



## **Who We Are: Explaining the Mission Statement of Trinity School**

The mission of Trinity School is to educate students in transitional kindergarten to grade twelve within the framework of Christian faith and conviction—teaching the classical tools of learning; providing a rich yet unhurried curriculum; and communicating truth, goodness, and beauty.

At Trinity School we seek to create a community in which there is delight in learning and an atmosphere that encourages the sort of intellectual, moral, and aesthetic development that is fitting for those who bear the image of God. We want to challenge our students in a way that stimulates their natural curiosity, guiding their discovery toward personal, intellectual, and spiritual growth.

In the following pages we offer a more detailed explanation of some of the distinctives of our school:

- The Framework of Christian Faith and Conviction
- A Classical Education
- A Rich Curriculum
- An Unhurried Curriculum
- Communicating Truth, Goodness, and Beauty

Education is primarily the responsibility and privilege of parents, and Trinity School seeks to enter into a partnership with our parents toward the goal of an excellent education. Our aim is to support families by bringing our special resources to bear to help them attain their educational and spiritual goals. To this end, we encourage each family to be actively involved in the child's life as a Trinity student, and we look forward to working together to develop this community of learning called Trinity School.

## *The Framework of Christian Faith and Conviction*

Trinity School is a Christian school. Trinity aspires to be a place where children learn that God is at the heart of all that we are and do, that we do not belong to ourselves but to God, that the chief purpose of our lives is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. At Trinity, we aim to set our children out upon a journey of learning about God and the world he has made, with the hope that they will enter into a personal relationship with God through Christ, and follow the path of discipleship and vocation wherever God leads.

As a Christian school, Trinity seeks to be evangelical, orthodox, and ecumenical. We are a nondenominational, Board-governed school, with over 40 churches represented in the student body. Parents are not required to subscribe doctrinally to our statement of faith, although everyone in the Trinity School community is expected to support the school's Christian mission. We welcome into the Trinity School community those families from differing theological traditions or from secular backgrounds who respect and support the school's mission and policies.

As an evangelical school, we recognize and accept the authority of the Scriptures and the doctrine that salvation is found in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. The evangelical tradition has always affirmed that a personal and transforming relationship with God through Jesus Christ is essential to the Christian life. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ, applied through the work of the Holy Spirit, has the power to save from both the guilt and power of sin and to remake a person, enabling him or her to live the blessed life forever in God's holy presence. Upon this foundation alone is real and lasting character and virtue built, and by such faith will our school's leaders model true discipleship for the students.

When we claim that Trinity is an orthodox school, we affirm that there are ideas and doctrines that are correct, right, and true. Orthodoxy holds that the gospel has a specific factual and theological content (I Corinthians 15:1–11; Galatians 1:6–9; I Timothy 6:3), and that the Scriptures, the inspired word of God, tell us all that we need to know about God and how we should relate to Him. This clearly presents a challenge to the intellectual and moral relativism of our age.

Beginning with the first seven Councils of the Church, the Scriptures have been interpreted to affirm Trinitarian and Christological truths apart from which the redemption of humanity is impossible. Trinity's doctrinal statement below is a summary of these basic Christian tenets. All Board members, teachers, and staff must unreservedly affirm and support the following doctrinal commitments:

We believe in:

- The only true God, the almighty Creator of all things, existing eternally in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—full of love and glory.
- The unique divine inspiration, entire trustworthiness and authority of the Bible.
- The value and dignity of all people: created in God's image to live in love and holiness, but alienated from God and each other because of our sin and guilt, and justly subject to God's wrath.
- Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, who lived as a perfect example, who assumed the judgment due sinners by dying in our place, and who was bodily raised from the dead and ascended as Savior and Lord.

- Justification by God's grace to all who repent and put their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.
- The indwelling presence and transforming power of the Holy Spirit, who gives to all believers a new life and new calling to obedient service.
- The unity of all believers in Jesus Christ, manifest in worshiping and witnessing churches making disciples throughout the world.
- The victorious reign and future personal return of Jesus Christ, who will judge all people with justice and mercy, giving over the unrepentant to eternal condemnation but receiving the redeemed into eternal life.

Trinity's Board, faculty, and staff are committed to the Triune God, and to the basic tenets of Christianity as expressed by the orthodox and evangelical traditions. We share a common vision to create at our school a Christian community characterized by a living and culturally engaging faith. Teachers, staff, and Board members must demonstrate a vibrant faith consisting of true knowledge of God and of personal trust in the Lord Jesus. They must be able to give a clear testimony of their faith in Christ and must be exemplary Christian role models in every area of their lives.

Rooted in these evangelical and orthodox traditions, Trinity aspires also to be an ecumenical school, one that furthers the cooperation and unity of the church as the Body of Christ. While acknowledging the existence of denominational differences in theology and practice, we emphasize those truths that Christians have believed in common for centuries, across boundaries of time, place, race, and culture. We are excited to be involved in an endeavor that has the potential to bring together Christians of many different traditions and racial and ethnic groups to grow together in our knowledge of God and his world, and to train our children in his ways and give them the tools to think from a thoroughly Christian perspective about every subject and issue in a way that transcends denominationalism.

### *A Classical Education*

A classical education is founded on the fundamental question, "What is a human being?" Seminal answers have been given by the Greek (intellectual), Jewish (moral), and Christian (spiritual) traditions. Jacques Maritain has summarized these three important streams of thinkers and believers who shaped the classical tradition:

[W]e may give the Greek, Jewish, and Christian idea of man: man as an animal endowed with reason, whose supreme dignity is in the intellect; and man as a free individual in personal relation to God, whose supreme righteousness consists in voluntarily obeying the law of God; and man as a sinful and wounded creature called to divine life and to the freedom of grace, whose supreme perfection consists of love.<sup>1</sup>

These visions of the human are complementary, forming what has been called the Great Tradition. As Mortimer Adler has said, "What binds the authors [of this tradition] together in an intellectual community is the great conversation in which they are engaged. In the works that come later in the

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), 7.

sequence of years, we find authors listening to what their predecessors have had to say about this idea or that, this topic or that. They not only harken to the thought of their predecessors, they also respond to it by commenting on it in a variety of ways."<sup>2</sup>

To participate in this conversation, one must be acquainted with these predecessor thoughts. Trinity believes that its students should be steeped in the letters, history, arts, sciences, technology, and mathematics of this Great Tradition. Such study helps them to understand their full humanness and to be informed participants in their own world's conversation. Studied well, such a curriculum trains the intellect, awakens the imagination, challenges one's faith to grow in depth and conviction, cultivates a love for learning, and develops the capacity for generative, divergent, creative thought.

This tradition originated and flourished in the West, and thus a classical curriculum will have a Western emphasis. This Western emphasis is not exclusive. At every grade level, Trinity engages with the ideas of peoples of diverse cultures. Connecting the Great Tradition and its big questions to cultures beyond the West serves to correct and illuminate the conversation. Exposure to various cultures, life experiences, and perspectives serves several important goals: to train young people to see goodness in the variety of God's human creation and virtue in every culture, despite our universal fallenness; to perceive the flaws of one's own culture; and to develop discernment in judging the relative merits of different cultures. From this kind of study arise fuller appreciations of humanity and God's involvement in the world; fresh currents of creativity; humbled perspectives about one's own culture and self; a broader context for a global conversation; and a deeper grasp of what is true, good, and beautiful.

In conveying this rich heritage, our curriculum emphasizes, again not exclusively, the classical works that have stood the fierce test of time—as a guideline, not a rule, two generations. Such an emphasis is also an antidote to the inevitable tyranny of the present (what C.S. Lewis called “chronological snobbery”) and franchises those important voices easily ignored by an education focused on the contemporary. As we balance enduring books and primary sources with some new ones, we aim to choose the new in large part by their relation to the big questions defined by the Great Tradition.

Whether time-tested or contemporary, of the Great Tradition or beyond it, works studied at Trinity will have some key characteristics of classics, as described by Jacques Barzun: *thickness* (i.e., a density of discourse), *adaptability* (i.e., its thickness transcends its original context and serves purposes larger and more lasting), and *publicness* (i.e., it must be recognized widely, though not of course unanimously, as a classic). In all of our selections, we want to avoid what Charlotte Mason so aptly described as “twaddle.”

In the visual and performing arts, a classical education trains students to appreciate the arts of the Great Tradition, to perform excellent works from past masters, and to create one's own music and art. Each art form has its own standards of excellence, though the classical criteria of *unity*, *harmony*, and *splendor* ought always to be considered. In any great work of art, there is an interplay between

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<sup>2</sup> Mortimer Adler, "The Great Conversation Revisited," in *The Great Conversation: A Reader's Guide to Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1990), 28.

simplicity and complexity. Through imitation and creation, both essential to the artistic process at every stage, students find their own voice or style and create art that is truly their own.

By the time they reach Trinity’s Middle and Upper Schools, students are ready to study works of substance in increasing depth. Such an education is not easy, but it bears abundant fruit. As Barzun puts it, “The great works do not yield their cargo on demand, but if one reads them with concentration, the effort gives us a vast store of vicarious experience; we come face to face with the whole range of perception that mankind has attained and is denied by our unavoidably artificial experience.”<sup>3</sup> The cultivation of students’ interest in and love for great works is one of the most important challenges of a classical education. Attentiveness, patience, humility, perseverance—these are all habits necessary for mining the riches of the great works.

Such habits of thought and mind are formed early, and thus our Lower School endeavors to train students to be the sort of learners who are prepared to enter the Great Conversation. Charlotte Mason’s notion that the mind feeds on ideas resonates deeply with this classical vision of education. Our youngest children, though they are not prepared to tackle dense texts, are ready nonetheless for the ideas expressed in living books, for them a sort of prelude to the classics of the Great Tradition. We tell the old stories of the Great Tradition from the beginning of their education: Bible stories, classical myths, epic tales. In our selections of literature and art, we seek to engender a love for reading and learning. In the early years, emphasis is given to learning to read and write well; to mastering the grammar of various subjects; to memorizing poetry, Scripture, and noteworthy texts; to wondering, exploring, and discovering; to thinking critically and creatively; to solving complex problems; and to solidifying the understandings and competencies needed for higher levels of study.

A classical curriculum trains the intellect and develops the capacity to reason well. It also awakens the imagination and develops creative thinking. Analysis, synthesis, divergent thinking, and problem-solving are all manifestations of a good classical education. These skills are honed through reading, writing, guided practice, laboratory work, field studies, dialogue, and Socratic teaching. Material of density, adaptability, and publicness also often lends itself to performance. The classically educated learner who memorizes, recites, or performs such literature engages in a level of knowing that often stimulates creativity as well as a deeper appreciation for a work’s merits. A classical education gives special emphasis to writing—not only as the demonstration of understanding, but also as an exercise that brings understanding.

We expect all Lower and Middle School students to study at least elementary Latin, one of the two foundations of our own language and the language that helped shape thought and word through antiquity and in Christendom for two millennia. Moreover, our graduates will have completed foreign language study through at least the third-year level. Students take a formal logic course in Middle or Upper School and a rhetoric course in Upper School.

We aim to prepare students for confident, respectful, and benevolent engagement with the culture at large—a culture diverse in backgrounds, ethnicities, values, and beliefs, one that is shaped less and less

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Barzun, “Of what use the classics today,” in *A Jacques Barzun Reader: Selections from His Works*, ed. Michael Murray (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 412–23.

by the classical tradition. We believe that classically educated students are well prepared to discern and welcome all truth as God’s truth and to enter into vocations in which they will transform and shape culture for good. After they leave Trinity, they are not likely to be steeped in works from the classical tradition. Post-Christian and post-modern perspectives will dominate their education, especially at secular universities and colleges. For that reason, Trinity seeks to give its students a classical grounding, which they are unlikely to get elsewhere.

We believe that a solid classical curriculum augmented by modern, contemporary, and post-modern works will help our students to live as salt and light in the world, to delight in learning, and to exercise a faithful presence as educated citizens in their culture.

### *A Rich Curriculum*

Trinity’s emphasis on a rich curriculum derives from the belief that children are created in the image of God. As such, they have the ability to experience and reflect on God’s world, the capacity to know truth, do good, and appreciate beauty, and the potential to be changed by their experiences. Children are born eager to learn, with wide intellectual interests. Even the youngest children are curious about their world. They are inquisitive, active learners—not empty vessels needing to be filled full of facts, but persons brimming with potential, ready to be formed.

These convictions require us to take most seriously our curriculum’s content. A curriculum, rightly conceived, should enable children to interact with the richest age-appropriate materials available. This includes what British educator Charlotte Mason called “living books” (well-written, worthwhile books written by masters of a subject), primary documents, and classics of art and music. It will also include a thoughtful balance of mathematical investigation and practice, and ample first-hand interaction with the actual materials of nature and science. A hallmark of Trinity is a curriculum that is worthy of students’ attention, study, and understanding.

Along with Mason and many modern educators, we believe that students learn best by making meaningful connections and relationships with the things being studied and, ultimately, by making ideas their own. Minds that engage abundantly with truth, goodness, and beauty, and do so in richly varied ways – from memorization and narration to role playing, seminar discussion, and original creation – are adept at making a range of connections: analytic, aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, spiritual. As students become familiar with their object of study, identify its interesting details, connect it to its time in history, and relate it to other works, they expand and enlarge their understanding of themselves and the world. When students engage in this manner, a scientific model, a mathematical concept, an artist’s canvas, or a novel becomes a part of the learners. Like persons they have come to know, it is not easily forgotten.

For this kind of learning, the teacher’s job is to bring the student into direct contact with the book, the idea, or the thing to be studied. Good teachers of a rich curriculum are like midwives: they do not give birth to the idea, but they attend the birth of the idea in the mind of the student. The job of a Trinity teacher is to design student experiences that ignite the fire of learning.

Trinity's intellectual focus, then, is on living ideas: ideas that stimulate thought, inquiry, and inference, and lead students to acquire not merely information but knowledge. This guides the pedagogical and curricular decisions for every class at Trinity, and, especially in the higher grades, for electives and co-curriculars.

### *An Unhurried Curriculum*

We believe that an unhurried education fits learners who have been created in the image of God. In the Genesis story we read how God brought forth his good creation through the rhythm of patterned speaking and acting to bring order out of chaos. At the culmination of his creation, we see God's rest. Those who thrive in the good world of God's *shalom* will imitate these principles of rhythm and rest.

An unhurried education sets out to do just that. Our students have diverse callings and talents, and we aim to help them to order their lives rightly and to be faithful in their vocations; thus we seek a balanced education. Our students are to flourish in the God-modeled pattern of work and respite, through sabbaths of worship and play; thus we seek to make time for rest. And our students thrive on the changing experiences that come to them through the day, the week, and the seasons; thus we seek a rhythm that alternates seasons of stress and renewal.

Much education in our day is rushed. Our culture seems too often hurried and grasping, wanting as much as possible as soon as possible. Our world pressures children and families into an accelerated pace of life and learning and often ignores the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 4:6: "Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind." For this reason, an unhurried education takes daily decisions by faculty, parents, and students to resist cultural and personal temptations to intellectual greed and envy.

An unhurried education is rich and intellectually deep. It is challenging and interesting, and it is properly rigorous. It makes room for a certain kind of excellence that is not possible when learning is rushed. It slows down and pauses, when doing so fosters reflection, creativity, and higher-order thinking.

We believe, also, that an unhurried atmosphere in a school fosters virtue and promotes love among students, faculty, and parents. Learning is essential in any school, but love is paramount in a Christian school. Part of our calling is to teach our students to order their loves rightly: to love God, to love others, to love knowledge and understanding, to love themselves. An unhurried school makes space for these loves to find their proper place in our lives together.

A child's education is broader than just that which occurs at school. We recognize three spheres:

*Formal education in school.* This covers the things every child should learn, but at Trinity is oriented especially toward the love of learning, tools for learning (classical and twenty-first century), ways of organizing learning, and ways of communicating.

*Formal education outside of school.* Church activities fall here, as do lessons and activities addressing the special interests and talents particular to the child, such as dance, music, scouting, and sports. Trinity offers many after-school clubs and courses, and the school's schedule and pace is designed to leave time for lessons outside of school. Beginning at the middle grades, Trinity also provides an interscholastic athletics program that serves most of our students.

*Informal education.* Both inside and outside of school, this includes time with family and friends and time alone for reading, investigation, and contemplation. Play is, in a special sense, the unique “work” of children, for it awakens and nurtures the imagination. We believe that allowing people time and opportunity to play is vital to an excellent education. Trinity's shorter school day and year and our emphasis on little homework before the teen years aim to protect this time.

An unhurried education moves in part with our culture—for instance, cultivating creativity, facilitating serendipitous learning, modeling civility, nurturing friendship, and differentiating instruction for both the slower-blooming and the precocious student.

At the same time, a commitment to an unhurried education pushes against the culture: preferring fewer things done well; favoring enrichment and depth over acceleration; limiting the claims of the school beyond the school day and year; allowing for students to “stay younger” longer; and forging a developmentally appropriate curriculum.

At Trinity, academics is first, but fettered. Educating students is at the very heart of our mission: academic learning inside and outside the classroom is critically important. However, it is not so important that it trumps all other concerns. Even academic demands must be tested against the yardstick of unhurriedness, and academics must make place for other parts of a student's education.

We celebrate the marks of an unhurried school, which include these:

- Excellent, deep, retained learning
- Faculty who differentiate teaching to match their students' needs
- Students who read for pleasure
- Students who sustain focus and attend well
- “White space” in the school calendar
- A schedule that honors the principles of balance, rest, and rhythm, including unstructured play and social time for students of all ages
- Time for faculty, students, and staff to engage in personal devotions and stress-reducing leisure
- Students with involvements beyond Trinity—for instance, after-school and/or summer jobs, church youth groups, Scouting, or a travel sports team; service to a local charity; or a community dance or music group
- An early cut-off date for kindergarten, and transitional kindergarten for younger fives
- Teaching students to read only when they are developmentally ready
- Celebrating group activities as much as or more than dating activities

- Intentional and balanced policies regarding technology
- Summers and vacations that are protected for families

We seek to avoid and limit the marks of a hurried school, which include these:

- Accelerated coursework, especially in the lower grades
- Excessive homework
- Curricula that emphasize coverage over depth
- A winning-trumps-all mentality in athletics
- A talent-trumps-all mentality in the arts
- Students' dependence on parents to advocate and on faculty/staff to create all curricular and cocurricular opportunities

Trinity pushes against the early professionalization of students, in which individuals are pigeonholed by ability or cocurricular interest or aptitude. As students mature, aptitude plays an ever-increasing role in shaping their activities, but Trinity seeks to delay the point when only the most-skilled athletes can play on a team, only the best musicians can sing in an ensemble, or only the brightest engineers can be on a Robotics team.

Sometimes an unhurried education will be a rich one—when a slower pace of learning enables enrichment and the opportunity to go deeper. At other times an unhurried education will be in tension with a rich education—when students want to take full advantage of myriad opportunities for learning in the classroom, in athletics and the arts, and in cocurricular activities. Learning to manage this tension is part of our students' education; the faculty aims to model and to counsel how to do this. Trinity facilitates this exploration by restricting the time that curricular and cocurricular activities can each demand from students. Success in this balancing act depends on effective communication across the different lines of activity at Trinity.

In many American secondary schools there is much pressure to pursue college admission by taking burdensome course loads that leave little time for deep, joyous learning or for personal pursuits beyond the classroom. An unhurried education preserves the time and space for rich, spontaneous learning experiences, yet still provides students a rigorous, excellent college preparation that is attractive and compelling to the full range of college admission offices.

Trinity athletics, especially our Middle School and JV teams, manifest unhurriedness by emphasizing team cohesion and player development over winning. While recognizing the desire to compete well, Trinity defines excellence at these levels as more about process than product. Trinity's varsity teams, which culminate years of player development, more time, commitment, and effort, expect more of athletes; and athletes and coaches enjoy working together with a stronger, but never exclusive, focus on winning. Varsity athletics can be in tension with family life and other student endeavors, including academics. Academics trumps athletics at Trinity, but our goal is to support students as they learn to balance and order competing priorities in their lives.

The fine and performing arts contribute to and are shaped by Trinity's unhurried mission. Music performances in younger grades showcase what students have been studying in their regular curriculum. We emphasize classroom-based presentations instead of large-scale productions. Trinity aims to retain

non-auditioned groups as long as possible, to encourage strong participation in all divisions. We suit performance expectations to a student's developmental stage. In the theater arts, play practices are usually incorporated into the school day, enabling drama students to participate in other activities. At the same time, the episodic nature of cocurricular activities such as drama, music, and robotics creates unavoidable pressures and stresses that students must learn to manage. Like music, drama requires shared time, and the school's commitment to planning for this allows for a less hurried production.

Technologies to enhance educational enrichment are a double-edged sword for Trinity. They afford new opportunities for learning, but they can accelerate the pace of life and information exposure, distract students from deep reflection, and sometimes accelerate the pace of childhood. Thus we promote moderation and discipline in the use of these tools. We expect Trinity students to use current technologies effectively, but also to be effective learners without them. We encourage breaks from connectivity and the online world for the sake of reconnecting with God, with others, and with the natural world.

Trinity is a place where children and adolescents are free to learn, play, read, and connect in ways that fit their natural bent at each age. Trinity's developmentally sensitive curriculum respects children and adolescents as maturing, but not yet fully mature, bearers of God's image. Without over-stressing them, we aim to challenge students with the learning experiences that will grow their imaginations and their abilities naturally, and so help nurture in them a lifelong love of learning.

### *Communicating Truth, Goodness, and Beauty*

Truth, goodness, and beauty are the great transcendentals of the classical tradition. The intellectual, moral, and aesthetic experiences are avenues by which human beings have moved outside the self and have come to know spiritual realities. At Trinity, these great transcendentals are interpreted through a specifically Christian vision: We believe their source and medium is the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In pursuing these transcendentals, we urge one another on to a fuller vision of God in Christ.

- Trinity School welcomes all *truth* as God's truth. This perspective promotes unfettered inquiry in which all subjects may be studied and all questions asked. At the same time, Trinity seeks to understand and adopt God's interpretation of every aspect of life, integrating all subjects in a unified perspective that is thoroughly Christian and consistent with the Scriptures.
- Trinity seeks to provide an education in *goodness*, one that develops the conscience and teaches virtuous habits. Most importantly, we hope to plant and tend the seed of faith in Jesus Christ, without which true goodness is impossible, and to help shape that faith into deep spirituality and Christian character. By encouraging such habits as fairness, humility, truthfulness, self-control, perseverance, courage, and compassion, Trinity prepares students for benevolent engagement with the culture at large. Such moral education is accomplished through precept and praise, through examples from history and literature, and through the living example of parents, teachers, and school leaders, by the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our students.

- Trinity also nurtures an appreciation for reflections of God’s glory and *beauty* in nature, in the arts, in culture, and in human relationships. We believe that both aesthetic discernment and imaginative expression are important aspects of education. Trinity exposes students to sublime expressions of beauty, cultivates the imagination, and strives to develop in every student an ability to re-express God’s beauty in creative ways.

Trinity is blessed to have faculty members who on a daily basis strive to communicate and to model the truth, goodness, and beauty that flow from God and can be seen in his world.

Christianity is at the heart of who we are. The Christian education we offer is not superficially religious, a mere overlay of Bible courses, prayer, and chapel services upon an otherwise secular curriculum. Through prayer and through the study and memorization of Scripture, through the Christian witness of teachers and staff, inside and outside of the classroom, Trinity students can come to love God and to grow in their knowledge of him. Believing that all truth is God’s truth, we teach students to use the classical tools of learning in their study of both secular and Christian thought in the arts, literature, and science. In so doing, we foster students’ growth both in knowledge and in discernment of what is true, beautiful and good, and encourage them to develop a lifelong love of learning. Through such means as community service, public speaking, debate, and exposure to non-Christian viewpoints, Trinity seeks to train students to participate in and transform the society in which they live.

#### *For Further Reading*

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*Additional Trinity School documents:*

- The Philosophy of Charlotte Mason at Trinity School
- Policy documents on Computers and Technology, Foreign Language Instruction, and Teaching of Creation and Origins