The creation narrative in Genesis reveals that man, both male and female, is made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). Since God is pure spirit, one might wonder how we can look like God or what it means to be made in the image of God when God is not physically visible. Yet we reflect God in our freedom and ability to love. In the Letter of John, the Apostle states directly that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). This Divine Revelation that God is love is demonstrated so beautifully for us by Jesus Christ’s gift of himself as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). Therefore, Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, is the archetype of God’s plan for love, demonstrated as a gift of selflessness to others.

Unfortunately, this message has become lost in this world, buried beneath the multitude of information people receive from social media, the internet, advertising, and television. Especially for the youth, the culture of love and life that the Church proclaims is drowned out by their participation in Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat, and Twitter. With the ease of access to social media, young people are now terrorized by group bullying whenever they connect to the internet. The youth lack the formative experience of the Church because sadly, many of our youth are coming of age in homes that are divided by strife and lack an understanding of God’s plan for love and our redemption. On many college campuses throughout the United States, pervasive casual sexual experiences are the norm, not the exception. Violence is glorified through movies, video games, and YouTube clips. Recent studies have revealed that millennials are the largest generation who self-identify as not religiously affiliated or non-observant. But we need not lose hope because Jesus came to proclaim the good news of freedom from judgment and shame found in Him.

Last summer, Lindenwood was asked to develop a retreat to help young people to understand and embrace their dignity as sons and daughters of God (2 Corinthians 6:16-18). In answer to the invitation, Lindenwood created a retreat called, “Embrace Your Dignity: A Theology of the Body Retreat.” Using Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition of the Catholic Church and the teachings of Saint John Paul II on love and personalism, Lindenwood’s retreat explains God’s original plan for love, how to recognize and purify counterfeits of love with virtue, and to answer God’s call to love through the Christian vocation. Through these retreats, Lindenwood hopes to counteract the dominant culture that twists the very meaning of what authentic love is and to allow its participants to know and live Jesus’ promise of redemption as experienced in the gift of interior freedom (Theology of the Body 46:4).