

HEAD LINES

A Monthly Message from Chip Denton, Head of School



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Dear Trinity Community,

What sets Trinity apart? “At Trinity, students are known and loved.”

I’ve said this often—at prospective parent Tour and Information Sessions, or at our home in the fall when we greet new parents. And I’ve heard others say this too: parents who speak at our admission events, or in campaign visits where I ask parents, grandparents, or alumni parents what they appreciate about the school.

It’s a powerful motto, in large part because it’s true. This is a promise we keep at Trinity—not perfectly, but truly. You can see this in the comments that are written about students in their grade reports, and in the wise insights that faculty have into the struggles or challenges that students are facing. I wish everyone could read some of the excellent letters our faculty write in recommendation of our students who are applying to colleges, rich with the attentiveness of deep and personal knowledge, warm with affection and respect. Perhaps the most powerful keeping of this promise is at the Senior Banquet and the Eighth Grade Celebration at the end of the year, when each student is celebrated very personally, with the kind of tribute that can come only from faculty who have lived with these students, taught them, and grown to love them deeply. It’s no wonder that when our alumni return to campus, they make a beeline to our faculty.

But does this claim really capture a Trinity distinctive? I know for a fact that other heads at other schools promise the same thing (I’ve heard their speeches, too). The truth is that almost every independent school in the country can lay claim to knowing and loving students. This is what good schools do. Private schools are often like small towns: community is part of the secret sauce that makes them so valuable and effective at forming students. Intimate learning environments, teachers who care about student learning and success, schools that see partnership with parents as a fundamental value—these make most intentional, independent schools places where students are known and loved. In fact, if I were charged with marketing independent schools as a whole, across all their varied and sometimes conflicting missions, I would camp out on this one promise: students are known and loved. I’m not saying that other (public and charter) schools can’t do this, but I’m saying that independent schools have learned to do this really well. So when we talk about this at Trinity, are we saying anything distinctive about our school? I think so, and here’s why.

At Trinity, when we say we know students, we know something else: something supernatural. Of course, we know many amazing natural things about them: their passions, their ambitions, their likes and dislikes, their quirks, their sense of humor, their anxieties and hopes. All that, yes, but there is something else.


Please turn over...

We believe and know that these students are created in the image of God. This means that God's very self is reflected in each of these students. When you stop to ponder that simple truth, it will blow your mind—every Trinity student is like a mirror in which, if we are attentive, we can get a glimpse of the living God! And so we faculty and staff gaze with wonder at these students, like Galadriel's mirror, in which we see things wondrous and transcendent. And what we see is not something we can wrap words around very easily, but it is nevertheless real. In fact, it is more real than many of the other identities we might be able to describe about these students. This image of God (*imago Dei*) is sacred and inviolable, and the fact that we are surrounded all day, every day, by human persons whose dignity is rooted in this divine life makes our teaching, coaching, disciplining, and guiding a sacred vocation. I think that parents who speak about Trinity students being known and loved sense that we see something more about these young men and women.

And when we say that we love these image bearers, we mean more than that we have a deep affection for them—much more. We mean that we long to see Christ formed in them—to see them live like the apostle Paul, who said, “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). We teach them and guide them, hoping to see their pride and self-love transformed into love for Christ and others. This is what knowing and loving at Trinity School means.

There is a wonderful and mysterious promise made to the faithful in one of the letters in the book of Revelation: “I will give . . . a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it” (Revelation 2:17). Only the Lord Christ can give this gift; only the True Image of God can tell each of us who we are in the image of God. It is an identity that is so precious that it is, in some sense, a secret between each of us and our God. When we say at Trinity that we know and love students, we don't pretend to know this. But we know that this secret and true identity is what really matters, and we believe that we can point students to the only One who can tell them who they really are, love them as they are, and transform them into who they alone can be.

I like to think that when people say that Trinity is special because its students are known and loved, some of this deeper, Christian meaning is felt, even when it may not be fully understood or articulated. I like to think that even for those among us who are not Christ followers, this deeper knowledge of our students as bearers of the *imago Dei* and this love of students in whom we see Christ may ring like a true distinctive of Trinity School. Not for us and our honor, but for the honor of Christ, for he is the real distinctive of our school. *Non Nobis*.



Chip Denton
Head of School

TRINITY SCHOOL OF DURHAM AND CHAPEL HILL

4011 Pickett Road • Durham, North Carolina 27705 • trinityschoolinc.org • 919-402-8262