



MINNEHAHA ACADEMY - VOLUME 98, ISSUE 5
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Photo of Bleeding Hearts flowers by Lyndon Johnston

Ready to launch

After months of hard work
by the ISS team, experiment
is ready for space

BY CHARLIE OLSON
Staff Writer
On May 21, 2018, an orbital ATK Antares rocket was scheduled to launch from Wallops Island, Virginia, shooting directly for low-Earth orbit. Its destination is the International Space Station. Its cargo includes a project that Minnehaha students have been work-

ing on for the better part of a year, the ISS class's latest microgravity experiment.

"Really the experiment started last spring in A.R.E. 1 [Applied Research in Engineering 1 class], when students were doing their final projects, and were given the idea that you could design an experiment for the ISS," said Timo-

thy Swanson, one of the ISS class teachers. "Several students chose to do that, and at the end of the semester students voted on which one they wanted to do."

The initial design of the experiment was created by two A.R.E. students last year, seniors Isaac Rose and Forrest Ahrens. After the

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Mark Norlander retires

Beloved teacher, coach leaves after 30 years

BY EMMA MELLING
Staff Writer
A canoe drifts through a stretch of lake in the boundary waters, gliding past a shoreline of dense trees that are reflected on the surface of the water. The water is full of native birds that flock together. The land holds a solid mass of plant life and trees. The forest is a thing of beauty, and for Minnehaha French teacher and tennis coach Mark Norlander, it is not only a natural scene where he feels God, but also the way he thinks about teaching.

"If you think of people growing up and becoming adults, from the ages of 14-18, it's a big time of change, physically and emotionally," said Norlander. "I like thinking of it as going through a deep, dark forest, and you don't know where you are going, especially when you're in there. Teachers are

just adults who have already gone through the forest, but they decided to come back through the forest to the people who are just going in."

After 30 years of helping MA students "through the forest," Norlander is retiring. He explained that his wife, Sharon, who teaches at Normandale French Immersion Elementary School in Edina, is also retiring from teaching this year and that for him, "the timing was right." As a long standing member of the community, the impact Norlander has had on Minnehaha students and colleagues has been immense.

"He is a professional, but he wants to engage his students, not only as academic learners, but as people," said Norlander's longtime friend and colleague the Rev. Dan Bergstrom, who retired from Minnehaha in 2016. "He cares deeply. He is an introvert, so it is a different

kind of expression of care than an extrovert might have, but he deeply cares about [his students]."

Bergstrom has known Norlander for over 30 years, and he explained that not only does Norlander love and care for his students, but he is also a steadfast friend.

"He and I have the relationship where we can tell each other anything about family or whatever that is hurting or stressful, and then the prayers become automatic," he said. "I can go to [him] and I know I'll get prayer support, and it goes without saying...Those kind of relationships are rare."

Norlander loves teaching. His career path began in seventh grade at a Bible camp, when a speaker was talking about living a life for Christ and devoting yourself to

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Photo by Ellie Bedingham

Mark Norlander teaches a French class in the spring of 2017. Norlander has taught French at Minnehaha for 30 years.

Rebuilding

Campus plans updated

BY LUKE VON ARX AND EMMA MELLING
Staff Writers
Since the design renderings for the north campus rebuild at 3100 West River Parkway were released in April, the Minnehaha Academy administration and team of architects has been working on making some general revisions and improvements to the building plans. Throughout the process of continuing to re-evaluate designs and make decisions for the rebuild, questions have been brought up from individuals of all perspectives.

"I would say there have been two significant events," said Principal Jason Wenschlag. "The first one is,

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Drawing courtesy of Cuningham Group Architecture

An updated design rendering for the front entrance of the rebuild at 3100 West River Parkway as of May 2018.

Faith at MA

Spirituality survey results

BY PATRICK CULLINAN
Staff Writer
Going to a school that has chapels every week and Bible classes every semester might give the impression that most people at that school are religious. However, many students wonder and theorize about just how religious all their classmates are. For this reason, the Talon conducts a survey of seniors and freshmen every four or five years to ascertain the exact numbers behind faith at Minnehaha. The most recent of these polls, conducted two months ago, reveals much about the state of religion at this school.

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Senora Woetzel to travel world • 2



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Survey: Views on spirituality expressed

RELIGION FROM PAGE I

The results of the poll were, in many respects, unsurprising. About 85 percent of students said that they did (to some extent) follow the teachings of a “great religious teacher” (like Jesus), only 7.7 percent said they didn’t consider learning about other faiths to be important, and about 95 percent said that as they got older, their understanding of God changes.

Most of the students were Christian, and the breakdown on students’ church denominations was consistent with past years. The largest number who said they did align with a Christian denomination were Lutheran (21 percent), closely followed by Covenant (14 percent), and after that the other Christian denominations held roughly the same percentages.

Interestingly, the people who associated with no denomination, or answered “none,” to the question of the denomination they belong to, has been on the rise. In 2012, about 10 percent of students claimed no affiliation with a religious institution or place or worship; in 2018, that number rose to 24 percent.

Similarly, in 2009 and 2012, roughly 75 percent of people answered that they believe in a God that relates personally to humanity. That number dropped by 10 percentage points in 2018. Meanwhile, the percentage of students who say they don’t believe in God rose to 11 percent in 2018, up from 6 percent in 2012 and 5 percent in 2009.

A Christian school; a more secular society

Elaine Ekstedt, Minnehaha’s learning specialist and Learning Lab teacher, who’s been with the school for 45 years, thinks that the drop in religiosity has nothing to do with the school.

“Minnehaha has always reflected society,” she said. “Things have changed in our society, things have changed in our student population. As society has moved away from traditional religion, that’s going to affect us, too. People may say they don’t go to church anymore, but that’s not a direct cause of anything the school might have done.”

According to polls conducted by Gallup, the Pew Research Center and the Public Religion Research Institute, the number of Americans who claim no religious affiliation has risen significantly in recent decades, from 8 percent in 1990, to 14 percent in 2001, to 16 percent in 2007, to 24 percent in 2016.

Between 2007 and 2014, the number of Americans who believed in God dropped by three percentage points, and the number that believed with absolute certainty dropped by eight percentage points.

It may also be true that Min-

Teacher perspectives

What religion teachers at Minnehaha found most noteworthy from the survey

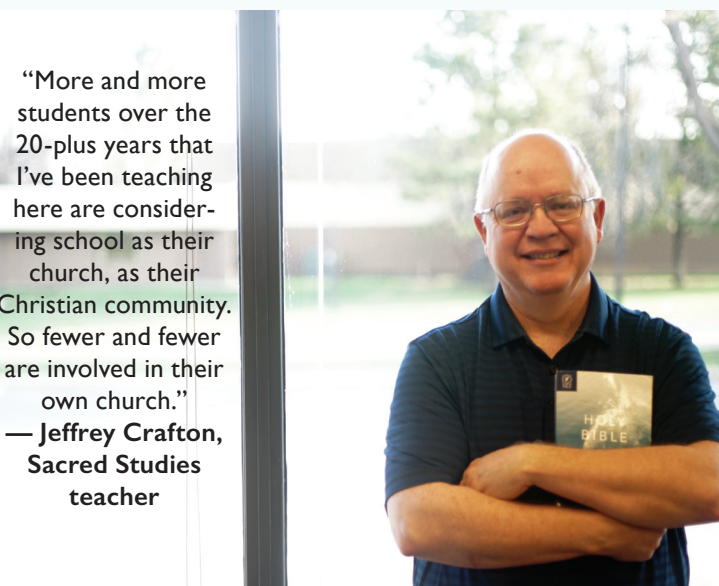


Photo by Lyndon Johnston



Photo by Silas Zukolsky Larson

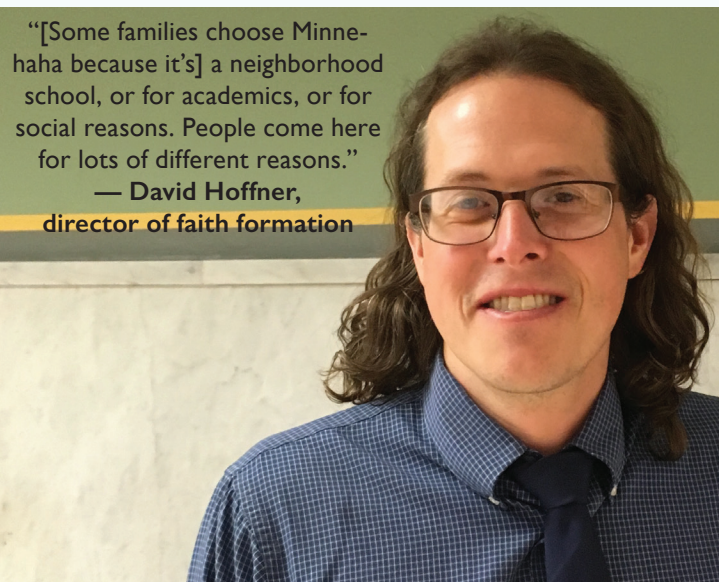


Photo by Patrick Cullinan

“More and more students over the 20-plus years that I’ve been teaching here are considering school as their church, as their Christian community. So fewer and fewer are involved in their own church.”
— Jeffrey Crafton, Sacred Studies teacher

“The same sort of trend is happening at Minnehaha as is happening in broader culture, where fewer people are believing in God, and fewer people are attending institutional religious churches.”
— Greg Ellis, Sacred Studies teacher

“[Some families choose Minnehaha because it’s] a neighborhood school, or for academics, or for social reasons. People come here for lots of different reasons.”
— David Hoffner, director of faith formation

nehaba’s reputation as a school with strong academics, fine arts and athletics has grown since the early 2000s, with the rise of Advanced Placement classes and several honors won in extracurricular areas. Many secular families have reported choosing Minnehaha for those strengths.

“We’ve always tried to keep both the academic excellence and the spiritual strength equally strong,” Ekstedt said. “There’s a lot of schools that have chucked one or the other, or said, ‘this is more important than this,’ and I think Minnehaha has really tried to keep those just as important as [each other].”

Does going to Minnehaha affect faith?

Freshman and seniors had similar responses for many questions, but one key difference was the number of people who “didn’t know” what they believed about God, which was smaller for seniors. This statistic aligns with the fact that the majority of seniors feel their spirituality and religious convictions have increased since the beginning of high school.

One way to interpret this data is that while students’ time at Minnehaha may not convert many atheists to Christianity, it does educate people enough that by senior year

more people are certain of what they believe.

“Having teachers and classmates who are more open to talking about spirituality and faith has actually given me a chance to really explore my own faith,” said senior Forrest Ahrens, one of the seniors who took the poll. “Even if I don’t always agree with what the school stands for, it’s an environment that I think is really unique—that I wouldn’t have been about to get at other schools.”

Another student wrote that they “[aren’t] most impacted by chapels or speakers or things like that. Rather, it is the adults in the community who are examples of faith

Student views

Select student responses from the free-response section of the survey

Who do you believe Jesus is?

“A real human man who did good for others, like one of the first social workers”
— freshman

“A really important example of how God wishes us to act and the vessel through which we can reach God”
— senior

“God as a man, who came to experience suffering as humans did, and to experience betrayal as humans did. He forgave unlike any human could.”
— senior

What do you think it means to be spiritual?

“I believe being spiritual means to take what you get from a church service and put it to use.”
— freshman

“Feeling a connection to some force outside of yourself. Not necessarily to worship it in organized or unorganized religion, but to recognize its existence.”
— senior

“I think it means that you have a close relationship with God and you work to strengthen that relationship.”
— freshman



Minnehaha Academy’s “core values” stress the integration of Christian faith and learning. While leaders emphasize that it is “distinctively Christian” with the goal of encouraging one another to become “authentic followers of Jesus Christ,” some families choose Minnehaha for “cultivating potential”, the “caring community” and the “exceptional academics”.

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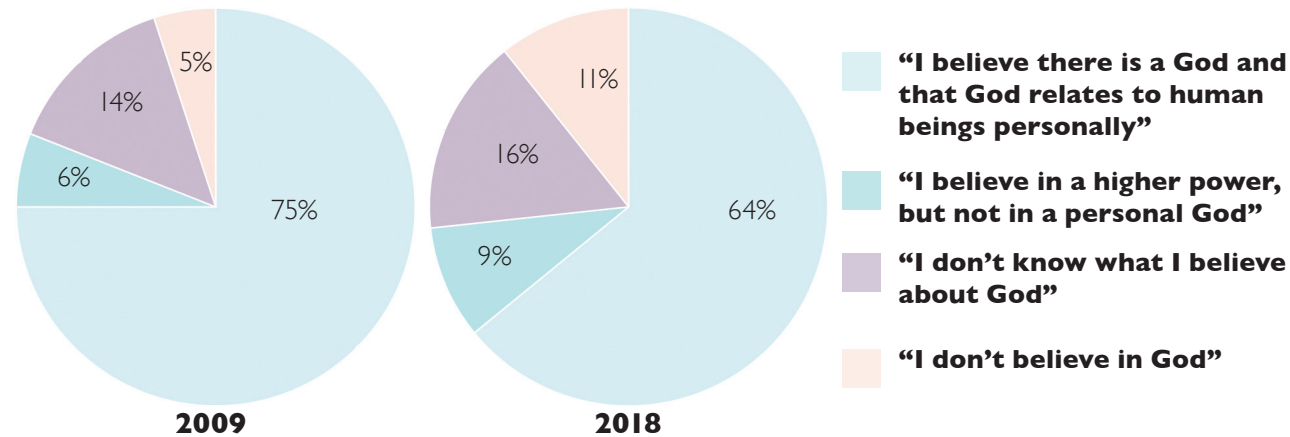
Another student wrote that they “[aren’t] most impacted by chapels or speakers or things like that. Rather, it is the adults in the community who are examples of faith

and who show me the love of God that have made the deepest mark on my life.”

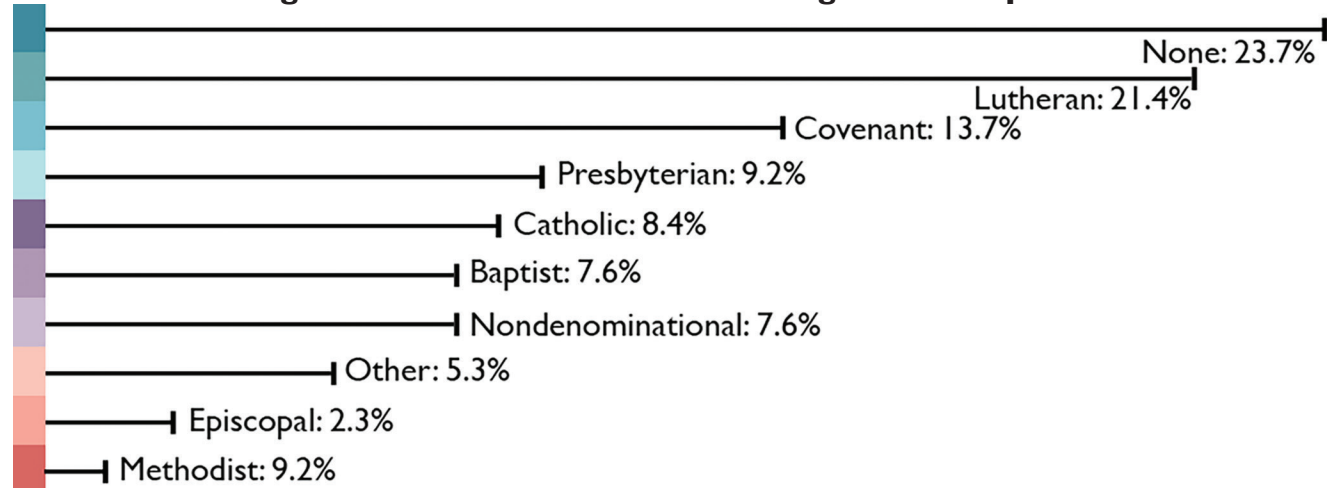
One of the free response questions was “do you think your time at Minnehaha has shaped your religious and spiritual beliefs?” About three-fourths of the seniors (76.6 percent) wrote about the way coming to this school has strengthened their faith. Six said they didn’t know, and nine wrote that Minnehaha hadn’t helped their religion along at all (one even saying that “the constant nailing of Christianity has led me astray and [made me] bored of religion”).

David Hoffner, Minnehaha’s di-

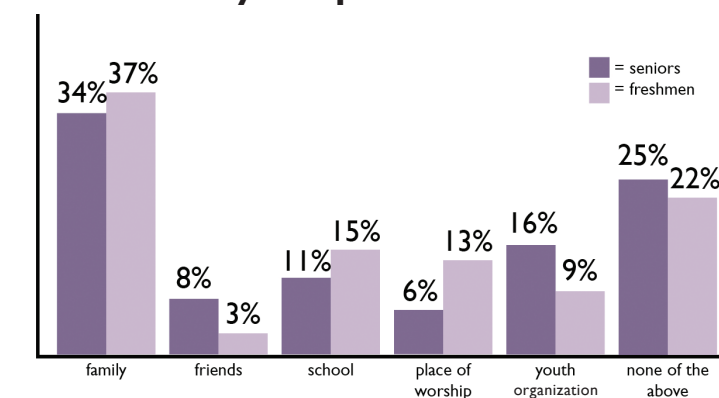
Which one of these best describes what you believe about God?



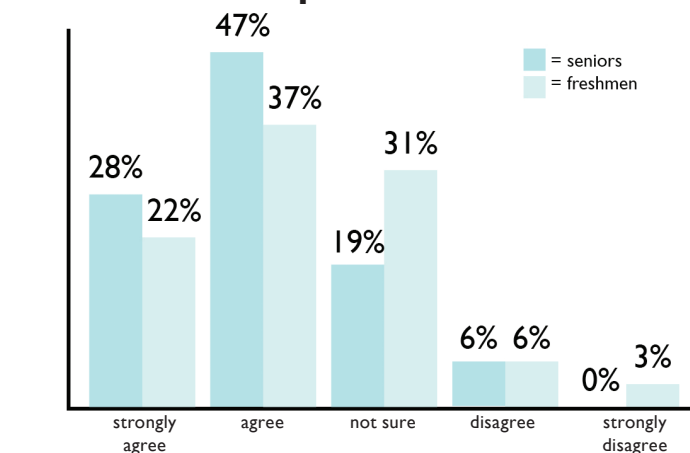
The religious institution to which I belong to/worship most often is



Who or what most helps to support your spiritual life?



Learning about different faiths is important to me.



Graphics by Sammi Martin and Tea McLawhorn

rector of faith formation, in response to those students who feel they have lost religious conviction because of their time at Minnehaha, said this is because of a natural rebelliousness most people have.

“I recognize in myself a rebellious streak,” he said. “I can give you an example: I recently rented a car, and they said, ‘You cannot drive this through drive-throughs.’ What’s the immediate thing I want to do as I’m walking out of the rental place? I looked at the van and was like, ‘I’m gonna drive through the first drive-through I find.’ So I think some people view the faith that way, too. They come to chapel and we’re

like, ‘praise Jesus!’ And kids are like, ‘no.’ ‘Join me in song!’ Kids are like, ‘no.’”

How evangelical is M.A.?

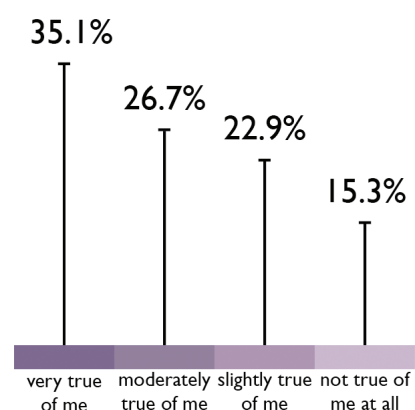
Minnehaha is owned by the Evangelical Covenant Church, so it is conceivable that the school is making an intentional effort to convert non-Christians to Christianity, but according to Jeffrey Crafton, sacred studies teacher, it’s a little more complicated than that.

“[We are evangelical] in the sense that [conversion] is something we would long to have happen. But not in the sense that if someone leaves the school and has

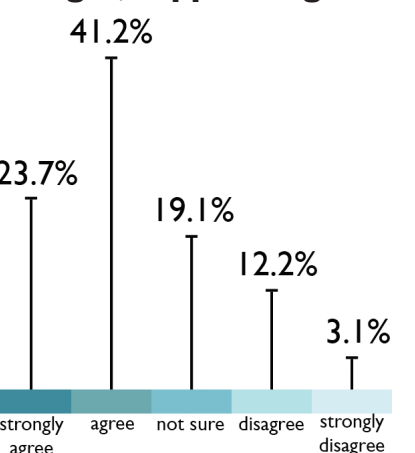
not made a commitment of faith, that somehow we have failed that student. We would not say that. It’s not a goal in the sense that every student must individually accept faith before they leave this school. But we do desire that people come to a faith in Jesus Christ.”

The data would seem to say that Minnehaha’s evangelical “goal,” is—for the most part—being achieved. Almost every senior said their understanding of God changes as they age (and most freshmen agree), almost 50 percent of seniors said their faith had increased, and three quarters of the seniors that answered the poll said they had more

I try to follow the teachings of a great religious teacher.



My beliefs/practices provide me with strength, support & guidance.



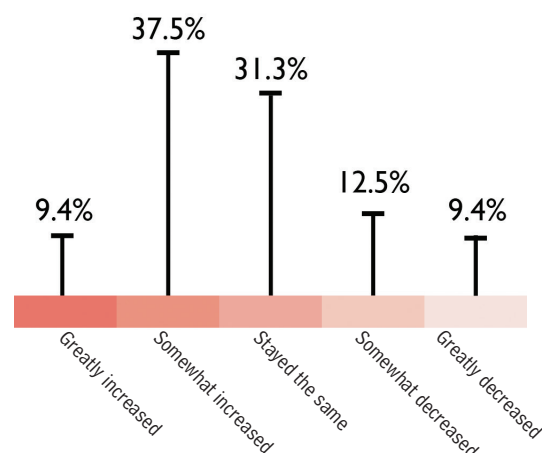
doubts and questions about God than they did in the past—which shows that they’re thinking about religion more.

The majority of respondents said it was being at Minnehaha that helped their faith, with seniors saying that conversations in Senior Capstone classes were helpful, that learning about other religions was important to them and that Minnehaha taught them it’s okay to doubt God.

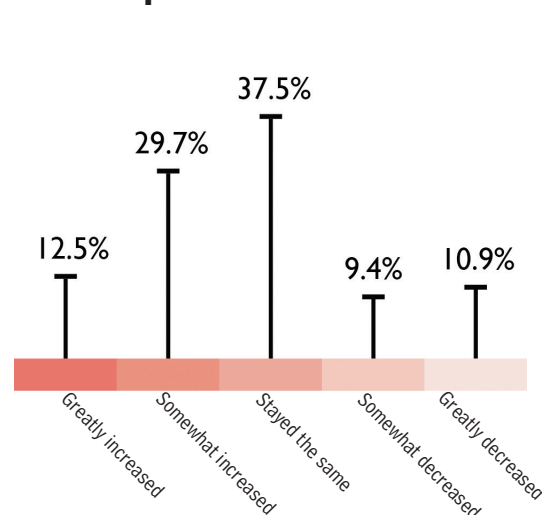
Finally, although a three-fourths response rate is usually reliable for a survey, it is worth considering why some students may have decided not to take the survey. “We have to be very

The graphics below represent the opinions of the senior class of 2018, when asked about the past 2-to-3 years.

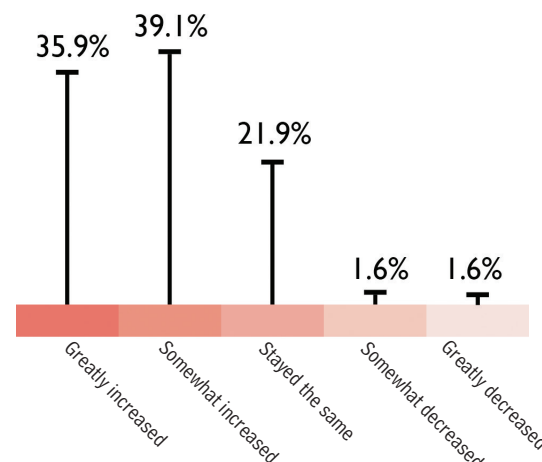
My religious beliefs and convictions have...



The importance of my spiritual life has...



The number of doubts or questions I have about religious matters has...



About the survey

Minnehaha’s survey was given to freshmen and seniors via Google Forms from March 8 to 14, 2018. For freshmen, 67 of 94 responded (71%; 41 male, 26 female). For seniors, 64 of 79 responded (81%; 31 male, 33 female). In all, 131 of 173 responded (76%; 72 male, 59 female). The Talon asked the same questions of freshmen and seniors in 2012 and 2009, based on a 2008 Search Institute survey, with permission. The survey was anonymous; individual responses were not viewed by journalism staff.