

March 2005

Dear Parents,

The time has come!

For many years the idea and practice of a “Senior Prom” has gripped the imagination and expectation of every high school Senior. Originally, a college concept and ritual, it gradually filtered down to secondary schools, where in addition to a high school Senior Prom, there grew up a parallel Junior Prom. And from place to place you will even see an “Eighth Grade Prom.” One good turn deserves another!

But all is not fine in Prom Land. What started out as a formal Senior dance has become a recreational institution that has taken a life of its own. It has expanded in time and money, but more importantly, it has taken on a sophistication that is far from what is expected in a Christian educational institution.

This change has been going on for a number of years. It has accelerated significantly over the past ten years, to the point where it is no longer even marginally compatible with Kellenberg Memorial’s philosophy of Christian education. In fact, we consider the current practice of the Senior Prom as practiced to be antithetic to what we are about.

What are the objections? We have to be frank, and not speak in abstract terms only. Here is our experience.

- #1) What was a single dance has become an exaggerated rite of passage that verges on decadence.
- #2) Its cost is out of bounds – the least expensive is the bid – dress, limo, after-prom activities – often add up to over a \$1,000.00.
- #3) It goes without saying that alcohol has always been a factor in the “Prom Experience,” often characterized by a post-prom “Booze Cruise” or a bar in the limo, etc.

- #4) This “rite of passage” also includes sex. Common parlance tells us that this is the time to lose one’s virginity (if it hadn’t occurred before). It is a time of heightened sexuality in a culture of anything goes. You are all acquainted with the sexual climate in which we live. Recently we had a nationally recognized speaker present to our student body the real consequences of adolescent promiscuity – pregnancy, a variety of sexually transmitted diseases, etc. The prom has become a sexual focal point. This is supposed to be a dance, not a honeymoon.
- #5) Peer pressure is always present in an adolescent society, but it reaches its apogee in “Prom Mania.” Who can top whom? What outrageous experiences can we boast about later? Who can outdo whom in dress, expense, behavior – adolescents need no encouragement in this area.
- #6) This extravaganza verging on decadence is magnified by the ages involved. Many of these “Seniors” are under eighteen years of age. Their dates, both male and female, are often Juniors, frequently Sophomores, and occasionally Freshman. The current Prom culture is really out of their league.

[At this juncture, I would recommend that you would investigate an ‘American classic’ that appeared in 1999. The title of the film is “American Pie.” It is almost a cult film, like “Animal House” before it. The plot features four male teenagers who make a pact to lose their virginity before graduation, and the locus is the Senior Prom. I would venture to say that all our Senior class has seen it. Like “Animal House,” which had an enormous impact on college dorm life, “American Pie” is a good example of nature imitating art – adolescent culture being formed and led by the media. If you hesitate to rent the film (which I do not recommend), you can get a fairly good idea by typing in “American Pie” on the Internet. You will get dozens of links. A particular critique of the film from the moral point of view can be gotten by:

[http://www.pluggedinonline.com/movies/movies/a0000453.cfm.](http://www.pluggedinonline.com/movies/movies/a0000453.cfm)]

Is there anything that has precipitated this concern at this time? Yes, there is.

We have in hand a signed contract for the rental of a residential house in Southampton. The details of this lease are as follows:

- #1) It is a residential house in a residential area. The owner is leasing it for sixty persons.
- #2) The time of lease is from early Saturday morning to noon on Sunday, approximately thirty-six hours.

- #3) The cost is \$300.00 per student plus \$100.00 for “security,” a total of \$400.00 per student.
- #4) No food or amenities are provided by the owner for the cost.
- #5) A down payment of \$10,000.00 has already been made, with the following amount of \$10,000.00 to be paid by April 1<sup>st</sup>. It seems that the total amount of money for the rental of this house is \$20,000.00.
- #6) There is no indication anywhere that there is any type of supervision. Nor is there any indication of responsibility for liability.
- #7) Forty-six Seniors have already paid their down payment for this one particular “house.” They have received no rules or guidelines for these thirty-six hours. We are informed that there are other houses in the Southampton area that are rented under similar conditions.

What strikes us as a school staff in reviewing this data?

- A) The cost is outrageous – the owner stands to gain almost \$20,000.00 for a thirty-six hour rental. Quite a deal! It takes advantage of our students.
- B) There is no indication of any type of supervision for this group of students, the majority of whom are under the age of eighteen. The students received no statement concerning the parameters of their conduct during this time. Conversations with the students involved indicate that they received no parameters and certainly expected alcohol to be present.
- C) The signed rental agreement was just that – a rental agreement. It did not express any liability for the welfare of these students.
- D) The parents received no written notification of what was transpiring during this time. Nor did they know to what extent there was going to be any supervision. Also, how do you supervise fifty or sixty students in one house for thirty-six hours?

We emphasize the question of liability because of our experience in the past. The Prom is a school related event. Where does the Prom begin and end? The lines are not clear. It is difficult enough to keep alcohol out of the limousines and out of the Prom itself without assuming any responsibility for after-Prom activities.

What to do?

The Administration of Kellenberg Memorial High School experienced this problem some years ago with the Junior Prom which had escalated to an enormous expense of money and super-sophistication for students who were even younger. We suppressed that Prom and substituted a Junior Ring Banquet. It still takes some effort to keep this from becoming an expensive extravaganza, but we have managed to do so.

The easiest solution would be to suppress the Senior Prom altogether, starting next year. Another solution, one that has been taken by some public schools, is to schedule the Prom on the Friday before Graduation, thus limiting the extension of post-Prom activities. The change of that Prom date will definitely be instituted next year, 2006, if the Prom is kept at all. We have investigated changing the Prom date this year to the Friday before Graduation. That date was open for the caterer. However, because of deposits already made for limousine and transportation services, we decided to leave the arrangement as is this year, while we contemplate what to do for future years. At any event, Kellenberg Memorial High School does not want to be associated with or give support to the current Prom practice. By this letter we inform all the parents of what is going on, in case they are not aware of the details of Prom 2005, and by this letter we eschew any responsibility for post-Prom activities.

Sincerely yours,

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Father Philip K. Eichner, S.M.  
President

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Brother Kenneth M. Hoagland, S.M.  
Principal

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Brother Richard J. Hughes, S.M.  
Assistant Principal for Academics

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Brother Roger A. Poletti, S.M.  
Assistant Principal for Activities

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Father Albert F. Bertoni, S.M.  
Assistant Principal for Guidance

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Miss Maria Korzekwinski  
Assistant Principal for Latin School

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Mr. Kenneth Conrade  
Assistant Principal for School Personnel

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Brother Ryan J. Sheehan, S.M.  
Director of Apostolic Activities

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Mrs. Marina Trentacoste  
Dean of Students

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Mr. Edward Solosky  
Dean of Men

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Mr. Edward J. Dunn  
Athletic Director