

# Lafantaisie: Young Catholics have lots of options to fill in their gap year

After graduating high school, most people think they only have two options: college or university. But what about neither?

Taking a gap year is becoming a more commonly accepted third option for a high school graduate. A yearlong break between high school and university can be just what a person needs to grow in life experience before taking on a post-secondary career.

As Catholics, a gap year can also be an amazing time to discover God's call for us, so I decided to investigate some faith-filled options for those who might be considering a gap year.

## **The pilgrimage**

Travel is a popular option for many gap year participants because it's an opportunity to learn more about the world and about one's self in a new environment.

Europe is a popular destination because of its rich history, but more importantly its rich Christian history. You can elevate your backpacking trip through Europe by making it a Camino de Santiago.

This popular pilgrimage, also known as The Way of St. James, has many routes that take pilgrims from almost any point in the continent. All roads lead to Santiago de Compostela Cathedral, the resting place of the apostle St. James the Great.

There are so many places with rich Christian history to see abroad: From Vatican City in Italy, to experiencing stories of Mother Mary's apparitions in Medjugorje, Bosnia, to visiting Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

## **The missionary life**

Gap years are also an amazing time to pursue mission and God's call to serve His people.

In Canada, NET Ministries offers young people the opportunity to serve in parish communities for one year and build youth ministries from the ground up. NETers are sent across the country hosting retreats and youth events in different parishes.

Catholic Christian Outreach is a similar missionary program that could double as a workplace opportunity as well. Members of CCO spend their year on a

university campus to help students grow in their faith.

### **In service to the Church**

For those who feel called to go out into the margins of society, there is a one-year mission program called Christ in the City in Denver, Colo.

CIC welcomes young people from all around North America to serve the poor and homeless. Christ in the City takes you out of every comfort zone that you've ever been in and brings you face to face with the less-fortunate men and women of Denver while living in community with the rest of the missionaries.

### **Discovering vocations**

The St. Thérèse Institute of Faith and Mission in Bruno, Sask., provides attendees an opportunity to spend a year living in community while also providing students with academic opportunities.

The program at St. Therese includes daily prayer and sacraments, community living and a curriculum that consists of classes such as theology, Church history, philosophy and Scripture.

Madonna House in Combermere, Ont., is another community that provides visitors with an opportunity to figure out their call in life.

A young person would likely visit as a working guest which requires a minimum seven-day stay and means they work and follow the structure of prayer and discipline in the community. Madonna House also provides discernment opportunity for those discerning the priesthood or apostolate.

Overall, gap years are tricky. It can be hard to convince your parents that this is the right move for you. There are resources to help you discern your options and the "right" choice for you.

Ultimately, whatever the choice, pursuing a faith-filled gap year will do great things for your soul and help you recognize the next steps you want most in life.

*-Janelle Lafantaisie, 24, is a writer and photographer in Winnipeg. Her column was originally published in The Catholic Register.*