

# HEAD LINES

A Monthly Message from Chip Denton, Head of School



February 2020

Dear Trinity Community,

In this year of remembering, Trinity's twenty-fifth year, January put me in mind of a cold night in an alley off of Rosemary Street in Chapel Hill. It must have been the winter of 1992, because that was the year our oldest started kindergarten. We wanted a half-day program, and my wife had heard about the kindergarten program at University Presbyterian Preschool—that the school's head, Ann Henschel, was a strong leader; that the program was solid; and that it was hard to get into. So one January night, around midnight, I bundled up and ventured down to the back side of University Presbyterian Church to get myself a place at the front of the line for registration the next morning. I am a bit ashamed now when I remember that immoderate and desperate move, especially when I try to advise parents of school-age children not to fret over whether their child will get into the school of their choice. Do as I say and not as I did.

I tell this story now because it has three connections to Trinity's beginning. First, there were a few other dads in line with me for the better part of the night, and one of them was Jim Lamont, who would become one of the founding Board members of Trinity three years later. That cold night was the start of a much longer collaboration with the Lamonts and others about how best to educate our children. Secondly, the UPPK program taught us a lot about what we wanted for our children: wise teachers who knew and loved them, developmentally appropriate learning, rich intellectual stimulation without unnecessary academic push-down, and intimate learning environments. And thirdly, what I did to pass the time through that long cold night turned out to be a metaphor for a Trinity education.

I spent that night sanding bedposts. A friend of mine, John Cheek, had been mentoring me in the craft of woodworking, and by the time the UPPK registration came around, my four-poster cherry bed project was well underway: I had sawed, planed, and chiseled all four of the bedposts, and it was time for sanding. I'm sure that Jim and the other dads in that alley thought I was crazy, straddling seven-foot cherry posts and sanding them upside-down and backwards through that frigid night. I had a lot of time on my hands (midnight to dawn), and I'm pretty sure that my bedposts are some of the smoothest I've ever seen (or felt).

And what, you ask, does this have to do with Trinity School? Bear with me. A year or two after that memorable night, I got a letter from an acquaintance who had enrolled his children in the Geneva School in Orlando, Florida, a classical Christian school. He sent me a copy of the manifesto for this new school: Dorothy Sayers's "The Lost Tools of Learning." It was probably the early fall of 1994 when I sat down one

*Please turn over...*

Sunday afternoon to read this essay, and when I finished I knew that I wanted more for our children's education.

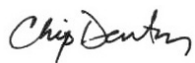
And what, you ask, does this have to do with bedposts? Well, it turns out that woodworking was a dominant metaphor in Sayers's essay. Her main idea is that "the sole true end of education is simply this: to teach [people] how to learn for themselves," and her radical proposal is that a return to the liberal arts of grammar, logic, and rhetoric might be a more sensible way to accomplish this goal than our modern tendency to teach subjects and specialize early.

[M]odern education concentrates on teaching subjects, leaving the method of thinking, arguing, and expressing one's conclusions to be picked up by the scholar as he goes along; mediæval education concentrated on first forging and learning to handle the tools of learning, using whatever subject came handy as a piece of material on which to doodle until the use of the tool became second nature.

The medieval trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric are the chisel, saw, and plane of learning. Too much of modern education is simply teaching people how to follow the instructions; a classical education teaches students to master the tools they will need for a lifetime of learning.

Trinity School has not followed Miss Sayers slavishly. We have modulated her proposal in important ways, most notably by bringing Charlotte Mason to the table as her peer and dialogue partner. But I am still inspired by this vision of an education that teaches students the tools of learning in the service of a larger purpose, what we call a Big Why. We are created by God to glorify him and enjoy him forever, and an education that attends carefully to the image of God in our children, as creatures capable of thinking, understanding, listening, and speaking, is the kind of education my money is on. And so, as a fitting memorial to Sayers's vision, I'd like to encourage all of our readers to go to Trinity's website and read a copy of her seminal essay ([losttools.trinityschoolnc.org](http://losttools.trinityschoolnc.org)). I hope it inspires you and helps you appreciate the kind of learners we are trying to form at Trinity School.

*Non Nobis,*



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