARBARA FRASER

This figure of Jesus bearing the cross on his way to Calvary is part of a life-size Way of the Cross by stone carvers from the Artesanos Don Bosco in Huaraz, Peru. The statues will be installed in a prayer garden at Holy Spirit Catholic Church in Las Vegas.

Discerning the Call to Religious Life

This month, Pope Francis' prayer intention, according to the Apostleship of Prayer, is "that young people may respond generously to their vocations and seriously consider offering themselves to God in the priesthood or consecrated life."



What makes young men and women want to offer their whole life to God in this way?

Discerning "the call" to a religious life is different for each person. Sister Jennifer Barrow, who professed her first vows last year, said that she first thought about religious life in high school and in college. "I really did not know what it meant," she said, reflecting on her journey.

After college, she completed a year of service with Mercy Volunteer Corps, a volunteer program of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. While volunteering in Texas, she realized she was attracted to "the joy of the Sisters (of Mercy), their prayerfulness and the care they show in community, the way they engage in service."

Afterward, Sister Barrow went to law school while embarking on a discernment process with a spiritual director and a vocation minister. During this time of inquiry, she also visited the Mercy community and went on retreats. The charism of the Sisters of Mercy resonated in her heart, and after law school, she applied to become a Sister of Mercy, a process that takes at least seven years.

Like many other religious and priests, Sister Barrow prayerfully engaged in discernment during this process. Discerning the voice and call of the Holy Spirit from other calls or desires in life can help people, especially young people, to become who they were created to be.

God calls people with different backgrounds, personalities and life experiences.

As a reporter, in addition to meeting diocesan priests from across the world, I once met a Capuchin Franciscan brother who used to be in a gang, later pursued a career in finance and then realized that his vocation was to serve God and don a brown Franciscan habit.

I also met a young new member of the Poor Sisters of St. Joseph, who had wondered, "How do I know God is calling me?" and, "Is God calling me to live a life for him as a religious person?" soon after emigrating from El Salvador.

Recently I talked to two young men who, after a long process, are about to become Maryknoll priests and will be sent to any of the 20-plus countries where the missionary society serves.

All of their vocation journeys are unique and God's hand is evident in the events that led them there. Once they discovered their vocation, they freely responded to God's call; but this, too, was a process of continuous discernment and then life-giving commitment.

Scripture, prayer and the Eucharist are also common themes in their journeys to discover their vocations – and remain a constant while answering their call.

Sister Barrow, who now ministers as a public interest attorney practicing housing law, tells young people: "Don't be afraid to start the discernment process," which can be done with a diocesan vocation office or with a religious community or seminary while working with a spiritual director.

"Discernment is really just a commitment to deepening your relationship with God and being open to (wherever) that leads," she said.

— Maria-Pia Negro Chin

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

The Quantity vs. Quality Debate

Years ago, I was in the middle of a debate between two parents over parenting should focus more on quantity



vs. quality or quality vs. quantity. Parent No. 1 was adamant that the busyness of life shouldn't diminish the quality time you have with your children whereas Parent No. 2 argued that quantity is more realistic and

that your children feel more comforted when you are around, but not necessarily engaged with them.

This argument often surrounds the battle between working moms and stay-at-home moms. Is quantity better when raising children or does quality time matter more than the number of hours you are together?

I don't have the answer. Honestly, as a single working mom, I often struggled with the guilt of having to leave my young children with a sitter. However, knowing that the nights were rushed with homework and after-school activities, the need for quality time prompted me to plan more one-on-one face time with my children on the weekends. Even a simple walk around the neighborhood suppressed a tiny bit of my guilt and brought us closer together.

I've also had experience with quantity. Now that my teenagers drive (and one is away at college), I find myself less busy in the evenings. Unfortunately, though, teenagers moan and groan at the idea of a day of quality time with mom when they could be spending time up in their rooms playing an xBox

or texting friends. My children may not crave my attention, but there is something comforting about knowing I'm in the house and readily available to talk when they have something to say.

As our children grow older, their needs change drastically. We may not always have time to eat dinner together each night, but we do capture a television show together or spend a few minutes at the store. After praying about how to find a balance between quantity and quality, I realized that focusing on one or the other only prompts me to force time with my children, which is often less-than-stellar for all of us.

Instead, I've put my faith in the idea that I need to make the time we do have together natural, which ultimately leads to quality. I don't need to plan a family day to show my children I love them. I need to take those infrequent times we have together and roll with it. I don't feel the need to squeeze in every single piece of advice I want to give them into one hour or one day anymore. I just need to take their cues and be present when they need me to be a listener, a mom, a comforting source or even a nurturing human.

I've always told my children that this parenting gig is complex, just as being a child or teenager is confusing. However, with faith by our side, we can focus less on quantity and quality and just enjoy being "us."

— 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/PAUL HARING

Pope Francis greets the crowd after celebrating Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican April 9.

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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