

WHERE IS THE CHRISTIAN IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION? CHIP DENTON

How does your Christianity impact the education you offer at Trinity?

This is a fair question, frequently asked. The school asks it on the application form of prospective teachers and staff. Prospective parents invariably ask it. People from non-religious schools want to know what might be different here.

First, **a Christian education is an education offered by Christian teachers.** Every legitimate vocation in the yellow pages can be adorned and honored by a sincere Christian who takes it up with reverence, humility, diligence, honesty, and love. Of education, however, we can say more. Because its currency is ideas and truth, and because its material is the human person, the opportunities for doing serious good and serious harm are magnified. Wherever we find honest Christian teachers plying their trade—whether in public schools, independent schools, or religious schools—we should give thanks and pray for their benevolent influence in the lives of their students. At Trinity School we work hard to hire and nurture teachers who are Christians.

We can say more. **A Christian education is an education from a Christian perspective.** Frank Gaebelin, first Headmaster of the Stony Brook School, defined this as “integration” of our faith with learning in every aspect. Some Christian schools today like to talk about “worldview.” At Trinity we have chosen these words in our mission: “to educate . . . *within the framework of Christian faith and conviction.*” This mission puts us into a double posture: Enlightened by Christian truth, we meet the world with interest, sympathy, curiosity, and compassion. All truth is God’s truth. All that has been well said belongs to us Christians. On the other hand, we know that creation waits in travail and we live in a fallen world, a dangerous place where truth is still held hostage by unrighteousness. Therefore we seek to bring every thought captive to Christ’s truth, to scrutinize what we hear according to God’s truth, and to sift the true from the false. Both of these postures are essential to Christian education.

If education *by Christians* is possible in almost any school, education *from a Christian perspective* is not possible in many of our schools. A school like Trinity offers Christian education in both of these senses, but also in a third, which is unique: **Christian education can also be defined as education in a community of Christian teachers and students.** This fellowship is vital because education is a communal experience. We learn from one another. The fastest student in the class has a chance to explain indirect objects to her struggling desk-mate. That same desk-mate, later in math class, asks the question which breaks the log jam of misunderstanding for half the class. What is true of education is all the more true of Christian education. We are the body of Christ and we belong to one another. Students in Christian schools learn how to value rightly their own gifts and those of their classmates. Moreover, Christianity is caught as much

as it is taught, and many Christian parents put our children in schools like Trinity because we want the Gospel to be formed in them, in every part of them: from imagination, to intellect, to will. Since our students spend six or seven hours in a school setting, it makes sense to ask what sort of community is shaping them.

A school like Trinity offers a Christian education in all three of these senses. Our teachers are believers who give students a framework of Christian faith and conviction in a community that is attempting to live out the Gospel and kingdom values. Any one of these can be a potent force in a young person's life; but the combination of the three can be, by God's grace, life-changing.