



# HEAD LINES

A Monthly Message from Chip Denton, Head of School



March 2020

Dear Trinity Community,

What's in a name? Where did Trinity get its name?

I was rifling through some old files recently, and I came upon a MEMORANDUM typed in WordPerfect, printed on a dot-matrix printer, dated 4/5/95, from me to “The Steering Committee” (Nancy Brooks, Bob Byrd, David English, David Hostetler, Jim Lamont, and Kathy Tyndall). It had the subject: “The Name of Our School”—which, being translated, means that by April 5, 1995, there was a school (not yet incorporated) and there was a “we,” but not yet a name.

Here are the ones we did not choose: The Logos School, Mars Hill Academy, Christ the King, St. Augustine's School, The Academy of Chapel Hill and Durham, Veritas Academy.

## Why Trinity School?

We liked the clear but somewhat subtle Christian identification. When you think about it, there is no more unapologetic Christian claim than to be trinitarian. But the name was not (and still is not, I think) overly pious, or triumphalistic, or in-your-face religious. Some of this is because of its overuse—try claiming a URL for “Trinity School.” It felt to us like a school that was very comfortable in its Christian skin without shouting about it. I think that even in 1995 we sensed that our place as a Christian school in an increasingly pluralistic culture would require wisdom and deft navigation through some rocky shoals. Being Trinity School instead of Christ the King has helped us do that, I think.

It's also a classic name for a classical school. It goes back, way back: to the early centuries of the church, to the great theologians of the patristic period, and—ad fontes—to the New Testament itself, if not explicitly certainly in substance, as the framers of the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds discovered and unveiled as they attended carefully to Scripture.

Like the name, we wanted our school to major on the majors. What could be more central and unifying than the Trinity? What is at the heart of all we are, of the whole world, seen and unseen, than the Three-Personed One God from whom and through whom and to whom are all things? Other names might tribalize us, or make us partisan, but this one suggests a school that is trying to keep First Things first. A school that is going for an evangelical, orthodox, and ecumenical identity is a school grounded in the Trinity.

*Please turn over...*

Less important, but still advantageous, Trinity suggests other triads which, though not paramount, are still important to the school's foundational commitments. Truth, goodness, and beauty are a trinity of sorts: the unity of the transcendent expressed in the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic realms. And the Trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric represents a triune approach to learning: three liberal arts that together represent the tools of learning across any number of subjects.

A local and indigenous connection made this name all the more attractive: One of the major universities in our area was also named Trinity before James B. Duke created the Duke Endowment and the school was renamed in honor of his father, Washington Duke. Trinity College of Arts and Sciences still bears the old name within that larger university. I hope that our light blue families will look kindly on this connection.

The other word I used in the memo to recommend this name was "euphonious." I chuckle now at my word choice, but it's true that "Trinity School" trips off the tongue more nicely than "The Academy of Chapel Hill and Durham." The official name of the school ended up being a bit more cumbersome: Trinity School of Durham and Chapel Hill. There was already a Trinity School in Fayetteville, and our incorporation required something more distinctive.

One other consideration is important to note. We chose Trinity School and not Trinity Academy for a very specific reason. We were aware that some Christian schools and some other private schools in the South that bore the name "Academy" had been formed in part as segregationist schools, and we wanted to signal from the start that Trinity was open for business for all people in our community. Two clarifications here are important—I don't want to be misunderstood. I am not suggesting that other "academies" in our area were segregationist, but only that we wanted to avoid all such appearance, connotation, or misunderstanding. And I certainly don't mean to ascribe a segregationist history or motive to the school in Raleigh that bears the name Trinity Academy. That school was founded in 1995 as Regent School and changed its name several years after both it and we had started.

The Steering Committee, which amounted to the protoboard of the school, readily embraced the name of Trinity School. That act, like Adam's naming of the animals in Genesis 2, was more than an arbitrary move of convenience. It was a defining: a way of discovering and bringing out the essence of this school that we all love and that we now, reflexively, call Trinity School. I like to think that when we called this school Trinity, the Lord looked on and saw that it was good.

*Non Nobis,*

Chip Denton  
Head of School



TRINITY SCHOOL OF DURHAM AND CHAPEL HILL

4011 Pickett Road · Durham, North Carolina 27705 · trinityschoolnc.org · 919-402-8262