

## Hope is saying *Yes* to Life

“Where there is life there is hope” is confirmed over and over in our counselling and research. The stories of anguish and triumph we hear show repeatedly that hope begins with a decision to survive. It is like getting married to the adventure of life, for better or for worse. Saying *Yes* is a decision that I am in for the full trip. Saying *Yes* to life is much different than saying “maybe”.

In a delightful book entitled One Hundred Over One Hundred, 100 centenarians share their views on life. They said yes to life for over 100 years. Most of us will be pleased to hear that people who live to be 100 are not necessarily non-smoking vegetarians who have been happily married to one person for 80 years. There are those who were pioneer health nuts and those who had been addicted to tobacco for eight decades. Some had recovered from cancer three times; some had undone their “I do’s” four times! What was common was that these people had a quiet gusto, a non-aggressive determination, a soft fortitude ... a relentless involvement with life... they loved life and they had a passion... music, work, sports, children, literature and it was always accompanied with a concern for those beyond themselves. Over those 100 years they witnessed amazing changes and they were at times disabled, disenfranchised and discouraged. They were proud to have survived the 1918 Spanish influenza that took nearly 40 million lives, not to mention surviving two world wars. They were neither embarrassed to love nor ashamed to be tough.

Saying *Yes* to life then, is not only about surviving. It is about engaging in the life that we have. It is one thing to be alive physically; another to be alive emotionally and spiritually. In a conference presentation a young mom shared a turning point in her handling of her son’s illness. Each morning she struggled to go to the bedside of her seven year old, newly diagnosed with leukemia. Well aware of the poor prognosis and ambivalent about the demands of the treatments, daily she feared she would be unable to hold back the tears. Entering the room one morning she found her son beaming with a smile as he put his pencil down having finished circling his choices from the kids’ menu. She inquired as to his happy look. His reply was, “Wow, tomorrow I am going to get Fruit Loops for breakfast.” From that moment on, she decided if he lived each day with joy, perhaps she too could treasure the special time they would have. If he could say *Yes* to life, so could she.

Aids and Its Metaphors suggests that “the generic rebuke to life and to hope is AIDS”. Certainly it is the condition which is thought of as “the testing ground for the undauntedness of the human spirit”. Yet studies have illustrated that despairing circumstances are not synonymous to a despairing attitude. Joanne Keen, author of one study, wrote that initially, “Hope teetered on a precipice than plummeted with traumatic change smashed their lives against an outcropping of cruel and unfair circumstances.” People spoke first of how hope and been smashed, then of how it was rebuilt in a deeper way – away that clarified values, relationships and priorities. Somehow they said *Yes* to life.

What is little understood is what it takes to say *Yes* to life. Why are young people opting for *No* to life at alarming rates? Answers are not simple. Each person, each culture is complex. Perhaps each of us can begin by asking, “Have I said *Yes* to life? Not just to being here but to living

fully? Have I put any conditions on my *Yes*?” Perhaps we can also ask “In what way might I contribute to someone else having hope – to them saying *Yes* to life?”