

The Future Begins with Love

Beginning Our Seven-Year Journey through the Charisms of JP II

By Jennifer Smith

As Pope Saint John Paul II Preparatory School (JPII) looked toward our 25th year, we found ourselves standing at a powerful intersection between who we have always been and who we are becoming. Over the past two decades, much has changed for our young community. The addition of a middle school to an established high school and the rapid population growth of our surrounding area prompted us to consider whether the identity that had shaped us still reflected our Catholic values and supported the formation of a whole community.

This milestone sparked deep reflection, an inward journey that led us to rediscover the foundations of our identity, inspired by our namesake, and to chart a path toward articulating our charism through a focused study of the life and teachings of Saint John Paul II.

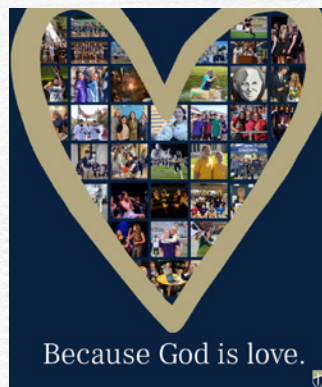
The process began with a conversation with Sister Elizabeth Anne, OP. “During a meeting, she said to me, ‘Look to your great patron for who you will become,’” recalled principal Jennifer Dye. “She mentioned another school that displayed its cornerstone beliefs in the central hallway, and it got me thinking. What if we explored the teachings of Saint John Paul II and made them more visible here, too?”

From that idea, a year-long community reflection took root. Although Saint John Paul II’s well-rounded life already informed the major pillars of a JPII education—faith, scholarship, fine arts, and athletics—we sought a deeper way to engage the entire community. We hoped to enrich our faith lives, sharpen our focus of service and discipleship, and establish shared themes that could anchor curriculum and community events.

Our journey began with the faculty, who studied excerpts from Saint John Paul II’s writings and his biography, *Witness to Hope*. Together, we explored his central teachings and connected them to what we already believe and practice. We welcomed guest speakers, including a JPII parent who attended three World Youth Days led by Saint John Paul II and shared her firsthand experience of his powerful message to young people. Students learned about his life through assemblies and created artwork for his feast day celebration. Our chaplain, Father Ohanaka, offered homilies inspired by Saint John Paul II’s teachings, specifically focused on the theme of hope.

Father Ohanaka reflected, “I first encountered his biography as a seminarian in Ars, France, during a silent retreat called ‘The Roman Experience.’ Hearing his story during those quiet meals was transformative. Last fall, I revisited his biography to help our





Photos and art courtesy of Pope Saint John Paul II Preparatory School

students see how his life mirrors themes we find in Scripture: his love for youth, his message of hope, and his ability to find truth through art and literature.”

After a year of shared study and reflection, one question emerged: *What does it mean to live as a community inspired by Saint John Paul II?* Faculty submitted more than 500 reflections on this theme, which were synthesized into major groupings and refined with input from the executive council, academic departments, student groups, and clergy.

What emerged would become a defining strategic initiative for the school: The Seven Charisms of Saint John Paul II. Beginning in fall 2025, JPPII launched a seven-year cycle in which one charism is studied and lived each year. When the cycle concludes, it begins again, ensuring that every student experiences all seven charisms during their seven years at JPPII.

“These are not just themes,” said principal Dye. “They are a cornerstone. A charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit given for the good of others, which reflects our school’s mission to develop the gifts God has given us and to use them to serve the world.”

The Seven Charisms of Pope Saint John Paul II Preparatory School

The first charism, chosen to launch the cycle, is **LOVE**. More than emotion, it is a radical call to see every person as a child of God.

Launching with love was intentional. “As a school, we’re already rooted in faith and hope, but authentic love is foundational,” said Father Ohanaka. “To love authentically is to recognize that each of us was created by love, for love. That’s how we build the culture we want at JPPII.”

Principal Dye added, “If we can teach our students to recognize love as a gift and to live that gift by honoring others, then we’re forming a community where every member sees the worth in themselves and each other.”

Faculty spent the summer preparing activities, curriculum connections, and service opportunities aligned with the theme. The community is invited throughout the year to reflect on three guiding questions: *How do we love? Whom do we love? How do we make that love visible?*

The remaining six charisms follow, creating a complete formation rooted in Saint John Paul II's vision of holiness in the modern world:

MERCY: The sacrificial spirit of mercy calls us to place others' needs before our own, echoing Christ's love and Saint John Paul II's acts of compassion.

SOLIDARITY: We are one human family. Solidarity calls us to stand with one another, especially the marginalized. Saint John Paul II was known for his ecumenical outreach and willingness to engage people of all faith traditions.

COURAGE: Inspired by Saint John Paul II's resistance to Communism and his commitment to truth, courage empowers us to fight for what is right, especially when it is difficult.

CREATIVITY: As children of a Divine Creator, we are called to co-create by using our talents to bring beauty and goodness into the world, echoing Saint John Paul II's work as a playwright and lover of the arts.

WISDOM: Uniting faith and reason, wisdom helps us discern and follow God's will. Saint John Paul II modeled an intellectual life anchored in faith.

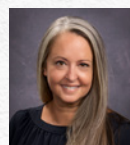
HOPE: A virtue urgently needed today, hope lifts our eyes beyond suffering. It is not mere optimism but confidence in God's

promises. It is fitting that Saint John Paul II's biography is titled *Witness to Hope*.

Looking Ahead

As JPPII steps into the next 25 years, these charisms will shape every dimension of school life, from classroom discussions and assemblies to service projects and spiritual formation. Students will encounter these themes across theology, literature, science, and the arts, making them not just ideals but lived experiences.

Principal Dye shared her vision for the years ahead: "In seven years, I want every member of our community to recognize these gifts in themselves and in others. I want us to be a school that knows its mission and lives it joyfully, a community transformed by grace."



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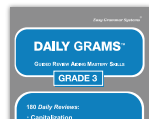
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