

Be not afraid...

In January 2017, the Board of Directors, along with the administration, teachers, staff, and a group of parents updated the strategic plan for St. John Paul II Catholic School. While many ideas came to light and were implemented, one item in particular stood out – the need for a school motto to clearly proclaim to the world precisely what our school believes, teaches, and is at the heart of our community.

The school motto had to be foundational; it would not only inspire our students and families but motivate them. Our community would know exactly where we stand, as we knew where our patron stood. The motto had to guide our students as they enter the world from this foundation with prayer, confident in the knowledge that Jesus had come to save them and, through them, the world.

At his Inauguration Mass, Pope St. John Paul II laid out the central message of his pontificate:

"Do not be afraid. Open, I say open wide the doors for Christ. To His saving power open the boundaries of states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization, and development."

Later, the pope said again at World Youth Day in 1993:

"This is no time to be ashamed of the Gospel. It is the time to preach it.... Do not be afraid to break out of comfortable and routine modes of living in order to take up the challenge of making Christ known in the modern metropolis."

And finally:

"Do not be afraid. Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.... I plead with you--never, ever give up on hope, never doubt, never tire, and never become discouraged. Be not afraid."

Thus, at the heart of Pope St. John Paul II's message is this progression:

Be not afraid ... Open wide the doors for Christ ... Engage the world as confident Catholics.

After study, much prayer, and many months of discernment, the motto unmistakably revealed itself to us from our patron:

Be not afraid...

What does this mean for our students and for our families? As children begin their journey at our school, everything is new and sometimes uncertain. We can point to the motto and share our patron's message, encouraging newcomers to leave fear at the door because here is a safe space for them to learn, grow, and transform.

Throughout elementary school, a child grows in knowledge and discipline but is also discovering who he or she is and will become. We will point to the motto and share the message to be confident in their faith and education, that they could be better than they can ever imagine.

As these children transition to young adulthood, they face new challenges, both mental and physical, in modern culture and at school. Exams, friendships, and new responsibilities all present obstacles. We will point to the motto and share our patron's message – to students and their parents – that there is no need to fear. Christ will be their strength.

Our teachers and staff will help children, all unique individuals with diverse needs, and in those hours when we wonder how to make the difference, we will read the motto and be energized to implement our patron's message.

Our motto is "**Be not afraid...**" rather than simply "Be not afraid." We add the ellipsis intentionally because Christ's message, revealed through all of Sacred Scripture, remains the same as challenges change throughout our lives.

Be not afraid...to live your faith.

Be not afraid...to be kind to all your classmates.

Be not afraid...to say "I don't know" and ask for help.

Be not afraid...of challenges, embrace them.

Be not afraid...to be confident Catholics.

Be not afraid...to have a giving heart.

Be not afraid...because Christ is with you forever.

In his biography of Pope St. John Paul II "Witness to Hope", George Weigel summed up what one commentator said about Pope St. John Paul II:

He was a man utterly without fear. ... It is an unmistakably Christian fearlessness. In Christian faith, fear is not eliminated but transformed, through a profound personal encounter with Christ and his Cross – the place where all human fear was offered by the Son to the Father, setting us all free from fear.

Pope St. John Paul II ended his inaugural homily with this, applicable to all of us, and explaining what his thesis was, and is:

So often today, man does not know that which is in him, in the depths of his mind and heart. So often he is uncertain about the meaning of his life on this earth. He is assailed by doubt, a doubt which turns into despair. We ask you, therefore, we beg you with humility and with trust, let Christ speak to man. He alone has words of life, yes, of life eternal.

Let our motto, which is not only our patron's message but Christ's, be the guiding light by which our community fearlessly pursues education, fearlessly pursues faith, and fearlessly pursues its full potential in Christ.