

Admissions

Woody Allen once said, in his inimitably self-deprecating way, that he'd never want to be a member of a club that would have him. The joke sticks with us because we all want to belong to something bigger than ourselves and wonder, deep down, whether we really deserve such a privileged association. The Greeks had a word for this: *koinonia*, which can be translated as “partnership” or as “fellowship.” Paul used this word a good deal as he spoke to first century Christians about their common cause in the Gospel, and it's no coincidence that you'll hear these same words around our school. We speak of a partnership between parents and school; our teachers enjoy a rich fellowship in the workroom or outside school.

But the more satisfying the community the more acute is Woody Allen's anxiety: How does one get to be a member of this group? How does one get into Trinity School? It's that time of year (admissions season) when many are asking that question. All the more when we have such a large number of applications for a limited number of spots.

Every school has to wrestle with this question. Even public schools have space limitations. So how does one decide whom to admit?

One solution is to enroll students on a first-come, first-served basis. In private schools, this system may be combined with a set of minimum requirements that all students must meet. Such a system rewards foresight, planning, and promptness but it does not necessarily create the student and parent body where one might experience something like *koinonia*.

Another approach is to define a narrow set of criteria for students and test carefully for those.

Most commonly, those criteria are academic, so that the school ends up with the upper crust of students on the IQ scale or the national norms of some standardized test. Other schools look for excellent athletes or gifted artists or exceptional musicians. I

heard recently that some elite colleges are now looking for one exceptionality among many: that is, they want each student to be extraordinarily gifted in some area, whether it is in literature or physics or linguistics or cello.

Still another way of dealing with limited educational resources is to allocate them to one's friends and connections in a sort of good-ole-boy educational network. The way you get in is to know somebody.

Trinity has adopted an admissions policy different from all of these, one that is fairly common among independent schools, both religious and secular.

Premised on the notion that no one school is going to be best for every child, the independent school seeks to find students and families that are a good fit for its mission and that will likely succeed in its program. At Trinity we have tried to keep our mission in the forefront as we wrestle through the difficult admissions decisions.

The mission of Trinity School is to educate students in kindergarten to grade twelve—teaching the classical tools of learning; providing a rich yet unhurried curriculum; communicating truth, goodness and beauty—all within the framework of Christian faith and conviction. How does this mission impact our admissions decisions? In several ways:

- First, we take the long view that we want to be a school that works with students over many years—ideally over thirteen years. Over those thirteen years, we think we can build a lot into children and make quite a difference in their

Admissions decisions for all applicants who applied before the published deadlines have been mailed this week. In some classes there are waiting lists, but in others we have decided to add second sections and have some spaces still available. We encourage you to contact the admission office (919-403-0543) to inquire. We continue to accept applications for all grades for next year.

lives. Consequently, for our younger applicants, we look for two primary characteristics: developmental readiness for the grade in question and respectful habits of behavior. With these two simple but critical components, we think we do a lot with children of various abilities. Furthermore, the younger the applicant, the less we need be concerned with academic achievement.

Second, we teach the classical tools of learning: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. We believe these to be universally relevant skills of learning which are true to human nature. Anyone who learns anything at any time will need and use these tools. They are not elite tools, only to be used by the academic elite, and so we seek a broad range of abilities within our school. At the same time, mastery of the tools is not innate to human nature and requires hard work and perseverance. Consequently, we look for good work habits among our applicants. This becomes all the more true as the applicants get older, for poor work habits reinforced over several years are hard to break. Finally, these tools are to some important extent sequentially taught: grammar first, then logic, then rhetoric. This means that applicants for our middle, logic phase will need to demonstrate an aptitude and willingness to catch up on some missed training. We don't find many older applicants, for example, who have had Latin or logic. We are working hard to make Trinity's later grades entry points for new applicants, but we recognize that we need a certain academic aptitude, good study habits, and cooperative parents to make the transition work. We are greatly encouraged by several students who have successfully navigated this later entry already.

- Third, we aspire to offer a rich yet unhurried curriculum. We are very careful not to rush children beyond where they are developmentally. At our youngest grades, kindergarten and first grade—where we see the greatest number of our applicants—we administer the Gesell Developmental

Assessment, an instrument that has been developed over many years and is useful for pinpointing a child's developmental age. Developmental age rarely coincides exactly with chronological age, and when there is a leap or a lag there is nothing to be concerned about. Our principal concern as a school is that, regardless of chronological age, children who enter kindergarten are fully five developmentally and that those who enter first grade are fully six developmentally. We believe that this criterion is a necessary, though not sufficient, indicator of success at Trinity. When older students apply from schools where a different placement philosophy has been implemented, we may want to talk to the applicant family about placement, though the older the child, the fewer options there are for adjusting grade placement.

- Finally, we are a Christian school. From the beginning of the school the board made a conscious decision not to make this part of our mission statement a criterion for student admissions, but to be as open and honest as we can about our Christian faith and conviction and to let families themselves make the decision about whether Trinity is a good fit. During the year Cheryl Wolfe, our Admissions Coordinator, and I spend considerable time meeting with prospective families who want to understand just what sort of Christian school we are. Our printed admissions materials and our website give a full picture of our Christian vision. Our teachers and board members are committed Christians who subscribe to the school's doctrinal statement. And we say to applying parents, "Take a good look at us, ask your questions, and if you'd like to be here we'd love for you to apply."

Building a strong student and parent body which is enthusiastic about our vision is one of the critical tasks before us as we grow our school. I stand amazed at the people whom God has gathered here thus far, and I look forward to the new generations of partners in this very exciting enterprise.