

Civic Virtue Starts at Home

Faith and Freedom for Institutional Transformation

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We don't mind all this diversity. But are they Catholic?"

The Trinity College alumna who challenged me with this question gave voice to what many other alumnae were thinking in the early 1990s as Trinity's student body underwent a dramatic demographic paradigm shift.

Historically hailing mostly from traditional, white, Catholic families in the middle- and upper-middle-class parishes of the East Coast and Midwest, Trinity students in the first seven decades of the college's life emerged as smart, strong leaders of families, communities, and corporations with deep devotion to their Trinity friendships and traditions. Their memories of alma mater were infused with the deep longing of nostalgia, a recollection of experiences enjoyed in the hazy days of youth: the Well Sings and Class Days and smoker sings; the well-scrubbed young men from Georgetown waiting for their dates in the Grail Parlor under the benevolent gaze of Sister Ann Francis; memories of daily Mass in the big chapel, with long years of instruction in Catholic theology and moral philosophy.

The thought of hundreds of young women of different races and ethnicities chilling to rap music on their iPods in the courtyard or calling out to friends in street vernacular on the hallowed Marble Corridor of Main Hall sent shivers through the ranks.

Diversity is fine, but are they Catholic? Well, no, they're mostly Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal with a few Muslims for good measure.

Good heavens, does that mean that Trinity has lost its faith?

The question masked profound discomfort with the shifting cultural landscape not only at Trinity but throughout society. Blue jeans had long proliferated on the Marble Corridor, and even when they were still coming around, Georgetown boys no longer wore ties on first dates. Besides, dates had long given way to simply hanging out.

Framing the change question in terms of Catholicism was like clinging to a plank from the ship that had already exploded on the reef. With everything in the social ecosystem turned on its head, could we still count on faith to be the stable center holding fast to our values, helping us continue to find meaning in the chaos of change?

In a way that our alumnae did not expect, the answer was clearly, “Yes!” Trinity’s faith center imbued the decades of change with meaning and purpose, but not in the narrowly doctrinal, ritualistic ways that some expected. Rather, the vibrancy of a truly contemporary understanding of our faith made it possible for Trinity to articulate mission in extraordinary new ways to new populations of students. The faith is stronger than ever, but everything looks different.

The pushback was hard.

The idea that we do what we do not because our students are Catholic but because we are Catholic had not yet taken root. The understanding of our faith as a source of true freedom to embrace a new form of institutional expression was alien. For Trinity’s historic constituencies, as was true for many Catholics nationwide, a Catholic institution was defined by the religion, rituals, and rules of its population, not by the idea of mission and ministry in service to others.

Mission as ministry, rather than mission as characteristics, was a whole new idea. We understood our faith as a source of constraint and restriction, not of liberation to embrace the world as we found it. Quite frankly, I wish twenty-five years ago I had heard the words that Pope Francis recently proclaimed in Rio: “We need to proclaim the Gospel on every street corner...” (2013). Our Catholicism is manifest in our ministry to the world, not only to Catholics but to all who seek God’s grace.

We typically think about how we can use the leverage of our faith values and free voices to teach our students how to engage the great issues of building the Good Society beyond the borders of the campus.

But, sometimes, the campus itself is precisely the place that needs such evangelization and transformation, a conversion process that turns the community inside-out, that uncloaks the security of history and tradition, exposing the institution to the risk of a large paradigm shift in the articulation of mission, to new constituencies who hunger and thirst for the liberating power of education, to students who need new and different programs and pedagogies, to human beings who are changing the course of history for their children and families by being the first ever to enroll in college.

In this paradigm shift, civic virtue is not simply an extrinsic good we share with the world—noblesse oblige—but rather, an intrinsic imperative shaping institutional characteristics, choices, and commitments. In this model, the institution is the society we seek to change as a Gospel imperative, and through such transformation we are better able to evangelize and serve the needs of the world beyond the campus community.

This is Trinity's story.

1897: Radical Sparks of Life

When the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur founded Trinity in 1897 as one of the nation's first Catholic colleges for women, they had a then-radical view that women had the same right as men to go to college. They founded Trinity in direct response to the fact that women were being barred from admission at the newly-established Catholic University of America. By the way, the Sisters of Notre Dame (SNDs) did not impose any religious test on students from the start; students of all faiths were always welcome at Trinity.

The leading bishop in Washington then was the progressive Cardinal Gibbons, who wrote to Trinity founder Sr. Julia McGroarty that it was "an embarrassment" (Letter to Sister Julia McGroarty, SND, June 21, 1887. Reprinted in Mullaly 1987, xiii) that Catholic women were denied admission to the new university, so he supported the founding of Trinity. However, then as now, the extreme right-wing in the Church had a very dim view of women and women's education, and raised quite a ruckus about Trinity's founding, going so far as to suggest it was part of a heresy called "Americanism." But the nuns prevailed, and from the fire of the founding struggles a college emerged whose soul was imbued with the passionate commitment of the SNDs to work in service to the world, to live by the social justice imperative of the Gospel.

The idea of academic and intellectual freedom was embedded in Trinity's sense of mission and purpose from the start. In the founding years, the Sisters of Notre Dame received support and encouragement from Bishop John Lancaster Spalding of Peoria, whose influential work *Means and Ends of Education* extolled the importance of a college education for women, a radical idea at the end of the nineteenth century. He wrote,

There is not a religion, a philosophy, a science, an art for man and another for woman. Consequently, there is not, in its essential elements at least, an education for man and another for woman. In souls, in minds, in consciences, in hearts,

there is no sex. What is the best education for woman? That which will best help her to become a perfect human being, wise, loving and strong. What is her work? Whatever may help her to become herself. What is forbidden her? Nothing but what degrades or narrows or warps. What has she the right to do? Any good and beautiful and useful think she is able to do without hurt to her dignity and worth as a human being. (Spalding 1895, 101)

Spalding's statement was ahead of its time, a prophetic call to liberate women from the ignorance imposed by cultural constraints on women's education. The Sisters of Notre Dame used this statement and Spalding's great work to justify the founding of Trinity in the face of severe right-wing criticism. A century later, we would return to this statement to justify liberating Trinity from the cultural constraints that had threatened to diminish or destroy the transformative imperative at the end of the twentieth century.

Trinity at Mid-Century: Growing Influence

By the middle of the twentieth century, Trinity was widely regarded as an intellectual powerhouse, "the Catholic Wellesley" in the phrase used by some admirers, the college of choice for influential Catholic families.

Trinity drew its students over the first seventy years largely from Catholic girls' high schools in the major eastern cities: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. Our alumnae over the years became famous for their broadly ecumenical devotion to service to our nation and world, exhibiting a fierce intellectual prowess that made our graduates able to lead the way as "the first women" in many fields of endeavor.

Because of Trinity's location in the nation's capital, many daughters of Catholic politicians attended Trinity, and following in their fathers' footsteps became a grand tradition. Trinity became the first college or university in America to have two female graduates serving in Congress at the same time when Nancy Pelosi, Class of 1962, joined Barbara Kennelly, Class of 1958. Congresswoman Kennelly, the first woman ever to serve on the House Intelligence Committee, blazed the trail for Pelosi's ascent into party leadership. Congresswoman Pelosi ultimately became Speaker of the House, the first woman to do so in American history, and she now continues in Congress as Democratic Leader.

When Kathleen Gilligan Sebelius, Class of 1970, the former governor of Kansas who became Secretary of Health and Human Services, stood alongside Speaker Pelosi as President Obama signed the Affordable Healthcare Act into law, they became famous

as the “Trinity Sisters” (Carey 2011). Beyond those famous faces are thousands of women across the generations since 1900 serving the greatest needs of their communities, teaching and healing and raising children, and advocating for justice in myriad ways around the world.

From its founding through the heady days of the 1960s, Trinity’s enrollment grew to nearly 1,000 young Catholic women preparing for future roles as mothers and wives, corporate executives and public officials, teachers and writers, doctors and lawyers (Figure 1). Trinity’s proud, progressive soul soared through the 1960s with a view to the future as almost an unlimited horizon for a college devoted to women’s leadership and advancement in society.

So high was Trinity’s arc, so far was its vision, that it could not foresee the swift-rising threats that rose like dangerous wind shears to suck the institution back to earth with a long, thudding, thumping, crashing skid through the 1970s and 1980s.

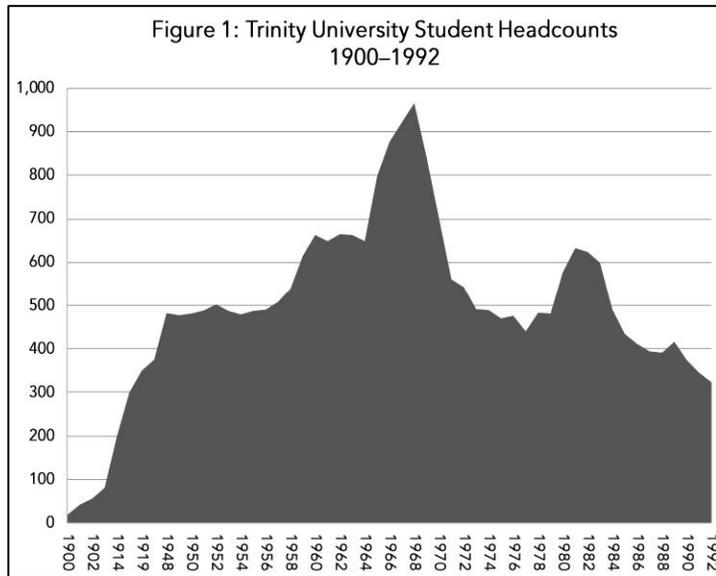
Years of Challenge

Vatican II led to the rapid evaporation of the free labor of the nuns who floated so much of Trinity’s financial boat for the first eight decades. The Cold War, the Space Race, and the rise of the National Science Foundation built the men’s university campuses and laboratories beyond any previous imagination, but largely skipped over the women’s colleges. So after coeducation swept the land, followed by the effects of Title IX and the NCAA, the women’s colleges were left with outmoded facilities and suddenly seemingly irrelevant missions in a world that had changed so very quickly from 1965 to 1985. From a high of nearly three hundred women’s colleges in 1960, nearly 190 of which were Catholic, today fewer than fifty institutions identify as women’s colleges, and fewer than fifteen of those as Catholic women’s colleges. Some merged, some went coed, many simply closed.

Trinity Transformed

Trinity remains, not merely surviving, but flourishing; not merely a recovery operation, but a true triumph of institutional renaissance and transformation.

We didn’t “go coed” but we do have men in many programs today, since we have come to a view that a women’s college is not about exclusion but about inclusion, not about isolation from men but engagement with issues of equality that include gender, race, class, and other characteristics.



We stuck firmly with our traditional mission to women in the daytime, undergraduate program, now called the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), because we realized that new populations of women needed precisely this kind of education that focused on their learning needs, but almost everything had to change to make this mission work in a new age. We breathed new life into the liberal arts by embracing professional studies. We learned that the true

soul of a Catholic college is not in educating Catholics alone but in opening the power of our educational mission to the students of the world who need us the most, those who might not have had other opportunities but for our work.

How Did Trinity Do It?

Strategic planning became the backbone for managing the kind of change that Trinity had to embrace if we were to have a future. In the early 1990s, our discussions about our strategic future were a tug-of-war between the most radical traditionalists who preferred to die rather than consider any change and those whose idea of change was to consider coeducation as a way to safeguard our Catholicism, a bulwark against a perceived rising tide of feminism, diversity, and, in their view, mediocrity.

Fortunately, the Sisters of Notre Dame, while increasingly few in number on the faculty and staff, still had moral authority and presence on our board. “Why are we trying so hard to reclaim the past,” declared one such nun at a board meeting, “when there are thousands of women at Trinity’s doorstep who could profit from this education? We founded Trinity to make higher education accessible to women, and countless women still find barriers to achievement. Trinity should be open to them.”

In a real sense, the SNDs on the board gave us permission to exercise our freedom to create dramatic, even radical change; we felt a sense of freedom as vibrant and urgent as the freedom our founders exercised in creating this institution in the face of so much opposition in 1897. Like them, we had to create options for Trinity’s future that were not constrained by history, tradition, or cultural objections from people who viewed any change as a subversive rejection of Catholic values. Quite the contrary, we had to

educate our many constituencies about the real meaning of our Catholic identity as a source of freedom to design a future for Trinity more clearly rooted in the call to action for social justice as a central tenet of our faith.

Trinity's transformation has included dramatic changes in institutional organization, curricula and programs, and populations served. Recognizing the fact that new populations of historically marginalized students would need or desire different educational programs, and also anticipating the increasing demand for graduate and professional education, Trinity reorganized out of the uni-dimensional liberal arts collegiate model into a complex university model with four academic schools designed to meet the needs of different student population, while also providing a more logical organizational form for faculty and programs in remarkably different disciplines and degree levels.

Through a decade of strategic planning, benchmarking, and market analysis, Trinity discerned that the mission to women should continue as a strong central commitment, but that a woman-centered identity must also include and welcome male students in many more programs. Additionally, while remaining steadfast in the belief that a strong liberal arts platform is essential for a true higher education, Trinity recognized the need to build stronger and more affirmative links with professional studies.

From all of this discussion, a new mission statement emerged and was adopted in 2000:

Trinity is a comprehensive institution offering a broad range of educational programs that prepare students across the lifespan for the intellectual, ethical and spiritual dimensions of contemporary work, civic and family life. Trinity's core mission values and characteristics emphasize:

Commitment to the Education of Women in a particular way through the design and pedagogy of the historic undergraduate women's college, and by advancing principles of equity, justice and honor in the education of women and men in all other programs;

Foundation for Learning in the Liberal Arts through the curriculum design in all undergraduate degree programs and through emphasis on the knowledge, skills and values of liberal learning in all graduate and professional programs;

Integration of Liberal Learning with Professional Preparation through applied and experiential learning opportunities in all programs;

Grounding in the mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the Catholic tradition, welcoming persons of all faiths, in order to achieve the larger purposes of learning in the human search for meaning and fulfillment.

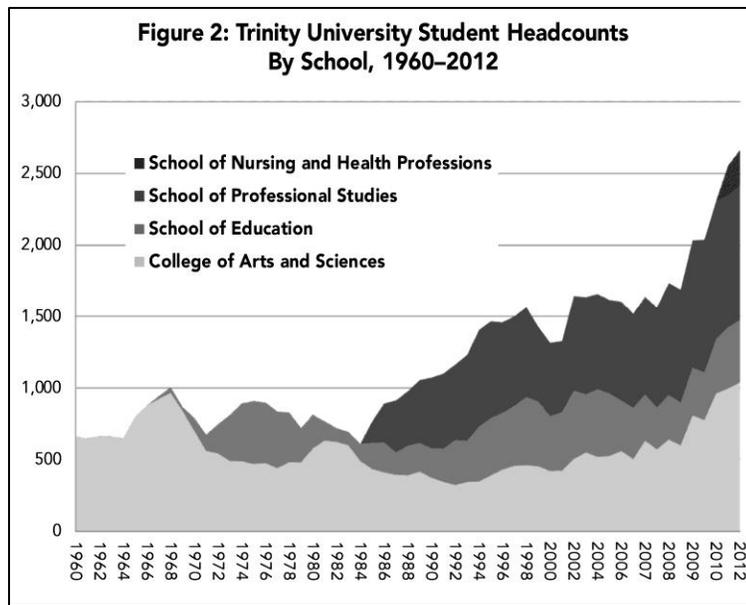
At the same time, Trinity at long last adopted the organizational form of the diversified university model that would give all programs the opportunity to grow with the right academic framework and administrative support. Trinity evolved from a single-college focus—the historic women’s college—to a multi-unit university with multiple revenue streams and a framework for governance that recognizes the ability of faculty within the units to make their own curricular decisions.

This complex form of organization made it possible for Trinity to design and deliver programs suited to many different populations. The coeducational School of Education (EDU), begun in 1966 as a Master of Arts in Teaching program, now offers a range of education-related masters degrees. The School of Professional Studies (SPS), started in 1985 as a Weekend College for adult, working women, now offers women and men a full range of degrees from associates through bachelors and masters. The School of Nursing and Health Professions (NHP), also coeducational, fulfills a great workforce need in the Washington region (Figure 2).

The Paradigm Shift

“Paradigm Shift” is the phrase used in Trinity’s 1996 Middle States Self-Study to describe the demographic changes sweeping the student body. Those changes occurred because of new programs and drove additional programmatic innovation.

Even as the nuns urged us to open wide the doors of opportunity in our full-time undergraduate college, the adult women who were coming in larger numbers to our Weekend College began to see Trinity as a great option for their daughters. Predominantly African-American, many of them single mothers, working full-time while studying Shakespeare on weekends, these were and are the women who run Washington, the mid-level federal workers managing the administrative affairs of the big agencies, the secretaries and office managers of the law firms and private businesses managing government contracts. They came to Trinity to complete baccalaureate degrees so that they could get promoted at work and improve the economic security of their families, and they discovered the real power of liberal learning as personally, intellectually, and spiritually fulfilling beyond the mere economic incentive. They realized the powerful results of an education focused on making women successful. They brought their daughters, first a trickle and then a great wave, a tsunami of change cresting over the once-impermeable granite walls of Main Hall.



From 1989–2000, Trinity’s student body demographics changed from more than 85 percent white to more than 60 percent black, from predominantly Catholic to predominantly Baptist and other Christian denominations, from middle class to low income. The changes in race and social class also illustrate the fact that Trinity was fast becoming a preferred institution for students from the District of Columbia

and nearby Prince Georges County (see: Trinity Washington University 2011).

More than half of Trinity’s full-time undergraduates today are from DC, and about 50 percent of our total student body are DC residents. About one-third of these students are from the “east of the river” neighborhoods that are among the lowest income places in the city. DC has one of the highest poverty rates among major metropolitan areas, along with one of the highest median family incomes. DC also has a staggering adult illiteracy rate, about 35 percent, even though it also boasts the highest percentage of earned degrees in the country. DC is a city divided, and that divide runs down the center of the map; Trinity serves most of the city on the eastern side of the map.

These changes in race, religion, social class, and geographic service required Trinity to be bold and unafraid: bold in stating our belief that mission is not about characteristics but service; unafraid of the inevitable criticism and resistance that comes with changing demographics. We also had to be creative with our limited resources and savvy about building margin while affirming mission. We managed the conflict in ways that kept everyone at the table, and some of the most ardent critics became our best supporters.

By 2006, our Middle States visiting team was able to tell us:

The team has experienced in Trinity, at every turn, a mission-driven institution.... The team recognizes the impressive congruence of Trinity in 2006 with the original vision of Trinity’s founders in 1897. The team admires and commends the University’s rejection of the notion that paradigm shift means abandonment of historic mission. Rather, we discover in the work and vitality of Trinity of 2006, a most obvious continuity with Trinity’s 110-year-old mission expressed with a renewed relevance and vigor.... (5)

There is breathtaking achievement chronicled in the self-study... Above all, perhaps, is the success of Trinity faculty in curricular and pedagogical change serving the students of the “paradigm shift.” (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2006)

Catholic Mission in a Transformed University

As Trinity developed through the last two decades, we have remained mindful of the foundation of our mission in Catholic values and religious beliefs even as we have welcomed people of all faiths. In many ways, our lived experience as an institution serving a remarkably under served population of students is the best sign of our fidelity to the Gospel imperatives of our faith in social justice.

To engage this transformation, we also had to understand the power of academic freedom and to use that freedom effectively to create the change we desired. We learned that issues of faith, freedom, and civic engagement are not just about outcomes of curricular and co-curricular programs, but in fact are deeply entwined with choices about the students we choose to serve, the academic programs we offer, and the entire structure and organization of the university, choices that will ensure success for students who bring tremendous needs onto the campus. Our civic engagement with the greatest needs of our city as a matter of social justice is not about sending our students out to feed the hungry, but rather, figuring out how to serve the hungry students who come to campus each day.

Our students bring with them characteristics of severe poverty, educational deprivation, domestic violence, and the results of chronic marginalization and real oppression:

- 75 percent of entering first-year students in Fall 2012 were Pell eligible.
- The approximate median family income of first-year students is \$25,000.
- 25 percent of first-year students estimate their family income at \$10,000 or less.
- More than 75 percent identify as African American; close to 20 percent as Hispanic.
- The majority are self-supporting.

- Most work more than twenty hours per week; many work forty or more hours.
- About 15 percent of first-year young women already have children.
- About 40 percent of first-year students have health issues that can impede academic progress.
- Many of these health issues are previously undiagnosed or untreated.
- The majority of entering students require some level of developmental math instruction.
- Students' critical reading and writing skills are deficient.
- Their knowledge of "the academic vocabulary" and culture is limited.
- Few, if any, have adults in their lives who can be good supports for academic success.

Many of our students come to Trinity with astonishing stories about their lives. Each year, I read the admissions essays of the students who enroll, and I find myself stunned, appalled, amazed, and humbled by their words. These are women who, at very young ages, have had to figure out how to prevail over circumstances that would make most of us tremble and collapse. Mothers shot. Fathers incarcerated. Siblings abused. Death, sickness, violence, hunger, homelessness, refugee status, genocidal war, oppressive regimes, flights across the border seeking safety and security in a new land. Our students have known all of this before age eighteen.

We have reflected on what the Church might expect of us as a powerfully transformed university rooted in the Catholic tradition and charism of the Sisters of Notre Dame. To understand our freedom and responsibilities, we return from time to time to the essential text of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and particularly to these paragraphs:

32. A Catholic University, as any University, is immersed in human society; as an extension of its service to the Church, and always within its proper competence, it is called on to become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society. Included among its research activities, therefore, will be a study of serious contemporary problems in areas such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life,

the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level. University research will seek to discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimensions. If need be, a Catholic University must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society.

33. A specific priority is the need to examine and evaluate the predominant values and norms of modern society and culture in a Christian perspective, and the responsibility to try to communicate to society those ethical and religious principles which give full meaning to human life....

34. The Christian spirit of service to others for the promotion of social justice is of particular importance for each Catholic University, to be shared by its teachers and developed in its students. The Church is firmly committed to the integral growth of all men and women (32). The Gospel, interpreted in the social teachings of the Church, is an urgent call to promote "the development of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance; of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfillment" (33). Every Catholic University feels responsible to contribute concretely to the progress of the society within which it works: for example it will be capable of searching for ways to make university education accessible to all those who are able to benefit from it, especially the poor or members of minority groups who customarily have been deprived of it.... (John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*).

How does Trinity interpret and apply these principles in the modern diverse university we have become?

Trinity's Model of Civic and Faith Engagement

Throughout our history, Trinity has been a deeply pragmatic institution with a strong impulse for education that inspires our graduates to engage the idea of service to the community in both professional and volunteer capacities. This characteristic arises from the mission and charism of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, whose founder St. Julie Billiart was famous for instructing her sisters to give their students the tools for success, to "Teach them what they need to know" to be productive in life.

Trinity has taken an intentional, multi-dimensional, and multi-disciplinary approach to ensuring our pervasive witness to Gospel values at institutional, curricular, and co-curricular levels. Institutionally, Trinity clearly has taken the “option for the poor” in developing contemporary ways to articulate its historic mission to marginalized populations. The institutional choice to accept students with large financial and academic needs into our programs means that we also accept the consequences of this choice.

I often say that poverty is one of our grand traditions, and in many ways Trinity and its personnel reflect the material poverty of our students. We live and work in somewhat austere conditions. While we do routine upgrades for safety and functionality, I don’t think anyone would say that our facilities are lavish. Most of our furniture has come from donations from downtown corporations: great stuff, hardly used, why not recycle it at Trinity? Our salaries are modest; we lay people cannot do “contributed services” in the grand scale of the nuns, but in smaller ways each of us who works at Trinity makes a contribution in wages foregone because we choose Trinity. We speak of our work as a ministry; regardless of the religious persuasion of our staff, each one feels called in some way to be part of Trinity’s mission.

We exemplify the institutional embrace of social justice in some of the work we do in the public square on the issues of higher education today. We are relentless advocates for access to higher education, for ensuring the strength of the federal financial aid system, for reducing the cost of higher education, and for ensuring that even the most marginal student has access to the learning resources she needs for success.

Institutionally, we also take care in our policies and practices to create a campus culture that places respect for human dignity at the center of our work. We emphasize the foundational importance of caring for our students regardless of the issues that walk through the front door each day. Someone new to Trinity recently remarked that if a student sneezes ten doors open along the faculty corridor. A dean told me that a student needed meal tickets because she had spent her last dollar on materials needed for a class and had not eaten for quite some time. We have created a food pantry with faculty and staff donations to help out students in need. We keep supplies of Metro passes on hand to help those with no money to commute. There are, of course, similar examples across all types of universities, public and private, Catholic and secular, and we also take care to say that we don’t have a corner on the market for development of an academic community with a passion for human dignity and social justice. But we do take pride in living those values as part of our faith identity.

But beyond good works and great care, we also manifest our Catholic values through the curriculum and co-curricular programs that focus on teaching our students the habits of social justice. While most of our students come from populations of great need, and while we believe that our education itself is part of community transformation, we also believe it is deeply important to enlarge our students' worldviews, to leverage them out of their own sense of poverty and possible victimization and into a realization of their own privilege as educated people, as citizens and leaders with an obligation to use this education to lift others as they climb toward greater economic security and higher social status. Our students at Trinity know suffering all too well; we don't need to teach them empathy with suffering. Rather, we need to teach them how to raise their sights and spirits beyond the moment of pain to grab hold of the opportunity for change, to experience the kind of personal transformation that will make them able to serve their families and communities effectively.

Beyond the typical requirements for courses in religion and philosophy, Trinity's curriculum emphasizes service, engagement, and ethics throughout the disciplines. Examples of the ways in which Trinity's curriculum and academic programs teach our faith values include:

- **Dreamers:** Trinity is partnering with a new organization in development of a scholarship program to support undocumented students in college.
- **Community Support:** Trinity extends a broad range of services and hospitality upon request to local community residents and civic leaders; Trinity students, faculty, and staff donate on average more than 50,000 hours of service to the community each year.
- **Peacebuilding:** Trinity faculty and students participate each year in programs of the Capital Area Association of Peace Studies (CAAPS), and Trinity students, faculty, and staff also engaged actively with the Fiftieth Anniversary of Pacem in Terris conferences.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** Trinity participates routinely in recycling and environmental stewardship planning for campus facilities; students actively pursue environmental action on campus; Dr. Diana Watts of the Business Administration faculty emphasizes sustainability and "green business," while Dr. Shizuki Hsieh in Chemistry pursues research on pollution in Ivy City.

Billiard Center for Social Justice

Named for St. Julie Billiart, founder of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, the Billiart Center for Social Justice rests on four pillars: scholarship, spirituality, religiosity, and service—pillars on which the identity of Trinity rests as well. The Center explores contemporary local, national, and international social and economic issues that affect the lives of women, particularly in the religious and political spheres. The programs offered by the Billiart Center build on the many ways in which these themes already are explored in Trinity's curricula and extracurricular activities. This Center is a central place that gathers and encourages what is already being done and offers assistance in developing more programs and ideas.

Programs offered through the Billiart Center in Fall 2013 include:

- **The Sociology of the Papacy, Pope Francis's Transformative Role:** Sr. Mary Johnson, SND, Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Religious Studies.
- **Poverty in the United States:** Sr. Marge Clark, NETWORK.
- **Action for Justice at the United Nations:** Sr. Jean Stoner, SND, liaison for the SND NGO at the United Nations.
- **Soup with the Sisters:** A periodic gathering of students, faculty, and staff with the SND community on campus to reflect on women's spirituality and issues of concern to women.

Campus Ministry Initiatives

With the leadership of Sr. Mary Ellen Dow, SND, the Campus Ministry program offers a wide range of opportunities for prayer and worship, spiritual development, and active engagement with social justice through community service. Some of the programs conducted through Campus Ministry include:

- **Alternative Spring Break in Selma:** A select group of Trinity students spend the spring semester studying issues of justice and leadership, with a capstone experience during spring break in Selma, Alabama working with the Blackbelt Housing Coalition on housing rehab, and also tracing the historic steps of civil rights leaders.

- **Cunneen Fellowship:** Trinity students receive generous fellowships for summer work in community service sites, with academic preparation and required summative papers to ensure the full learning experience.
- **Sower's Seed Lecture:** Supported by a generous gift from an alumna, the Sower's Seed lecture is an annual program to engage an alumna leader involved with in- service and justice work for a week long exploration of issues related to her work including a lecture for the campus community.
- **Weekly Service Programs:** Students, faculty, and staff have weekly opportunities to perform needed service with community organizations such as the Capital Area Food Bank and Christ House.

Science and Mathematics

Trinity's faculty and students in the sciences and mathematics are engaging with critical issues in the Washington community in numerous ways:

- **Ivy City Air Quality Study:** Dr. Shizuka Hsieh of Chemistry is conducting research with colleagues at area universities to collect data on air pollution in Ivy City, an impoverished section of northeast DC with significant bus traffic. This project also presents undergraduate research opportunities for Trinity students. Dr. Hsieh also focuses on environmental justice in her CHEM 101 courses, and her approach takes the students through a global view of environmental challenges from air pollution in China to lead poisoning in Senegal.
- **Dr. Sita Ramamurti,** Professor of Mathematics, is spending her sabbatical year at the Maya Angelou Public Charter School working with teachers on a model program to enhance their capacity to teach to the mathematics expectations in the Common Core curriculum. Maya Angelou serves acutely low-income students in the most impoverished section of DC; Maya Angelou students have often been unsuccessful in other schools. The school is part of the larger network of schools and programs organized through the See Forever Foundation.
- **Access to the STEM disciplines** for low-income African-American and Latina women in DC is a clear emphasis of Trinity's entire science and mathematics curriculum and co-curricular programming.

Sociology

Courses in Sociology typically embed a broad range of social justice considerations, and many of these courses also require service learning. Some examples include:

- **Understanding AIDS:** Students created a poster project for display on campus presenting data on prevalence, transmission, testing, affected populations, and other dimensions of HIV/AIDS.
- **Inequality and Society:** This course examines issues of income and wealth distribution, poverty, and the effects of social class, gender, and race/ethnicity on social inequality in the United States.
- **Senior Seminar Requirements:** Students engage with community organizations focused on issues of economic, ethnic, and gender inequality, working with organizations such as Bread for the City, N Street Village serving low-income women, My Sister's Place, Beacon House and other organizations serving critical needs in the city.

School of Education

Students and faculty in Trinity's School of Education are actively engaged in projects, curricula, and programs designed for urban communities that have high levels of poverty, educational marginalization, a prevalence of students with disabilities needing specific services, immigrant populations, and issues related to race, gender, sexual orientation, language, national origin, and religion, among others.

Topics in the Spring 2013 Research Colloquium presenting student and faculty papers illustrate this engagement:

- **Secondary Education:**
 - The effect of black male teachers on the behavior and performance of black male students in Prince Georges County High Schools.
- **Counseling Program:**
 - A qualitative study of home schooling among African-American families.
 - Counseling El Salvadorian adolescents

- Striving To Achieve Real-World Success (STARS): a career development program for high school students with and without disabilities
- **Curriculum and Instruction, Educating for Change:**
 - Human consumption and a changing earth

Dr. Deborah Haskins, Program Director and Assistant Professor of Counseling, co-authored an article on “Human Flourishing: A Natural Home for Spirituality” in the *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* (Volume 15, Issue No. 3).

School of Nursing and Health Professions

Trinity’s faculty and students in Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Health Sciences, Exercise Science, and related disciplines are engaged with a range of issues for healthcare in DC and the surrounding region.

- Dr. Nancie Bruce, director of the RN-BSN program, is a member of the DC Action Coalition that seeks to address problems with disparity in access to excellent health care in the Washington region, particularly for impoverished populations.
- Two Nursing courses (320: Policy and Politics in Nursing; 325: Contemporary Issues in Nursing and Health Care) specifically focus on problems in healthcare delivery and public policy issues.

Minding the Church’s Call

In all of this, at Trinity we are mindful of the call to family, community, and participation that emanates from the social justice teachings of the Church. We strive to create a community of learners who understand that the entire point of education is to work toward the improvement of the human condition, not simply for the sake of good secular aims but truly as a means of salvation.

We have recently been so inspired in this work by the magnificent example and words of Pope Francis who gives life to the idea of “mercy” at the heart of the social justice teachings. In his interview published in *America* and other Jesuit magazines, he said many things worth contemplating, but this one thought leapt out as the apt description of all that we are trying to do at Trinity:

“No one is saved alone, as an isolated individual, but God attracts us looking at the complex web of relationships that take place in the human community. God enters into this dynamic, this participation in the web of human relationships...”

“I see the holiness,” the pope continues, “in the patience of the people of God: a woman who is raising children, a man who works to bring home the bread, the sick, the elderly priests who have so many wounds but have a smile on their faces because they served the Lord, the sisters who work hard and live a hidden sanctity. This is for me the common sanctity. ...”

“How are we treating the people of God? I dream of a church that is a mother and shepherdess. The church’s ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor. This is pure Gospel.... The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people’s night, into the darkness, but without getting lost...” (Pope Francis, 2013).

This is the faith we strive to live at Trinity each day. Through the awesome power of an education formed by the deep faith of women driven by the Gospel, we are able to offer the best kind of freedom to our students, the freedom that comes from hope and empowerment. With these gifts of education, our students can truly engage the world with a passion for justice and creative zeal to make permanent change for good.

There is no greater purpose in higher education than to embed the virtue of hope and the power of change in the lives of people who have previously had scant acquaintance with either hope or true empowerment. This is our faith at Trinity; this is how we leverage our freedom. This is our contribution to civic virtue.

Patricia McGuire is the fourteenth president of Trinity Washington University in Washington, DC.

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