

## Opening Prayer

Prayer of Saint Ignatius Loyola

Dearest Lord,  
 teach me to be generous;  
 teach me to serve You as You deserve;  
 to give and not to count the cost,  
 to fight and not to heed the wounds,  
 to toil and not to seek for rest,  
 to labour and not to ask for reward  
 save that of knowing I am doing Your Will.  
 Amen.

## Main Input

Here are some suggestions for leading a brief talk on Saint John Paul II, which introduces his life and gives context to his teachings as Pope.

**Pope John Paul II was a great leader of the church and someone deeply involved in the history of the twentieth century, but the fact that he is now a Saint means that he remains important for us today as an example of holiness and as someone who continues to pray for us in heaven!**

**Pope Francis describes him as “the great missionary of the church, a man who proclaimed the Gospel everywhere.”**

### Early life

- Saint John Paul II was born in Wadowice, Poland in 1920 and named Karol Wojtyla
- The youngest child of Emilia and Karol Wojtyla. His mother died when he was eight. His elder brother died suddenly when Karol was 12, leaving Karol and his father alone together.
- Karol and his father were very close. They lived in a single-room apartment behind their parish church and would go on pilgrimages together.
- Young Karol was studious and well-liked. He loved playing soccer, skiing, hiking with his father, writing poetry and acting.

### A son of Poland

- Saint John Paul II reflected that as a young person he was “completely absorbed by a passion for literature, especially dramatic literature, and for the theatre.” He seriously considered pursuing a life on the stage.
- The Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, and closed the university in Krakow where young Karol was studying. He began working in a quarry to avoid imprisonment.
- Wadowice was a town where Jews lived alongside Christians. One of Karol’s best childhood friends was Jerzy

Kluger, a Jew. They were separated by World War II but later reunited when Karol became a bishop.

- In defiance of Nazism, which was suppressing expressions of Polish culture, Karol and his friends established an underground theatre which performed Polish plays in secret.

### A young priest

- At the age of 20, Karol’s father died, leaving him without any living members of his family. Saint John Paul II later reflected that “At twenty, I had already lost all the people I loved”.
- Even though priests were being persecuted by the Nazis, Karol entered the underground seminary in 1942, two years after his father’s death. He worked at a factory during the day, and studied theology in secret at night.
- Karol almost lost his life in the war – once he was hit by a German truck, but Nazi officers gave him first aid and sent him to a hospital. This was so unusual that Karol believed it to confirm his vocation to be a priest. Another time he hid in a basement and escaped to the Archbishop’s Palace while Nazis rounded up over 8,000 young men in Krakow.
- After the war ended, Karol was ordained in the private chapel of the Archbishop of Krakow, at the age of 26.
- As a young priest, Father Karol worked in parishes and universities. He frequently led hikes for students, who gave him the nickname “Uncle”.

### Bishop and Pope

- Father Karol became a bishop at 38. He was appointed Archbishop of Krakow in 1964, when Poland was under an atheistic communist government.
- Bishop Wojtyla was elected pope at age 58, in 1978. He was the youngest pope in 132 years, and the first non-Italian pope in more than 500 years. He chose the name John Paul to honour Pope John Paul I who died suddenly after a pontificate of 33 days.
- Saint John Paul II survived an assassination attempt in 1981 when a Turkish gunman shot him at Saint Peter’s Square. Two years later, he met with the gunman in his prison cell and forgave him.
- He helped end communism in eastern Europe, especially supporting and encouraging the Polish people to maintain their faith and continue to struggle for freedom.



## Main Input cont.

• Saint John Paul II died in 2005 after a long illness with Parkinson's disease. His final words were "Let me go to the house of the Father".

### Gifts to the church

- There is so much Saint John Paul II gave to the church during his long papacy! John Paul II wrote more than any other pope did, canonised more saints than any other pope, and travelled more than any other pope.
- One of Saint John Paul II's most lasting gifts to the church is World Youth Day. He invited the youth of the world to meet him at the first World Youth Day in Rome in 1984. Millions of young people have attended World Youth Days since.
- Saint John Paul II's writings include 14 encyclicals, 14 apostolic exhortations, 11 apostolic constitutions and 41 apostolic letters
- His teachings are a lasting legacy – the church will continue to reflect and learn from his writings and homilies for decades to come.

**As we continue our journey on the Pope John Paul II we will be spend some time as a groups exploring some of his writings, messages and themes of his time as Pope.**

## Checking in with Activities

- At this early stage of the Award you will most likely need to give the participants an overview or reminder about the requirements for undertaking their activities and signing off/recording them. *See page 3.*
- Having communicated with Parish Clergy, and any other ministry groups in the parish offer current opportunities for Parish Involvement activities - and any training that may be needed. Include activities that might be coming up in the coming months - Advent & Christmas.
- Give any information from outside charities or organisations who have been in touch regarding opportunities for Social Awareness activities.

**Remind participants to take a regular photograph of their Record Card on their phone as they fill in and get activities signed off. Having this will make it easier if their Record Card gets lost.**

## Closing Prayer

Pope John Paul II Award Participant Prayer

God our Father,  
 Saint John Paul II tells us to trust Christ;  
 To listen attentively to his teachings,  
 To fix our eyes on his face,  
 To persevere in listening to his Word,  
 To allow him to focus our search and our aspirations and all our ideas and the desires of our heart.

Help us God our Father, to do this so that all the actions  
 and decisions of our lives are done with Jesus  
 who is our Saviour and friend for ever and ever.  
 Amen.

Our Lady of Knock pray for us, and for the young people of Ireland.

The Pope John Paul II Award encourages you to go beyond your comfort zone on a journey of self-discovery.

It challenges you to give of your time, your talents, your intellect, and your social skills for the well-being of others and for the Glory of God.



