TRINITY SCHOOL
AT RIVER RIDGE

# A Culture of Learning and a Culture of Christian Life

A school culture involves all members of the community: faculty, staff, coaches, advisors, volunteers, parents and students.

Trinity School aims to provide a Christian culture that is free yet disciplined, safe for students, and supportive of our educational goals. All members of the Trinity School community work together to support this culture, but the relationship between the parents and the school is particularly important.

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## Education as Human Awakening

Parents want more for their children than merely a good education. They also want their children to thrive as human beings. At Trinity School we aim to introduce our students not to typical schooling but to a genuine experience of human awakening. Our goal for our students is that they would experience such awakening by developing a wide range of intellectual and aesthetic habits of mind. We want them to develop a sense of wonder about the world, to grow in their love of truth, to desire the good in their own lives and in the world, to become morally and spiritually serious, to recognize beauty in all its manifestations, to be intellectually honest with themselves and one another, to respect others and their views, and to recognize the dignity of all human beings.

These habits of mind must be modeled, not merely taught. To that end, we understand our faculty to be not only individual teachers but also (and more importantly) members of a community of learners. As individuals and as a community, the faculty model learning as a lifelong adult activity and a way of being in the world, not as a hoop to be jumped through during adolescence on the way to something else.

We also resist grade-consciousness in our students and avoid educational practices that link learning to external rewards rather than genuine experiences of wonder and inquiry. Parents can support the school in this effort by conveying the same message at home and by engaging their children in genuine discussions about the material they are learning.

## The True, the Good, and the Beautiful

The best educational models have always pointed students to the higher goals towards which human beings should strive. At Trinity School, we seek to create a culture that bears witness to the pursuit of truth, the practice of goodness and the creation of beauty. Our reading lists, drama selections and artistic works are drawn from the best of human culture throughout the ages, reflecting our commitment to excellence. We want our broader Trinity School culture to mirror this commitment as well.

We encourage students to participate in the pursuit of truth, the practice of goodness and the creation of beauty as a way of life, not just as something that takes place at school. We resist the influence of youth culture and popular culture where it is at odds with these ideals. Parents often experience the benefit of this for their family life in serious discussions around the dinner table or in one-on-one conversations with their teenage children. We encourage parents to foster an approach to learning that spills out of the classroom into carpools, class parties and elsewhere.

## The Freedom and Responsibility of the Human Person

In order to thrive as human beings and move towards taking their place in the world as adults, children need to experience genuine freedom and increasing responsibility. At Trinity School, we understand students to be the agents of their own learning and fundamentally free and responsible for their own choices within the community. Students agree to abide by the code of conduct stated in the student handbook, but even in matters pertaining to rules and discipline, we believe that students should be treated in a way that respects their fundamental freedom.

## The Free and Disciplined Exchange of Ideas

Genuine conversation is a difficult art, but it is one of the most satisfying and productive as well. At Trinity School, we want students to learn this art through dialogue with one another and their teachers. We seek to promote a culture of the free and yet disciplined exchange of ideas. We want students to discuss the ideas

they encounter in their courses without a spirit of faction or partisanship. Therefore, we discourage partisan political discussions in the classroom and expect our faculty to teach and model respect for others' opinions. Disciplined discussion requires that students give a good account of their own perspectives, ask questions of each other, and engage in rational discourse about the topic in front of them.

## Proselytizing and Faith Formation

The moral and spiritual education of children is of great importance to parents and the school alike. However, the roles each play in that education are distinct. Parents, churches and other faith communities bear the most immediate responsibility for the moral and spiritual education of their children. Trinity School faculty and staff members do provide positive Christian role models and engage students in a personal manner, but are asked not to engage in proselytizing or explicit faith formation.

Trinity School does, however, aim to provide an authentically Christian education within a culture designed to support parents in their efforts to foster Christian faith in their children. Every class begins with prayer; each year of the curriculum includes the study of the Christian Scriptures or sacred doctrine; and students attend daily morning prayer where faculty members bear witness to their life in Christ. All faculty members are required to assent in good faith to the tenets of the Nicene Creed, to be members in good standing in their own denomination or Christian tradition, and to abide by a basic code of conduct informed by Christian teaching.

Trinity School does not require either parents or students to be practicing Christians or to sign a statement of agreement in order to enroll their children.

## Personal Counseling

The teen years can be personally challenging. Sometimes these challenges involve issues with anxiety, depression or other mental health concerns. The dean of boys and dean of girls have primary responsibility for caring for students in this regard,

being aware of students who may be struggling, and working with parents to care for each individual appropriately. Trinity School does not provide professional counseling to students. However, if parents are concerned about the well-being of their child and would like help in finding such services, they should contact the appropriate dean or the head of school.

## Christian Unity and Diversity

Trinity School is committed to bearing witness to Christian unity wherever possible. Our approach to Scripture is carefully chosen to make it possible for students to study Scripture together without respect to denomination. Most other courses are also taught from within a general Christian framework rather than the perspective of a particular denomination or tradition. Importantly, students and faculty also pray together every morning as Christians from a wide variety of denominations.

However, we do also want our students to be educated in the history and teachings of their own church or Christian tradition. In ninth grade we offer separate Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox doctrine courses as options. When leading morning prayer, faculty members are free to speak from their own Christian tradition, though they are reminded not to speak as if everyone in the room shares that perspective.

Since Trinity School also admits students from families of other religions as well as from families with no faith tradition, we also encourage respect for the beliefs of these families and students as well.

## Christian Relationships

Since Trinity School has high aims for establishing a genuine community of learners among our students, maintaining good relationships is essential. We believe that every person is created in the image of God, equal in dignity and worthy of respect and honor. Thus, we expect that in word and deed the members of our community will strive to build a culture that is characterized by love of God and neighbor, and

by joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, purity, truthfulness, gentleness and self-control (cf. Gal. 5:22; 2 Cor. 6:6-7).

We expressly reject any form of harassment, bullying, verbal abuse or intimidation by any member of the Trinity School community towards any other member for any reason. This includes harassment based upon a student's sex, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality or perceived sexuality. These are antithetical to the spirit of Christian relationships and to our fundamental commitment to human dignity. Such behaviors are considered major violations of our code of conduct for students and faculty alike. (For more information, see the Student Handbook.)

Trinity School takes reports of abuse very seriously. If any member of the Trinity School community has reason to believe that sexual or physical abuse of a child has occurred, that person should immediately contact the appropriate government authorities. Contact information can be found 🗋 File.

Trinity School has also retained the firm Lathrop GPM to facilitate independent reporting and investigation of incidents of sexual misconduct or the abuse of a child. Please contact Robin Maynard at (612) 632-3063 or TrinityReport@lathropgpm.com.

## Differences Between Boys and Girls

Trinity School is a coed school offering separate-sex education. Our reasons for this arrangement are primarily practical. It is our experience that boys and girls at this age learn best in single-sex classrooms. We also understand men and women to be created by God equal in dignity but distinct from one another. We seek to uphold both that equality and appropriate distinction in our culture.

In the younger years, especially, we encourage the boys to build strong relationships with other boys, and girls to build strong relationships with other girls. As they grow older, boys and girls are encouraged to develop healthy relationships with one another as well. Parents are an essential part of helping to establish these relationships and are encouraged to stay in communication with

each other and with the school about challenges that arise or any problems their children are experiencing in this area.

## Marriage and Sexuality

As a part of our commitment to help students establish Christian relationships, we want to provide an environment marked by behavior and speech that are consistent with the teachings of Scripture, Christian tradition and our own core beliefs. These beliefs are rooted in a particular Christian understanding of marriage and sexuality. We believe that the fact that humans are born either biologically male or female reflects God's intention in creating each person. We understand marriage to be a legal and committed relationship between a man and a woman and believe that the only proper place for sexual activity is within these bounds of conjugal love. Outside of marriage so understood, we believe that sexual activity (whether heterosexual or homosexual) is not in keeping with God's plan for human sexuality.

We do not require parents to subscribe to this position, but they should understand that students will encounter it as normative in our Scripture courses, doctrine classes and other courses at Trinity School.

## Human Development and Sexual Identity

Young men and women in their teenage years experience a great deal of change, sometimes volatile emotions, and a growing sexual maturity. Though it is natural and consistent with human development that students experience sexual attraction, we discourage the formation of exclusive relationships. The decision whether to allow children to date is left to the parents, but we ask students not to be exclusive or give evidence of their dating relationships while at school.

At this age, some students may also experience same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria. We believe that it is unwise, however, for teens to prematurely interpret any particular emotional experience as identity-defining. We believe that such self-identification at a young age can lead to students being labeled based solely

upon sexuality, generate distraction, create confusion, and prevent students from experiencing true freedom within the culture of the school.

When challenging issues of sexuality arise for a student, the school makes every effort to handle these situations with sensitivity, discretion and care for the student. As a matter of right speech, we ask students not to openly discuss matters of personal sexuality. Furthermore, teasing, ridicule or mistreatment based upon a student's sexuality or perceived sexuality are unacceptable and subject to disciplinary action.

In this as in all other matters, parents bear the primary responsibility for the education of their children. The school aims to provide a culture in which all students can learn and thrive in peace and freedom.

## Communication

Good communication and well-ordered discussions are essential to a smoothly functioning community. At Trinity School, we want our culture to be marked by the ideals of charity, right speech, honor and directness in our communication. Therefore, we promote the principles of thinking and saying the best about one another, encouraging one another, honoring all members of our community and communicating directly with one another. We understand that there will be differences among us, disagreements that need to be worked out, and wrongs that need to be addressed. However, gossip, slander, rumor, pressure tactics, etc., have no place in our culture.  If parents have a concern with elements of the culture of the school, they are encouraged to speak directly to the head of school.

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## Conclusion

Trinity School makes every effort to foster an environment that lives up to the high standards of our culture of learning and our culture of Christian life. It is important that parents understand our distinctives and are able to support the school in these

aims by not modelling behavior or advocating for positions within the Trinity School community that are antithetical to our core beliefs or disruptive to the culture we are establishing together. Together with faculty, staff, coaches and others directly employed by the school, the witness to these values that parents provide in speech and action is a powerful source of cultural formation that will have far-reaching positive effects in the lives of the next generation.