

Why the "John and Rita Marschall" Newman Presentation?

In 1968 a young Catholic priest from Chicago was assigned to Our Lady of Wisdom Parish and Newman Center. Father John Marschall was one of two Viatorian priests assigned to replace the previous pastor and Newman advisor. He was to focus on UNR's Catholic-Christian young adult ministry.

It was then only a few years into the heady glories of the Second Vatican Council. In the words of our beloved (and now-officially-Sainted) Pope John the XXIII: "Let us throw open all the doors and all the sashes!" Let all the *choking "dust"* be quickly aired out *in the light of science*, and *updated for the modern mind!* Most young Catholics were both enthused and impatient of these hope-filled winds of change then blowing through the hallowed caverns of their ancient church.

Father John was deeply committed to such re-visioning. His ideals were clearly the high-minded and well-informed results of *his own* intellectual embrace of Vatican II. Both his heart and mind were already fully and powerfully engaged! *And ecumenism was in the air!*

John quickly found a like-minded ministerial partner: the Reverend Dr. John Dodson of the Methodist church. Together, they created an *ecumenical* plan for Reno. They would combine the reality of both Marschall's Newman Center and Dodson's Campus Christian Association into one "Center for Religion and Life!" They would re-present an integrated Christian outreach to students *and all of Reno* via an *actually-realized, shared Christian unity, as deeply symbolic of our actual Christian origins*. Somehow, miraculously, the then very pastoral Catholic Bishop Green and the involved Protestant community actually approved of their bold plans. And so the *new UNR Center for Religion and Life* was born and very soon was active, working as *a single reality* out of the old Wisdom/Newman parish hall!

One of "the two John's" most memorable creations was a regular lecture series called the "Thursday Night Forum." It was directed toward *re-thinking Christianity for the modern mind*. It was promoted to the whole community as symbolic of their new ecumenical "Center." These talks indelibly transformed the worldviews of many Reno believers! (They certainly blew open the Christian mindset of this writer!)

Unfortunately, after only three years, the reality of our new *Center for Religion and Life* was abruptly ended. A discouraged Father Marschall then left the ministry and became a UNR professor of history. Ironically, he soon fell in love with Rita Cody, whom he had originally met during the original lectures. (The lecture experience certainly transformed *their* lives!) Unfortunately, John has just recently passed, leaving Rita behind to continue to represent their profound legacy. Tonight, we will be inspired by the first of what will be many such presentations.

Larry Marshall
Class of 1969