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Early 80's at Cardinal Newman

The early 80s. A time marked by the rise of MTV, blockbuster movies, and conservatism. A time untouched by the chaos of technology but not without its own struggles. This period was a time of major growth in the United States but even more so for a pair of small Catholic Schools in Sonoma County. As we celebrate the 60 year anniversary since Cardinal Newman opened its doors to students throughout the community, it's time to travel back into the past to Cardinal Newman during the years 1980 through 1984.

Cardinal Newman was initially an all boys school with its sister school Ursuline no more than a few feet away. Both schools faced large growth in student enrollment during this period as a result of protests in the Santa Rosa city schools. Starting in November 1980 and lasting more than 8 weeks 500 teachers went on strike demanding pay increases (Organized Labor, Vol. 80). The result of such a massive movement was a flood of new students entering private institutions in hope of escaping the chaos and making up the lost school credits. Graham Rutherford, current Government teacher and Alumni director, still recalls teaching summer classes on campus to help public school students entering Newman get caught up on school credits. The graduating classes at Newman from the years of 1980 - 1984 were larger than my current graduating class despite our school now being co-ed. Ursuline enrollment being just as overinflated, they saw an influx of new ideals and needed to adapt to the larger student body.

The separation of genders would not have as large of an impact on the day to day life of the schools as one might anticipate. Students in their Junior and Senior years would attend classes on both campuses. Getting to interact regularly with one another during class and at school events. Dan Stevens, a student at Cardinal Newman who graduated in 1984, claimed, “By senior year, 5 of my 6 classes were at Ursuline so I actually had a friend up there who had a lot of classes at CN, so we shared each other’s lockers.” While Ursuline and Newman had separate administrations, many alumni claim that attending Newman or Ursuline did not feel as if they were at an all girls/boys school. The further you would progress through your schooling the more interaction there was between the boys and girls. This concept was further highlighted by Kathy Badger, a 1983 graduate from Ursuline. “While they were 2 separate schools we did have a lot of classes together and we had lunch together. We had CN cheerleaders, and played together, but PE was separate.” This deep connection between schools would foreshadow the eventual decision to make Cardinal Newman a co-ed school after the bankruptcy of Ursuline in 2011.

While Ursuline had a sturdy identity established from 100 years of high quality education by the early 80s, Newman was still working toward discovering its identity as a Catholic High School. As a result, changes in policy were quite common as the administration decided how they wanted the school to be perceived, especially the changes in dress code. It was a culture shock to many youth who had spent their childhood in private institutions to arrive at Cardinal Newman and see people dressed in whatever they desired. When interviewing Peter Megreenie, he recalled upperclassmen arriving at school in nothing but blankets or sleeping bags. This extremely lax dress code was in stark contrast to not only the current Newman dress code but

even the mandatory wool skirt and white blouse the young women at Ursuline had to wear daily. It would only be a matter of time before Newman realized the widespread abuse of the dress code and began requiring collared shirts and khakis for its students starting in 1982; further solidifying the schools identity as a college preparatory school dedicated to providing a mature environment.

We all know that Cardinal Newman is known for its robust sports program and has become a critical place for the community to gather. While football games are all the rage on campus today, during the early 80s they were not at the forefront of student attendance. In contrast to the phenomenal sports facilities we have today, Newman only had a practice baseball and football field. They always had to travel for their season games with our home fields being at local parks. As a result, despite the dominance of the football teams in prior years due to players such as Jerry Robinson, basketball became the place to meet with your friends on a Friday night. At games, alumni Pete Magrini remembers the gymnasium getting hot during games as stands filled to the brim with cheering students. Stanley Cordero further highlighted the importance of these games by stating, “We had an incredible cheering section that year with lots of fun at home games during basketball season. There was toga night against Montgomery (imagine over 100 students chanting “Toga! Toga!” in unison as they entered the gym.” It was truly a testament to the strength of the Newman/Ursuline community as everyone was there to cheer on their fellow classmates. Magrini, also being a star Baseball Pitcher, mentioned the baseball team's victory in the NBL. He claims he owes his success to coach Pat La Fortune whose lessons not only on the field but in life as general molded him into a young man.

Sports games were not the only events students would rally around. Newman and Ursuline had some phenomenal assemblies. Nearly every alumni I interviewed could recall the visit from Maureen Reagan daughter of president Ronald Reagan. Her grand arrival, surrounded by secret service, left a buzz on campus for weeks. Newman also had visits from many popular bands and songwriters of the time such as Joan Baez and even the military bands. Local bands such as Ocean Breeze also played at rallies and also school dances. Dances would be held in either Newman or Ursulines gymnasium and prom was at the Flamingo Hotel. They were always a blast and something for the students to get excited about.

Clubs and the arts were also an important aspect of life as a Ursuline or Cardinal Newman student. Clubs were not as large as they currently are at the school but were still offered to students such as yearbook and alumni Cathy Badger was part of ski club for all for years. The arts were another gathering point for students. “I remember performing in a couple of musicals, Godspell and Love Stories that gave me a chance to push myself beyond my comfort zone through dramatic expression.”(Stanley Cordero) Plays, musicals, art classes, and choral classes were all an important aspect of students' time at Cardinal Newman and continue to be celebrated today through our arts alive rallies and dance shows.

As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of Cardinal Newman, it's vital to appreciate this rich history and the pivotal role these years played in shaping the school's identity. The development of the dress code, the growth of the sports and performing arts programs, along with the influx of new students provided Newman with the opportunity to discover its identity as a Catholic School and as a school dedicated to preparing its students for college both inside and out of the classroom. The memories students made at both Newman and Ursuline throughout

their education will never be forgotten as they were vital to molding them into young men and women. But if there is a single thing all alumni could agree on, the most substantial impact Cardinal Newman had on their lives was providing them with a tight-knit community that could support them through thick and thin and provide them with friends they would keep for a lifetime.

Works Cited

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