

Young people, faith and the meaning of life

Year 11 students were asked to respond to the following statement: "Faith helps in the search for meaning in the life of a young adult".

Below are some of their responses.

Many young people constantly question the reason for their existence and what their place is in life. At school we deal mostly with facts that really tell us nothing about who we are. There have been many times in my life where I have needed my faith as a way to keep going and a form of guidance that teaches me to empathise with others. However, I have never wanted this faith forced upon me, it's a free act and something I need to discover on my own. When going through a difficult period in my life, such as when a family member has been ill or died, I've needed my faith as a support so I can be strong and support those around me. It does no good when a bad thing has occurred to question why God would do this to us, it is important instead to use God as a way to keep strong and help others. It is all too easy to simply blame your problems on God or religion. God shouldn't be there to fix your problems, he should be there to help someone remember they are loved and cherished. Faith can show us that we don't always have to know what we want to be, who we want to be or where we want to be, but that no matter what we will have someone there with us, believing in us. Many members of the youth lack direction and experience, this is okay, faith can be a way of unravelling the mysteries of life. (Ella)

Faith is a concept which can be forcefully instilled within an individual, or it can serve as a wonderful opportunity which can enable a young person to explore the wonders and complexities of life. As a young person myself, I tend to find it quite difficult to place my faith entirely in the Catholic Church, due to their opinion on various issues and their refusal to accommodate for the needs of modern society. I find that sometimes the words written within the bible are interpreted too literally, causing pain and conflict among many individuals and adherents. However, I still find inspiration and guidance from within the bible, especially in the words and teachings of Jesus. I am inspired by Jesus' tendencies to associate with the outcasts of society, spreading the concept of equality thousands of years before modern day heroes, such as Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. It is ultimately his actions that I try to follow, and even though I am undoubtedly a long way away from achieving this, he provides the motivation needed to be the most accepting person I can be. My faith has grown, as I try to learn from his teachings and try to practice them in my everyday life. As Archbishop Hart suggested in his pastoral letter to young people for Pentecost 2013, "faith is a free act", it shouldn't be forced upon an individual, instead it should be allowed to flourish and provide guidance in one's life, in a way which is most comfortable and satisfying to them. (Sheruni)

Faith can be discovered and strengthened about through an array of avenues, the most common naturally being religion. While religion may not always be popular amongst young people, it still remains an aspect of life that contributes greatly to the sense of self. Young adults in today's society are faced with a magnitude of pressures and expectations; as such it can at times prove to be difficult to be able to find a sense of meaning and purpose. Some may denote purpose to career path or role in life a person may choose, however, it is much more than that. Faith and meaning are derived from

much more than the tangible things in our lives; material objects have little prevalence on the larger scale of life. It is through the employment of faith that young people are able to give more meaning to their own lives. As Archbishop Hart's pastoral letter states 'faith is a free act'. As such young people must make the choice to have and follow their faith. No amount of lecturing or nagging will ever be enough to instil within a person a sense of faith. It must be a natural occurrence and choice. In this way young people are encouraged to seek meaning for their own lives instead of accepting a universal definition of meaning. It is through this practice that the young may turn to religion for guidance, for it is here they can explore the variety of truths that have been discovered over time. The image captioned 'put your finger here' is an invitation to young people to explore faith within religion and discover whatever meaning it conveys to them. As a young person myself I look to many resources for purpose and meaning be that through religion, my family, the people I surround myself with as well as many other aspects of my life. I am continuously on a journey of rediscovery and constantly revising my own definition of meaning and faith. I don't believe I am yet to develop a comprehensive understanding of the more fundamental aspects of life yet I know that faith will be able to be an essential tool in the continuous development of my thoughts, ideas and most importantly my understanding of life. (Ashleigh)

As a young adult faith can play a major part in my everyday life. Young adults can often feel lost and anxious about life and growing up and faith will help young adults find hope. "Faith is a free act": you can find faith whenever you need it. As a young adult it can be hard to understand the concept of faith and whether to believe in it or not, yet you can simply just take five minutes of your time to sit down and reflect or pray and it can make your day a lot better. When it comes to tests or exams young adults are most likely going to feel stressed; faith can help young adults feel safe and relaxed. Faith can also help a young adult realise why they are here on earth and what they can do with their lives. Young adults are often inspired by religious figures to help one another and to find spiritual guidance. Faith in general is a way of finding peace within yourself when you are feeling anxious or stressed. Finding faith does not always, however, mean following religious traditions. I have found that meditation is a great way of releasing any negative energy and finding faith. Trying different traditions from different religions is also a really great way of finding faith and can help a young adult in their journey through life. Jesus had faith in every one of us so we should also have faith in ourselves and others and it will help us get through life's big obstacles. (Eve)

Faith gives one a sense of hope and guidance through their life. It is a free act and should never be forced upon one as we are different and unique in our own way; no two people are the same. Through faith we can search for meaning and the reason why we were placed upon this mundane earth. Faith enables me to believe not only in the afterlife but also in myself allowing me to do anything I set my mind to. It opens up my mentality and allows me to see the bigger picture rather than to focus on the negatives. Faith guides me through this mysterious thing we call life allowing me to believe and understand that there is more to this world than what I see, hear and touch. (Mary)

We are free to follow our faith in any direction we wish to go. If we believe in something strongly enough there is nothing stopping us. Finding what you believe in is like being as free as a bird. You can land in different places, experience new faiths but you can fly off if you don't like it, if you don't believe. Personally, I don't always see faith as a religion. It could be a right, an action. It is just something that you have a strong belief in. My faith has yet to lead me to find the meaning of my life it is shaping me into a person I am proud to be. My faith teaches me to be strong and accepting of every single person in this world no matter age, gender, race, religion or sexuality. My family might not follow the exact same faith as me but that is fine, as long as you are happy, the people who love you will be happy. We are all entitled to believe in whatever we wish. Our beliefs will guide us and shape us into the best young people we can be. This is all we can ask for. (Anon.)

When we are younger we go where our parents go, but as we get older, we start to make our own decisions we follow what we want to follow it allows us youth to do as we please. Faith is a free act so we can choose what to and not to follow as we see fit. I choose to follow my religion, Coptic Orthodox, because of the feeling of belonging and how the church WANTS to keep interacting with everyone including children, teenagers and youth. For the children in kinder to year 10 they have 1-3 hour classes on Saturday afternoons whilst the actual class only runs for half the time and the rest is to have fun with friends at church. For years 11-12 and youth our classes are the same only it's on a Friday night. The church Wants to stay connected to young people in turn makes US want to stay connected to them. (Monica)

From my experience, my faith has indeed led me to search for my purpose and meaning in life.

My dad was recently diagnosed with cancer and such a diagnosis left me feeling incredibly low. It was after a while that I stopped and thought to myself that feeling ceaselessly dismayed wasn't going to help my dad recover nor was it going to benefit the lives of my family who were also in an apparent state of despair. It was in contemplating on such that I turned to prayer and in doing so, I realised that in order to make the most out of my days with my dad, I must help and support those around me. Such a realisation additionally led me to acknowledge that I am positively impacting on the life of my dad, those around me and myself. This can ultimately be pinpointed as being my life meaning; to forever help and support those who are in need of a shoulder to lean on.

And so it was. By supporting those around me, I was putting warmth and contentedness back into the hearts of my family and my dad and we were all in a much clearer state of mind. The ample amount of determination to see my dad overcome this spiteful obstacle was additionally made apparent in every single individual in my dad's life and such a state of mind has inevitably led me to become a stronger person.

Ultimately, this experience has taught me that hope is infinite and every obstacle or dilemma comes with its own solution no matter how far off it may seem. (Andrea)

“Faith helps us in the search for meaning in the life of a young adult” as it provides us with a sanctuary in which we can reflect upon ourselves as humans living the Word of God.

As a part of the pastoral letter from Archbishop Hart, it has provided the youth of Victoria with visual images that reflect how faith can be a part of our everyday lives. We have to accept that there is no way of visually seeing God, but it is instead how we see God through our actions.

As a young Catholic, I understand that there are always acts that cannot be controlled by one individual like myself, but however, we as a community can ensure that the right aid and services are arranged to protect others in our community and the world.

I do not openly thank God, because I am self-conscious of how I will be judged as in the 21st century, as young adults, it is not perceived as “cool” to be religious. I instead thank God when I have done the best that I can. As a person in any situation while also thanking Him for giving me the gift of life, as I know that God has placed me here on this earth to do great things which will benefit those around me.

God is my saviour as he opens my mind to aspects of the world and of myself that I have never known. He is also my protector; when things have occurred that change my emotions, such as the death of my grandfather, God was there when I wanted to reflect on the times I had with my nonno so that I would never forget him. God is the best friend of all of us as he never judges and is always willing to listen.
(Adriana)