

HEAD LINES

A message from Chip Denton, Head of School



November 2022

Dear Trinity Community,

Trinity School's mission is like a guitar with several strings tuned together, all with a tension that is just right. Too much and the string is sharp; too little and it's flat. The tension on a guitar string is not the sort of strain that needs to be relieved or resolved: the instrument plays as it should only when the string's tension is balanced and true, and the guitar is built to hold that tension just right.



Trinity School is built to hold certain tensions, too. These are not accidental, but intentional. They go back, most of them, to the founding of the school and the codification of the mission. Because they are tensions, we may feel the urge to resolve them, to move further to one end or the other to release the pressure—tension can be stressful. But to do so would be to untune the harmonious mission of Trinity School.

In this year's *Head Lines*, I have proposed to do a little tuning of Trinity's mission. Let's start with our Christian and Non-Covenant string.

Mission Tension 1: Christian and Non-Covenant

Trinity is a Christian school, and we also welcome students, parents, and families who do not share our Christian faith. The technical term for this kind of Christian school is "non-covenant" or "open enrollment." It would be simpler, with less tension, if we went in one direction or the other, either by requiring every student and family to be Christian, or by relaxing the Christian identity of the school, with a loose connection to the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Because Trinity's Christian identity has been so strong, most of the conversations I have are about why Trinity is not a covenant school. I'd like to share what I see as the two most compelling benefits of the open-enrollment model we have chosen.

The first is the gift that a school like Trinity can be to the community and the wider world. The light of the good news about Jesus shines in a Christian school in all sorts of ways. Some without faith are drawn to this light; some come for other reasons and see the light when they get here. The light may be truth taught or the love of Christ caught, but it is real, and people know that in their bones. "Let your light shine before people that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). This is the gift of Trinity to the world outside. Some have argued that the increasing secularization of our society calls for tighter Christian circles to preserve our identity; I would argue that in a more secular world, a school is one of the

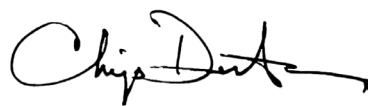
best places for Christians to share the good news about Jesus. The good things we offer at Trinity are common goods, and many will come for excellence in learning, for community that flourishes, for teachers who are called to do what they love. Let us work and pray that everyone who comes will get a glimpse of our Good Father, who is the source of all that is true, good, and beautiful at Trinity School.

The second gift is what the wider world brings to Trinity School. This may seem odd, especially at a time when many Christians lament the escalating secularization of our culture. But the world (à la John 1) is where we live, and God knows this. Having unbelievers among us is inevitable, as Jesus taught us (Matthew 13:24-30) and as experience bears out, but the presence of doubters and skeptics is good for us all. Their questions, when honest, are often the best questions. Their doubts keep us from taking ourselves too seriously, mindful of our own stories of faith and how it was God who found us and not we God. “There’s a crack in everything; that’s how the light gets in,” as Leonard Cohen sings. And it’s the irreverent Imogene Herdman who reminds the pious church folk of the shockingly good news of the Christmas story in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*.

How do we keep the tension on this string of Trinity’s mission in tune? I’d say that the very presence of people of other faiths (and of none) among us guards us from going “sharp”—too religious, arrogant in our own Christian convictions. But what is to keep Trinity from going “flat,” from losing our saltiness (Matt. 5:13) as a distinctly Christian place? Three things: First, we hire Christian faculty and staff (check out the application to work at Trinity), and members of our Board of Trustees are also Christians. Second, we practice Christian community, worshiping, praying, and orienting our life around the Scriptures. And thirdly, we teach from a Christian perspective, with Bible and theology classes for everyone, integrating our faith and learning in deep ways in every subject, shaping our pedagogy according to Jesus’s story. Traditions like all-school chapels, weekly worship by divisions, faculty devotions, and faculty-staff prayer walks are anchors of our Christian mission.

One of my favorite kinds of conversations is with prospective parents who are cautious about our Christian mission. “How Christian is this school?” they will ask. Here is what I like to say: “We’re Christian with a Big C—if you want a Christian school that downplays Jesus, the Bible, the cross and resurrection, then that’s not us. At the same time, we are so glad to have families who don’t believe among us, and if you come, this will be your school too, and you will bring us many wonderful gifts. We will never force our faith on you or your children; we don’t proselytize. But we do share the good news about Jesus with every student. If your child comes here and becomes a Christian, that is a good story that fits our mission. But it’s a story that God will write and not us.”

May God keep us tuned to this mission always.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chip Denton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Non Nobis,
Chip Denton
Head of School