

# Young people and spirituality: directions for Christian schools

## Section 1: Introduction

Here is how one school principal spoke about the innate spirituality of young people and the need for schools to understand and educate for it.

*The age old obsession of young people with questions of justice and morality; the sense of being personally touched and helpless before intense beauty, pain, tradition or genuine greatness; the search for a frame of reference within which to make their own decisions; the need for a personal commitment to an ideal; these are all evidence of that side of our nature which can be termed spiritual and which can either be enhanced and enriched by the educational diet that it is given, or stunted and warped by starvation.<sup>1</sup>*

This paper is about young people and spirituality, so let me begin with some examples of how young people experience this. The following quotations are from 16 or 17 year olds who took part in the research which I will be describing later in this paper.

### About being alone

- *I like the quiet of being alone. I like to explore the outdoors, go down to the bush park about one kilometre away and explore.*
- *Sometimes I need time to just think about stuff. I ride BMX bikes and whilst I enjoy riding with my friends, sometimes I enjoy riding by myself, I feel more free.*
- *Sometimes I like to be alone so I can think back on all the things I've done, good and bad. When I am on my own I usually think about all the things that are going on in the world. What I also do when I'm on my own is pray for things that I want, and pray for people, and say thanks to God for doing things for me.*

### About friendship

- *One friend I've had since primary school has really been one of the most important in my whole life. We don't see a whole lot of each other but we remain friends, and can talk about anything to one another. This friendship has taught me that words don't always have to be spoken for a friend to understand you, and no matter how much or how little you see each other, a true friend will always be your friend.*
- *From a friendship I gained acceptance for who I am- I felt free to share secrets with this friend. Through this I was able to feel good about myself, because I knew others felt good about me.*
- *A friend is a person who is ready to sacrifice themselves so that another will live. This does not always mean sacrificing their lives, but it can mean sacrificing their time to help someone with a problem. A true friend will always talk and listen and will help you with problems and will be there for you in times of need. And they will forgive you in the end because everyone makes mistakes. You will always be able to relate to them and to talk to them*

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Lealman (1985). P.67.

### About life

- *I was asking myself one night, why am I here on this planet? I know I won't live forever so what's my purpose?*
- *I think about life all the time, underneath what I put out to the world.*
- *At home I was bored reading a book late at night. I wandered away from the book and was thinking about my life, what had I done for so many years. I realised how fast it went. I thought about what I am going to do when I am older. I wondered what will happen to me when I die. I wondered how old I will get.*

### Feeling fully alive

- *Every time I go out with my girlfriend and talk to her or look at her, it makes me see that life isn't just living, but it is enjoying simple pleasures such as that.*
- *When I surf or go snowboarding.*
- *Whenever I play soccer I feel the adrenalin and I know that there is no other place on earth that I would like to be.*
- *I'm into street art, graffiti if you will. The time I feel most alive is when I'm putting up a stencil, an artwork for the rest of the world to enjoy.*
- *I once had a very long and honest chat with a friend. We were able to gain a much better understanding of each other, and at the same time were able to learn something about ourselves-we touched areas within ourselves that we have not before.*
- *I feel fully alive when I am at the beach and on top of a wave. When I fly down the face it feels so cool, and then when I fall off you know you're alive.*
- *When I score a goal in soccer and I get a compliment from someone I love.*
- *Being in love with a girl and being loved in return makes me feel fully alive and happy.*
- *Bike riding early in the morning with no one on the track.*
- *Sometimes when I'm swimming and the water just runs over me as I cut through the water.*
- *When I got an A+ for an assignment, which I tried so hard at. I felt alive inside and proud of my achievement.*
- *On windy days because it makes me think and enjoy the wind, reminds me that this world is wonderful.*

### About what I'd do if I had power and money

- *I would go to a place where homeless people live and give them clothes, money a house and help them to get back on track with their lives.*

My intentions in this paper are to explore the spirituality of young people by a) contextualising it within some themes of post-modern thought, b) noting capacities and expressions of young people's spirituality, and c) proposing ways in which those who educate young people in Christian schools may support and challenge the spirituality of young people.

### **Section 2: Post-modern themes**

Like me, you're probably weary of endless talk about postmodernism and the suggestion sometimes made that it renders young people religiously and spirituality

illiterate. I don't want to add to the numerous essays that have been written and will continue to be written about post-modern thought. However, for our purposes in thinking about young people and spirituality, it is essential to begin with a common language. I want to simply identify three foundations of post modern philosophy that have bearing on our concerns, these being, the death of foundationalism and the critique of grand narratives, the rise of relativism, and the role of hermeneutics in constructing meaning. My purpose is to propose these against the background of our interest, which is a deeper understanding of the spirituality of young people and the ways in which Christian schools can educate it.

### *The death of foundationalism*

Foundationalism (also sometimes called modernism) claimed that that we can come to understand the world by knowing its **foundations**, the large theories from which the rest of knowledge flows (Kuhn, 1962). Science, economics, psychology and religions had their own theories for explaining how and why things are the way they are, theories that provided a foundation for everything else. These theories come with their own pre-understanding, frameworks worldviews, or metaphysics. Each philosophical, religious, psychological, scientific or economic tradition had a certain way of seeing the world, which was based in part on their views about how the world originated, how it is constructed, what its purpose is, where it is going, what human beings are and how society is constructed. The foundational framework lays the groundwork for interpretation and understanding. Now foundationalism, with its assertion of an overarching theory or narrative that explains and scaffolds all else is "critically undercut" (Hoksbergen, 1994, p.1), and post-modern thought claims that there is no grand or meta-narrative that that explains the world from an objective viewpoint. "There are only narratives based on particular perspectives and viewpoints" (Hoksbergen, 1994, p.1)

### *Relativism*

The death of foundationalism leads to questions of relativism. The post-modern question is **whether it is legitimate to judge the worth and value of anything, outside the particular context in which we live**. In this view it is impossible to objectively evaluate one culture or its cultural practices, because these are contextually bound. Moral relativism flows from this. This is the idea that is impossible to objectively judge between different individual values and behaviour patterns, and further that that it is impossible to judge between different competing truth claims, because once again these are historically and culturally bound. Diversity of context, and disagreement cannot be avoided (Letiche, 1992, p.2). All is relative and no one way of seeing the world, of judging truth claims or of making decisions is any better or worse than another. Each can be understood and accepted or rejected only within its own context.

### *Hermeneutics*

Linked also to the death of foundationalism is hermeneutics. Hermeneutics deals with interpretation, and it was traditionally linked with the interpretation of sacred texts. When we explore a passage of scripture to understand its historical, cultural social and religious context, and from this to decipher it's meaning both for the ancient

community for whom it was written and for Jews and Christians today, we are engaging in hermeneutics. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the study of interpretation has spread into literature, art and the social sciences. Hermeneutics takes the interpretive reading of a text, (and a text may be an artwork, a conversation, a narrative, a sermon, even one's own experience) as the paradigm for all forms of interpretation (Lavoie, 1990, 1). Thus meaning making is a continual conversation with, evaluation of and selection among a myriad ways of seeing the world. .

### *Traditions*

Post-modernism has brought a realisation that traditions continually develop and change. They ask new questions, reformulate traditional answers, and reconstruct knowledge based on new contexts. The development of a tradition is never finished. It is always in process and its knowledge is always being revised (Hoksbergen, 1994, p. 5). Therefore, there is no overriding viewpoint from which we can compare different traditions, and judge one better than the other. Because no language exists outside of traditions it is not possible to properly evaluate a theory, a culture, or a tradition of thought or belief unless we become very familiar with its language and with the context within which it first developed (Hoksberger, 1994. p. 6). Knowledge is developed within traditions, and it accepted on the basis of the agreement among the members of the community of knowers.

## **Section 3: Religious questions that arise from postmodernism**

### *Questions about dogma*

Certain questions arise for religions and for those who work in religious schools, from these post-modern themes.

- If all truth claims are relative, what becomes of the truth status of Christian doctrine? Is teaching Christian revelation now simply inappropriate?<sup>2</sup>
- Is revealed truth given to us or is it a human construction?
- Is the meaning of dogma irreversible and does it preclude other meanings?

If we take post-modern thought to its conclusion, our entire understanding of revelation, especially the role of Christian doctrine can be challenged. We develop a quite different understanding of what the deposit of faith is, how it has developed and continues to develop, and about the nature of its continuity (Guarino, 1996, p.5). Less emphasis is placed on the enduring nature of Christian truth because this view can only be sustained by a foundationalist notion of truth. Post-modern theologians do not speak of an unchangeable meaning that endures through the ages, but rather of a body of texts and symbols that in their historical character open themselves to reflection and interpretation throughout time. In this view, the gospel is always open to fresh readings (Bonsor, 1994)

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<sup>2</sup> This may never have been the problem in Protestant thought that is in Catholicism. The Protestant protest was in part at least against the identification of God with the power of the Church, and with the images of God and of revelation promoted in the Church. Von Balthasar (1982:41) has pointed out that Luther's resistance of icons remains important, because it "keeps the transcendental beauty of revelation from slipping back into equality with an inner worldly, natural beauty".

### *Questions about language*

Further questions that arise from postmodernism concern language.

- Does the language we use about God really only obscure God?
- Is religious language itself an idol rather than an icon? (Marion, 1991).

Postmodernism resists attempts to name God and often returns to the basic mystical experience rather than to verbal concepts. This is not new. Tomas Aquinas opened his *Summa Theological* by noting the limitations of language to speak about God. (Ecclesiasticus 3:22). Catholic teaching<sup>3</sup> acknowledges both the historical condition of doctrinal formulations and the limitations imposed by all human perspectives. At the same time the tradition does not want to abandon language about God to such an extent that agnosticism is the result.

A further question that often arises then, is this:

- If language can obscure God, is spirituality (mysticism) a better starting point for beginning to know something of God?

The experience of God is the beginning of all theology. Mysticism emphasises God's initiative in reaching out to people in and through the ordinary and extraordinary experiences of our lives.

- Is it important to enable people to have an understanding of and a language for their experience of God?

Confoy distinguishes mysticism, which she describes as "God's initiative in reaching out to us" (2003: p.110) from spirituality which is "our efforts to reach out to God" but I am uncomfortable with this distinction. I see spirituality as a capacity to experience God's initiative in our lives, **and** the ways in which this experience affects and colours the way we live. The search for spirituality is all around us.

*The religious impulse will always reveal itself in a search for wholeness, as a longing for psychological and cultural individuality. Such preoccupations, never far away in modern writing, are the most obvious expressions of the religious instinct in this turbulent century (Egan, 1990, p. 113)*

This brings me then to the proposal that a greater understanding of how young people experience and express spirituality may provide a starting point for a renewed education about religion and spirituality that takes account of their post-modern context. I suggest this not to deny religious traditions for I find very satisfactory expression of my own spirituality within my Catholic tradition, but to suggest a dialogue between the spirituality of the young and the wisdom and reflection of religious traditions.

### **Section 4: How do young people experience and express spirituality?**

#### *The background to the research*

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<sup>3</sup> The International Theological Commission, 1989.

It's time now to tell you about the research in which I've been involved for the last two years, on teenage boys and spirituality. The reasons for finding out how teenage boys experience and express spirituality are related to the feminisation of religion that is the experience of all mainstream Churches (Francis & Kay, 1996; Hoge, 1981; Kenny, 2003) and to the known fact that religion and spirituality are protective factors for adolescents against depression, suicide and risk or harmful behaviours (White, 1997; Hassen, 1996; Maslen, 1997; Withers and Russell: 2001; Resnick et al 1997; Human Services, Victoria, 1999; Abbott-Chapman and Denholm, 2001).<sup>4</sup> Boys in particular are more affected by these behaviours. Among 15-19 year old Australian males, suicide is now the leading cause of death (White, 1997; Hassen, 1996; Maslen, 1997). Teenage boys are much more likely than girls to be struggling at school, to be marginalised, socially alienated, to be in trouble with the police and to use violence for problem solving. I have now over 1000 respondents from teenage boys in Victorian Catholic schools, and am beginning to see certain spiritual capacities and expression of this spirituality that are of great interest in the work of the Christian school. In order to speak to you today about young people in a Lutheran school, I approached the Principal and Head of Religious Education at Luther College, Croydon, and they gave me permission to replicate my research among the Year 10 students at their school. In this case I conducted the research with girls **and** boys, treating them as two separate groups to see if there were any significant differences. The research was conducted at Luther College only a matter of 8 weeks ago. I will share it with you against the background of the large body of data I have from teenage boys in Catholic schools, and towards the end of the paper will note any important differences.

#### *The definition of spirituality used in the research*

The first task was to define what I meant by spirituality, and a search of classic and contemporary texts brought me to the following definition.

*Spirituality is : a) **experience** of the sacred other which is accompanied by feelings of wonder, joy, love, trust and hope (James 1958, Harris & Moran, 1998, Shanasy & Bates, 2002, Dreyer 1995, McBrien 1994). b) **connectedness** with and **responsibility** for the self, other people and the non-human world ( Harris & Moran, 1998, James 1958, Evans 1979): c) the **illumination** of lived experience with meaning and value (Harris & Moran, 1998): d) the need for naming and **expression** in either traditional or non-traditional ways, (Tacey 2003, Harris & Moran, 1998).<sup>5</sup>*

Having arrived at the definition I tested it in twenty interviews that were conducted in 2003 with teenage boys, and finally developed the questionnaire that I have used extensively in Catholic schools and now in one Victorian Lutheran College. The questionnaire explores the components of spirituality addressed in the definition, that

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<sup>4</sup> There is not the opportunity to spell out this background to the research in this paper, but those interested in seeing more details about either of these factors may read Engebretson, K. Teenage boys, spirituality and religion. In Press. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*. To be published in December 2004.

<sup>5</sup> A detailed analysis of the sources for this definition and a justification of it are given in the paper cited earlier to be published in the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* in December 2004.

is **experience** of the sacred other, **connectedness with self others and the world**, **expression** of spirituality and **naming** of spirituality. After gathering data about age, ethnicity, religion, the questions were:

*What do you hope for in the future? Who inspires you and why? Describe the kind of man or woman you want to be. Describe a friendship that has had a big impact on you. What did/do you learn or gain from that friendship? What does it mean to be a true friend? What “rules” or philosophy do you try to live by? Who has influenced your views about the “rules” that you try to live by? If you had lots of power and money, what would you “fix” in the world? What would you “fix” in Australia? What kinds of prayer do you take part in? Apart from daily prayer at school, how often do you pray and/or reflect privately? Describe a situation in which you found yourself thinking deeply about your life? Write about an experience you had that made you feel fully alive inside. Have you ever had a sense that God was very close to you or have you ever experienced a close relationship with God? If so, try to describe the experience. The students were then asked to nominate their level of agreement with nine statements of Christian belief. Who or what has influenced your religious beliefs? What does your school do well in the education it offers you in religion and spirituality? How could it improve this?*

A small number of the questions were closed, in that they provided a range of responses for the students to choose among, but most were open ended, and the students wrote as much or as little as they chose. Following are the results of the Lutheran school, and I will indicate points of agreement or disagreement with the data collected from boys in Catholic schools. Sixty-five boys and seventy-seven girls from Year 10 at Luther College completed the survey, and they were fifteen or sixteen years old. Only eight of the 142 were not born in Australia, 116 said that their parents were born in Australia, and most of the remaining had parents born in other English speaking countries. Ninety-six said that their grandparents were born in Australia with grandparents also coming from Croatia, England, Italy, New Zealand among other countries. The high percentage of Australian born parents and grandparents, contrasts with the group of the Catholic schools, which, to varying degrees, were highly multicultural. Religious affiliations were as follows.

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| No religion                               | 45     |
| Lutheran                                  | 32     |
| Catholic                                  | 11     |
| Anglican                                  | 8      |
| Other Christian                           | 7      |
| Orthodox Christian, not sure              | 4 each |
| Pentecostal                               | 3      |
| Hindu, Uniting Church, Church of Christ   | 2 each |
| Baptist, Buddhist, Theist, Jedi, Crossway | 1 each |
| No response                               | 20     |

### Question 1: What do you hope for?

#### Boys

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Career goals:</b><br>good job (13) Business owner (7) career (7) | 27 mentions |
|---|-------------|

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Family goals</b><br>marriage (10) family (9) love (2)  | 21 mentions |
| <b>Success in general</b><br>success (9) fulfilling life (2) achieve dreams and goals (2) famous (1)      | 14 mentions |
| <b>Lifestyle goals</b><br>happiness (7) friends (2) good life (2) enjoyment (1) longevity (1) sex (1)     | 14 mentions |
| <b>Ideals</b><br>peace (9) make a difference to the world (3) law abiding (1) be remembered as a hero (1) | 14 mentions |
| <b>Financial</b><br>wealth (8) financial stability (3)  | 11 mentions |
| <b>Educational goals:</b><br>degree (4) university (3) finish school (1)                                  | 8 mentions  |
| <b>Possessions</b><br>Car (3) house (2) stereo (1)  | 6 mentions  |
| <b>Sporting achievement</b>   | 4 mentions  |
| <b>Achievement in the arts</b><br>Musical achievement   | 3 mentions  |
| Missing   | 2           |

- For pollution, poverty and war to be over, and for no money to exist.
- That I will have a loving family.
- A family, true love, happiness.
- To live harmoniously with others and to be at peace with myself

### Girls

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Family goals</b><br>Family (51) marriage (29) love (4)  | 84 mentions |
| <b>Lifestyle goals</b><br>Happiness (32) travel (11) fun (8) health and longevity (8) friends (7) good life (6)  | 72 mentions |
| <b>Career goals:</b><br>Good job (16) career (12) profession (5) job satisfaction (4) business owner (2) business marketing (1)                                | 40 mentions |
| <b>Success in general</b><br>Success (15) achieve my dreams and goals (4) achieve my best (2)  | 21 mentions |
| <b>Ideals</b><br>Peace (5) make a difference to the world (4) good person (3) relationship with God (2) heaven (1) improve the lives of others (1) respect (1) | 17 mentions |
| <b>Educational goals:</b><br>university (5) complete VCE (4) education degree (4) finish school (1) degree (1)   | 15 mentions |
| <b>Financial</b><br>Wealth (5) financial stability (4)   | 9 mentions  |
| <b>Possessions</b><br>House (5)  | 5 mentions  |

- A husband and kids who love me and I love them
- A better world, healthy people.
- I hope to be a good person that people respect. I hope to have a healthy and happy life. I wish to find a career where I will be able to put in my best no matter what. I hope my family has happy and healthy lives and to be as close as we always have been.
- I hope to have a career doing something I love. Ideally it would involve music, as that's what I'm passionate about. I'd love to do something to help people, like counseling, which I believe I'd be good at.

### Question 2. Who inspires you to achieve your goals?

#### Boys



|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Adults I admire</b><br>Sports people (11) famous people (6) people who push boundaries (3) successful people (3) bands (2) TV personalities (2) heroes (2) musicians (2) older people (1) people who help others (1) | 33 mentions |
| <b>Family</b><br>Father (5) parents (2) aunts (1) brother (1) grandfather (1) grandparents (1) mother (1)   | 12 mentions |
| <b>Myself /no-one</b>   | 6 mentions  |
| <b>Peers</b><br>Friends (5)   | 5 mentions  |
| Missing   | 9           |

- My friends. No matter how smart or stupid they keep trying, and are there when you need them
- My aunty-nun-worked in El Salvador and East Timor-very caring.
- My grandmother and grandfather were very influential on me. They had qualities I really admired.
- My pa, because he is very sick and still keeps on going.

### Girls

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Family</b><br>parents (20) mother (12) family (10) father (2) brother (1) extended family (1) grandmother (1)  | 47 mentions |
| <b>Adults I admire</b><br>People around us (4) musicians (4) hard workers (3) dream achievers (2) people who overcome adversity (2) famous movie people (2) singers (2) famous people (1) motivational speakers (1) who help others (1) sports people (1) successful people (1) teachers (1) successful writers (1) | 26 mentions |
| <b>Peers</b><br>Friends (17)  | 17 mentions |
| <b>Religious</b><br>God (1) religious heroes (2)  | 3 mentions  |
| Myself (2)  | 2 mentions  |

- My mum because she has lived always to do everything for my health and well-being. She moved out and lived on her own and fended for herself at 14.
- Martin Luther King because he fought for equality.
- My parents and friends and teachers. They are people who have worked hard in life to achieve their best.
- My mum inspires me because she has taught me so much about life and I admire how she approaches life.

### Question 3: What kind of man/woman do you want to be?

#### Boys

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Personal integrity values</b><br>Kind (16) happy (13) Caring (12) respected (9) nice person (9) good (8) friendly (5) trustworthy (3) loving (2) loyal (2) considerate (2) good natured (2) helpful (2) does his best (1) forgiving (1) giving (1) hardworking (1) honest (1) likeable (1) moral (1) no enemies (1) can be himself (1) truthful (1) understanding (1) peaceful (1) like Jesus (1) | 96 mentions |
| <b>Success oriented values</b><br>Financially free (10) successful (6) achieve my goals (3) intellectual (3) businessman (1) challenged (1) famous (1) fit (1) talented (1)  | 27 mentions |
| <b>Personality and physical values</b><br>fun (4) carefree (4) enjoys life (3) entertaining (1) sporty (1) strong (1)  | 14 mentions |
| <b>Family values</b><br>Family man (1) husband and father (1)  | 2 mentions  |
| Missing /not as I am now/  | 1 each      |

- I want to be a person that cares for others and the community.
- Strong, wise, kind, fit and wealthy in many of life's riches.
- Warm, kind, happy, loyal and fulfilled with life.
- Loyal, quiet, no enemies. People respect me and children and adults alike love to hear my stories.

### Girls

|  |              |
|--|--------------|
| <b>Personal integrity values</b><br>happy (38) caring (22) kind (19) loving (13) friendly (8) helpful (7) likeable (6) trustworthy (6) can be myself (5) reliable (5) respected (5) compassionate (4) hardworking (4) good (3) honest (3) loyal (3) inspires others (3) loves God (3) nice person (3) someone you can talk to (3) stands up for beliefs (2) thoughtful (2) positive (2) moral (2) generous to people less fortunate (2) giving (2) loved by others (2) earns respects (2) courageous (1) ethical (1) generous (1) good friend (1) humble (1) has dreams (1) patient (1) principled (1) responsible (1) understanding (1) warm hearted (1) wise (1) contribute to the world (1) | 210 mentions |
| <b>Personality and physical values</b><br>fun (12) healthy (8) confident (4) fit (4) lives life to the full (3) carefree (3) extroverted (2) enjoys life (2) tall (2) entertaining (1) good looking (1) strong (1) independent (1) sense of humour (1) quiet person (1) better organised (1) better eyesight (1)   | 48 mentions  |
| <b>Success oriented values</b><br>achieve my goals (6) successful (5) smart (4) financially free (2) accomplished (1)  | 18 mentions  |
| <b>Family values</b><br>good wife and mother (6) puts family first (1) make parents proud (1) make someone happy (1)   | 9 mentions   |
| Missing /as I am now /not sure   | 1 each       |

- I want to be someone who always cares for others, someone positive, kind and enthusiastic. I want to be confident and follow my dreams.
- One that someday other people will want to be. A role model, but easy going when need be.
- A trustworthy, happy person who has done things that inspire others.
- Someone who doesn't always try to please people, always myself and strong.

#### Question 4. What have you learned from friendships?

##### Boys

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Learned from friendships</b><br>girlfriends are friends (6) closeness of friends (4) learned to speak my mind (3) help shape me (3) they impact on my life (2) what good friendship is (2) difficulties in trusting (2) Can change your life (1) confidence (1) difficulties of life (1) friends help when you're sad (1) friends make you happy (1) how to love (1) learn about myself (1) not to take things too seriously (1) patience (1) respect and discipline (1) that I can trust people (1) gained humanity (1) | 34 mentions |
| <b>A good friendship</b><br>mutual respect (4) listening (4) long lasting (4) can talk to them about anything (2) stick by you (2) guiding (1) fun (1) look out for each other (1) there when in need (1)   | 20 mentions |
| No friends (4)  |             |
| Missing 21  |             |

- I discovered more about myself.
- I was really close to a girl, which was completely friendship. It was good to see a female point of view on life.
- My friends have all had a large impact on me. They have made me who I am and all of them are enjoyable to be around
- A very close relationship with a friend who has a mild form of autism. I learned patience and respect from the very close friendship we have, it made me look past image and physical appearance.

##### Girls

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Learned from friendships</b><br>closeness of friends (17) helped shape me (7) things are not always what they seem (7) boys can be friends (4) gain strength (3) they teach me a lot (2) choose friends wisely (2) confidence can be myself (2) learn about myself (2) not to take things too seriously (2) difficulties in life (1) difficulty in trusting anyone (1) expand your horizons (1) fragility of friendship (1) friendships are the most important thing (1) it's hard to compromise (1) put fights behind you (1) reassurance (1) learned to speak my mind (1) parents can be your friends (1) | 58 mentions |
| <b>A good friendship</b><br>lasting (10) listening (9) there when in need (7) support (6) stick by you (4) fun (4) mutual respect (4) trust with problems (2) can talk to them about anything (2) loyalty (1) reliability (1)  | 50 mentions |
| Missing 3  |             |

- Emma, my friend, she always has a smile on her face and she has shown me that my religion is OK to show.
- My friendship with dad. I still learn so much from him. He teaches me how to be a better person in every way.
- My sister. She is like my best friend. We are very close and she teaches me to be a better person.
- My friendship with my boyfriend is the most beautiful thing. We both learn and grow. We appreciate and understand each other completely.
- I have a friendship where we can laugh together until the cows come home, but also understand each other when we are unhappy. We can cry together, and just be comfortable around each other. She has taught me not to care what others think and be proud of who you are.

Question 5: What does it mean to be a true friend?

Boys

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>General qualities</b><br>caring for them (8) respect (6) doing things together (5) help each other (5) kind (4) listening (4) good person (4) easy to talk to (3) truthful (3) have fun with (3) sharing (2) forgiving (2) allow you to be yourself (1) doesn't use you (1) love (1) other points of view (1) nice (1) | 54 mentions |
| <b>Trust and loyalty</b><br>Being there (14) trustworthy (11) even when you fight you'll stay friends (9) loyalty (5) sticks by you (4) support in hard times (3) lasting (1)   | 47 mentions |
| Everyone is a friend  | 1           |
| No friendships  | 1           |
| Missing   | 9           |

- Complete honesty
- Be able to share something confidentially and reasonable feedback.
- Always there no matter what. Kind and forgiving.
- To be able to trust and be trustworthy and not to keep secrets from your friend.

Girls

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| <b>General qualities</b><br>caring for them (19) honest (16) have fun with (12) listening (12) love (12) truthful (10) help each other (8) allow you to be yourself (6) kind (5) understanding (5) respect (4) non judgmental (4) forgiving (4) easy to talk to (2) tolerance (2) encouragement (2) positivity (2) gives good advice (2) nice (2) brings out the best in me (1) give without expecting anything back (1) not putting them down (1) putting them first (1) sharing (1) upfront (1) | 135 mentions |
| <b>Trust and loyalty</b><br>Being there (31) trustworthy (26) loyalty (20) sticks by you (11) support in hard times (8) looking after them (3) look out for you (1)   | 100 mentions |

- A true friend is someone who never lets you down, someone who is always there for you through thick and thin, and someone you know and trust even if your life depended on it.
- To be trustworthy, honest, understanding and caring. To be able to listen, advise and care. To help someone whenever they need it while getting to know them and having fun together.
- It means that two people are able to be themselves around each other and feel comfortable sharing everything with each other. It means to stick by the other person through happy times and especially through sad times. It means to think of the other person as an equal to you and be honest and loyal to each other.

Question 6: What rules or philosophies do you try to live by?

Boys

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Values in relation to the self</b><br>have fun, enjoy life (5) live each day to the fullest (5) do what you want (3) have no regrets (3) doing your best (3) end justifies the means (2) achieve your dreams (2) life is what you make it (2) live your own life (2) be happy with what you have (1) don't take drugs (1) live day by day (1) live each day as it counts (1) make your own decisions (1) try hard to succeed (1) work hard (1) | 34 mentions |
| <b>Values in relation to others</b><br>treat others the way you want to be treated (6) don't hurt others (2) treat others well (2) be polite to all (1) being a good friend (1) being considerate (1) equality (1) forgive and forget (1) friends better than enemies (1) live for others (1) out others before yourself (1) respect others (1) don't allow people to get you down (1)  | 20 mentions |
| <b>Moral</b><br>Be honest (4) be a good person (6)  | 10 mentions |
| Don't believe in rules  | 4           |
| Missing /don't know   | 12          |
| <b>Religious</b><br>Bible/10 commandments   | 2           |

### Girls

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Values in relation to the self</b><br>have fun and enjoy life (7) be yourself (6) live each day fully (6) be present focused (6) don't take life too seriously (5) live by your own values (5) accept yourself (5) achieve your dreams (5) do your best (4) be happy (4) be your own person (3) take care of your health (3) live each day as it comes (3) have no regrets (2) life is what you make it (2) live day by day (2) work hard (2) stand up for yourself (2) be happy with what you have (1) believe in your own potential (1) do what you want (1) don't stress (1) don't leave things to the last minute (1) end justifies the means (1) fashion before comfort (1) | 79 mentions |
| <b>Values in relation to others</b><br>treat others the way you want to be treated (11) treat others well (8) be non judgmental (5) love (4) be understanding (2) trust (2) be friendly to all (1) forgive and forget (1) respect others (1)  | 35 mentions |
| <b>Religious</b><br>Believe in God (4) bible /10 commandments (6) karma (2)   | 12 mentions |
| <b>Moral</b><br>Be a good person (8) live by morals (1)   | 9 mentions  |
| Missing /don't know   | 2           |

The individualistic approach to values that was displayed by both boys and girls (found also very strongly among the respondents from the Catholic schools) warrants comment. Taylor (1991) characterises this as “soft relativism” and says that it assumes that:

*Everyone has the right to develop their own form of life, grounded on their own sense of what is important, or of value. People are called upon to be true to themselves or to seek their own self-fulfilment. What this consists of each must, in the last instance, determine for his or herself. No one else should try to dictate its content. ... This individualism involves a centring on the self and a concomitant shutting out, or even unawareness of the greater issues or concerns that transcend the self, be they religious, political historical (Taylor, 1991, p.14).*

We know that this moral relativism is characteristic of the values of today's adolescents. Taylor critiques it in these words.

*Unless some options are more significant than others are, the very idea of self-choice falls into triviality and incoherence (Taylor, 1991, p.36-40).*

Moral relativism is critiqued implicitly and explicitly in educational and family environments that foster critical moral consciousness (Mustokova-Possardt, 2004, p.256), that is environments that are oriented to values greater than the self. These educational and familial environments value the heart as well as the mind. They challenge young people to create a spiritual and moral sense of identity, personal authority and responsibility, relationships with individuals, groups, nature, social institutions, and to think about and discuss the meaning of life (Mustokova-Possardt, 2004). In these environments young people are helped to move from "moral yearning to moral consciousness" (Mustokova-Possardt, 2004, p.268). There are many implications here for school curricula.

Question 7: Who has influenced your values?

Boys

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Family</b><br>father (39) mother (33) family (23) aunt (1) | 96 mentions |
| <b>Peers</b><br>Friends (25) myself (7)                       | 32 mentions |
| <b>School</b>   | 12 mentions |
| <b>Other adults</b><br>Authors (1)                            | 1 mention   |
| <b>Other</b><br>Government laws (1)                           | 1 mention   |
| <b>Religious</b><br>Bible/God (1)                             | 1 mention   |
| <b>Missing</b>  | 5           |

Girls

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| <b>Family</b><br>Mother (55) father (49) family (47) grandparents (1) | 152 mentions |
| <b>Peers</b><br>Friends (48) myself (7) Boyfriends (2)                | 57 mentions  |
| <b>School</b>   | 29 mentions  |
| <b>Other</b><br>Books (1) music (1)                                   | 2 mentions   |
| <b>Other adults</b><br>People I admire (1)                            | 1 mention    |
| <b>Religious</b><br>Bible/God (5)                                     | 5 mentions   |
| <b>Missing</b>  | 5            |

Question 8 . If you were to write a letter to a world leader, what concerns would you ask him or her to address?

Boys

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Disadvantage</b><br>poverty/hunger (26) third world (6) world famine (3) homelessness (3) help the disadvantaged (1)                    | 39 mentions |
| <b>War/peace</b><br>world peace/end to war (9) threat of terrorism (3) American interference (1)<br>interference with others countries (1) | 14 mentions |
| <b>Health</b><br>cure for cancer (4) combating disease (2) Drug awareness (1)  | 7 mentions  |
| <b>Environment</b><br>Destruction of natural resources (3) greenhouse gas (1) pollution (1)  | 5 mentions  |
| <b>Local/Australia</b><br>increase in violent crime (1) decrease cost of insurance (1) fix up the local areas (1)<br>police corruption (1) | 4 mentions  |
| <b>Striving for a better world</b>   | 4 mentions  |
| <b>Political</b><br>Corruption (1) democracy (1)   | 2 mentions  |
| Missing /nothing   | 9           |

- Put 19 billion dollars into stopping world hunger and lots of money into cancer research.
- The people in poverty in Africa.
- I would set up a lot more charities for disadvantaged people.
- Clean fresh water available for all as well as electricity and food. World poverty.
- Make sure everyone had somewhere to live. Provide poor countries with food, water and medical aid. So that there would be no need for fighting between rebels and government.
- I wouldn't solve world hunger because that is a hard thing to do. I would give the money to a world hunger charity and let them do what they want.
- The environment. Stop logging the Amazon forest. The greenhouse effect.
- I would create a big army and force everyone to unite, and showing no mercy to anyone who seriously disrupted the peace. You have to be cruel to be kind.
- To make sure there's food and shelter for everyone.
- All the war. Clean the world up.
- I would give money to charities, wipe out world hunger and poverty and aim for world peace and cure the sick.

#### Girls

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Disadvantage</b><br>poverty /hunger (52) homelessness (13) third world (13) help the disadvantaged (8)<br>world famine (6) world population growth (1) abandoned children (1) | 94 mentions |
| <b>War/peace</b><br>world peace/end to war (13) threat of terrorism (5)  | 18 mentions |
| <b>Equality</b><br>Discrimination (6) racism (5) injustice (1)   | 12 mentions |
|  |             |

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Health</b><br>Combating disease (5) cure for cancer (4) drug awareness (1) suicide (1) better counselling for teenagers (1)                     | 12 mentions |
| <b>Local/Australia</b><br>Harsher punishment for criminals (3) increase in violent crime (2) cruelty to animals (2)                                | 7 mentions  |
| <b>Women</b><br>Domestic violence (1) sexual harassment (1) sexual oppression in religions (1) violence against women in third world countries (1) | 4 mentions  |
| <b>Striving for a better world</b>   | 6 mentions  |
| <b>Political</b><br>Democracy (1) Corruption (1)   | 2 mentions  |
| Missing /nothing   | 1           |

- Poverty, because so much of the world suffers from poverty, but there are so many people with wealth who could fix this problem. We lose the innocent lives of so many people, because of those who are fortunate and selfish and spend money on plastic surgery or nuclear bombs and stuff that will only cause evil.
- I'd make it that young people like my friends wouldn't die and would always be healthy. Make it that no one was racist –against me or anyone else.
- I would take more concern for this planet than others- we spend too much on space travel and it could feed so many children.
- I would fix poverty. I would spend money on what's important rather than on war and crime.
- No discrimination and respect for everybody, because if everyone respected each other there would be no wars and no killings or murders.
- Poverty and world hunger. It breaks my heart to see starving kids in Africa.
- World hunger. Send money and adopt children from poor countries. Give kids the chance to eat, sleep under shelter, and get education and medicine.



Question 9: What would you fix in Australia?

Boys

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Help the disadvantaged</b><br>homelessness (5) poverty (4) aborigines and disadvantage (3) support charities (1)<br>help the disadvantaged (1) child and youth services (1) the very self centred lives<br>people lead (1) | 16 mentions |
| <b>Health</b><br>Drugs (5) cure for cancer (1) cure for disease (1) youth suicide (1)   | 8 mentions  |
| <b>Political</b><br>Tax (3) stand up for ourselves (1) stop Australia becoming like England (1)<br>dissatisfaction with present government (1)  | 6 mentions  |
| <b>Crime /safety</b><br>Child abuse (1) crime rate (1) criminals (1) rape and violence (1) speed limits and<br>revenues in the police force (1)   | 5 mentions  |
| <b>World issues</b><br>Make a perfect world (1) terrorism (1) ignorance of world history (1)  | 3 mentions  |
| <b>Environment</b><br>Drought (1) animal cruelty (1) agricultural industries in NSW (1)   | 3 mentions  |
| <b>My life, my family and friends' lives</b><br>Myself (1)  | 1 mentions  |
| <b>Education</b><br>Make English language compulsory for migrants (1)   | 1 mention   |
| <b>Other</b><br>Everything (4) AFL (1)  | 5 mentions  |
| <b>Missing</b>  | 11          |

- Rape and violence against anyone.
- I would make sure there are not homeless people.
- Multiculturalism is all good, but people should at least learn our language and culture if they want to live here.
- Detention centres.
- The very self-centred lives people live.

Girls

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Help the disadvantaged</b><br>homelessness (18) poverty (12) welcome refugees (3) aboriginal rights (2) help the<br>disadvantaged (2) help refugees (2) unemployment (1) uneven distribution of wealth<br>(1) violence against women in the third world (1) help abandoned children (1) help<br>struggling families (1) horror of detention centres (1) | 45 mentions |
|--|-------------|

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Crime /safety</b><br>rape and violence (7) crime rate (4) harsher punishment for criminals (4) child abuse (3) sexual abuse (1) better help for rape victims (1)                                   | 20 mentions |
| <b>Health</b><br>drug addiction (9) suicide (3) cure for cancer (1) cure for disease (1) better medical facilities (1) smoking (1)  | 16 mentions |
| <b>Equality</b><br>equality (4) racism (3) discrimination (2) justice system (1)  | 10 mentions |
| <b>Social</b><br>Broken families (1) broken lives (1) standard people live by (1) help troubled youth (1) better media entertainment (1) peoples attitudes (1) divorce rates (1) welfare services (1) | 8 mentions  |
| <b>Environment</b><br>Animal abandonment (1) help wombats (1) less subdivisions (1) better transport (1) fix the roads (1) more water reserves (1) salt problem in the desert (1) more parks (1)      | 8 mentions  |
| <b>Political</b><br>government behaviour (2) Corruption (1) stay in the Commonwealth (1) dissatisfaction with present government (1)  | 5 mentions  |
| <b>World issues</b><br>World peace  | 2 mentions  |
| <b>Missing /nothing</b>   | 9           |

- Sexual abuse. So many women get abused every day and the government doesn't care.
- I would try and compensate for the immigrants and residents who do not have enough to get by. I would also try to get a higher level of education in public schools and better facilities.
- I would fix teenager/adolescent issues, eg drugs.
- Non-acceptance and the cruelty of poverty and drugs.
- I would fix the government so that Australia made some better decisions in the war and religion problems. Everyone to feel safe, no one to be in poverty.
- In Australia I would donate a lot of money to research into diseases, as well as access for people that need a safe place to stay. Help people in depression and violent homes.
- It would be great if everyone were treated a lot more fairly. I also think it would be great if aboriginals were no so much discriminated against. After all it is their land.
- The rate of suicide and sexual and physical abuse and drug and alcohol related problems. Poverty in the city and suburbs. Discrimination issues against aborigines and let the refugees in.

#### Question 10: What kinds of prayer do you take part in?

##### Boys

|                                |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Private, personal prayer       | 27 |
| Chapel services                | 24 |
| Don't pray                     | 18 |
| Church services                | 16 |
| Prayer for yourself            | 15 |
| Prayer for others              | 13 |
| Prayer in the church community | 12 |
| Prayer for the world           | 12 |
| Prayer with your family        | 6  |
| Prayer groups                  | 2  |

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| Reflection | 1 |
| Missing    | 3 |

### Girls

|                                |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Private, personal prayer       | 50 |
| Chapel services                | 50 |
| Prayer for others              | 40 |
| Prayer for yourself            | 31 |
| Prayer for the world           | 29 |
| Church services                | 27 |
| Prayer in the church community | 25 |
| Prayer with your family        | 9  |
| Prayer groups                  | 9  |
| Prayer with your class         | 9  |
| Don't pray                     | 6  |
| Meditation                     | 2  |
| Prayer for my family           | 1  |

### Question 11: How often do you pray?

#### Boys

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| Never                  | 22 |
| In times of difficulty | 11 |
| Every day              | 9  |
| Occasionally           | 7  |
| Once or twice a week   | 6  |
| Almost never           | 5  |
| Quite often            | 4  |
| Missing                | 3  |

#### Girls

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| In times of difficulty | 25 |
| Every day              | 14 |
| Occasionally           | 14 |
| Once or twice a week   | 14 |
| In times of happiness  | 13 |
| On special occasions   | 10 |
| Quite often            | 8  |
| Almost never           | 7  |
| Never                  | 7  |
| Once a fortnight       | 1  |
| Times of loneliness    | 1  |
| Missing                | 1  |

### Question 12: Situation when you thought deeply about your life

#### Boys

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Contemplating /reflecting</b><br>At night (9) often think about my life (6) being alone (2) challenging myself (1)<br>contemplating life (1) reflecting (1)  | 20 mentions |
| <b>Difficult times</b><br>death of someone close (3) coping alone with something difficult (2) depression<br>(2) health problems (2) being hurt (1) disappointment in sport (1) fighting with my<br>family (1) people close in need (1) relationship break up (1) | 14 mentions |
| <b>Life transitions</b><br>thoughts of the future (4) exams VCE (3) baptism (1)   | 8 mentions  |
| <b>Other</b><br>none as yet (3) boredom (1) shopping (1)  | 5 mentions  |
| <b>World events</b><br>September 11 <sup>th</sup>   | 1 mention   |
| Missing   | 15          |

- I thought about my future and all the possible outcomes and who else was going to be involved.
- After the death of grandma and after having a poor footy season.
- When I was in a lot of trouble with my family I thought about leaving.
- When I listen to music.
- When I have been hurt.
- Breaking up with my girlfriend
- Before I go to sleep.
- Everyday
- When my dad died.
- When someone I knew was doing drugs and getting hurt.
- Thinking about what I want to be.
- When I was overseas.

### Girls

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Difficult times</b><br>death of someone close (11) coping with something difficult (4) parents divorce<br>(4) fighting with friends (4) depression (4) when people close are in need (3)<br>fighting with family (2) family illness (2) tragedies happening to young people (2)<br>times of loneliness (1) losing friends (1) thoughts of suicide (1) | 39 mentions |
| <b>Contemplating /reflecting</b><br>reflecting (8) contemplating life (8) at night (6) often think deeply (6) thinking<br>about my life (2) being alone (1) challenging myself (1) need for religious<br>experiences (1) whether I was a good friend to one who turned to me (1)   | 34 mentions |
| <b>Life transitions</b><br>thoughts of the future (6) exams VCE (5) Making decisions (1)   | 13 mentions |
| <b>Other</b><br>Listening to music (2) when I'm happy (1) travelling (1)   | 4 mentions  |
| <b>World events</b><br>World hunger (think about it in chapel)   | 1 mention   |
| Missing  | 7           |

- When I'm walking home or by myself. When I'm listening to calming music in my room.
- When everything seems way off track, and my family and I are upset about something that I have done.
- When my grandma died recently I wondered about many things- whether I was there enough for her, and what I will be remembered for when I die.
- It was a time in my life when I was unsure and confused about myself, a time when I wanted to give up on myself.

- When someone I loved betrayed me, and I questioned whether I meant as much to them as they did to me. This resulted in me questioning myself, and whether I was worth someone caring that much for me in the first place.
- When I am around a particular person who is so wise and knowledgeable. He makes me feel so truthful and real.
- Every night I reflect on my life, about the things that have happened, and that may happen. Some times I get into really deep thoughts about my future.
- When I hear other people's stories about their lives.

Question 13: Write about a time when you felt fully alive inside.

Boys

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Personal challenge</b><br>sporting challenge (12) being adventurous (3) driving a car (2) riding a motorbike (2) roller coaster ride (2) travelling overseas (2) moving to Australia (1) consideration of others (1) helping people (1) | 26 mentions |
| <b>Personal affirmation</b><br>winning at sport (3) being with friends (2) winning a competition (1)   | 6 mentions  |
| <b>Time-out/fun</b><br>Listening to music (4)  | 4 mentions  |
| <b>Creative activities</b><br>Playing music (2)  | 2 mentions  |
| <b>Being in nature</b>   | 2 mentions  |
| Missing/none   | 21          |

- When I dance in a competition in front of thousands of people.
- Making friends with a person that I hadn't made friends with and I knew their face.
- When I won a motor cross race.
- Skiing snow and water.
- When we won a game in footy.
- There are times when you're having fun with your friends and everything is suddenly clear and it seems nothing could be better.
- When I was elected captain of the basketball team in Singapore.
- Helping cancer (shave for a cure).
- Knowing how much people care for you in a tough time.
- Travelling to the Vatican City. St. Peter's basilica as well. As you can guess I have Italian heritage.
- I feel fully alive whenever I'm doing something extreme.
- When I go surfing and go carting.
- Standing on top of the Empire State Building
- Kayaking in a sea storm I could have died but I kept doing it for hours.
- This one time at my grandma's I was on the trampoline and I tried to comprehend eternity. But I fell and hit my head on a log.
- Playing football and running. Very basic emotions are used when playing football. There's nothing to worry or think about just the game and the ball.
- When I had my first helicopter ride last year. It was awesome.

Girls

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Personal challenge</b><br>roller coaster ride (7) sporting challenge (4) travelling overseas (4) being rebellious (1) extending myself (1) helping someone in need (1) work experience (1) riding a motor bike (1) getting away with bad behaviour (1) trying to understand death (1) | 22 mentions |
| <b>Personal affirmation</b><br>Being with friends (9) something good happens (2) academic achievement (1) being in a relationship (1) being an inspiration to someone (1) being with my mother (1) sexual experience (1) winning at sport  | 16 mentions |
| <b>Creative activities</b>   | 14 mentions |
| <b>Religious</b><br>At baptism (1) praying God in Church (1) Church group activities (1) meditation (1) in chapel (1) when my friends became a Christian (1)   | 6 mentions  |
| <b>Time-out/fun</b><br>Holidays (3) partying (2)   | 5 mentions  |
| Missing/none   | 12          |

- Riding my horse on the beach.
- When I'm at the beach swimming among massive waves and when I climbed to the top of Mount Oberon at Wilson's Prom.
- When I was out with people I love, having fun, the fullness of life. I was happy, felt loved and accepted.
- Listening and playing music is the most beautiful thing in the world to me. It's my creative outlet and I think everyone needs one to be content with their lives.
- When I was at my auntie's house for Christmas and everything in my life was "perfect". When my baby brother was born it made me really happy.
- Having a one on one conversation with a good friend about a personal experience that I had a few years back. Really opened up my eyes.
- Dancing with my friends every week. I absolutely love dancing and my friends are so fantastic and it's great fun. Going to dancing makes me forget all the bad things that are in my life at that moment.
- When someone close to me told me that I was an inspiration to them, and that the world is a better place because I am in it.

Question 14: Have you ever had a time when you felt God was very close?

Boys

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| Never /not sure/not really/not yet/missing   | 47          |
| <b>Difficult times</b><br>At a time of danger/fear (5) At the death of a loved one (2) During illness of a loved one (1) Going through hard times (1) When something bad happens (1) | 10 mentions |
| <b>Awareness of God's presence</b><br>Everyday (1) In Church (1) Too personal (1) Alone at night (1)   | 4 mentions  |
| <b>Doubts about God</b><br>Alone at camp (1) There is no God (3)   | 4 mentions  |

- I felt scared about something and I asked God for help, and felt a presence near, and suddenly everything was at peace.
- After the death of grandma it was a warm and happy feeling.
- This one time at band camp....
- I was spear fishing and thought I saw a shark. I believed I was about to die.
- When I got out of the most dangerous situation and it was pretty impossible to get out.

- When something bad happens and I could have been involved in it but wasn't.
- Yes, all the time.
- I feel that he helped me through tough times.
- I just feel that he is always watching out for me, and sometimes when I make a prayer it happens, or it doesn't but for the best.

Girls

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| Never /not sure/not really/not yet/ missing  | 38          |
| <b>Awareness of God's presence</b><br>God talks to me in my heart (3) God is in everyone (3) In Church (2) In prayer (2) at baptism (2) Many times (2) Alone at camp (2) God is always watching out for me (2) Hard to explain (2) Youth group(2) I talk to God (1) Plays a part in my life (1) On the beach (1) I have a close relationship with God (1) Nothing else mattered (1) Alone in chapel (1) Felt on top of the world (1) I sometimes feel God's presence (1) Everyday (1) times of deep calm peace (1) When I asked God to show me the way (1) When prayers are answered (1) When I was younger(1) Not in a Christian sense(1) | 36 mentions |
| <b>Difficult times</b><br>When I'm in need (3) At the death of a loved one (2) When something bad happens (2) During illness (1) Going through hard times (1) After a suicide attempt (1)  | 10 mentions |
| <b>Doubts about God</b><br>Don't know how to get close to God (2) I've lost my faith (2) There is no God (1) Sometimes I feel that God is never there (1) Question whether there is a God (1) I feel brainwashed about God (1)   | 8 mentions  |

- Yes I have. I felt like I could do absolutely anything. I felt like I was on top of the world and that I could overcome anything.
- It was like everything was OK for a moment and nothing mattered except to breathe.
- It feels like a deep calm peace that flows over you, and sometimes it is almost as if God has wrapped his arms around you, and held you in an embrace.
- On the beach looking at the stars. Sometimes in chapel when a song is on.
- When I asked God to show me the way and he did. I felt very close to him. I really feel a close relationship with God when he talks to me through friends, family, Church, prayer, Church services or prayer groups. When I receive a message from him I feel close to him.
- When we had a really bad car accident. I believe that God was with us because everybody got out of the car alive.
- At the funeral of my best friend's mother. I have never felt as though God was really there but there was no doubt about it there. You could see it in the family crying, remembering, and comforting each other. I just felt him there.
- I talk to God and I can hear him talking to me through my heart.

Question 15: Where do you stand in regard to the following Christian beliefs?

Boys

I believe in a life force greater than myself whom some call God (63 answered).

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 29%            | 29%   | 27%      | 2%       | 14.2%             |

I believe in God (63 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 21%            | 25%   | 30%      | 10%      | 14%               |

I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (60 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 27%            | 16%   | 30%      | 11%      | 11%               |

I believe in the Holy Spirit (62 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|

19%                      21%                      32%                      10%                      18%

I believe that God loves us (63 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 29%            | 24%   | 27%      | 10%      | 11%               |

I believe that God wants us to be the best we can be (63 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 30%            | 24%   | 27%      | 8%       | 11%               |

I believe that Jesus Christ showed us a way to live (63 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 16%            | 24%   | 30%      | 16%      | 14%               |

I believe that the Church holds and teaches the message of Jesus Christ (59 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 17%            | 38%   | 24%      | 7%       | 15%               |

I believe that after death there is life with God (61 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 23%            | 26%   | 33%      | 8%       | 10%               |

### Girls

I believe in a life force greater than myself whom some call God (75 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 29%            | 36%   | 27%      | 7%       | 1%                |

I believe in God (76 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 28%            | 36%   | 29%      | 4%       | 4%                |

I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (76 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 34%            | 24%   | 34%      | 3%       | 5%                |

I believe in the Holy Spirit (76 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 30%            | 25%   | 38%      | 3%       | 4%                |

I believe that God loves us (77 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 44%            | 29%   | 22%      | 1%       | 4%                |

I believe that God wants us to be the best we can be (76 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 43%            | 29%   | 21%      | 3%       | 4%                |

I believe that Jesus Christ showed us a way to live (76 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 29%            | 22%   | 33%      | 9%       | 7%                |

I believe that the Church holds and teaches the message of Jesus Christ (76 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 22%            | 39%   | 31%      | 4%       | 3%                |

I believe that after death there is life with God (74 answered)

|                |       |          |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| strongly agree | agree | not sure | disagree | strongly disagree |
| 32%            | 19%   | 40%      | 1%       | 7%                |



### Question 16: Who has influenced your beliefs?

#### Boys

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Family                                    | 28 |
| School                                    | 26 |
| Friends                                   | 13 |
| Congregation                              | 9  |
| Religious community                       | 5  |
| Other<br>Everything (1) TV (1) myself (1) | 3  |
| No-one nothing                            | 1  |
| Missing                                   | 12 |

#### Girls

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| Family                 | 51 |
| School                 | 42 |
| Friends                | 34 |
| Church                 | 29 |
| Religious community    | 9  |
| No-one nothing         | 9  |
| Congregation           | 5  |
| Prayers being answered | 3  |
| Other<br>Books (1)     | 1  |

### **Section 5: Some conclusions from the research.**

I draw the following conclusions from the research that I have done with boys in Catholic schools and now from the 142 students at Luther College whose responses I have now shared with you.

#### Finding 1.

Spirituality is *experienced* in a sense of self, which has a strong future orientation. It is *expressed* in openness to, and hope for, the future. Hope is centred on career and educational prospects, and on the development and maintenance of future relationships in marriage and family. Among the Lutheran students this latter expression was more significant for the girls than for the boys, but nevertheless for the boys it was an important category, and this was backed up by the data from the Catholic schools.

#### Finding 2.

Spirituality is *experienced* in a sense of self, which constantly seeks identity. This aspect of spirituality is *expressed* for the boys in their construction of masculinity predominantly in terms of personal integrity values.

#### Finding 3.

Spirituality is *experienced* in a sense of self, which seeks thoughtfulness, evaluation, and reflection.

This is *expressed* in an attraction to times of quiet, as a part of life that helps them to grow in understanding of the human experience.

Finding 4.

Spirituality is *experienced* in a sense of the self as an individual actor in the world. It is *expressed* in an individualistic approach to values and decision-making, which is not incompatible with, but is also separate from religious beliefs and values.

Finding 5.

Spirituality is *experienced* in a strong sense of self, which seeks direction in life. It is *expressed* in relation to the self, others, the community that help the adolescent to find path through life. These values and philosophies are drawn from a range of sources, but the role of family, school and friends are central.

Connectedness with others.

Finding 6.

Spirituality is *experienced* in a capacity for love. . It is *expressed* in love, respect, and admiration for family members especially those of the immediate family, peers and other significant adults.

Finding 7.

Spirituality is *experienced* in a need and capacity to form close relationships. It is *expressed* in the give and take of friendships, in managing and understanding friendships, and in learning life lessons from friendships.

Finding 8.

Spirituality is *experienced* in a need to trust and be trusted. It is *expressed* in the development of trusting relationships with the family and peer group. It is also *expressed* in the development of loyal trusting relationships, in the value put on trustworthiness in relationships, and in an attitude of trustworthiness towards others.

Finding 9.

Spirituality is *experienced* as a capacity to learn from and be shaped by others. It is *expressed* in attention to the advice, values, and philosophy of the people they trust, love, and admire.

Connectedness with the world

Finding 10

Spirituality is *experienced* in a sense of belonging to a wider world beyond the self. It is *expressed* in belonging in family and social relationships, and in concern for community and world issues, in a sense of responsibility for the world around them, with a particular focus on a desire for peace in the world and for the improvement of life for the poor and disadvantaged.

Connectedness with the sacred

Finding 11.

Spirituality is *experienced* in a sense that there is a spiritual dimension to life. It is *expressed* in a variety of ways: in relationship to a sacred other (God), in relationship with self and others, in concern for the world around them, and in their values. For the majority this perception of the spiritual dimension in life was expressed through prayer.

Finding 12.

Spirituality is *experienced* in a sense that there is a spiritual dimension to life. It is *expressed* in thought about life and it's meaning triggered by life difficulties, and life transitions. Their spirituality is challenged and forged in times of hardship, loss, and life transition.

### *Finding 13.*

Spirituality is *experienced* in a sense of self-transcendence and fullness of life. It is *expressed* in seeking, experiencing and describing times of personal affirmation through relationships and academic and sporting success, and in times of personal challenge.

A direct sense of the sacred was less pronounced among the boys, with only eighteen of the 66 responding to the question about a time when they have felt close to God. To this question 39 of the 77 girls responded. Yet teenage boys do experience the sense of mystery that we often refer to as God, as the following responses from a Catholic boys' school, in response to the question, *Have you ever felt that God was very close?* indicate.

- I saw the sunrise and sunset and witnessed the beauty of God's creation.
- God was very close when I was depressed because of family. I felt that I was not alone, and I had someone to comfort me while I was trying to get through this hard time.
- I have had an experience where God has helped emotionally in the time of the death of my grandfather. He helped me keep my faith, strengthen my ability to believe. It helped me to be there for my father so that he would feel loved.
- The time when I went to the hospital to see a newborn baby. It was a miracle and I felt that God was with us to see it.
- When I climbed Mt. Cook in New Zealand and looked out over the scene before me. I felt like God was there looking out with me, staring at the beauty he had created.
- When I was sick God came close to me and tried to make me better.
- On Christmas Eve I felt God's presence in the sky, in one of the brightest stars above.
- It is impossible to explain the feeling but I know it was God's presence.
- Right after my grandad died I was lying in bed and felt a very strong connection with something beyond this world.
- Most of the time when I do something well or pass a test I think he is around, and I feel his presence.
- I feel that God is very close when I am alone late at night and it is all quiet. I find that this is good to reflect on the day and what happened during the day.
- I have felt like God was close in prayer. When I have been searching for answers to things about life, it feels like God or someone is trying to provide them.
- Yes I have, during a form of prayer in which I was just telling God all my thoughts, pains, fears. I felt safe, relieved and very comfortable, like being with an old friend.

But this kind of response is more typical

- No I don't feel like I have, but I do know that I am loved by many and cared for by many.

### *Naming spirituality.*

#### *Finding 14*

Although many individuals name their spirituality in religious faith, others do not. Those who do not name their spirituality in religious terms also experience spiritual

and meaningful experiences. This was apparent in the responses, where many students who identified themselves as having no religion, still displayed spirituality and expression of their spirituality in their responses to self, others and the world. In the research conducted with boys in Catholic schools, approximately 60% *named* their spirituality in terms of Christian beliefs. In the Lutheran school, an average of 44% of the boys and 61 % of the girls *named* their spirituality in Christian terms, agreeing with a range of statements of Christian belief. Their spirituality was also named in other beliefs related to self, others, and the world.

### *Summary*

#### *Finding 15.*

This study has shown that **the key way** in which teenagers experience and express spirituality is in connectedness with self, others, and the world. This is confirmed by the research I have conducted among boys in Catholic schools. Among the girls, experiences of the sacred in terms of mystery we call God, were more numerous and more easily described.

### **Section 6: Spirituality and the school curriculum.**

I wonder if the following description rings true for those of you who work with young people in schools.

*Being pitched by this fad and that fad and never knowing who we are, where we are going and what is the meaning of life for us and our students. More specifically, we are standing by a spring yet dying of thirst. We, in a sense, feel apart from ourselves and the universe. There is no feeling of oneness between our inner and outer voices. Our intuitions tell us that there is something more meaningful we should be doing with education and curriculum. Somehow in our moments of reflection we sense more than ever that a fundamental need is not being fulfilled (Graham, Furr, Flowers, & Burke, 1998, p.1).*

The many young people who have contributed to this research have shown that spirituality is not just a *dimension* of life, it colours all of life. It is evident in their hope for a meaningful future, in their cherishing of relationships with family and friends, in their concern for the world around them, in their openness to the beliefs of religions and for some who were able to talk about it, in a sense that there is a presence in life, which inspires a sense of mystery and awe but that is also loving and kind. Therefore I offer you these suggestions for a curriculum that is concerned about spirituality. Such a curriculum will:

1. Nurture hope for the future.
2. Explore ways of being fully human beyond educational, career and financial success, and provide example of role models who have achieved this.
3. Engage in quiet times of evaluation and reflection.
4. Value questions, imagination and creativity.
5. Emphasise the development of relationships and help students to reflect on what they learn and gain from relationships.
6. Reach for higher and deeper levels of awareness and meaning in all that is studied.
7. Create an awareness of the world around us, and the connectedness of all that is a part of the universe.

8. Explore values that go beyond individualism, and link this with decision-making.
9. Challenge individualism by creating an educational environment where the heart as well as the mind is valued, that challenges young people to create a spiritual and moral sense of identity, personal authority and responsibility, relationships with individuals, groups, nature, social institutions, and where there is an ongoing conversation about the meaning of life.
10. Discuss the values and philosophies of adults they respect and admire.
11. Encourage responsibility for themselves and others.
12. Encourage a spirit of compassion and justice in their relationship with the world .
13. Help students to receive and give personal affirmation.
14. Challenge students as emotional and spiritual beings.
15. Reflect on times of hardship and life transitions
16. Allow young people to be alive, flexible, spontaneous, and optimistic, with an active sense of being human, and a deep love of life.
17. Encourage flexibility, creativity, engagement, reflection, and teacher and student stories of meaning-making.
18. Invite them to have a faith in something larger than themselves.
19. Study spiritual levels of awareness, just as it studies stages of intellectual, moral, and physical development.
20. Treasure moments of awe and wonder.
21. Provide opportunities for students to understand the different meanings of spirituality, to reflect on their own spirituality, to define some of the characteristics of their own spirituality, to learn about different ways in which people experience and express spirituality.
22. Face the issue of the existence or non-existence of God.
23. Teach about God, and about the variety of ways in which the Christian and other traditions speak about God.
24. Provide opportunities for experience of God.
25. Although no language can explain God, encourage students to write and talk about their spiritual experiences. Create an atmosphere where these are valued.
26. Provide space for genuine doubt and searching about spirituality, but in a context that is informed by the wisdom of the world's religious traditions, as well as the best of contemporary ways of searching for spirituality.

To conclude, I return to the quote with which I began this paper.

*The age old obsession of young people with questions of justice and morality; the sense of being personally touched and helpless before intense beauty, pain, tradition or genuine greatness; the search for a frame of reference within which to make their own decisions; the need for a personal commitment to an ideal; these are all evidence of that side of our nature which can be termed spiritual and which can either be enhanced and enriched by the educational diet that it is given, or stunted and warped by starvation.*<sup>6</sup>

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