

The importance of a Catholic high school ring: Sharing memories and traditions with the John Carroll Class of 2016



The John Carroll Ring (Photo: JC Patriot)

Congratulations to the John Carroll Class of 2015!!

At 7 p.m. tonight, they will gather with classmates and loved ones for one of the best traditions of their high school experience in Bel Air: the reception of their John Carroll ring.

This ring ceremony —and all the festivities that accompany it— is part of a time-honored tradition and legacy that has been passed down to every class since the very first class received their rings to identify them as members of the John Carroll Class of 1968.

The school celebrated their fiftieth anniversary year last year, and after fifty years, there are plenty of traditions to celebrate and to remember.

It's a rite of passage at the Catholic high school in Harford County. And the excitement spans three days.... The ring ceremony on Thursday evening, the Mass and breakfast on Friday morning, and the Ring Dance on Saturday evening.

Honoring the Sisters of St. Joseph:

The first faculty members of the school in 1964 were four Sisters of St. Joseph of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia. Because of their community's legacy to our school for 45 years, Saint Joseph has always been a special patron saint for John Carroll. The timing of the Junior Ring ceremony and dance has always been placed close to the March 19 Solemnity of St. Joseph's Day to honor the Sisters for their selfless service to our students over their years of ministry.

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Notice the embossed design representing the school on the onyx:

Their John Carroll rings were part of the wedding photo shoot for Tony Herman and his wife Stephanie Ward Herman, both members of the Class of 2007

(Photo: Photography by Brea)

Part of the tradition includes how to wear the ring as a student and later as

a graduate:

When I was Campus Minister, after the juniors had each received their ring boxes during their ceremony, I had invited them to place the ring on their fingers with the open end of the embossed design facing toward them. This signified that the student still had more a year left to continue to learn the traditions and heritage of the school community and to be ready to represent that legacy as graduates at the end of the following year.

In the same manner, at graduation, I would prompt the new alumni, after receiving their diplomas, to take off their JC ring and place it back on their fingers with the embossed opening facing outward. This commissioned the new graduating class to go forward and share with all those they encounter along their life-journey the lessons they learned from their John Carroll experience. Lessons such as: Go, make a difference; let your light shine; to be compelling, considerate, and uncompromising, characteristics which were attributed to our patron, Archbishop John Carroll; and to always remember, both in good times and in bad, that God is good... All the time!!

Reflections from an alumnus-faculty member:

Michael Gaudreau, who graduated with the Class of 1970, has been teaching Art at John Carroll for forty years. He has also been the speaker at the annual Ring Ceremony, sharing his reflections on the meaning of the ring to the thousands of JC alumni.

Michael recalls faculty member Ed Miller recruiting him, as a new alumni-teacher, to say a few words to the juniors on what his JC ring meant to him. Subsequent classes kept inviting him back and now the Gaudreau stories are part of the legacy of receiving the school ring:

"I joke about being a tradition. When I started telling the story, the school was too new to have traditions. As I tell the kids (and their parents), 'Now we have a history, and within history is story, and this is ours.' I enjoy it when the Juniors begin to realize they are part of something bigger than a piece of flashy jewelry.

"I wear my ring all the time. It is a timeless, modern, and well-designed piece of jewelry. I always ask the audience to raise their hands if they still wear the ring and many do. This makes an impression on the kids."

Michael's shares lots of great stories, including those about the 'high-recognizability' of the gold and onyx ring. He loves relating how older alumni see younger graduates wearing their ring and make the connection, about grads recognizing the ring on other grads all over our nation and throughout the world, in places such as Italy, Ireland, Russia, and Thailand.

Among his favorite stories are the 'lost ring' stories, including the girl who lost her ring on the beach in Ocean City in 1985. It was found fifteen years later by a

beachcomber with a metal detector. He returned the ring to the school office and the owner was identified since our juniors get their names or initials with graduation year engraved inside.

Michael shares that he has learned more about the origin of the John Carroll ring over the years.

Some fun facts include:

- The first design of the ring was drawn on a paper napkin by the school's first Art teacher Frank Kelly while having dinner with the first principal, Rev. Raymond Wanner, at a restaurant in Aberdeen.
- The Class of 1968, the first to receive the ring, didn't much like the onyx and gold design, but changed their mind after they got them and saw the unique and classic style.
- The shape of the imprint on the onyx was based on the shape of the school chapel, which was designed by Michael Gaudreau's uncle, Thomas L. Gaudreau of Gaudreau, Inc. Though many have believed the chapel to be shaped like the bishop's mitre—in honor of Archbishop John Carroll—Thomas Gaudreau designed the chapel as though God was cradling something special, the people gathered within, in His hands.
- Principal Father Ray Wanner wanted the ring to be simple and beautiful, something that would not be thrown in a drawer after graduation. His belief was that exposure to beauty, in good design, in landscape, art, and in architecture, made for a richer life, and in doing so brought us closer to God.

Graduates share their stories with the Class of 2016:

"... super-excited for my sister:"

Sierra Ficca of the Class of 2013, a student at Towson University, wears her JC ring every day. She recalls how special her ring ceremony was and is looking forward to this evening's program when her younger sister Nicolette, Class of 2016, receives her ring as well.

"The JC ring is a symbol of the best four years of my life! Everyone says college will be the best, but for me it was high school at John Carroll where I met lifelong friends and have close ties with the faculty and teachers!"

Sierra happily recalled a fond ring memory:

“Courtney Wilson, my best friend from high school, and I were heading to Rock Spring Swim Club, where Courtney worked, to relax and go tanning after school one day. We arrived in our uniforms. We were the only ones there at the pool except for an older lady who stopped us to admire our “cute uniforms” and ask where we went to school. When we told her John Carroll, she quickly held out her hand and flaunted her ring, asking to see ours! She told us that she was part of the first graduating class, meaning she was also part of the first class to receive a ring! She made us laugh when she said that her class used to color the ring with yellow chalk so the engraving would pop out. I love this story because she was so thrilled to see that the ring was still the same, and that the uniforms had gotten much cuter!”