What are some of the best ways to gain a better understanding of someone else’s faith? You could go to official online sources, and that’s pretty good. But if you only search online, that won’t always give you the whole picture. When it comes to really understanding a faith, you can learn a lot by talking to the people who practice it.

And that’s just what some young people in California, USA, are doing.

The mission statement of the Interfaith Youth Council of Orange County (IYCOC) says their goal is to help youth “come together to promote respect, understanding, and appreciation for the integrity of each other’s beliefs, cultures, and traditions.” One way it does this is by hosting an annual Faith Forum and Festival.

UNDERSTANDING AND CELEBRATING FAITH

Last year’s festival was held on a beautiful Sunday afternoon near the grounds of the Newport Beach California Temple. Over 150 youth from more than a dozen different faiths were able to take a tour of the temple grounds and ask questions about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Missionaries from the California Irvine Mission served as tour guides. They fielded questions from the youth about the basic
beliefs of the Church and about the temple. These youth were seeking greater understanding of Latter-day Saints’ faith, and they knew this was a great way to get it.

“It’s better to understand other people’s faiths and not just think of them the way you think they are,” said Mohammed, a Muslim. “You need to actually know what their religion is.”

Nazee, a Zoroastrian, agreed. “These interfaith events bring people together and promote respect and understanding for all religions.”

I want to reach out to more people to help them to learn about other faiths.”

**SHARING FEELINGS AND BELIEFS**

After the tour, the youth met in a nearby stake center to talk about and share their beliefs. Youth from various faiths were seated at tables together. They asked each other about their traditions and beliefs, their struggles in practicing their faith, and how their faith affects their views of current social issues.

As the youth expressed their beliefs, the conversations became more open. Latter-day Saint youth were able to share their feelings about being sealed together as families for eternity in temples, helping and serving others, why we emphasize the full name of the Church, and even what it’s like walking for miles and miles on a pioneer trek.

In the same discussions, youth of other faiths shared their own beliefs, values, and challenges. One young man of the Sikh faith said he has to live his faith stronger since he is no longer in India surrounded by others of his faith.

A Jewish young man expressed the challenge of keeping the Sabbath day holy in today’s society. A young
woman shared what it’s like to be one of only three students of her faith at her school.

Some from other countries remembered the joy of celebrating their traditions back home and how it’s different in America, where they’re not as widely celebrated. Others expressed hope that someday there wouldn’t be so many negative stereotypes about their faith.

SHARING HOPES
Representatives of various religions from the youth council stood at the front of the meeting and lit an electric candle as they stated their hope about religion.

“I light this candle in hopes of peace and unity,” Mohammed said.

“I light this candle to support faith education,” Lizzie, a Hindu, said.

“My hope is that we can all find respect for each other that we didn’t have before,” Jessie, a Protestant, said.

Daniel C., who served as the vice president of the interfaith youth council, represented The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and said he hopes “that we can find similarities between our faiths.”

All youth participants took a moment of silence in unity and respect for each other.

**How We Relate to People of Other Faiths**

“The spiritual and physical needs of the world require goodwill and cooperation among different faiths. Each of them makes a valuable contribution to the larger community of believers... Thus, members of [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] do not view fellow believers around the world as adversaries or competitors, but as partners in the many causes for good in the world.”

“We want there to be more respect and less alienation,” Daniel said. He has attended many “house of worship” tours with the council over the last few years, visiting places such as the local Jain Center, Sikh Center, Buddhist Temple, Islamic institution, and Zoroastrian Center.

“I have much more respect now that I have made friends with people of other faiths and have seen what’s important to them,” Daniel said. “I learned that all religions are rooted in the values of doing good to others and serving your fellowmen. Most religions have beliefs similar to the Golden Rule.”

SEEKING UNITY AND PEACE

Daniel’s friends who have participated on the interfaith youth council expressed similar understandings and desires. Raj, of the Sikh faith, said, “I think that these experiences have shown us a lot of the similarities between our faiths, and as a result of that, it’s comforting to see that people are feeling the same way you do.”

“At the end of the day, everyone wants peace, unity,” Mohammed said. “No one wants terrorism; no one wants to hurt others. They just want to have a good society and a good community.”

Learning about different faiths and cultures helped him get rid of misconceptions, Raj said. “There’s so much more to it than what I previously thought. I want to reach out to more people for them to learn about other faiths as well.”

Paige M., one of the Latter-day Saint participants, said, “I think if we can join together with other religions and realize our commonalities instead of our differences, then we can help protect religious freedom and be able to come to understand what everyone else is talking about, gaining a respect for what they believe.”

Understanding, respect, friendship, and love. These are things that people of all faiths strive for. And when we strive for them together, it can be a very powerful thing.

Name: **RAJ**
Religion: **Sikh**
Free-time Activity: Normal stuff.
“I like sleeping. Well... yeah, I’ll stick with that.”

Hobby/Interest: Going to the gym

Name: **DANIEL C.**
Religion: **Member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**

“Being on the interfaith youth council has motivated me to learn more about my faith so I can answer questions and explain to others what I believe and why. This has given me a greater appreciation for what I believe. And I think it will make me a better missionary, because I’ll have a better understanding of people.”