**Faith & Belief Forum – Schools Speaker**

*Jonathan Mace*

*Secondary School*

My name is Jonathan Mace and I’m a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I am a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, and I believe that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is led directly by Jesus Christ and is a restoration of the same church He established when He was physically on the earth.

Just like he called disciples (Peter, James & John etc), I believe in living prophets and apostles who communicate with Christ and then share His messages with the world and the church. I also believe in ancient prophets such as Noah, Moses, Abraham etc., and believe the words they wrote in the Bible to be the word of God, as far as it has been translated correctly.

I also believe in a book of scripture called the Book of Mormon, which was written by ancient prophets in the Americas between 600 B.C and 400 A.D. I believe that a prophet called Joseph Smith found this record in the 1820s and translated it into English by the power of God. I therefore believe the Book of Mormon to be more words of God which we can follow to find true happiness.

Ultimately, I believe Christ’s teachings, and those of ancient and modern prophets, are there to guide us on a path which will lead us back to living with our Heavenly Father, in ever-lasting joy with our families.

*So how did I acquire these beliefs?*

I was raised in a home where both my parents were of this same faith and so I was taught doctrine and principles from a young age. In order to achieve the goal of eternal families and staying on God’s path for us, I was taught codes of conduct which would help me obey God’s commandments. These included key beliefs like the Law of Tithing (giving 10% of all your income to God, through the church), The Word of Wisdom (living a healthy lifestyle, including the avoidance specifically of alcohol, cigarettes, drugs and tea & coffee) and the Law of Chastity (having no sexual relationships before marriage). Growing up, I readily accepted the doctrine, principles and behavioural norms of my religion and found that they actually made me happy, rather than being unnecessary restrictions on my life. For example, not drinking alcohol in my teenage years didn’t mean I wouldn’t go to parties or hangout with friends, but I would avoid the negative effects of getting drunk (being sick, being unable to drive etc.) and it saved, and continues to save, me a lot of money!

My church encourages everyone to question what we believe and find out for yourself whether the doctrines are true. The Book of Mormon invites everyone to specifically pray about whether the teachings are true and promises that Heavenly Father will reveal this through the Holy Spirit. It might be a warm, comforting feeling or inspiration in the mind.

As I said, I quite happily accepted the teachings of my religion growing up, but at the age of 15 I went to a week-long youth camp and there I was given the direct invitation to pray to God to know whether what we were being taught was true. I remember going to my room, reading a portion of the Book of Mormon and then kneeling in prayer, asking whether it was indeed true. I stayed on my knees a while after the prayer, hoping for some kind of response from God. I received words in my mind as an impression: “you already know”. And I felt a peace. I did already know it was true. I believe this impression came to me through God’s messenger - the Holy Ghost. In times later in my life when I’ve had questions about a particular point of doctrine, I think back to that experience. I knew then, and I know now, that what I have been taught is true and good.

In our church, we place emphasis on sharing the joy and truths we feel with everyone, and as such it is seen as a duty for boys to go on a mission, and it is also strongly encouraged for girls. A mission is an 18 month to 2-year time period where you put your life on hold and go and share the gospel and serve people in a location anywhere in the world, assigned to you by the prophets and the apostles. There are around 67,000 Full-time missionaries serving around the world right now.

When I finished High School at 18, I decided I wanted to serve a mission. I filled in forms and sent them off to church headquarters and a few weeks later I received a letter assigning me to serve in Chile. I received two months of language and teaching training in America and then went to a mission in Viña-del-Mar, Chile that included around 200 other missionaries. Before I went on my mission, I believed that what I had been taught was true, but my faith was greatly strengthened during my two years of service as I taught people what I believed and invited them to join the church and be baptised. I taught and baptised around 25 people during that two-year period.

When I returned from my mission, there was a difficult period of adjustment back to normal life. For two years, I’d focussed on teaching the gospel and living my religion as best as I could and had very few other cares. Everything was taken care of. When I came home, I had to start thinking about studying, work, interacting with my family and friends, and it took me a while to settle back in. I learned how to live what I believed but in the context of everyday life.

In December 2014, at a church dance, I met my wife-to-be, Lauren. She had also been raised in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and so we immediately had many shared values, beliefs and goals. We dated on and off for about a year and a half, and then got engaged in August 2016 and married in February 2017. We continue to be heavily involved with our church – I lead the organisation of the men’s group, teaching lessons, giving counsel and planning activities, while my wife has a similar assignment with the Young Women aged 12-18. We both truly believe the principles and doctrines of the church, but we also love the social nature of being part of a congregation who all share values and goals.

I think the thing most of all I’d love to stick with you after listening to my story is that it’s OK to stick with what you might have been taught at home as children and not everyone has to make a radical change in their beliefs. With that being said, I do firmly believe that everyone is entitled to know for themselves whether what they believe is truly of God. I don’t believe in following a religion purely because we’re told to do so. So, it’s OK to question, it’s ok to investigate other religions or attend different churches to see what they’re about. I believe we can all find a peace and sense of belonging and that this can bring us true joy.