CHARISM GUIDE

Bishop O’Dowd High School
Finding God in All Things
PURPOSE

Here at O’Dowd, we embrace our Catholic identity through the lens of our ‘charism’ which highlights our spiritual endeavor – namely, finding God in all things – and through the pursuit of the six core values in our life as a Catholic high school. These values define who we are as an institution, as well as who we are individually called to be and what we are indebted to as a school community – where we illuminate these values and instill in each of our students as they become the leaders of tomorrow.

We strive to amplify the visibility and experience of O’Dowd’s Charism as it manifests across the academic and co-curriculars of our school’s community. The educational experiences of our students and families are part of their formation here at O’Dowd making it more than a school. Rather, a dynamic center for community and learning that offers students a contemporary take on Catholic education. O’Dowd students experience a powerful transformation, developing into the morally grounded leaders needed today – loving, open to growth, intellectually competent, committed to justice and peace, and oriented towards creating positive change.

And it is our Charism that differentiates O’Dowd from other catholic and private independent schools.

My hope is that through this Charism Guide, we can further our understanding of its meaning and enact our Charism with profound intention as a representative of Bishop O’Dowd High School.

You have my best,
J.D. Childs
TABLE OF CONTENTS

• O’Dowd’s Mission
• O’Dowd’s Charism
• Integrated Student Outcomes
• Enactment of our Charism
O’DOWD’S MISSION

Bishop O’Dowd High School is a Catholic college-preparatory community, guided by the teachings of Jesus Christ, that educates its diverse student body to build a more just, joyful and sustainable world.

Our educational mission is rooted in our Catholic heritage and our success is built on the partnership of students, staff, parents, the community, and the Diocese of Oakland. O’Dowd’s academic, spiritual, and co-curricular programs develop exceptional graduates who communicate Christ to others and enrich society through Gospel values and the way in which they live their lives.
O’DOWD’S CHARISM

A “charism” is a gift of the Holy Spirit and a set of spiritually inspired core values. At O’Dowd, our inclusive charism, “Finding God in All Things” calls us to: community in diversity, strength of character, academic excellence, kinship with creation, social justice, and joy.

Each year, school and student leadership strive to achieve this vision of an O’Dowd community enlivened, challenged and animated by the spirituality and values of our charism. While giving preference to Catholics, we welcome students of all faiths who embrace our mission and contribute to it.

Finding God in All Things Calls Us to:

Community in Diversity
Strength of Character
Academic Excellence
Kinship with Creation
Social Justice
Joy
A Reflection on  
Bishop O’Dowd High School’s Charism:  
*Finding God in All Things*

Our charism highlights a specific spiritual endeavor - namely, *finding God in all things* - which animates the pursuit and enactment of six core values in our life as a Catholic high school: *community in diversity, academic excellence, strength of character, kinship with creation, social justice, and joy.* This list of values is intended to be both descriptive (*who we are*) and prescriptive (*who we are called to be*). It is in living out our charism - our spiritual identity - in its fullness, that we can be the most robust and integrated Catholic school imaginable. Our Catholic identity at O’Dowd is expressed through our charism profession. It is how we “do school” and how we are most distinctive as an institution.

*Finding God in all things* is a theological statement used by St. Ignatius of Loyola to describe the goal of the Christian life. Metaphysically, Catholics believe the world is designed to mediate experiences of God’s presence. We’ve all had experiences where that sacred dimension bursts forth in revelatory ways: hearing the hallelujah chorus, experiencing the birth of a child, standing on a mountain peak, being forgiven. In our world of grace, *people* are the most profound purveyors of God’s wisdom, care, and compassion. Engaging in this world of others where grace abounds surprises us occasionally with insight and joy! Here at O’Dowd, we begin from this foundational profession of graced reality, of God’s nearness and intimacy, and that is the frame through which we pursue the commitments of our personality known as charism. In short, our charism is a theological claim that expresses the principle of *sacramentality*.

The principle of *sacramentality* says that God’s invisible grace can be expressed in visible, tangible ways. In other words, reality is symbolic of mystery and has a hidden character. Catholics are a sacramental people. The stuff of this world is designed to mediate powerful experiences of the good, the true, and the beautiful. There are seven Sacraments in the Church where material - rings, bread, wine, water, oil, fire - is used thematically to convey meaning and to transmit grace. In these encounters, what is
mediated is Christ, the Sacrament par excellence. But there are also countless “s”acraments available to us, analogies of the primary Sacraments, discoverable when we bring attention and intention to our everyday lives. One might not be able to see the invisible in the visible per se, but perhaps we’ve experienced the divine in the human, the creator in creation, grace in nature, the spiritual in the material, eternity in history, or the sacred in the ordinary.

Theology is theory making a claim for truth, whereas members of community make those grace-filled realities come true in our school. As teachers, we are called to enact and fulfill our charism elements both in the way that we integrate these values into our work, but more powerfully, by our witness to a sacramental reality. The work that we do in this place - our Curriculum - enacted through our colleagues and with the students in partnership with their families, is holy activity, sacred stuff. We believe that our people are both finders of God and instruments of grace, seekers and sacraments, givers and receivers, and that our Curriculum facilitates holy encounter through our classes, programs, events and initiatives.

Finding God in all things is a fundamental profession at the heart of the way we live our identity as a Catholic school. We believe something about reality and God’s place in it, and are therefore invited into profound responsibility. As educators, we are called to make God real for students, families, and one another by our care, competency, and commitment. While ideas help direct and point the way, teachers are the energizers who enact the identity of our school, enkindle that identity in the hearts of our students, and generate the momentum by which we make these commitments real for our students. Teachers are therefore formators of a particular kind of worldview and imagination. Indeed, God is made known through the expression or enactment of our institutional spiritual personality, precisely as expressed and discovered through community in diversity, academic excellence, strength of character, kinship with creation, social justice, and joy.
COMMUNITY IN DIVERSITY

Recognizing the inherent dignity of all humans, attuned to the real world experience of difference and the shared experience of being human.

When have I felt different?
When have I felt connected?
What do I want to do about that?
A Reflection on
Bishop O’Dowd High School’s Charism:
Community in Diversity

Abstract
The magnanimous love of God allows us to see all people as brothers and sisters.
• Jesus and his disciples affirm brotherhood and universal love over the demands of
tradition and the bonds of common ethnicity and practice.
• People of different backgrounds can find common ground in their experiences of God.
• Pope Francis calls for a culture of “dialogue and encounter.”

Introduction
Finding God in all things calls us to community in diversity. This commitment is grounded
in the magnanimous love of God through which we are enabled to see all peoples as
brothers and sisters. Beginning with Jesus and the gospels, affirmed by Paul and Acts,
and played out in the radical love of enemy embodied by saints like Francis of Assisi,
God’s boundary-transcending love animates our understanding of “community in
diversity.” Though respect for cultural and religious diversity is a contemporary value
embraced by much of society, a community that desires to intentionally live Spirit-filled
“community in diversity” (beyond mere political correctness) must be able to muster the
courage to stand firm in its commitment in the face of divisiveness and discrimination.

Scriptural Foundations
As Christians we look to the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth as the ground and
model of any virtue/value. In his outreach to the outcast, which extended to people of
various backgrounds, Jesus embodies Isaiah’s vision of God’s universal offer of saving
love. His diverse company of intimate followers included friends of different genders,
origins, economic levels, and religions. In his table fellowship especially, which angered
the scribes and teachers of the law, we glimpse the openness at the heart of the
kingdom of God. And his disciples, in accepting the hospitality of both Jewish and
Gentile hosts during their missionary work, demonstrate a courageous affirmation of
brotherhood and universal love over the demands of tradition and the bonds of common
ethnicity and practice. St. Paul’s “analogy of the body,”1 in which joys and suffering are
shared, upholds the value of the diversity of roles, gifts and functions within a Christian
community alive with the Holy Spirit.

Church Tradition
Following Jesus’ example of cultivating a diverse community, the Church has long taught
that “every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on

1 Corinthians 12
the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s design.”

But non-discrimination extends deeper to a call for encounter with those who are different, as exemplified by the famous friendship between St. Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malek al-Kamil. This counter-cultural interfaith mission of Francis reminds us that people of different backgrounds can find common ground in their experiences of God. Reflecting on its own shortcomings, the U.S. Catholic Bishops acknowledge racism as “an evil which endures in our society and in our church,” but that Catholic schools are aware of their unique calling to educate the marginalized and minorities, so that those students might “receive a form of education and formation which constitutes a key to greater freedom and dignity”.

Pope Francis and a “Culture of Dialogue and Encounter”
The Church’s commitment to “community in diversity” continues to be articulated and modeled by Pope Francis. He emphasizes a “culture of encounter, a culture in which all have something good to give and all can receive something good in return.” Such a culture, he asserts, requires a special attitude marked by openness and availability without prejudice, which he calls “social humility.” This is the only way, according to Pope Francis, that understanding can grow between cultures and religions, “mutual esteem without needless preconceptions, respectful of the rights of everyone.” Unless we stand together with the culture of dialogue and encounter, Francis warns, “we all lose, we all lose.”

Community in Diversity at Bishop O’Dowd
Since its founding in 1951, Bishop O’Dowd’s value of diversity has expanded beyond ethnicity and gender to the full measures of humanity called for by our Catholic roots and Pope Francis. Students from different socio-economic, religious, and cultural backgrounds benefit not just from the lived reality of community in diversity, but also from the intentional culture of dialogue and inquiry that permeates our campus. From our most experienced school leaders down to incoming freshmen, opportunities for enriching dialogue and encounter abound, both inside and outside the classroom. Examples include spirited but civil in-class debates about ethics and politics, student-led Dragon Talks discussions about topics like racial justice, school-wide curriculum on gender relations, interactive faculty trainings about equity and inclusion, and dynamic assemblies which highlight and celebrate the heritage of our students. O’Dowd pushes back against the dangers of a single narrative by encouraging and facilitating interaction between and among people of different backgrounds.

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3 In the year 1219 during the Fifth Crusade, Francis of Assisi quietly and unceremoniously broke enemy lines to greet the Muslim people, teach them about Jesus, and avoid further bloodshed, even at the risk of his own life. After arrest and beating, Francis was taken to Sultan Malek al-Kamil, widely known as a benevolent, fair and deeply spiritual leader. After initially trying to convert one another, Francis and the Sultan remained together for the better part of a month praying, sharing and comparing sacred writings, and discussing the mystical life.
4 United States Catholic Bishops, Brothers and Sisters to Us, 1979.
5 Pope Francis, homily, Brazil. 2013.
6 Ibid
7 Ibid
STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

Integrity with self and others built on truth and expressed in loving action guided by an informed conscience.

*How have I stood up for something good?*
A Reflection on  
Bishop O’Dowd High School’s Charism:  
Strength of Character

Abstract
The moral life is an invitation to all persons to fulfill their human destiny in response to the gratuitous love of God.

• Jesus models a sacred connection between the love of God and love of neighbor.
• The Theological and Cardinal Virtues provide a formula for embodying the wisdom and attitude of Christ.
• Our school is committed to the forming and informing conscience, that interior space where we can hear the truth, the good, the voice of God.

Introduction
Finding God in all things calls us to strength of character. As a Catholic educational institution, O’Dowd is committed to educating the whole person. A primary focus of that endeavor is to educate the heart, that is, to help cultivate the development of our students into good, upright and moral persons. The fundamental perspective of the Catholic tradition is that the moral life is an invitation to all persons to fulfill their human destiny in response to the gratuitous love of God. For Catholic Christians, the moral life is life in Jesus Christ, which is characterized by our loving one another as Jesus loved us. Inspired by Scripture and Tradition, Bishop O’Dowd commits to exploring the nature of truth and goodness, and develop moral character, through the formation of personal conscience for judgment and action rooted in love.

Scriptural Foundations
The stories of Jesus listening to the voice of God in his own depths, and his interaction with people of various backgrounds, give us insight into his values and a model to follow. He is found frequently turning inward through reflection and prayer, and also turning outward with justice, mercy, and respect for human dignity, especially towards those on the margins of society. When asked about how to live a life pleasing to God, he offers the two great commandments: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength,” and “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”¹ In short, Jesus models a sacred connection between the internal love of God and external love of neighbor. Acting as a person of strong moral character involves living like Jesus Christ. We find a particular expression of this calling in making decisions grounded in Gospel virtues. Of the many virtues highlighted in Scripture, St. Paul underscores that “faith, hope, love remain... but the greatest of these is love.”²

Church Tradition
The Catholic understanding of virtue, the “habitual and firm disposition to do the good,”³ is grounded in the life and teachings of Jesus and is expounded upon in Tradition by such thinkers as St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas added to theological virtues (faith, hope, and love) what he called the Cardinal virtues, those virtues on which all other virtues hinge: temperance, justice, prudence, and fortitude. These two lists are long-held values in the Judeo-Christian tradition, stretching back to the Wisdom⁴ tradition and forward through modern theologians who

¹ Mark 12:29-31  
² 1 Cor 13:13  
³ CCC 1803  
⁴ “Or if one loves righteousness, whose works are virtues, She teaches moderation and prudence, righteousness and fortitude, and nothing in life is more useful than these” (Wisdom 8:7)
continue to approach major moral questions from a standpoint of virtues. Overall, we find in these virtues a formula for embodying the wisdom and attitude of Christ.

**Pope Francis on Conscience**
Deep in the heart of every person resides a sacred voice for decision making. Building a strong character requires getting in touch with that voice. The Christian tradition calls this voice conscience, and defines it as “the most secret core and sanctuary of a person,” where “the person is alone with God, whose voice echoes in the depths of the person.”

Pope Francis’ teachings brings to the fore again the Catholic doctrine of the inviolability and authority of personal conscience:

> So we also [like Jesus] must learn to listen more to our conscience. Be careful, however: this does not mean we ought to follow our ego, do whatever interests us, whatever suits us, whatever pleases us. That is not conscience. Conscience is the interior space in which we can listen to and hear the truth, the good, the voice of God. It is the inner place of our relationship with him, who speaks to our heart and helps us to discern, to understand the path we ought to take, and once the decision is made, to move forward, to remain faithful.

He calls Catholic institutions, like Bishop O’Dowd, to help the students form (i.e through spiritual reflection and discernment) and inform (i.e. through research and study in classes like *Christian Morality*) their consciences. As teachers, we are also called to model and point out examples of moral heroism, to give our students signs of hope and examples of qualities to emulate.

**Strength of Character at Bishop O’Dowd**
What does strength of character look like at Bishop O’Dowd? The student with strong character is someone who

- **chooses his actions consciously and freely, and** grounded in Gospel values, like justice, mercy, and respect for human dignity.
- **strives toward integrity,** having one’s beliefs and words match one’s actions, especially in when nobody is watching.
- **demonstrates care for others and the natural world.**
- **uses her voice wisely to tell the truth** (i.e. on academic assignments, in competitive events, and in conversations), **speaks up for herself** (i.e. when her needs are not being met) and **for others,** (especially those who experience oppression or marginalization)
- **demonstrates cultural competency,** which is formed by rigorous academic study, regular, honest interactions with people different from herself, and intentional co-curricular efforts.
- **does not tolerate bullying, racist or sexist remarks, or any other actions that diminish the dignity of other people.**

This O’Dowd student demonstrates strength of character by striving to become like Jesus, a person of wisdom, integrity, and—most importantly—love. By educating the whole person at Bishop O’Dowd, we aren’t simply teaching the good to be pursued, but we are also facilitating students’ practice of the good.

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5. *Gaudium et Spes*, 16
ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Purposeful pursuit of knowledge in a process of self development and in service to the common good.

What did I become curious about?
How will I use what I learn to make the world a better place?
A Reflection on
Bishop O’Dowd High School’s Charism:

Academic Excellence

Abstract
In a vision of "academic excellence" within the Catholic tradition, wisdom is placed at the service of the common good, rather than as mere personal intellectual achievement or acquisition.

- Wisdom is a treasured gift of God to help with practical human problem-solving.
- In the spirit of Jesus the teacher, the Church sees education as a human right and an expression of the Catholic faith, especially for the poor.
- The concept of the magis points us to that end which truly serves the common good in the deepest way conceivable.

Introduction
Finding God in all things calls us to academic excellence. From the Prophet Isaiah through contemporary Church teachings, the traditional “seven gifts of the Holy Spirit” are understood to have been bestowed upon believers at Baptism and strengthened at Confirmation. Four of the seven -- wisdom, understanding, counsel, and knowledge -- clearly relate to the intellect and, thus, provide depth and insight to what “academic excellence” might mean from a scripturally enlightened Catholic perspective. Scripture and Tradition lead us toward a vision of “academic excellence” as wisdom at the service of the common good, rather than as mere personal intellectual achievement or acquisition.

Scriptural Foundations
Hebrew Scriptures emphasize that wisdom is a treasured gift of God to be put at the service of practical human problem-solving. Solomon, for example, when blessed by God with “whatever you may ask for,” chooses wisdom that he may govern God’s people and puts that wisdom into action.¹ Furthermore, the seven books of the Wisdom (Sophia) tradition reveal wisdom as an attribute humans can acquire, an actual divine entity (or part of God’s being), and as a path or way of life (which is said to contrast clearly with the “foolish” path). No lofty thing, this wisdom is even available to children and the simple²; yet there is no end to the search for true wisdom³. Wisdom is one of the faces of God, shining on seekers for their enlightened living in greater fidelity to God. Biblical scholars draw attention to striking parallels between the attributes of Sophia and the qualities of Jesus of Nazareth, in that Jesus undermined the world of conventional wisdom and spoke of an alternative wisdom, depicted as the “narrow gate.” Jesus, whose most common title was rabbi (teacher), models for his disciples wisdom at the service of the common good.

Church Tradition
The quest to continue Jesus’ teaching mission has attracted many followers and has evolved for centuries through the efforts of monastics, missionaries, saints, and Catholic religious orders. Monasteries, even as places of silence and prayer, became centers of great scholarship

¹ Solomon provides us with an example of the application of wisdom in his famous judgment regarding two widowed mothers both claiming a single child as their own. After hearing each mother’s case, Solomon grabs a sword and promises to split the child evenly between them, at which the real mother gives up her claim and begs Solomon to give the child to the other woman.
² Prov 8:24, 30
³ Sir. 24:28-29
and learning. In the 1200s, schools attached to cathedrals were organized into subject area groups or universities, organized like the craft guild system of the time. St. Thomas Aquinas celebrated reason as “a divine gift,” and the Scholastic tradition of valuing reason and human intellect has continued to inform the Catholic imagination and academic tradition to the present day. The second Vatican council affirmed, as Catholic Social Teaching has repeatedly for over 100 years, that all persons have an inherent right to an education, and further, an educational experience full of wonder and exploration, discovery and challenge. In the context of American Catholic education, the U.S. bishops remind us of the four-fold purpose of Catholic schools (didache, gospel-centered teaching; koinonia, communal life and students’ lived experience of community; leiturgia, praising God; and diaconia, service to the greater society), and that education is an imperative ministry to the poor.  

**Pope Francis and the Magis**

One specific and essential theme of Catholic academic excellence has emerged out of Ignatian spirituality. The concept of the *magis*, which literally means “more” and has implications of “excellence” or “greater good,” is intimately connected with the motto of the Jesuit order: *ad majorem dei gloriam,* “for the greater glory of God.” In educational endeavors, the *magis* would refer to that end which truly serves the common good in the deepest way conceivable. Transcending personal fame, fortune, or achievement, true academic excellence is therefore that which serves and uplifts society. Pope Francis, a Jesuit himself formed by the concept of the *magis*, summarizes the transformative vision of Catholic education: “Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature...education can bring about real changes in lifestyle.”

**Academic Excellence at Bishop O’Dowd**

As the cornerstone of Bishop O’Dowd High School, our rigorous academics help expand students’ minds and prepare them for educational opportunities in service of the common good. We offer a wide range of classes, including advanced academic courses, in subjects that are as engaging as they are challenging. We understand that students learn just as much outside the classroom as inside, and therefore offer many “Beyond the Classroom” opportunities, engaging trips and tours, and a service-learning program which connects students to the margins of society. We are committed to supporting the latest technology tools and platforms for our students, faculty and staff in order to maximize learning opportunities while also supporting productive digital citizenship. Finally, O’Dowd also addresses student academic performance challenges through a layered system of resources and support that is carefully designed and personalized. Ultimately, our “academic excellence” is not sufficiently measured in grades, test scores, or National Merit awards. Rather, as suggested by the U.S. Bishops, a Catholic school should measure itself by how well it helps the community “to see the dignity of human life with the vision of Jesus and involve itself in the search for solutions to the pressing problems of society.” We seek to transform lives so that they might transform society.

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4 In their landmark pastoral letter on racism the U.S. bishops said of Catholic education, “No other form of Christian ministry has been more widely acclaimed or desperately sought by leaders of various racial communities. For a century and a half the Church in the United States has been distinguished by its efforts to educate the poor and disadvantaged, many of whom are not of the Catholic faith” (USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 1979).


KINSHIP WITH CREATION

Practices that care for God’s creation as a sign of our love for God and neighbor.

What have I done to support a sustainable natural world?
A Reflection on
Bishop O’Dowd High School’s Charism:
*Kinship With Creation*

Abstract
Because all living things have come from the same source (God the Creator), we are joined in a splendid universal communion with all creation and together, we are members of an interconnected, interdependent earth community.

- The world, created by God, continually reveals God’s grace.
- Our care for and mutual relationship with all creation is a sign of our love for God, neighbor, and our global community.
- Ecological conversion involves awareness of the interconnectedness of the earth’s suffering and our suffering and our call to respond.

Introduction
Finding God in all things calls us to *kinship with creation*. Because all living things have come from the same source (God the Creator), we are joined in a splendid universal communion with all creation and together, we are members of an interconnected, interdependent earth community. Pope Francis calls for Catholic communities, including schools, to be leaders in ecological education that converts minds and hearts, facilitates “the leap towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning,” and helps our students “to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care.”¹ Such kinship demands that we invite our students to hear and respond to both the “cry of the earth” and the “cry of the poor.” A look back on the roots of the idea of kinship with creation in Scripture and Tradition helps ground us in that aspect of our charism at a time when dialogue between religion and science is critical to the future of humanity and the earth.

Scriptural Foundations²
From the creation stories in the book of Genesis through the nature-based parables of Jesus, references to the environment (and humanity’s relationship with it) run throughout the Bible. We read, for example, that God created as good³, loves deeply⁴, and has an ongoing relationship with all⁵ God’s creation. In turn, creation has a relationship with and praises God⁶. As part of that beloved creation, humanity has a unique relationship with the earth which is inherently connected to a relationship with God⁷. As a result, human

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¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, paragraph 210
² Scripture has also been misinterpreted and manipulated to justify and perpetuate environmental degradation. Specifically, a focus on the notion of God’s call for humans to “fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28) has been cited as one source of the mindset that justifies the use and abuse of the earth for human greed and gain.
³ Genesis 1:1-2:3, Job 38:41, Job 12:7-10, Psalm 104
⁴ Genesis 9:8-17, Psalm 136, John 3:16
⁵ Numbers 22:22-39
⁶ 1 Chronicles 16:32-33; Psalms 19, 65, 66, 96, 98, 150; Isaiah 55: 12-13; 1 Corinthians 10:26
⁷ Genesis 4: 10-11; 1 Kings 4:29-34; Ecclesiastes 3:18-22; Romans 1:20
(dis)obedience to God’s commandments has consequences for creation\(^8\). In the New Testament, Jesus has a deep relationship with creation\(^9\), and the locus of his own spiritual life is often in wild places like deserts and mountains\(^10\). The earth for Him is an opportunity, a place of revelation, to facilitate an experience of God. The Creator has been imprinted on creation and is accessible to us as well, when we take time to be in kinship with and stewards of it\(^11\). Humans are also called to hear creation’s “groaning in labor pains” and share in the hope that creation itself would “share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.”\(^12\)

**Church Tradition**

Despite the importance of the earth in Scripture and the spiritual writings of notable Church figures\(^13\), the institutional Church said little or nothing about environmental stewardship until the Second Vatican Council\(^14\), which asserted that Christians must “learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation\(^15\)” and recognize that “together with all creation, we are the Breath of God. Perhaps influenced by scientific research or the social impacts of the environmental crisis, a series of Catholic Social Teaching documents\(^16\) and the most recent three popes have focused on environmental stewardship since Vatican II. Pope John Paul II urged stewardship and fair distribution of the land and its good\(^17\), and emphasized that “responsibilities...toward nature and the Creator are an essential part of our faith.”\(^18\) Pope Benedict XVI, the first pontiff to earn the distinction of a “green pope,” warned in his first homily that “the earth’s treasures have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction,” that a focus should shift to the “needs of sustainable development,” and that polluting the environment was a grave sin. The theme of his World Peace Day homily in 2010 was entitled *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation.*

**Pope Francis and *Laudato Si***

Pope Francis picked up where his predecessors left off, taking the name of the patron saint of the environment\(^19\) and listing the following Church priorities in his opening homily: respecting “each of God’s creatures and respecting the environment in which we live”; becoming “protectors of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment”; and refusing to allow “omens of destruction and death to accompany the advance of this world!” After radically simplifying the traditional papal lifestyle, Pope Francis authored the ground-breaking *Laudato Si*, the first papal encyclical to be focused on the environment and the importance of caring for our “common home.” In this letter to the Church, he

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\(^8\) Deuteronomy 11:13-17; Deuteronomy 28:4,18; Isaiah 24: 1-3; Isaiah 44: 1-5; Hosea 4:1-3

\(^9\) Mark 16:15; John 12:47; Romans 8:18-23; Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:19-20


\(^12\) Romans 8: 8-13

\(^13\) Since the time of Jesus, a number of notable saints and eco-prophets have emerged in the Christian Tradition. Examples include St. Hildegard of Bingen, several Irish saints (such as St. Brendan, St. Columban, St. Kevin), St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Kateri Tekakwitha.

\(^14\) Though the introduction of earth-conscious language was promising, an anthropocentric worldview persisted in teachings which suggested that humankind “can and should increasingly consolidate its control over creation” because, after all, “all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown” (*Gaudium et Spes (Church in the Modern World)*, paragraphs 9,12).

\(^15\) *Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, paragraph 36

\(^16\) See an extensive list of CST documents related to stewardship at https://www.cctwincities.org/education-advocacy/catholic-social-teaching/notable-quotations/stewardship-of-creation/.
reminds us that nature is a source of divine revelation, because “each creature reflects something of God and has a message to convey to us,” and God incarnate “is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with his affection and penetrating it with his light.”

And with such revelation comes responsibility: the ultimate aim of “kinship with creation” is not for students simply to amass scientific information or satisfy spiritual curiosity, but rather, to discover God in the created world and, in the words of Pope Francis, “to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.” Perhaps most importantly, after pointing out that the environmental crises most directly affect those on the margins, Pope Francis develops an integral ecology which calls us to respond to both the “cry of the earth” and the “cry of the poor,” and to understand our “poverty of excess” is deeply connected to the poverty of the poor.

**Kinship With Creation at Bishop O’Dowd**

At O’Dowd, kinship with creation manifests as a school-wide effort for sustainability across our campus, curriculum, community, and culture. We aim to equip students, faculty, staff, and the greater community with the tools and experiences to create an environmentally sustainable, socially just, and economically viable world. As an institution, we continually work to reduce our resource consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, and to purchase food, apparel, and other goods as sustainably as possible. Campus infrastructure includes the award-winning Center for Environmental Studies which, equipped with solar panels and a rainwater catchment system, provides an educational model for sustainable design. From a student perspective, kinship with creation may be epitomized by our on-campus “Living Lab,” a four-acre native plant community and sustainable garden. As a platform for experiential, multi-disciplinary learning, the Lab not only engages students with topics such as ecology and food systems, it also provides a peaceful setting for contemplative practice, meditation, and written observation. This experiential space, along with the integration of sustainability throughout the O’Dowd’s curriculum and and infrastructure, creates a school culture where all students are invited to be informed, passionate lovers of all creation who embody and preserve our sacred covenant with our earth community.

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17 1979 trip to Americas
18 1990 World Day of Peace homily: *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*
19 St. Francis of Assisi left a rich legacy of “kinship with creation” through writings like *The Canticle of Creation*, in which he addresses aspects of the natural world as his brothers and sisters.
20 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, paragraph 210
21 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, paragraph 217
SOCIAL JUSTICE

Responsible to stand in solidarity with the marginalized and to work for a more equitable society.

*Whom have I stood with, served, and empowered?*
A Reflection on
Bishop O’Dowd High School’s Charism:

Social Justice

Abstract
Society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their location.

• Humans are made in the image and likeness of God in relationship, and have inherent dignity.
• Scripture calls for a preferential option for the most poor and vulnerable members of society.
• Catholic Tradition calls for a faith that does justice through engagement with economic, social, and political issues.

Introduction
Finding God in all things calls us to social justice. Our school is called to work for social justice because this institution is a part of the wider Catholic Church, and therefore shares this essential social mission. Working for greater social justice is one of the “constitutive elements” of the Church which at its core is concerned with the dignity of the human person within society. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation". Bishop O’Dowd responds to this call if it sustains and supports vital relationship at the service of human dignity, and actively resists obstacles to human flourishing.

Scriptural Foundations
The Catholic understanding of social justice is grounded in an understanding that humans are made in the image and likeness of God in relationship. Not only does every person have inherent dignity as a child of God, but s/he also reflects the Trinitarian nature of God – God in community – as our nature is to be in relationship with each other as with God. The Kingdom of God could be described as the fullness of humanity, in communion with God and each other, and is therefore served by the social mission of the Church. The story of Cain and Abel, for example, calls us to be our “brother’s keeper”. The laws of Moses, starting with the Ten Commandments, codify specific moral behaviors which, after our relationship with God, are primarily concerned with how humans treat each other, which

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1 Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1928.
2 Genesis 1:26-27
3 Genesis 4:9
is the essence of social justice. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, and most specifically in the prophetic books, there is clearly a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable: if those with the least resources to care for and protect themselves are in fact cared for and protected, then it can be assumed that the society operating justly. It follows that a just society must concern itself with those systems that most affect the poor and vulnerable. Hebrew Scriptures include numerous exhortations to not oppress the widow, the orphan or the alien - in Ancient Hebrew, referred to as the Anawim - those most vulnerable due to the very structure of their society. There are deeper spiritual implications to this understanding that “the poor” enjoy God’s special love, not based on their personal merits but rather as a part of the Divine intellect. This is most clearly modeled in Jesus’ ministry to the poor, culminating in his final sermons in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus states “when you did this to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.” To be in communion with “the poor,” therefore, is to be in communion with God.

Church Tradition
Catholic Social Teaching (CST) refers to the modern accumulation of papal and episcopal writings and other teachings on various economic, political and social issues. These teachings from popes and bishops respond to the “signs of the times” within our understanding of God and our world from the tradition of the Church and scripture. Though the writings come from the Magisterium, or teaching authority of the Church, there is no definitive list of documents, as CST is essentially about the application of Catholic faith experience to the human experience in the modern world. Major themes do run through these writings, however, and have been compiled into lists, typically as either seven or ten principles. Though not definitive, the following seven principles (or themes) highlighted by the U.S. Catholic Bishops, lie at the heart of Catholic Social tradition:

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, and Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God's Creation

All of these themes are grounded in the first principle, the essential dignity of the human person as a child of God, and flow from this as an understanding of what people need to live with dignity in the world.

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4 Exodus 20:1-17
6 Matthew 25:31-46
7 Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions, Reflections of the U.S. Catholic Bishops
Pope Francis on Social Justice

The papacy of Pope Francis has been marked by an explicit focus on social justice. Both in word and deed, he has inspired Catholics to live out a life of charity and challenge those social structures which perpetuate injustice in today’s world:

Charity that leaves the poor person as he is, is not sufficient. True mercy, the mercy God gives to us and teaches us, demands justice, it demands that the poor find the way to be poor no longer. It asks — and it asks us... to ensure that no one ever again stand in need of a soup-kitchen, of makeshift lodgings, of a service of legal assistance in order to have his legitimate right recognized to live and to work, to be fully a person.⁸

Charity, as a response to another person’s immediate need, helps, at least for the moment. Social justice, however, responds to the underlying structures and systems causing injustice.

Social Justice at Bishop O’Dowd

As an educational apostolate of the Catholic Church, our school must not only teach our students about social justice, but it must lead them in working for greater justice in the world. Through Bishop O’Dowd’s service-learning program, for example, students learn the difference between social justice and charity, along with the reality of social privilege, through hands-on experiences of service. The “Anawim Project,” the core experience of our service-learning program, connects students to our modern-day anawim: those people on the margins of society. Students explore social justice issues within a 60-hour service-learning project done in junior or senior year and in the companion Peace and Justice Religious Studies course. In this context, work for social justice, when connected personally with poor in our society, moves beyond good works and into spiritual formation, a formation guided by the Holy Spirit in the heart of each person who encounters God in the poor.

⁸ Pope Francis, homily, 9/10/13
JOY

Passionate appreciation of the infinite love of God, of self, of others, and of the gift of life.

*What have I grown to appreciate?*
A Reflection on  
Bishop O’Dowd High School’s Charism:  

Joy

Abstract

Joy results from our awareness that we are infinitely loved by God.
- Joy is experienced in both the hope for the future, and the grace of the present moment.
- Personal joy naturally overflows into communal celebration.
- Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit which adapts and changes, refreshes and restores.

Introduction

Finding God in all things calls us to joy. In the Catholic tradition joy results from our awareness that we are infinitely loved by God. It is experienced deep in the heart of the individual and reaches its fullness in community when shared, and in this way is returned to God. It is experienced in both the hope for the future, and the grace of the present moment. In Catholicism this belief is informed by scripture, reason, tradition, and experience.

Scriptural Foundations

The prophets of the Old Testament ring forth the theme of joy in anticipation of the promise of God’s coming among us. In the New Testament, this anticipation reaches its fulfillment in the joy experienced in the presence of Jesus. The stories of the conception and birth of Jesus, for example, reveal that joy is responsive and expansive: joy emerges in the midst of the fear and doubt of his parents as they respond in a faithful embrace to the miracle of Jesus’ conception and birth, and expands from the humble stable to all of God’s creation as Angels bring “good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”1 Personal joy naturally overflows into communal celebration in three parables about losing and finding: the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin and the parable of the prodigal son.2 During the last supper, Jesus emphasizes the connection between joy and love at the heart of his message and mission: “As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love... I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you” (Jn. 15: 9-12). In this respect we note that the fullness of joy shared in community comes by virtue of our loving others as a response to God’s infinite love for us.

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1 Lk. 2:10
2 Lk. 15:5-6, 15:9, 15:32
Church Tradition
Two examples of teachings on joy from Church Tradition come from St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. For St. Augustine joy is the result of directing our desires toward their proper end in God. In his *Confessions*, Augustine speaks to our experience of restlessness that is ultimately a singular longing for God. “You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.”3 For St. Thomas Aquinas, when we use reason to order ourselves according to God, we find true joy. But reason is not without help. The work of the rational animal seeking joy is accomplished through grace in the work of the Holy Spirit. For St. Thomas, joy is a *fruit* of the Holy Spirit, both is the sense that it is the final product of a *tree* expressing the perfection of the order and something that is *harvested* for shared nourishment and enjoyment. The Holy Spirit “moves the human mind to that which is in accord with reason, or rather to that which surpasses reason.”4

Pope Francis and the Joy of the Gospel
Recent reflections by Pope Francis offer a fresh perspective on the virtue of joy. While acknowledging life’s difficult moments, Pope Francis challenges us when our “lives seem like Lent without Easter,” by affirming that “joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.”5 The wellspring of joy, according to Francis, never runs dry and is always available. It refreshes and restores us to “lift up our heads and start anew” because it is born of a God whose “tenderness never disappoints.”6 This resiliency of joy is a source of strength for both individuals and communities.

Joy at Bishop O’Dowd
Visitors to Bishop O’Dowd often notice a positive energy that is compelling and contagious. From the campus’ central quad where student gather throughout the day, to the most distant corners of the Living Lab and sports fields, a spirit of joy is tangible. Teachers continue to facilitate moments of joy by cultivating curiosity and discovery in the classroom, teaching mindful awareness and other contemplative practices proven to enhance well-being, accompanying students on spiritual retreats, and inviting students into meaningful positive encounters with each other and the natural world. The joy of the individual person spills forth and manifests as participation in community events like artistic performances, athletic competitions, Spirit Week and other all-school festivities. Enhanced by the diversity of gifts present in the O’Dowd community, joy emerges spontaneously in myriad ways, finding fullest expression in our communal celebration of gratitude for those gifts: the Eucharist.

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3 *Confessions*, Book 1, Chapter 1
4 *Summa Theologiae*, Second Part of the Second Part, Question 70, Article 4, Answer
5 *Evangeli Gaudium*, paragraph 6.
6 *Evangeli Gaudium*, paragraph 5.
Bishop O’Dowd High School is a Catholic College-Preparatory community guided by the teachings of Jesus Christ, that educates its diverse student body to build a more just, joyful, and sustainable world.

To fulfill its mission, students at Bishop O’Dowd High School will find God in all things through:

**Community in Diversity**
Recognizing the inherent dignity of all humans, attuned to the real world experience of difference and the shared experience of being human.

*When have I felt different?*  
*When have I felt connected?*  
*What do I want to do about that?*

**Strength of Character**
Integrity with self and others built on truth and expressed in loving action guided by an informed conscience.

*How have I stood up for something good?*

**Social Justice**
Responsible to stand in solidarity with the marginalized and to work for a more equitable society.

*Whom have I stood with, served, and empowered?*

**Kinship with Creation**
Practices that care for God’s creation as a sign of our love for God and neighbor.

*What have I done to support a sustainable natural world?*

**Academic Excellence**
Purposeful pursuit of knowledge in a process of self development and in service to the common good.

*What did I become curious about?*  
*How will I use what I learn to make the world a better place?*

**Joy**
Passionate appreciation of the infinite love of God, of self, of others, and of the gift of life.

*What have I grown to appreciate?*
ENACTMENT OF OUR CHARISM

Reflect upon ways our Charism comes to life and demonstrates how we at O’Dowd “do school.”

- *How can I live out our Charism with intention? And enact our Charism in the classroom?*

- *How would I use this information for my programs?*

- *What does a Charism-aligned classroom look like?*

- *What are Charism-driven ways of partnering with O’Dowd students and their families in our distinctive educational ministry?*

- *How will I illuminate these Charism values and unlock the goodness and potential in each of my students as they become the leaders of tomorrow to make our world a better place.*

- *How does O’Dowd’s Charism impact our students and families experience different from other catholic and private independent schools?*