

VOICES

2017



VOICES
OF FAITH

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VISION – ALL VOICES COUNT



Welcome to our 2nd edition of VOICES.

Voices of Faith continues to inspire the Church and society with the stories of courageous women of faith who do incredible work across the globe. It highlights and reminds us of the invaluable contributions women are making to the Church and society in the 21st century. Voices of Faith keeps knocking at the doors, reminding the Church to open up new spaces of leadership for them in order to participate equally and more fully in the global mission of the Church. What does it portend for future generations of women and their faith lives if our knocking at the door will not be heard? Our panelists looked at the ways the voices of women are heard in the Church and the world and how women are making a positive impact on the future.

In the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis urged us to be agents of mercy, to accompany the poor, to encounter others, to extend Christian love. Voices of Faith, in the Year of Mercy, emphasized that mercy requires courage. Our VOICES demonstrated that mercy is not just for the few; everyone needs mercy in their lives.

Katarina Kruhonja saw firsthand the horrors of war in Croatia. She realized that the war was a refusal of mercy, a refusal to accept others and empathize with them, a refusal to accept differences. Even she was affected by the infectious logic of hatred that war produces. Then came a point of transformation. Katarina saw that she had to refuse to become like the warmongers. She decided to show mercy even to those who waged war, which helped her to develop the capacity to rescue others through a dialogue of peace. **Sister Mary Doris**, through her work in New York City, had her eyes opened to people who need mercy. She advocates ceaselessly for homeless women, especially those stigmatized for being single mothers. In the process, she has discovered that music is a beautiful and universal way of showing mercy. **Cecilia Flores** needed courage to face a harsh reality in the Philippines. She showed courage by challenging the political system she was born into and confronting those in positions of power. She continues this path in her daily struggle against modern slavery.

Caroline Kimeu and **Judy Onyango**, both of Kenya, had to find their own way to reach the dream of going to school. Due to their determination and courage, they found people who were empathetic towards them and willing to assist their dreams. Now Caroline and Judy stand by the side of other girls who are stigmatized within their society. **Sabriye Tenberken** and **Paul Kronenberg** have started organizations that empower persons

with disabilities to make extraordinary contributions to society. Sabriye lost her physical sight early in life but never her vision. She overcame the temptation of self-pity to discover that she could give to others: self-confidence, opportunities to grow, and hope. **Merci** was forced to flee her country of Rwanda for a strange land and survive in a camp where she felt unwanted. However, she did not remain a victim. She transformed herself into an agent of mercy and is a champion of education for refugees.

As the tide in many countries around the world turns ever more dramatically against refugees and those who are “different”, Merci, Cecilia, Sabriye, Katarina, Caroline, Judy and many other women find the courage to be merciful and inspire us and bring us hope. They convey the message that every human being needs mercy in their lives, no matter what their color, religion, race, gender or country of origin.

The stories contained in this 2nd edition of VOICES provide a clarion call to reflect and act upon Pope Francis’ injunction “to give up indifference”.

Enjoy reading about these remarkable women. Share the passion, move to action and join Voices of Faith. Because all voices count.

Warmest regards,
Chantal M. Götz

ABOUT CHANTAL M. GÖTZ

Chantal M. Götz is the current Managing Director of the Voices of Faith initiative, which seeks to enhance the dignity, participation and leadership of women and girls through persistent and good storytelling. A lawyer by training with a Master’s degree in business entrepreneurship, Chantal has

led the Fidel Götz Foundation, a Liechtenstein-based foundation, for 18 years. The foundation provides opportunities for a just and equal world. Its core area of focus is education to empower women and girls as change agents and leaders.

ALL VOICES COUNT

by **Mary Lou Falcone**

Voices of Faith is where all voices count. Today on International Women's Day, our Voices of Faith forum in the heart of the Vatican celebrates love, generosity, inspiration and forgiveness, remembering that mercy requires courage. On behalf of my fellow Board Members of Voices of Faith and the Fidel Götz Foundation, we welcome and thank you for sharing today with us.

In a world where there is so much suffering, so much need and so much pain, it is our mission to highlight positive work that empowers hope! Pope Francis has consistently sent a very clear message that the Church is the voice and the face of mercy. The focus of Voices of Faith is to accompany the

poor, relieve human suffering, advance peace and extend mercy. Especially in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, today we share the incredible stories of people who are living this message, reaching out and making our world a better place.

To all who have tirelessly worked to make today possible, thank you! To the Götz Foundation for their belief and continuing support, thank you! And a most humble and special thank you to Pope Francis, Cardinal Pietro Parolin and all those at the Vatican whose support is invaluable!

Ladies and Gentlemen, we present Voices of Faith 2016!



Katarina Kruhonja, photographed by ... Schmidt

ABOUT MARY LOU FALCONE

Mary Lou Falcone is a classical music public relations specialist who created M.L. Falcone, Public Relations, in 1974. From her office located in Manhattan's cultural nucleus, she currently shares her expertise with such distinguished organizations as the Los Angeles Philharmonic/Gustavo Dudamel, and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra/Jaap van Zweden, along with Carnegie Hall and the Birgit Nilsson Foundation.

Mary Lou attended The Curtis Institute of Music where she studied voice. Upon graduating, she sang professionally for eight years with organizations like the WNET Opera Theatre and the St. Paul

Opera Company and soloed with orchestras, sang oratorio, and appeared in recitals. Also during this period, Mary Lou was a member of the faculty at the Baldwin School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, where she taught voice and general music for six years. Later she served as chair of the Music Department for several years. Mary Lou is currently on the faculty of The Juilliard School, and has lectured at the Mozarteum University in Salzburg, Austria, the Solti Accademia in Italy, and at the Curtis Institute of Music. She is a member of the Executive Committee of the Avery Fisher Artist Program, as well as Chairwoman of Voices of Faith.

WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING

by **Katarina Kruhonja**

Amid a personal crisis I was lifted onto my feet by becoming aware that the unconditional love of God indeed embraces me. Straightaway, I began respecting others and all of creation with equal dignity. This commitment laid the foundation for my peace work and deep commitment to nonviolence some 15 years later.

The violent disintegration of ex-Yugoslavia in the 1990s, particularly the war in Croatia, came unexpectedly for us ordinary people but it spread like wildfire. It seemed as if there was no alternative way other than to accept “it is either us or them”.

At the same time I did not give up struggling with this question: What could the fundamental Christian calling “love your enemy” mean to me in this time of war?

I just stuck to my will to love my enemy in the way Jesus would. This choice became my Passo-

ver. With it I stepped out from the logic of violence, and suddenly I could breathe again. I met people from my own community and from all over the world who believed in building peace during war. Gradually we had numerous peace organisations in Croatia, Serbia and other places.

Together we started a dialogue with the other side. For example, after five years of war we began this dialogue with a group of Croatian and Serbian women from a small village. The sound of the Serbian language made the Croatian women sick to their stomachs. The only therapy was to read from a Serbian book until they felt more at ease.



Katarina Kruhonja, photographed by ... Schmidt



Bildlegende ??

contempt to empathy and solidarity. It is about taking the risk to come close enough to the suffering or differences that scare us. It is about the potential in all of us for love, courage, creativity and wisdom. This great potential has transformative power.

On this journey I have learned two things. First, working for peace cannot be put on hold during war. During war it is both possible and necessary. And second, the work does not finish with the end of the war. Working toward peace never stops.

What could “love your enemy” mean in this time of war?

ABOUT KATARINA KRUHONJA

Katarina was born in Osijek, the fourth largest city in Croatia, where she completed her primary and secondary education. She received her diploma and Master's degree with a specialization in nuclear medicine from the Faculty of Medicine in Zagreb in 1983. She worked as senior specialist at the Department of Nuclear Medicine, Radiation Protection and Pathophysiology at the Clinical Hospital in Osijek until 1996.

The war in Croatia changed her life. In 1996 she quit her work at the clinic to join the post-war peacebuilding efforts in the war-torn areas of Eastern Slavonia. She cofounded the Center for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights. She built, trained and mentored a multi-ethnic team to support the peaceful return and reconstruction of 10 communities in

Eastern Croatia that had been destroyed during the war.

In the past decade she has been involved in national and regional cooperation, particularly in monitoring war-crimes trials. Her most important mission is her work to strengthen the culture of nonviolence and to create dialogue within divided societies.

She has been actively involved with several peace organizations and non-governmental networks, including the advisory board of Voices of Faith, the Vukovar Institute for Peace Education and Research, the executive boards of the Pax Christi, the National Foundation for Development of Civil Society in the Republic of Croatia, and the Documenta Centre for Dealing with the Past.

EMPOWERING YOUNG, HOME- LESS MOTHERS

by **Sister Mary Doris, O.P.**

Siena House, a shelter for 27 homeless mothers and their babies in the Bronx, has been and continues to be a true journey of faith. We primarily strive to share dignity and hope with those who are homeless.

Following a 30-day retreat in 1979, having just completed four years as Vocation Director for our Congregation, and before that, having taught in Catholic elementary and secondary schools for nearly 15 years, I felt inspired to work more closely with the poor in New York City.

The calling took place a short time after the retreat. One of our Sisters invited me to come to the Highbridge Community Life Center, a social service centre run by two of our Sisters in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the United States. They called it a “ministry to the unchurched”. When I went to visit them, I realized I was meant to be there.

In 1980, my first year living in the neighbourhood and teaching at St. Nicholas of Tolentine Catholic High School, I began to notice young

boys and girls hanging around the street corners with very little to do. In that first year I was able to start a high school equivalency class at night. Soon it became clear that the centre needed to set up an adult education programme. I left the high school in June 1981 and became involved in setting up day and evening classes that soon became very well known. We received grants and were able to hire additional teachers.

During that time, 1980-1989, I became more aware of the plight of young, uneducated girls who were either pregnant or trying to care for a young child and had no safe place to live. One day one of my students came to class sobbing that her five-month-old girl had been sexually abused by her sister’s boyfriend. She had been living with her sister and was now looking for another place to live. In my classes there were many young women who were struggling to



Sister Mary Doris, O.P., photographed by ... Schmidt

keep their children and to find some type of safe housing. Since they had little education and were without job skills, they were unable to find work to support themselves. There were many times I wished I could bring them home. I even tried to look for a small house in the neighbourhood where I could at least offer these mothers a room.

In 1987 our Congregation gathered to consider the “signs of the times” and our mission, and we made a commitment to the homeless. We announced: “As women of service, we are called to respond to the needs of the poor, particularly in our day, the homeless. We believe that as women made in the image and likeness of our God, we are called to proclaim our equality in

God’s creative design. We support those efforts that empower women to a fuller participation in the Church and society. We oppose those structures which deny human dignity and minimize the contribution of women”.

After the gathering, eight of our Sisters met regularly to discuss the growing need for a transitional housing facility for homeless women and children. We drew up a proposal for the City and started to look at vacant buildings in Highbridge. At the time, the Sacred Heart convent was being underutilized, and the Archdiocese was considering how it could best be used. Mother Teresa came to visit the convent. When I asked her if she was looking to use the building, she smiled and replied, “One day this build-

ing will be filled". She founded a new Order of priests, the Missionary Fathers of Charity, and for two years they resided in the building.

In 1988 at the New York Archdiocesan Synod, I suggested an addendum to a proposal made by Auxiliary Bishop Austin Vaughan to support all of the efforts of the Right-to-Life movement. I proposed adding a statement that we would support women who choose to keep their babies but are not able to provide for them.

During a break, Cardinal John O'Connor sent for me, thanked me for the suggestion and told me that the proposal would include the statement. How wonderful! At the end of the event

I saw the cardinal, thanked him for his openness and asked if he might help us to acquire the Sacred Heart convent in Highbridge as a shelter for young, first-time mothers and their babies. Right then and there, he invited me to a meeting that was being held the following week to discuss the best use of the building, since the Missionary Fathers of Charity were no longer there. I attended the meeting with our pastor and presented our proposal. In the next few weeks the City agreed to pay rent to the Church for the use of the building, to bring it up-to-code, since the crisis of homelessness was coming to the attention of the City administration. Thus Archdiocese approved the build-

We made
a commitment
to the homeless

ing to be used as a shelter for homeless women and children.

We named the shelter “Siena House” in honour of St. Catherine of Siena, the Dominican saint and doctor of the Church who lived in the 14th century and assisted homeless, struggling women of her time. Twenty-five years ago, on January 23, 1990, we opened our door to five homeless women. Two were pregnant and three had babies. Within two months we were housing 27 women. Sixteen had children under the age of two, and 11 were pregnant.

Since 1990 we have assisted over 2,500 home-

less mothers in providing a safe place for them and their children and in helping them to move beyond a situation of dependency and despair to independence and self-worth.

Many young women have moved beyond Siena House to a better life. I would like to share with you the stories of three of these women.

Wen Ying was a young woman from China who had to flee her country when she became pregnant with her second child, due to the one-child policy. She left her first daughter with her parents and came to the United States so she would not be forced into having an abortion.

ment to

less.

When she arrived at Siena House, her baby girl, Sandy, was six months old. Wen Ying spoke little-to-no English and struggled to keep up with her regular meetings with the social worker. She had a job in a nail salon in Queens and would leave early in the morning, taking the baby with her. Often she asked to prepare an evening meal for the rest of the women. After moving into her own apartment, she continued working at the salon until Sandy was two years old. Then she sent Sandy back to China with a friend until she was able to save enough money to bring both of her girls to New York. Eventually Wen Ying was able to purchase the salon and send for both of her children. She came to Siena House during the Christmas holidays about eight years ago, brought a cake and hugged each of the staff members who were present. On her way out she thanked me for what had done for her and gave me US\$200 in cash to buy a treat for the residents. Her gratitude was such a gift and affirmation for our staff.

Geraldina, an undocumented person from El Salvador, came to us in our early years. She had an 18-month-old son and was trying to improve her English and look for work. She was very discouraged since she did not qualify for permanent housing assistance. One day a retired teacher in the neighbourhood called to inquire about a trustworthy woman I might identify to help her with cleaning and shopping. Of course, Geraldina was the perfect match! For the next year Geraldina worked for the woman and saved her earnings until she was able to rent a room in the area. She continued to help with the cleaning and shopping for the next two years. When the woman died, she left everything to Geraldina. Such a blessing! Later on, we heard that Geraldina had married and had twins, a boy and a girl. She was also able to get her green card and to find work. We were delighted when she contacted us to thank Siena House for helping her get on her feet.

Michelle Andrews was a young, pregnant woman who was expecting her first child when she came to Siena House in 1994. In her sixth month of pregnancy, she was diagnosed with pre-eclampsia and needed to have an emergency C-section. At birth, her baby weighed just about one pound, and there seemed to be very little hope for his survival. I went to the hospital the next day with one of our Sisters who lived at the shelter and was also a nurse. We convinced Michelle to come with us to the neo-natal Intensive Care Unit to see the baby. All three of us placed our hands on the baby and prayed together for his survival. With the permission of Michelle, I baptized him. She gave him the name Mel. She stayed at the shelter for the next three or four months and went to see the baby every day to hold him and feed him. Little Mel did survive, and Michelle was able to move out of Siena House and into her own apartment in the Bronx. Michelle returned to Siena House with Mel when he was 14 years old, and he was taller than her! He had had some developmental delays in his early childhood but later became a healthy, young teenager involved in all school activities. Michelle was able to advance her career with Muzak, Inc., and became a regular gift giver to the residents at Christmas time, always grateful to the Siena House staff.

These stories represent a few of the extraordinary women who have passed through our doors. We have been inspired to continue this ministry to homeless women and children over the past 25 years by the testimonies of gratitude of women who return to share their story and express thanks for all that was done to help them provide a better life for their children. It always lifts the spirits of our staff to hear these success stories. Our mission is to keep these women safe and to encourage them to feel good about themselves and to help them with tools for an empowered life.

ABOUT MARY DORIS

Sister Mary Doris, O.P., was born in Motherwell, Scotland, to Kathleen and James Doris in 1938, and arrived in the Bronx, New York, U.S.A., as an infant the following year. When she turned 18, she entered the Convent of the Sisters of St. Dominic in Blauvelt, New York. Equipped with a Bachelor's degree in Education and a Master's degree in Mathematics, Sister Mary taught in both primary and secondary schools for 18 years before becoming the Vocation Director of the Dominican Sisters.

Sister Mary's calling to work with the poor began with her move to the High-bridge section of the Bronx, one of the poorest congressional districts in the country. Joining her fellow Sisters at a social service centre in this neighbourhood, she found several opportunities to help the community. In 1980 she initiated an Adult Education Program, teaching High School Equivalency and English as a Second Language. In 1990 she established Siena House, a safe house that provides transitional housing to 27 homeless women and their children.

Siena House, under Sister Mary's leadership for the past 26 years, has assisted over 2,500 homeless mothers. It strives to provide programs that assist women

to move from a situation of homelessness and poverty to one of independence and self-worth.

Sister Mary believes that music is at the heart of humanity with a capacity to inspire and transform. In 2013 Carnegie Hall invited Siena House to participate in THE LULLABY PROJECT, in which young mothers compose lullabies for their children. The artists connect one-on-one with mothers at Siena House and encourage them to write a poem, a letter or to simply list their hopes for their baby. With great sensitivity and gentleness, the words are set to music.

Amid all the stress and struggles in choosing to keep their children while living in a shelter, the Lullaby Project provides an opportunity for young mothers to cherish their babies and recognize the beauty and honour of motherhood. The artists help the mothers to reach deep within themselves to create something beautiful for their children that will remain with them for the rest of their lives. The Lullaby Project is a wonderful example of how gifted men and women can use their musical talents and creativity to make a difference in the lives of parents who are experiencing struggle as they try to raise their children in an environment of love.



Cecilia Flores, photographed by ... Schmidt

FIGHTING THE EVIL OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

by Cecilia Flores

I am Cecilia Flores-Oebanda, a sister to people of different faiths and races and a mother to many children who have survived modern slavery. I have been fulfilling a mission for the past 25 years that I believe I was entrusted with: to care for women and children who need it most. I believe that God has called me to this mission.

I was born poor. At age seven, I had to help put food on the table for my family. Every day I walked the streets of my town selling fish. I also scavenged for food in garbage dumps.

I was a catechist when my country was placed under Martial Law by the dictator Ferdinand Marcos. At a time of hopelessness and brutal repression, I spent my days among poor communities, telling them of God's saving grace. I loved telling the story of how God sent Moses to set His people free from the clutches of slavery under the Pharaoh. I am always emboldened by God's promise in that story: "I saw the affliction of my people and have heard their cries. Set my people free!" (Exodus 3:7-8). Bishop Antonio Fortich described the situation as a "social volcano". An eruption was inevitable.

The dictatorship soon turned its eyes toward the Catholic Church. Before I knew it, I was a target of the brutal military. Many priests, nuns and lay leaders were hunted down, including my young friends and me. Many of them were killed and imprisoned.

As I was leading the liberation movement, I became a mother. I hid in the mountains as the military ran an endless pursuit. To keep my first-born safe, I was forced to give him to my relatives. My eldest son and I were separated for 12 years.

After five years of fighting and hiding, my husband and I were captured in a gun battle that took eight hours. I was then pregnant with my second child. My three comrades suffered a dif-

ferent fate: They were killed in front of me. I plead with the military officials to have pity and spare the life of two young boys I had just recruited into the revolutionary movement. While the boys were kneeling, I begged for mercy, but their executioner said, “I regret to say, Madam, this is a mercy killing, and we are under Martial law”. I screamed at him that there is no mercy in killing – that it was “human slaughter”.

After that, they dragged me away from the dead bodies and before I knew it, I was with my husband and two others in a helicopter. While in the helicopter, I had a clear view of the entire mountain, and I could still see the body of my recruits and other friends of mine. I wanted to jump from the helicopter out of desperation and guilt. Why was I alive?

Soon I was in the interrogation room in a military camp. My interrogator tried to rape me even though I was in my eighth month of pregnancy. I fought back. I was ready to die that day – fighting for myself and for my unborn child. He could not believe that I was willing to engage in hand-to-hand combat with him, so he let me go.

After two days in prison I gave birth to a son. I started my family while in prison, the last place I ever imagined doing that. We stayed in prison for four years. Together with my former husband, who has passed, we were a family of political prisoners. I named my son Kip, a contraction of the Filipino word *dakip*, which means “captured”. I also had a daughter while in prison. I named her Malaya, which means “freedom” – the very essence of our dreams, what we were fighting for. I can still remember days when I would climb a tree with my son on my back, just to show him there was something else out there, beyond the walls of the prison. I would promise him that one day he would live in it.

Where is freedom when our women and children are sold, enslaved and exploited?

After two days in prison I gave birth to a son. I started my family while in prison, the last place I ever imagined doing that. We stayed in prison for four years. Together with my former husband, who has passed, we were a family of political prisoners. I named my son Kip, a contraction of the Filipino word *dakip*, which means “captured”. I also had a daughter while in prison. I named her Malaya, which means “freedom” – the very essence of our dreams, what we were fighting for. I can still remember days when I would climb a tree with my son on my back, just to show him there was something else out there, beyond the walls of the prison. I would promise him that one day he would live in it.

While many would consider my life the worst life one can endure, it was during these difficult times when I felt the strongest pull of God’s love. I found myself with an even stronger faith in Him and His promise of freedom. God was

my refuge and strength. It was during these times that my love for freedom took greater flames.

After four years in prison, the People Power revolution successfully ousted the dictator. My family and I were finally released. At that time I founded Visayan Forum.

I had thought my life was the worst life anybody could endure. When I started working with trafficking victims, I realized that my suffering was nothing compared to what these victims experienced. I think of the story of some Filipina women who were promised domestic work in France, only to end up in a bar in the Ivory Coast, forced to have sex with different men every day. Some of these women have contracted diseases that will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Within the Philippines, the same abuses occur. At one point, we rescued a number of girls, some as young as 14, who were trafficked into sexually exploitative work. Pieces of cotton dipped in pigeon's blood were being inserted into their private organs in order to fool their customers into thinking they were virgins. Those who got pregnant were forced by the handlers to abort.

We rescued a five-year-old girl who had severe lacerations and whose face is probably stocked in over a thousand pornographic websites because she had been forced to perform sexual acts in front of a web camera for a long time. The youngest victim of the cybersex slave trade is a one-year-old girl.

So, I ask: Where is freedom when our women and children are sold as sex toys, enslaved and exploited?

When Pope Francis visited the Philippines last year, he called for mercy and compassion. For the first time I asked myself: After what I, my family

and these women and girls have been through, what is the meaning of mercy in my life?

In my heart, truly, mercy and forgiveness do not come easy. I do not know if I have been able to forgive those people who have made my life and the lives of these girls hell on earth. Is swallowing what I endured and forgetting all the pain enough? I question myself.

What I have learned is that mercy begins with having the courage to forgive my perpetrators and captors. I cannot simply judge them by their wrongdoing. In the same way, I must not define my life in terms of suffering. Maybe one can never have courage if one does not have mercy. Maybe mercy is about the courage to overcome the pain and suffering for a purpose bigger than us to which God calls us. Looking back to my days in prison, only in Christ I found the strength to live. When I remember my days as a rebel leader, it was Christ and his promise of deliverance that gave me the courage to fight. Throughout my life, as I fought for one form of freedom or another, Christ was at the centre.

My fight against evil is far from over. Given the safety risks involved and how my enemies want to destroy my spirit and my organization, what we face almost every day in the battlefield against human trafficking is true evil. As long as we are aligned with God's plan, we shall have the courage to face this organized evil. The greatest enemy that we have to overcome is organized apathy. When good people remain indifferent to the plight of victims and choose to do nothing, the problem continues to grow. For me I believe that faith must lead to empathy and to action.

May the courage of trafficking survivors and those who fell down in the fight serve as our strength and inspiration to fight for freedom. I am honoured to know that you are one with us in this fight.

I hope that we realize the will of God for His children to be free, to let His children explore opportunities without the risk of being sold and enslaved and to let them dream again of a brighter future. Because in every dream we rekindle,

every life we rebuild and every future we win back, we are drawn closer to Christ who promised salvation for all of us, for all of His children. Good day, and may God bless us all!

ABOUT CECILIA FLORES

Cecilia Flores-Oebanda is a globally recognized human rights advocate and international expert on human trafficking, child labour and domestic work.

Born into poverty in the Visayas region of the Philippines, Cecilia was a child labourer, selling fish and scavenging garbage to help her family survive. She joined the fight against the Marcos dictatorship and, as a result, was imprisoned with her husband for four years. When democracy was finally achieved, Cecilia and her family were set free, and she found a new calling to counter the forces that deprive people of their freedom to live a decent life.

Cecilia is the founder and president of the Visayan Forum Foundation, established in Manila in 1991 to address modern-day slavery, especially human trafficking and the exploitation of domestic workers. Collaborating with a network of over 200 public and private organizations and government agencies, the foundation has served 18,590 victims and potential victims and filed

35 legal cases on behalf of 116 victim complainants.

The early success of the foundation can be attributed to its innovation in the area of transport. The focus on transport is crucial because it is the last point of visibility for victims and traffickers. Private companies – including shippers, crews and passengers – were trained to spot and intervene in situations that suggested trafficking, and organizations engaged in coordinated efforts to rescue victims and support them to be safe and build a better life.

In 2005 Cecilia received the Anti-Slavery Award from Anti-Slavery International. In 2007 she was recognized by the United Kingdom as a Modern-Day Abolitionist during the celebration of the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. In 2008 she received the Award for Social Entrepreneurship from the Skoll Foundation, and the U.S. Department of State recognized her as a Hero Acting to End Modern-Day Slavery.



Bildlegende

FREEDOM FROM CHILD MARRIAGE

by **Caroline Nduku Kimeu and Judy Auma Onyango**
Moderated by **Father George Menampampil, S.D.B.**

George: I have been asked to lead this conversation because the Salesians do a lot toward the prevention of child marriages. As a congregation dedicated to the youth, we believe that education is the key. We offer young people from difficult backgrounds opportunities for formal, academic, vocational and professional education. In our own schools and in others including those of the government, we run Child Rights clubs and Human Rights clubs. In village settings we organize children themselves to prevent child marriages. For a variety of reasons I could not bring a girl from India whom we had helped to avoid child marriage, but we have here two wonderful young women from Kenya who faced the challenges of a difficult family, poverty and tribal traditions to resist early marriage and continue their studies.

Judy and Caroline, could you tell me something about yourselves, your families and your cultural backgrounds?

Judy: I am 33, and I come from Kenya. My father died early, and my mother struggled to feed her five children. None of my brothers or sisters went beyond high school. Our culture is male-dominated. Girls are not expected to study beyond puberty, and women are expected to keep their mouth shut in decision-making.

Caroline: I am 22. My father was a drunkard and not concerned about his six children. The entire burden of the family was borne by my mother. My sisters married early, and I was expected to do the same.

George: Why are girls not expected to study and instead encouraged to marry early?

Judy: Education is expensive. My mother could not afford it for us beyond the minimum level. My sister was intelligent and could have studied if we had been a little better off. Investing in the education of boys is considered an asset. It is like an old-age pension and health insurance for the parents. The education of girls is considered a waste – or, at the most, a luxury – because they will get married and go away to another family!

Caroline: There is also the matter of “bride price” – what the boy’s family gives to the parents of the girl at the time of marriage. Many parents are eager to obtain it as early as possible to improve their own economic situation.

George: In my country, it is the opposite. The girl’s parents give to the boy’s parents. But then, the fear is that if a girl gets educated, she may expect a boy who is also better educated, which would mean giving him a higher dowry.

Why did you want to study?

Judy: I saw the miserable life my mother had, especially after my father died. We lived in a shanty house, had almost no drainage, and had constant illness, stress and anxiety. Above all, no one re-

spected her, let alone helped her. She was ridiculed. I was determined that I would not suffer as she did. I pitied the girls that had married early. Some of them even ended up with H.I.V./AIDS and thought of suicide as their only way out.

Caroline: My drunken father treated my mother like an object. He was not concerned about us at all. He even told us straight to our face that he was not even our real father. I saw my sisters who married early live an equally miserable life. They regretted their early marriage and all the troubles that came with it.

George: What did you do to overcome your problems and pursue your dreams?

Judy: The very first problem was to keep refusing to marry when they wanted me to. I decided that I alone would decide when I would marry, whom I would marry and how I would share my life with him. I completed high school and worked for about five years. Then I went back to studies. I finally married at 28 while in my final year of my Bachelor’s studies. I was not satisfied with that degree. With the consent of my husband I continued to study. It was a struggle running from pillar to post to find the money to pay for these studies, but I was stubborn. I never gave up. I found what I needed, I worked, and I went on studying. I am glad to say: I am study-

Traditions are made by people, not carved in stone.

-Caroline Kimeu

Judy Auma Onyango, Caroline
Nduku Kimeu and Father George
Menampampil, S.D.B., photo-
graphed by ...Schmidt



ing even now. I am doing a Master's in Business Administration.

Caroline: Money was my biggest problem. After Grade Eight, I moved to Nairobi and worked for three years as a house maid to earn, save and have enough to continue studying.

George: Was it hard to go against the traditions of the tribe?

Judy: I grew up in a city so the pressure did not come from the larger community. The pressure came from my mother, mainly due to our poor financial situation. But I resisted.

Caroline: Traditions are strongest in villages and among the least educated. I escaped the pressures from my immediate neighbourhood by going away to the city, despite all the challenges of a totally different situation, to find my own way. Traditions are made by people, not carved in stone. Old traditions do not always serve new realities. Culture must evolve.

George: Who helped you to continue your studies?

Caroline: I got help from the Jesuits at St. Aloysius Gonzaga School.

Judy: I got help from the Loretto Sisters and the Comboni Missionaries. My husband was a pillar of support for me. The people at the university were also very helpful. They saw my intelligence and my determination, and they were very understanding.

George: What role did your mother play in your family and in your life?

Caroline: First of all, it was my mother who kept us all together and enabled us to deal with our father who was always a problem for us. Second,

she is the one who developed courage in me, the courage to face difficulties at home, like not having enough food or opportunities to study. The courage she inspired in me enabled me to get through the difficulties of living and working in a family that was not my own, and even today, to live and study with another family that is not my own.

Judy: My mother had a huge influence on me. Her determination is my inspiration even today. She did odd jobs all over the place just to have a roof over our heads and to feed us. Her effort to get me married at 16 was negative, but of course she had married at 17 and her husband had been a wealthy man. So she felt that getting a rich husband would be better for me too. I do not blame her.

George: What difference will the education of one girl make to your society?

Judy: Of course, I alone cannot change my entire country. But I do change, first of all, the financial situation of my family. My children get good food, health care and education. My example also inspires other girls to delay their marriage and to study more. I can motivate other girls toward education and a better life. I can change the attitudes of people in my society who seriously think that educating girls is a waste of resources.

Caroline: In my community I am a pioneer of education for girls. My example is already inspiring other girls to follow in my footsteps.

George: What are you already doing to change things in your community?

Judy: My husband and I work together in Mirror of Hope, a community-based organization we cofounded. We care for orphans and concentrate on empowering women through income-generation skills, so they can become self-reliant and

raise their social status. We support the education of needy girls.

Caroline: I am now doing six months of community service, teaching children in the kindergarten.

George: What more do you hope to do for girls and women and your society?

Judy: It is clear that our resources of time and finances are very limited. But I do have hopes, plans and dreams to help many more girls to receive an education, delay their marriage to a more appropriate age, find decent employment and bring up their own children and girls to live with dignity, capable of contributing to society.

Caroline: I have two plans. One is to teach many more girls so they take their studies seriously and do well in life. My second dream is to become a healthcare specialist. Then I will go around giving seminars, training workshops and awareness programmes on health, hygiene, nutrition, child care and so on, so the quality of life of my entire community improves.

George: What is the key starting point to bring about radical change in the situation of women and girls in your community?

Judy: Education. For me education is everything. Knowledge is power. With it come dignity and respect. An educated woman can influence decisions.

Caroline: What is the difference between Chantal Götz [the founder of Voices of Faith] and me? The only difference is in the opportunities she had for the best possible education, which I do not have. Just see what she is doing to change the world. Give me an education like hers, and I feel confident that I can do the same. Education is the key!

George: What can people do to help you or women like you?

Judy: My dream is to academically empower as many girls as possible. We have to arrive at a tipping point in the education of girls. Once we reach that point, the rest will follow. I would like the people listening to us to join me in fulfilling

ABOUT JUDY AUMA ONYANGO

Judy Onyango, 33, was born and raised in Kenya. Now she is studying for a Master's in Business Administration and plans to pursue a doctorate in social ministry so that she can work with and give back to her community.

When she was 16 she was almost forced to marry and abandon her dreams of a secondary education. Judy is one of the fortunate ones. After her father's death impoverished her family of six, she re-

ceived financial help from both the church and friends that allowed her to complete her secondary education. Realizing that others girls in Africa are not so fortunate, Judy has volunteered with Mirror of Hope, a community-based organization that provides education for poor and vulnerable girls, since 2011. Judy strongly believes that through education a woman earns herself respect and dignity in society.

ABOUT CAROLINE NDUKU KIMEU

Caroline Kimeu, 22, is in her fourth year as a student at St. Aloysius Gonzaga Secondary School with plans to sit for her national exams later in 2016 and attend university.

Born and raised in a small town in Kenya, Caroline was initially forced to stop her education at age 14 because her family had no money. At that time, she found herself with two options: to get married or become a child labourer. Having watched the suffering of her older sisters who were victims of early marriages, she chose to move 250 kilometres away to Nairobi where she was able to find work as a maid.

Education for girls not only assures a better future for the girls themselves, but transforms them into agents of change in their society. "There is a vicious cycle", Caroline explains. "We are uneducated. So our production is low. So our income is poor. So we pay low taxes. So the government has little money. So the government cannot give free or cheap education. So we remain uneducated. So our production is low. And on and on. Things go round and round, again and again, with everything getting worse with each round".

**For society to flourish,
we need to
empower women.**

-Judy Onyango



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this dream of mine for the girls of my country.

Caroline: I am still very young. I am only going to start my Bachelor's studies this September. Even while studying, I would like to develop an organization to work with girls from poorer backgrounds to enable them to study and not get married too young. I am so young and inexperienced, so I would really appreciate it if the people around me could share with me their ideas, knowledge, skills and so on, to set up an organization and get it moving.

George: Any final message you would like to give the people listening to us?

Judy: We women are a part of society. When society suffers, we suffer with it. When society flourishes, we flourish with it. In most countries,

women are the pillars of society. For society to flourish, we need to empower women. This starts early in life while they are little girls. Let us join hands together so that every girl in the whole world receives a healthy upbringing and a good education.

Caroline: It is high time that we abandon the outdated elements of our culture. The world is changing fast, and society has to evolve with it. Yesterday's traditions were excellent for yesterday's reality. Yesterday's traditions cannot handle today's realities. We need to establish new ways of thinking and behaving to deal with today's needs. The traditions regarding gender relationships are outmoded in most societies. Let us work to develop new attitudes in ourselves and in those around us.

ABOUT GEORGE MENAMPARAMPIL

Born in Kerala, India, Father George has served the disadvantaged peoples of North East India and Bhutan for the past 48 years. A Salesian of Don Bosco, George has followed in the footsteps of their 19th-century founder who dedicated his life to the betterment and education of disadvantaged youth through what is known as the Salesian Preventive System.

His contributions have been numerous. He is founder and head of BOSCONET, the fundraising arm of Don Bosco India, which runs over 300 schools, 47 colleges and 123 institutes. He is au-

thor of the series of Value Education textbooks that have sold over 3 million copies. He is national coordinator for India of 92 centres for street children and child labourers, and he is the global leader of an International Rural Youth Organization.

His recent initiative to support the education of girls in tribal areas of India provides partial scholarships to allow them to board at the school. Without this support the majority of these girls would have been exploited: married off by their relatives and/or restricted to domestic work.



Sabriye Tenberken and Paul Kronenberg, photographed by xx

TURNING ADVERSITY INTO STRENGTH

by Paul Kronenberg and Sabriye Tenberken

Paul Kronenberg: A kanthari is a small but very spicy and powerful chili that grows wild in the backyards of Kerala, India. It is not only spicy; it also contains a number of medicinal values. It purifies your blood and lowers your blood pressure. It is a pain killer and makes you awake and alert. For us it is the perfect symbol for a person who turns adversity into strength, who is not a victim of circumstances, who has energy and spice to challenge the status quo and who comes up with new solutions for old and new problems. Like this chili, the kanthari change-makers are found in the backyard of society. Kanthari is the name of our institute which empowers marginalized people from around the world, individuals who have overcome adversity and gained strength to make the world and their surrounding a better place.

One example is Tosin from Nigeria. Her mother told her that she would be safe from domestic violence if she received an education and had

economic independence. Tosin studied hard and got a good job. But then, when her baby girl was only 28 days old, Tosin asked her husband to hold the baby for a few minutes. His reaction was outrageous: He beat her up so brutally that she was hospitalized and nearly died. This happened again and again.

Tosin often walked around in the slums of Lagos, looking at material scattered on the ground. She picked up a piece of Styrofoam, a piece of trash, and she felt: "This is me! I am treated like trash". This realisation, however, gave her an idea: She decided to turn trash into treasure. From that moment on, her life, her mind-set and her attitude toward herself changed completely!

After the training at the kanthari institute in Kerala, Tosin now runs a centre where abused women are healed by turning trash into beautiful objects. Styrofoam becomes part of a valuable cooking bag

and saw dust is changed into kitchen clocks.

Another kanthari graduate is Jyothsna Das, who comes from a tribal area in Orissa, India. For many years she was a victim of domestic violence. But one day she decided that enough is enough. She

The transformation from sorrow to celebration and from pain to acceptance is for us a pinching point and often it is exactly this moment a kanthari is born.

Sabriye Tenberken: A kanthari is born when

By losing sight, my imagination grew stronger. -Sabriye Tenberken

brought her two children to a relative and then she walked off. She found a well, 30 meters deep, looked around, saw no one and jumped. When she woke up she was looking right into the eyes of a villager who just by chance had seen her jump and got her out alive. Now Jyothsna runs Janamangal, an organization that helps women-victims of domestic abuse to stand up for their rights.

Another example of a true kanthari is Jayne Waitera, a woman who lives with albinism. She grew up as the only white person among her black sisters and brothers. People from East Africa who live with albinism not only fear the strong sunlight that burns their skin, but they are also discriminated against and even have to fear being hunted and killed. Witch doctors from Tanzania promise politicians and businessmen power and wealth if they drink potions made with Albino body parts or if they carry a finger of an Albino in their pocket. Jayne is an activist, a kanthari who risks her life to create awareness, to fight against superstitious beliefs.

mercy – as it relates to forgiveness and reconciliation – turns into empowerment and gratefulness. Grateful for the lives we have lived, we transform sorrows into strength.

If I knew at age 9 that at one time in my life I would say, “Yes I am grateful for all that happened I am happy to be blind!” I would probably have thought that this woman must be crazy.

At age 9 my life transformed from sight to blindness. I was a visual child, speeding on my bicycle, climbing trees and making pirouettes on ice skates. I will never forget the day when I was standing at the bank of our village pond. The pond was covered with a layer of ice, and I was wondering why my friends were skating in a circle. There were no “traffic rules” like the ones used on commercial ice-skating rings! It almost made me angry seeing my friends circling in conformity. So I put on my skates and skated right through the circle. I did not see the hole in the middle.

It was in fact a very cold shock, but it made me



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understand that I could not trust my eyes any longer. Slowly but steadily I realized my life was taking a drastic turn. It was a very slow transformation. It started with losing my colour vision. Then I could not recognize faces any longer.

I was afraid of becoming blind. I feared being isolated and side-lined. I feared living in the dark for the rest of my life. Some of these fears became true. I experienced discrimination in school and in society. Thus I withdrew from friends, avoided strangers and at one point even stopped talking to my own family. My parents were certainly concerned but they also had trust in me that one day I would be able to liberate myself from this active withdrawal. They did not interfere but read books to me, books that had something to do with my situation.

One of those books was about the civil rights movement of African-Americans. You might ask: What is the link between the civil rights movement and becoming blind? There was a trend among African-Americans in the 1950s and 60s to look and act like white people. Many straightened their hair, and they used special creams to lighten their skin colour.

They did not accept themselves as black, and I did not accept that I was blind. I was avoiding situations in which my lack of sight became obvious. Then I learned about the turning point in the civil rights movement, the transformation of the identity “black” from inferior and ugly to “black is beautiful”.

Fifteen years later, this tagline felt like a wakeup call to me. I remember lying in my bed playing around with the few words of English I knew: “Black is beautiful. Blind is black. Blind is beautiful”. At that point I understood what I needed to do. I had to stop whining about all the things that I was not able to do anymore. I had to focus on the advantages of becoming blind. I had to look

for the beauty of blindness.

What are the advantages? First, once I became blind I was able to concentrate and focus on what really mattered. I was not distracted by all the visual input of Hollywood, Bollywood and advertisements. Second, a blind person is forced to become a clear communicator. You have to be precise in your explanations; non-verbal communication will not work anymore. Third, being a blind child who was pushed into a world made for the sighted, I had to become a problem-solver. I had to find my own paths. Finally, I understood that by losing sight my imagination, my inner vision, grew stronger. I started to imagine things that were not obvious to others.

When I realized that my world did not become smaller, I was ready to embrace blindness. I was even ready for a life in the dark. But darkness never came. In fact the world surrounding me became even more beautiful and colourful because I was able to imagine it all in my own way.

The vision of my future brought me to Tibet where I met Paul Kronenberg. We started the first school for the blind, a Braille-book printing press and a vocational training farm, and then we made the jump to start kanthari in Kerala, India. In seven years at kanthari, we have empowered 141 participants from 37 countries. They have all overcome adversity and started their own social projects and initiatives. Over 80 projects are already up and running, reaching thousands of beneficiaries.

Many people criticize big visions. They say, “Stay on the ground. Do not grab for the stars. You are too small for such big ideas”. But our social change-makers now stand up and say, “Just bite into a kanthari, and you will realize that a small chili can make a huge difference”.

ABOUT SABRIYE TENBERKEN & PAUL KRONENBERG

Is from Bonn, Germany, where she attended university to study Tibetology and Central Asian Sciences. She attributes the fact that she became fully blind at age 12 as the driving force behind her two social entrepreneurship ventures.

In 1997 Sabriye cofounded Braille Without Borders, the first school of its kind in Tibet that empowers blind people to take their lives in their own hands. She has been recognized multiple times for developing the Tibetan Braille Script. In 2005 she cofounded kanthari in Kerala, India.

Kanthari is a school for social entrepreneurship that develops leaders from the margins of society, training them to start up and run effective, relevant social projects all over the world. The kanthari enrolls students of different backgrounds (former child soldiers, albinos, disabled individuals), people chosen precisely because they have overcome personal adversity, and from different countries, like the Chinese region of Tibet, Uganda, Myanmar, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Liberia, India, Nepal and other developing countries.

Sabriye is an active public speaker and the recipient of numerous awards. In 2011 she received the INCITE Award for Excellence in Social Entrepreneurship. In 2005 she spoke at the World Economic Forum in Davos as a Young Global Leader and was also nominated for the

Nobel Peace Prize. In 2004 she received the HERO Award from Time magazine Asia. She is the author of My Path Leads to Tibet and the star of the award-winning documentary 'Blindsight'.

Paul Kronenberg graduated from the Hogeschool Utrecht University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. With a background in mechanical engineering and computer science, he gained practical experience while working on development projects in Africa, Eastern Europe and Tibet with organizations like the Swiss Red Cross.

Physically scarred since childhood as a result of wrong medication, Paul believes that true beauty lies in one's soul. With Sabriye Tenberken, he is cofounder of Braille Without Borders and kanthari, where he manages the operations of both organizations. He supervises all construction projects and is the driving force behind the low-cost and eco-friendly designs of all buildings.

In addition to his public speaking, Paul has been recognized for his work. In 2012 he received the Bornheimer Award from The Europa School in Bornheim, Germany. In 2007 he was awarded the Mother Theresa Award, and in 2003 he was knighted by the Queen of Holland.

WHAT WOMEN WANT

A multigenerational conversation on expanding women's leadership in the Church Petra Dankova, Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala, Nicole Perone, GERALYN SHEEHAN, Dr. Carolyn Woo, Father Thomas Smolich, S.J., moderator

Tom: We have heard that mercy requires courage. And we have heard from women and a few men who have been out on the frontiers of our Church, the frontiers of society, expressing that mercy. We have seen what courage it takes. We have also met some of the women who have benefited from that mercy, and we have realized that it takes courage from them as well to get on that first rung of the ladder and to keep moving forward.

Now we are going to pivot from the frontiers, from the edge of things, back to the center. What brings us together here is that we are members of the Church. We have a portrait of Pope Francis in front of us. He is inspiring us to bring mercy to the frontiers, especially during this Year of Mercy. But we are here in the Vatican, and we must talk about being part of the Church itself.

Several of us celebrated Eucharist earlier today to begin the celebration of the International Women's Day. In the Gospel reading, Jesus cures a man who has been lying by the pool of Bethesda for 38 years. He was never the first one into the water when the water was stirred. The

Gospel is quite clear that miracles happen when the water is stirred. Our panelists today are going to stir the water a little bit and talk about both what opportunities have occurred, what things are happening in the Church, and also some of their visions, their dreams, what they hope can and should happen in the Church, where the water needs to be stirred.

Petra, where have you seen success related to the role of women in the Church?

Petra: The first thing we have to ask ourselves is what or who is the Church for us. It is really dangerous to look at the Church in a dualistic way as a man-dominated institution in which women are somehow external.

As someone who converted to Catholic faith as an adult, I know the Church to which I converted was a community, a community of friends and teachers at the University of Notre Dame and a community of people who showed me not just liturgies but how they live their faith in their everyday lives.

Right at the beginning we have to say that our Church is not only the Vatican and the Sunday Mass; it is both much more intimate and much bigger than that. Let us keep that in mind.

When women were not able to move to the top of the hierarchy, I wonder if their leadership focused more on moving toward the margins. I am a postulant in a religious congregation. About two years ago, the Sisters of the Holy Redeemer in Germany met a refugee family and decided to give this family church asylum to help prevent their unjust deportation.

From knowing this family, the Sisters saw the needs of refugees and very courageously, with no previous experience, decided to open a wing of their motherhouse to 100 asylum seekers. When that actually turned out to work well, they found another space, started hosting unaccompanied children and used their hospital to provide health care to asylum seekers.

The Sisters did not start looking for leadership; they saw people in need. They heard the Gospel saying they should take care of the stranger. From doing that, they have become leaders in this field of assessing asylum seekers, and now other people are coming to the Sisters and asking for their opinions and advice. That is part of the leadership that women in the Church are taking up in a great way.

Nicole: I would like to echo Petra about the way religious orders have really taken the initiative to empower women and lay people, really gifting lay people with their charisms. It is a really excellent model for the Church. As always, religious, especially women religious, are at the forefront, to the surprise of probably nobody in this room.

I am also blown away by all the places and spaces women currently occupy in the Church as heads

of Catholic healthcare organizations, universities and various organizations within the Church. In fact, some of them are sitting at this table or in this room today. They are my heroines, my she-roes.

I rejoice in how these amazing, important women are doing the vital work of the Church. While there are far too few women in these roles, I think the Church does well consulting with women in institutions. Women consult for the bishops' conferences, the Vatican and, most commendably, the Sexual Abuse Commission. Great work, Pope Francis! He really took the initiative to make sure there were women on that commission, as well as men. That is an area where the Church is doing well.

It is vital to bring women to the table for decision-making. Right now we see women doing it every day. As Petra said, they already operate in the periphery. We need to just bring them closer to where the heart of the Church is beating, because women are already the heart of the Church.

Geralyn: We cannot talk about the role of women in the Church without talking about the role of motherhood – our mothers. Mothers are the heart of every family. It crosses every culture around the world. Most of us receive our first witness of faith through our mothers.

I think of my mother, a very devout Catholic. I come from a big Irish-Catholic family, and so you cannot help but have Church as part of your culture. She also taught us about service. Women, by our nature, are nurturers.

I also think about my story. I have been influenced by Sister Giovanni, a School Sister of Notre Dame. She was my first boss, a force to be reckoned with. On the west side of St. Paul, Minnesota, Sister G saw the growth of Latino

gangs and rival gangs that were entering into violence. Since most Latinos were undocumented immigrants and could not get into school, their way into society was through gangs. Later I worked at Catholic Charities for another powerful woman, Marguerite Loftus, who ran our refugee program.

We can talk about the giftedness and heart of women without overly romanticizing it or thinking in stereotypes. The women I have met have been visionaries and have changed systems, policies and laws. I witnessed both of these women impact the immigrant and refugee policies in my state. I can tell you: There was not an archbishop, corporate executive or mayor who would say no to them. When we have this dialogue on the impact of women, it is important for us to think about these roles too.

Carolyn: I would say three things from a more macro perspective. First, Catholic Relief Services goes out into the world where people are very, very poor and very vulnerable. We truly see the commitment and the labor of the Church in serving women and girls in education, health care, H.I.V./AIDS and so on. That work cannot be discounted. The Church has been working for the well-being of women.

Second, whether out of necessity or invitation, about 80 percent of the lay ministry in the Church is done by women. The formation of people in faith and the work of evangelization and witness are being done by women. The impact of women is felt in that extensive ministry.

Third, many women hold high positions in the Catholic Church in the United States. More women are presidents in Catholic universities than in secular universities. Women lead many hospitals. Even in dioceses women are chancellors and general counsels. Women are being empowered, and power is being shared.

Gayatri: I want to agree with you, Carolyn. If we are talking about opportunities for the voices of women to be heard in the Church, we have one right here. We are five women sitting on a panel discussion, and our voices are being heard. It is living proof that this is happening.

I grew up in an interfaith household, which shaped how I view the world. I also grew up with a very strong female role model in my mother because, as Geralyn said, your mother is usually your first introduction to your relationship with God.

My mother was involved when the Catholic Bishops of India instituted a gender policy. Three women were invited to draft the policy. People worked alongside each other to encourage the equal representation of women within the Church. This collaboration is fantastic. It is happening all around us.

Tom: We have a cross-generational panel here. Given your own history, how have you seen changes? Have our younger panel members seen changes or received what our more senior panellists might have observed over the years?

Geralyn: It is interesting being here at the Vatican and getting to know the younger panellists. There is definitely a generational difference in how we experience the Church. The more interesting and insightful comments come from our two Millennials as they talk about themselves and their friends.

I grew up in a family where Church is not something you do on Sunday but is part of your identity, culture and family history. My uncle was a bishop, and many relatives were priests and nuns. It simply becomes part of how you see the world. In that case, the difficulty is to move away from the faith of your father and mother and to really go through the search yourself to

have a mature faith where you are asking the kinds of questions based on your life experience, and where you move away from what you have inherited and begin to develop a depth on your own.

I had a crisis of conscience when I was in my thirties. My father died suddenly. We were a working-class family, and he had no life insurance, which left my mother and four sisters with very little financially. At that point, some of my

Milton became like a father to me. His daughter, Cheryl, was one of my best friends. I often went to synagogue with them, and Cheryl came to Mass with us. Milton died when I was 30 or 31. I was crushed. I went to my uncle, Bishop Dudley, and said, "I need to tell you face to face: I am leaving the Catholic Church because I refuse to believe that Milton Fagel will not enjoy the arms of God. Milton was more Christlike than many Christians I know". My uncle hugged me

Let us use the gifts of everyone. They are all needed.

-Geraldyn Sheehan

sisters and I were more educated than our mother. It was a very scary time.

I worked for a grocery store owned by a Jewish man, Milton Fagel. He was incredible. He often gave food to our family. But he was always in a hurry – left the car running – when he would bring overstock to my mom. If my mom tried to pay, he always said, "I have no time".

and said, "Geraldyn, I am so happy for you. You are absolutely right. I am sure Milton was greeted: Well done, good and faithful servant".

What my uncle told me then is something I have hung onto. He said, "What you are distinguishing is the word of God and the word of man. Our institution has been ruled by very holy men, and we have also had some bad men. Never take everything for granted. Discern. Your

faith will withstand your questions. The word of God always does”. With that, I cried. I said, “I still want to be a Catholic”. It really informed me and made me fearless about questioning. In fact, he told me it was our duty and that the Church is only made stronger.

Gayatri: My mom always said, “The path to holiness is paved with questions”. We grew up with that in mind. Both of my parents are very spiritual. My father is Hindu, and my mother is Catholic. My brother once said, “Usually in interfaith marriages you have one or both people who are not religious, because otherwise there is a lot of friction”. In our family, both are very spiritual. We always felt we were privileged to grow up with two very different spiritual identities that ultimately merged into one. We never saw it as a disadvantage.

For me, I chose to get baptized when I was 22. It was never a decision to become Catholic. I had always been Catholic. And it does not mean that I am not Hindu. It was not a question of picking one over the other.

Very often there is an internal monologue – Nicole and I were talking about this earlier – where you wonder: Am I Catholic enough? I always feel a little insecure, a little uncomfortable. Do I deserve to be here? Am I Catholic enough? I have had experiences that have reinforced that.

A few years ago my mom and I decided we would go for Mass on my birthday. My mom was delayed, and I happened to go to a parish that I had never been to before. I do not know what it was – how I was dressed, my vibe – but when I went to receive Communion, the priest looked at me and decided that I did not look Catholic enough. He asked, “Are you Catholic?” I said, “Yes”. He asked, “Well, how do you receive communion?” It seemed so simple that I thought it was a trick question. And I froze.

Then he asked, “When is the last time you have been to confession?” I do not go to confession. I felt, “Oh, my God. What am I doing here? I should not be here. I want to go home right now”. He asked me to wait and chat after Mass. I felt like I was in high school and was being punished by the principal. I stood on the side while everybody else in that line received Communion. I waited about three minutes before I ran back home, by which point my mom had just come from work.

She took one look at my face and asked, “What happened? Are you okay?” I just sobbed. It was terrible. I told her what happened. You do not want to get my mom mad. She marched right up to that church, and she spoke to the priest. She told him, “You know what? You had an opportunity to make somebody feel welcome and instead you turned them away”. I have not been back to that particular church.

Tom: Good move.

Gayatri: This is the kind of experience a lot of Millennials like me face. Just because we do not follow the same rules as our parents, or do not always go to Mass on Sunday, or choose not to go to confession, we feel we are not Catholic enough and denied a space within the existing structure of the Church. Our voices are not being heard. If we do not have a space, how are we going to make a difference? I want to be a part of this structure and make my presence felt.

Carolyn: Tom, there is a gender difference. Gernalyn and I, growing up, only saw religious women doing the work of the Church. Our mothers were volunteers. I did not grow up in a Catholic household, but we did not see lay women doing the core work of the Church. That is a major difference. The fact of this forum, the fact that I am the C.E.O. of Catholic Relief Services and so forth, I think the generation that follows us



Discussion between Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala, Petra Dankova, Dr. Carolyn Woo, Father Thomas Smolich, S.J., GERALYN Sheehan and Nicole Perone, photographed by ...

actually does see lay women in the work of the Church. It is very, very important because it allows for a different imagination.

There are two other influences. The younger generation settles for less and asks more questions. In the last 40 years, women have woken up and realized, "I am not just happy with what is at the margin". They will ask questions and expect answers.

Nicole: We are not knock-off Catholics. Our Catholicism is legit as Millennials. Our Catholi-

cism is legit as women. It does the Church a disservice to turn away young people and women and young women. This panel is not trying to be punitive toward the Church, even if we have had negative experiences. This is not a critique but an opportunity for the Church to utilize the valuable resources of young people and women.

To speak to your question, Tom, about what change we have seen, I want to echo what we have already heard. First, women religious are amazing, and I love them. But also seeing lay women do something that is meaningful and

visible and authoritative makes all the difference in the world.

In my life I reached the point where I realized women can do those things. I am surrounded, even in this room, by so many women I admire. I have had so many gifted advisers and outstanding mentors who have gone to the heart of the Church and made their voices heard. It makes a big difference for Millennials.

now one of the most atheist countries. I am the first person in my family in three generations who has found her way back into the Church.

The question of women expecting more is not just a question of young women but also the generation of my mother who is a professional woman. She has been in a workplace her whole life where she has had a lot of opportunities but also has had to struggle sometimes in professions

Are women engaged in the Church as family, guests or guest workers?

-Dr. Carolyn Woo

As Gaya said, we want to have a space to occupy. That is where there is a bit of a break. Although we have seen a lot of great changes in the Church – things my grandmother and my mother, maybe, have not experienced – Millennials ask questions and do not, as Carolyn said so well, settle for less. They want to know why women are not allowed to do something. They ask: Where are those who look like me and believe what I believe? That is where the Church has not a problem but an opportunity.

Petra: I would move our conversation geographically a little bit. I come from the Czech Republic, which after 50 years of Communism is sadly

that were always a little more male-dominated.

When she comes with me to Mass, she might be excited about being part of this tradition. She might be curious about coming to Mass. She might be curious about the things I have done after I converted. But there is this barrier she will never cross, because she does not see people like herself in the Church. It is not just a question of keeping the people who might be leaving the Church but also evangelization and bringing people into the Church who do not see themselves there right now.

Tom: That is a very good point: Your experiences, both generationally and where you come from, give each of you a different perspective on this question.

We have commented a lot on what is working and where some real opportunities have evolved and opened up for women. What are some places where that opening, that process, still needs to move?

Geralyn: Over the years I have worked for and with a lot of institutions in very diverse situations. Institutions never change because they should; they change when it is in their self-interest. Part of the question we have to ask is: What is the current self-interest of the Church?

When I think about the global issues our Church faces, whether Boko Haram, ISIS, female infanticide, genital mutilation or human trafficking, which is really sex trafficking, the target of all those too often are women and their children. The solutions have to come from the people who have lived those situations. In fact, it is the only place from which those answers will come.

I have been a victim of both sexual and physical violence, and for many years – much more than I wish I had lived – I lived in silence. The power of the violence remains unless you have the opportunity to speak about it, and then you can begin to move into having survived it.

Across the world, one in four women will experience violence in their lives. So as we think about Church, the role of women of bringing faith to the next generation and the strength of their survivorship around the key issues of today, we can begin to talk about the self-interest of our Church to have women at every level of engagement. It is the way our Church will expand.

Tom, the other day you mentioned a study that showed that women are actually leaving the church.

Tom: Fewer young women are maintaining their faith. There are more men maintaining their faith than women, at least in the United States right now.

Geralyn: It is such a dangerous environment for us. We need their voice in the Church. We need to come at it from the perspective of understanding the key issues of the Church and where we will find solutions.

Petra: Geralyn spoke about it being in the self-interest of the Church to attract women. I have spent some time thinking about how that can be done. Panellists have already mentioned that in the past it was religious women who were really the face of women in the Church.

How can we distil some of this? If religious women are the greenhouses of women in the Catholic Church, what can we do now to go beyond the greenhouses? I think of the formation of women religious, which has a component of really growing into depth and spirituality. It has a component of education, and it has a component of practical ministerial experience. For folks out there who have never had that experience, it is like doing a different rotation over a period of years and different experiences in the Church.

What would be an equivalent experience that could bring more women into the centre of the Church? Maybe fellowships. What if we offered fellowships for women in the Church, where women with a couple years of practice in the field, or women in mid-career, would be able to come into a program and bring their experience to the Vatican or a diocese and be encouraged to become part of this structure?

We have a lot of women in health care and schools, but maybe we need to take the next step of making them present in the centre of this hierarchy. That is one idea to plant seeds to actually attract women at this point. Women have a lot of opportunities these days. It should be in the self-interest of the Catholic Church to attract the best of the best, because it really makes an impact for the whole community.

Nicole: I would like to echo a little bit of what we have heard. At this point the Church needs to adopt a top-down and bottom-up model. Women need to be entering the structure of the Church at high, managerial levels. There should be women on every parish council, pastoral council and finance council. They need to be advising dioceses, parishes and in the Vatican.

It can be a numbers game. There is nothing wrong with looking at numbers and adopting a policy – as it is happening in India – that there needs to be certain numbers. Numbers and percentages are not scary; they are very useful. Sometimes these are what you need to make sure you are accomplishing what needs to be accomplished.

In that same vein, I cannot help but wonder why two pontifical councils that could have really great spaces for women are not being run by women. I am looking at the Pontifical Council for the Laity – hi! [Laughter.] It baffles the logical mind why a cleric would be running the Pontifical Council for the Laity. And the Pontifical Council for the Family: What a great opportunity to have someone who has a family!

A component of the top-down method is that women need not only to be in leadership but visible leadership. I can name women in leadership in the Church because I am really into this topic. [Laughter.] I talk about it a lot. I am a nerd of the Catholic Church. I am okay with that. I can live with that. But I want my mother

and grandmother to be able to name – let's start with five – five women who are making really important decisions in the Church. If they can name clerics, they should be able to name women in leadership.

It should not be for the sake of appointing women, but women should be appointed who are invested in these things, who have been to the peripheries and margins, who have served, who are “warrior women” – as Cecelia talked about today. These are the women who should be bringing their voices to the table, not just for the sake of having a number.

Regarding the bottom-up approach, a cultural shift needs to happen in the Catholic Church. I see a real need for cultural shift when I think of Gaya's story. When we say all are welcome in this place, do we actually mean all are welcome?

When we have young people or women who have great ideas or want to be engaged in their parish or diocese as a lector or Eucharistic minister, do we turn them away? Do we scoff? Or do we really bring them in and figure out how to utilize their gifts and talents?

Those women, especially the young women, have every opportunity in the secular sphere. I am 24 years old, and I have full confidence that if I wanted to, I could be President of the United States. I believe it. Who is laughing? Excuse me. I am fabulous. [Applause.] Thank you. Women can be president of the United States. They can be the prime minister of their countries. They can be a Fortune 500 C.E.O. They can succeed in any sphere. So why is the Church the last frontier? [Applause.] The Church is doing itself a disservice. It is a brain drain. It is a talent drain. Right now, if the Church wants to stop that and really utilize these gifts and talents, they just need to continue to let the wealth blossom. It is there. The seeds are planted, and we just need to

continue to nourish them.

Gayatri: What Nicole says is interesting. We are talking about equal representation and looking at women in leadership roles within the Catholic Church. For me, it is really important to be introduced to women in leadership roles from a very young age. As Geralyn put it, women are the backbone of their family. To me, women and children come as a package deal, at least within the Church. You want to be raising children who look at both men and women on equal footing in the Church.

I am an educator. I work with high school students. What I love about them is that every day for me is a learning experience because they are always questioning. They always want to take things apart and figure out why and how and what next. The Church has a great opportunity to do that with young people.

When teaching the catechism or doing a Bible study in Catholic schools or Sunday school, you have the opportunity to teach young people a little bit of theology. Get them to question and reason. It is not encouraging dissent; it will make their faith stronger. You can teach them that men and women have the leadership skills equal to each other. Then young girls can grow up thinking, "I can do that. I can be that". That is what I want for the future of the Church.

Carolyn: Women are knocking on the door of the Church. Sometimes it is wearying for the people who are suddenly on the other side of the door. There is too much knocking. I like that particular analogy because in the Scriptures for those who knock the door will be opened. I believe it.

I also have the fear that the next generation of women will stop knocking. A day will come when there will be the silence of people not

knocking, and young people will not be able to imagine the light behind the door. They will begin to not see the door at all. The greater fear for me is that we are knocking right now, but a generation will come where they will not knock. That is what the Church faces.

This conversation about women in the Church is not for the women; it is actually for the Church. There are five things I want to say. I was the dean of a business school, so I have seen in the last 30 or 40 years how women have come into the whole corporate world. There is a whole set of things to do, but this conversation is richer than that. I do not want to talk about what you can do but about five types of contrasts in how women are thought of or engaged.

First, we do have women leaders in various positions. The issue is taking it from the exceptional and the occasional to the habitual so that it becomes part of the regular process, the expectation. We could do that.

Second, women are engaged. But I have a question: Are women engaged as family, are they engaged as guests or are they engaged as guest workers? I will let you think through that particular analogy.

Third, are the voices of women taken as a little threatening or as enriching? Since much of the conversation, particularly the most dominant and loudest conversations, have focused on the ordination of women, which is off the table, whenever women plead or speak or recommend or propose, it is met with scepticism and suspicion: Is this conversation leading to the ordination of women? Is it a slippery slope? It is treated as if everything women want eventually leads to the priesthood.

For example, could women be installed as lectors? In all of this there is a suspicion: When



Bildlegende

women speak, is it leading to ordination? It is unfortunate because in a lot of ways we fail to hear the voices of the mothers, single mothers, lay pastoral associates, whomever. When women speak, is there suspicion about where that conversation will lead? We should check that.

Fourth, Pope Francis and Pope Benedict have referred to the “feminine genius”. Often that term is invoked to mean sensitivity, intuition, intuitiveness, tending to others, to nourish, to care, the loyalty and steadfastness of women. That is wonderful. In fact, it is daunting to live up to.

What about women as social critics or social activists, like Dorothy Day? What about women who are scandalous, like Dorothy Day and Mary Magdalene and the woman at the well? What about women who are entrepreneurial, hard-headed, persistent and sometimes even defiant? Like many of the women religious who founded and sustained their congregations, and the women who followed them and went into these territories to establish works? What about those women? What about women who really take the spiritual works of mercy seriously, like Catherine of Siena, who wrote words urging the pope and the political leaders to change their ways? What about those women?

In the conversation about “feminine genius”, is there a place for the other part, which is a bit thorny, a bit pushy? If you look at the history of the Church, those women did a lot –Joan of Arc, for example.

Fifth, the Church really does minister to women. I work with a global church. I know what the Church does. But in addition to service to women, we need to think about the rights of women: the right of women to own land; the right of women to not be married off in a child marriage; the right of women to education, so that we are not just ministering to them in their misfortune, but we are actually standing with

them to understand how to create an environment through rights. Rights are very important ways to protect women in society.

Those are five things I want to offer for our thinking. I also want to offer two cautions. First, I am not totally comfortable that a lot of conversation is about titles. Pope Francis has spoken against the lure and temptation of clericalism. Women should not be going after a privileged status.

Second, it is a danger to think of the Vatican as the heartbeat of the Church. The Vatican is the power structure of the Church in many ways, and women need to have a seat at the table as family. But I just urge women in all the really inspiring stories we hear of the different priests and nuns and lay women who showed up at the right time to allow life to move forward. [Applause.]

Tom: Thank you. We began with a good image, from Geralyn, of what is in the self-interest of the Church. All of us have self-interest, but it is not always enlightened self-interest. It is an interest that is comfortable and familiar, the way it has always been. All of you have been talking about how we can raise these questions, not just on an affective level, but also on an intellectual level. From where might that enlightenment come? Where do you see moments of enlightenment right now? What does that enlightenment look like to you, and where would you want to push for that enlightened self-interest to really make a difference right now?

Geralyn: Carolyn, I love your points. Thank you so much for being so specific. That is so helpful to this conversation. A simple thing I think about is that much of the fear of where the conversation is going comes from really not understanding what women want. I do not want to be a priest. A lot of us do not. We love this Church. We are here because we love the Church.

Why is the Church the last frontier for women in leadership?

-Nicole Perone

It would be incredible if Pope Francis asked that every seminary have a course in women's studies. Imagine how a young seminarian would come out if during his preparation he studied and understood the role of women, historically. Not just in the Church but the role women have played in leading government, business, non-profits and movements.

Imagine if every young seminarian understood that voice. What might be the effect when he goes out [to a parish]? That could be a good step. If seminarians really understood the history and role of women, they would want them more engaged.

Gayatri: To some extent it is already happening in India. I know a lot of seminarians who also have to study feminist theology as part of their training. It is clearly a positive step.

Tom: Where would you push the enlightenment right now? What is that one thing you would like to see happen to move us forward?

Gayatri: I would like to see welcome. As a Millennial and a woman, my last experience at the parish I spoke about could have gone two ways. I could have never gone back to church, but I did. A lot of us would love to come back to the Church; we would love to be part of it. For many of us, Church is family. To simply welcome people

back and not pass judgment are huge steps in the right direction. And I think Jesus would approve. [Applause.]

Nicole: When I talk to women who are more experienced than me about how sometimes it feels really frustrating to be constantly raising my voice, every one of them talks to me about the prayer that is often attributed to [Archbishop] Oscar Romero, about planting the seeds and being a prophet of a future not your own.

If we really want to move this enlightened self-interest, we as women in the Church really need to orient ourselves in that humility to say that everything we do, on some level, makes a difference to perhaps even one person. And to say, "I may never see the fruits of this labour, but that does not mean to stop knocking."

What Carolyn said about a generation that will eventually not knock anymore is a clarion call for us to be really cognizant of the fact that we have to keep planting the seeds. We have to keep watering the seeds and tilling the ground because women in the Church are an endangered species. They really are.

Petra: I would go back to what Carolyn said at the beginning about speaking to men. I draw from

my experience of working with women who have faced violence. It is great to talk to women about violence against women. Women can really imagine how bad it is. But you have to talk to men. You have to find allies among men who will stand up and say that violence against women is not okay.

In the Church we have to do the same thing. Tom, I am glad that you are moderating the panel today and that there have been other voices of men among us. We really need to grasp these opportunities and consciously look for men who are allies and will raise their voices and say that women in the Church are important. We women are all convinced; now we need to take it a step further.

Carolyn: Whom do I want to enlighten? The most important people for me are my two sons.

By the way, research is beginning to show that when a young person makes a decision about his or her faith, this person grows up in some type of tradition rather than no tradition. The most important influence is not their peers but their parents. When young people make these decisions about what kind of life they want and how to live it, they actually look at their parents' model and ask: Do I reject it because I have never seen it work, or do I not want to walk away from it because I have seen how it works? The family is a very important place where you form these attitudes of acceptance.

Sometimes I am tired of being "the woman", like I am an entity that people do not know. I want to say, "You know me. I am not a different species". When my nephew – whose mother is Canadian and father is Chinese – was very young, we took him to Chinatown and pointed all the Chinese things. He came home and said, "I have now got it: I am half-Chinese and half-human".

I say: You have mothers and sisters and aunts. You know us. We are not a different species. I work

with a lot of men and women. I never look at my colleague, the executive vice president of strategy, and say, "She is a woman". Or that another colleague is "a man". It does not even enter into the equation. It is ironic on this panel but sometimes I just want someone to say, "I know them. They were my family. They are not some other species that needs to be figured out".

Tom: Earlier you said you are not guest workers and not guests but part of the family. We are part of the family.

It has been a very rich day. Let us take a brief pause and reflect on what we have been hearing, maybe earlier today or in this panel.

Panellists, I invite you to share a word or phrase that stays with you that might be a touchstone for each of us to continue thinking about what we have experienced and heard today.

Nicole: Gracious and tenacious.

Geralyn: Let us use the gifts of everyone. They were uniquely given to us for a purpose. They are all needed.

Tom: Gratitude. Just hearing the voices of so many people for whom God entered their lives through one another. I am grateful for what I have heard today and people's abilities to share their stories.

Carolyn: Welcome.

Gayatri: In order to empower, first we welcome. We welcome to empower.

Petra: Together we can go to a new depth and a new horizon.

Tom: I hope you all have enjoyed this panel as much as we have. Panellists, thank you very much. [Applause.]



Magalie Laguerre-Wilkinson,
photographed by ...Schmidt

ABOUT

MAGALIE LAGUERRE-WILKINSON, the moderator of the Voices of Faith forum in 2016, has been the associate producer of 60 Minutes on CBS television in the United States for the past 10 years. Born in the United States to Haitian parents, she studied at the United Nations International School and received Bachelor of Arts from Marist College in 1993.

In 2015 she received a Gabriel Award for co-producing an interview with Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley of Boston. In 2013 she won the Gracie Award for her interview with Christine Lagarde, director of the International Monetary Fund. In 2012 she won an Emmy and the prestigious Peabody Award for her coverage of a symphony orchestra from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE

The mission of Jesuit Refugee Service, an international Catholic organization, is to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. JRS launched their new campaign Mercy in Motion at the beginning of the Holy Year of Mercy on 8 December 2015.

The JRS Mercy in Motion campaign has the goal of providing 100,000 refugee children and youth with access to education by the year 2020. Education can help to build peace and foster the development of more resilient and cohesive societies. Further, schools provide the stability that children need to cope with the loss, fear, stress and violence experienced during times of crisis.

IMPRESSIONS EVENT 2016



NEVER GIVING UP – THE PURSUIT OF MY DREAMS

by **Merci**

Guests of honour, Ladies and gentlemen, I love telling real-life stories. I am here today to tell you the story of a refugee girl who had courage to pursue her education and now leads the way to achieve her dreams.

After facing many difficulties in my home country of Rwanda, my family decided to flee. We ended up living in Dzaleka refugee camp. We had no other choice. When we were persecuted and threatened, it was our only opportunity for refuge. Dzaleka refugee camp is located in Malawi in southern Africa. Hope is a word never heard there. Refugees are not allowed to go outside the camp and are only allowed basic education: primary and secondary school.

Thanks to the mercy that finds some people in this world, this camp eventually received access to some organisations that provided tertiary education for students who finished secondary

school. I had to work very hard to get into Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins, JC:HEM. They accepted only a limited number of students.

At first, I did not get into JC:HEM, so I faced a limited number of options. I could stay home and do nothing, or get married at a young age like many other girls. I did not want those options. They were not enough for me. I had to stand up for myself; otherwise no one else would. I started by volunteering at the secondary school where I had studied. I also applied for many Community Service-Learning tracks at JC:HEM but was unsuccessful. Missing these opportunities did not discourage or stop me from trying. I hoped other opportunities would come. I had this feeling that there is so much hope in the future that I was not seeing. It kept me going and trying as hard as I could.

You might wonder why I was so courageous and never ceased trying. Growing up in a family where I was the only girl motivated me because I believed that I could do anything that my brothers would do. While waiting for the hope that I could imagine, I volunteered for different activities around Dzaleka refugee camp, including serving as a secondary school librarian and an interpreter for the unit of UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, that guarantees refugees status.

Finally, the hope came to be realised, and I got selected for the Diploma program at JC:HEM. I expected it but did not know where or how it would happen. It was a dream-come-true. I had been longing for this opportunity as soon as I finished secondary school. I never ceased to volunteer for different activities to gain further skills and knowledge and give back to my community.

Through JC:HEM, I learned how to cooperate with people from different backgrounds and gained communication and computer skills. I gained a better understanding of other people's cultures through online and onsite communication. The most inspiring course to me was "Leadership Theory", which teaches the qualities of a good leader needed for a peaceful and happy world.

I was chosen to be a peer academic tutor to help other students with academic difficulties because people believed I possessed the required skills to serve in this way. I also co-founded a Girl's Club to help girls in the camp stay focused in school through workshops, discussions and fun activities.

At the same time, I was applying for the World University Services of Canada, or WUSC, which I believed to be the best opportunity to a brighter future. WUSC is a Student Refugee

Program that selects about 25 students to go further with education in Canada. More than 200 students apply annually.

The first two times I applied, I was not accepted, for different reasons, but I did not give up. I did not want to get married, have children and forget about my goals for the future I imagined. The third time I applied, I felt almost desperate. To my surprise, I got selected. This meant I could go to Canada to continue my studies. I had never been happier. My dreams would come true.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope this story is an inspiration for you, especially young people. It is a story that shows that education – with patience and hard work – can finally lead to success. If I had given up when I was not accepted for different opportunities, I would not have been able to reach my goals. Today I am reaching my goals. No matter what experiences you have as a girl or a woman, you are not alone. Just stand strong, do something different and show people that being who you are is not a weakness. Mercy requires courage.

May God bless you all. Thank you.

CLOSING REMARKS 2016

by Fidelis Götz

Mercy Requires Courage is the theme at the heart of this Voices of Faith event. Mercy comes in many forms, but when combined with courage it is a powerful tool for change. Why?

It takes courage to overcome adversities and become a social leader. It takes courage to break through traditional barriers in order to access and provide education. It takes courage to venture into war-torn countries. It takes courage to help victims of war believe in peace. And it takes courage to forgive your tormentor.

Today the world is facing many challenges as you have all experienced in various ways. It is our duty to leave our comfort zones for the benefit of those who live at the margins of society, especially children. Young people are the future of the Church. We must support them and give them a chance.

If we show some of the mercy and courage exemplified by the speakers today, we will provide our societies with the tools to make it a better place. Are we strong enough to do this? Yes! As we heard today: Your strength is within you. Find it!

On behalf of the Fidel Götz Foundation, I would like to offer a heartfelt and warm thank you to all of our courageous speakers, who are a great source of inspiration to all of us.

A very special thank you and deep expression of gratitude goes to His Holiness Pope Francis for his inspiration; His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin for his generosity, respect and support of the contribution of women to the Church and society; and to His Excellency Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, for opening the doors to the Casina Pio IV.

Also a big thank you to our audience in this room in the Vatican and to every one of you who followed our live streaming.

And last but not least a big thank you to Chantal Götz and her Voices of Faith team for creating this unique event and uniting all of us here on International Women's Day 2016.

Please give them all a warm round of applause!

Let us all be social leaders through mercy and courage. Thank you.

ABOUT FIDELIS GÖTZ

Fidelis Goetz is the Managing Director of Asia Society Switzerland. Through his many years of work in Japan, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong, Fidelis has gained a profound knowledge of Asian society, politics and business. Fidelis Goetz not only has a proven track record in building and leading international organizations, but also many years of experience in Asia and a broad interest in society, political affairs, culture and arts and education. He continues to be engaged in various philanthropic fields in the fields of education and culture.

From 1993 to 2006, Fidelis worked for Credit Suisse in Tokyo, Osaka, Singapore, Taipei and Hong Kong, the last two years as Chief Executive Private Banking North Asia. From 2006 to 2013, he served as Head International, Co-Head Private Banking and Member of the Executive Committee at Bank Sarasin & Cie. In 2014, he co-founded the asset management company Peak Values Ltd. He graduated from the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland with a Masters in Political Science and International Relations.

ABOUT



Fidel Götz Foundation

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The Fidel Götz Foundation is a charitable trust established in 1967. Its mission is to work with the Church and Catholic organizations to provide opportunities for a just and equal world. Its core area of focus is education.

Editor Luke Hansen

Luke Hansen, an American Jesuit and a student at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in Berkeley, California, is the editor of VOICES. Luke served as an associate editor of *America*, the Jesuit review of faith and culture, from 2012 to 2014. He has reported from Vatican, Honduras, El Salvador, the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (U.S.A.), and the U.S. military prison in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and he has won several awards from the Catholic Press Association for his writing. He has also interviewed several top Church officials including Cardinal Peter Turkson and Cardinal Reinhard Marx. As part of his priestly formation program, he is involved in projects that promote the leadership and ministry of women in the Church, and he serves as a deacon at a federal women's prison in California. Luke said he feels 'very privileged' to assist with this edition of VOICES and to revisit the 'heartbreaking and hopeful' stories of amazing women who continue to inspire his ministry.

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