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*The Founding of Cardinal Newman High School*

Not unlike today, the founders of Cardinal Newman High School experienced significant struggles finding faculty and staff. The first whispers of a Catholic high school for young men in Santa Rosa are recorded in correspondence dating back to 1947, however it was not until Valentina Trombetta and Bishop Maher became neighbors seventeen years later that the seeds of this idea finally took root. A Santa Rosa Catholic Social Services worker in the mid-1950's, Trombetta had two daughters and two sons, and strongly questioned why there was not a prep school for Catholic boys. In speaking with friends, most of whom sent their sons to either St. Rose or St Eugene's elementary schools, she found a group that shared the same concern.

In 1962, Bishop Leo Thomas Maher was appointed the first bishop of the Diocese of Santa Rosa, and happened to move in directly next to the Trombetta family! She and her husband hosted meetings in their home with other interested parents, Monsignor Hurley from St Eugene's and the Bishop. The people of Santa Rosa wanted a local alternative for Catholic boys; St. Vincent's High School was in rival Petaluma, about 30 minutes away, and Bellarmine High School was at least two hours to San Jose. Combined with Valentina's enthusiasm about the necessity of this school and the Bishop's directive to grow the Santa Rosa Diocese, momentum was good and Maher set to work.

The original proposed location was situated on orchard property to the east of St. Eugene's Cathedral, however before it was finalized, Bishop Maher was persuaded by the

Ursulines to buy land at our current location on Redwood Highway. Church and private donors were secured, building contracts established and a goal opening date was set; September, 1964. Initial attempts at staffing began with Bishop Maher's request of the Franciscan Province of St. Barbara, and secondly with the Society of the Precious Blood Fathers. As a friend of Bishop Maher, it is reasonable to believe that Valentina Trombetta assisted with finding staffing for the proposed new school. With her characteristic persistence, and her husband Allesandro's connections in the religious order, Valentina was able to put Maher in contact with the Society of the Precious Blood Fathers through her father-in-law.

Bishop Maher's correspondence with the Society of the Precious Blood began with a phone call with Reverend Byrne, in July of 1962. In this conversation, he included that he would be interested in having the Blood Fathers teach at a school in the area, but he had already put in a request of the Franciscans. About two months later, in correspondence dated September 15, 1962 from the Minister Provincial of the Franciscan Province, Bishop Maher was informed that the "[Franciscan Fathers had decided they could not grant his gracious request, because they felt they had sufficient high schools in their Province at the present time and could not assume the burden of staffing another one.]"

Four days later, on September 19th, Maher followed up with written correspondence to Father Byrne, describing what the new school would look like in terms of enrollment and location, and how it would be perfect for the Precious Blood Fathers because of the small number of priests required. He asked Byrne to let him know expediently if he could fulfill this proposal, because if not, other religious orders would have to be contacted. Responding in a letter from October 4th of the same year, Byrne replied that "[it was an offer they had been dreaming of,]" however because there were negotiations with the Franciscan Fathers for the new

high school in Santa Rosa, they had made a vague commitment with another Bishop that needed to be resolved first. Before this letter could arrive, Bishop Maher had to travel to Rome, where he would be until December, and a Chancellor from the Diocese of Santa Rosa responded in kind, stating that the Franciscans had declined and that he was sure the Bishop would be looking forward to a favorable response from the Blood Fathers.

In a letter dated January 22, 1963 to Father Byrne, it appears the Bishop still does not have a response on whether or not the Precious Blood Fathers can staff the school, and he states that he is hopeful of them being able to not only provide for the new high school, but also the chaplaincy at Sonoma State. With this uncertainty in mind, Maher writes to a provincial Father in Villanova, Pennsylvania on February 8th, explaining the staffing needs not only of the Diocese of Santa Rosa, but also St. Bernard's in Eureka and St. Vincent's in Petaluma and finally, mentioning the new boys school he is contemplating opening in Santa Rosa. He asks if they would consider staffing it.

Byrne replied to Maher in February bearing bad news; they were unable to give definite interest in the new Santa Rosa school until they received final word from the other Bishop he mentioned last October, and he has heard nothing about that or from the council. He mentions having a parish opening with no way to fill it and says "all of us are plagued with personnel problems." Maher wants the school opened in 1964, so at this point he needs a response on whether that will be possible. On the same day, he also received a response from the Provincial Monastery in Villanova, saying that it would be impossible for them to staff the school at the current time.

By March of 1963, Bishop Maher pushed the proposed agreement between the Diocese of Santa Rosa and the Society of the Precious Blood, and Father Byrne agreed to present the

contract and observations at the next provincial council meeting on April 16, 1963. When he finally gets a reply in May of that year, the news is most likely not what Bishop Maher was hoping for. While the Society of Precious Blood wants to work in the Diocese of Santa Rosa, they are unable to agree with Maher on some specific matters of staffing. According to their examples, a school of 400, the size that Maher proposed, requires 24 members on staff, and the blood fathers are only able to spare twelve. Simultaneously however, Fr. Byrne states that it would not be feasible to accept the responsibility on the condition that other religious orders would aid in the staffing because it has historically proven difficult. Although the financial burden would be more, this means they would need lay persons additionally, and certainly within the school reaching senior year. At the end of this correspondence, Byrne proposes a meeting between himself and Bishop Maher in the second week of June, and in a return letter, Maher agrees.

Finally, they met in Santa Rosa on July 8, 1963 and settled the matter practically, but desired to have the agreement refined so as to ensure understanding in the event Bishop Maher was promoted to another See. In letters to Bishop Maher on August 7th and 14th, 1963, Father Byrne includes a rough draft of their refined agreement and confirms that for all planning purposes, they are finished negotiating. He explains how pleased the Provincial Council of the Society of the Precious Blood is that they came to a good agreement, and gives credentials for Father Richard Grever, who will be the principal of the new school. Fr. Grever had his Principal's License and two years of teaching experience at Catholic Central High School in Indiana, and was expected to be released for this work in June, 1964. It is interesting to note that, at this time, the name for the new school had not been finalized but Bishop Maher was working for permission to name the school Paul VI.

There are few correspondence regarding the name of the new boys high school to be in Santa Rosa. Within the archives exists a list of suggested names on St. Rose Church letterhead including; Aquinas, Notre Dame, Don Bosco, Seton Hill and, simply, Santa Rosa Catholic Boys High School. It has been said that Monsignor Walter Tappe was first to suggest “Cardinal Newman High School,” but I was unable to find corroboration for this in the Chancery. There is, however, a remarkable paper titled “The Cause of Cardinal Newman,” a document written by H. Francis Davis, the Vice-Postulator of the Cause of John Henry Newman. In the document Fr. Davis argues for the Bishop to express his conviction that Newman should be publicly acclaimed by the Church as beatified by naming his new Catholic boys high school “Cardinal Newman.” In regards to Cardinal Newman’s cause for beatification, he continued,

“Many of us feel that the world today needs Newman’s deep and unshakable faith and abiding sense of God’s presence and providence. We need his conviction of God’s majesty, of the value and eternal destiny of each human soul, of the reality of the invisible world, and the awfulness of sin.

Perhaps no less important was his lifelong struggle to free people from soul-destroying doctrinal liberalism, and open their minds and heart to God’s word. He was also the great defender of the lay apostolate and of their important share in the general priesthood of the People of God. More than anyone in his time he recognised the place of the Holy Spirit in guiding the Pope and the Bishops, and indeed watching over the whole Church.”

Cardinal John Henry Newman’s “ deep hold upon the supernatural character of Christianity together with his sensitive understanding of the doubts and difficulties of the human heart and mind” make him an exemplary model for the development of young men. The attributes associated with his name made him the perfect choice for a new Catholic boys high school, and Bishop Maher made it so. We are Cardinal Newman High School.

In his letter to Father Byrne on August 23, 1963, the Bishop expressed his happiness that Father Grever was appointed as the first Principal of the new boys high school, which he then

said will be called Cardinal Newman High School For Boys. With that letter, he enclosed the final revised version of the agreement, and the staffing of the school was finally settled, with the official names of the staff sent to Bishop Maher on February 14th, 1964.

Given the priests would be residing on campus grounds, the primary structure to be completed was the faculty house, and inspection by Fr. Bryne was all praise. He remarked to the Bishop in correspondence dated June 26, 1964 that it was a “dream house,” and far exceeded what was hoped for by the plans. Unfortunately, neither the faculty house nor the school buildings were complete by the time the school was opened for classes. Arrangements were made for fathers to stay at St. Rose’s Parish rectory and St. Eugene’s Cathedral, and the missionaries remained at Woodside until the residence was completed shortly after opening, but for the freshman year, students were in the recently completed quad classrooms of Ursuline school.

The founding of Cardinal Newman High School was the result of unwavering dedication from key individuals like Valentina Trombetta and Bishop Leo Maher, and a supportive community that believed in the necessity of a Catholic boys’ high school in Santa Rosa. The vision for this school overcame many challenges, primarily in the area of faculty staffing, and resulted in the establishment of a school that not only met the educational needs of the local Catholic community but also embodied the values and teachings of its namesake, Cardinal John Henry Newman. The founding of Cardinal Newman High School stands as a testament to the power of faith, determination, and community action. This institution, borne from a shared dream and the tireless efforts of its founders, has since become a cornerstone of Catholic education in Sonoma County, shaping young men and women into leaders of faith and character for generations to come.