Trinity US Day of Silence
Friday, April 27

Dear Upper School Students and Parents,

Last spring, some of our US students participated in a national Day of Silence called for by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). The goal of this student-led national event is, by remaining silent during the school day, "to highlight the silencing and erasure of LGBTQ people at school." I am writing about this year's Day of Silence on Friday, April 27.

GLSEN is not a Christian organization, but its mission, "To ensure that every member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression," resonates with Jesus' call for Christians to love our neighbors. As Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) makes clear, "neighbor" includes both those who do and those who don't think or believe as we do. That was a radical idea in first-century Palestine and remains plenty hard today: It's the easier way to treat people as "other," holding them at a distance and seeing chiefly their differences. But when we do, this frequently leads to misunderstanding, disconnection, and painful experiences.

Many young people who identify as LGBTQ experience bullying and harassment in their schools, and regrettably, sometimes that unacceptable behavior is actually heightened in Christian school communities. Trinity believes that no student should be marginalized or mistreated and that, in particular because we are a Christian school, we are called to ensure that all students, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, racial identity, religious belief, learning difference, or any other "othering" category, are loved, known, and cared for.

As a Christian school that strives to value, all at the same time, orthodox, evangelical, and ecumenical approaches to Scripture and theology, we recognize the inherent challenges, tensions, and diverse perspectives in this part of our mission. It is important to note that Trinity does not support that part of GLSEN's mission or activities that would diminish or disagree with a Biblical view of gender and sexual orientation.

It would be easier in many ways for our school to stay silent on this. Trinity's strong commitment to the scriptures sets us at odds with our culture in various ways. And we know that faithful Christians in our community are wrestling with the interpretation of Scripture on these matters and arriving at different understandings. But we also know how hurtful silence on this topic can be in a Christian community, and how often that silence is the default way for Christians to "deal" with it. So, in hopes of fostering greater awareness of the pain regularly experienced by LGBTQ students, we will support students who wish to participate in this Day of Silence.

An event like this can cause division and discord, and it can reduce to one "simple" decision something that in reality is complex and multifaceted. Some may be enthusiastic about it and deeply disappointed in other classmates who don't participate. Some might draw unfair inferences about a classmate's decision to (or not to) participate. Some might feel pressure to participate but feel the matter is much more complex than a simple decision about participating can convey. Some might feel "love your neighbor" sympathy while at the same time worrying that participating will imply an interpretation of scripture that they disagree with.

Students who opt to participate in the April 27 Day of Silence may do so in a few ways. They may choose to remain silent all day in all their classes; in select classes; or only at break, lunch, and between classes. Another GLSEN idea is to maintain a day of silence with social media usage. To remain silent in classes, students should speak with teachers well in advance of April 27. Teachers will be flexible as best they can while still ensuring that the business of learning continues.

For those who participate, we will hold a prayer gathering at lunch on Wednesday, April 25, at which students can share reasons they are participating. Several of us faculty and staff, including Dean of US Christian Life Ellen Van Tongeren, Bible and Theology Chair Evan Cate, Dean of Students John Utz, Head of School Chip Denton, and me, will attend and offer thoughts about ways Christians can think about and engage in this important work.

Thank you for taking the time to read this, and don't hesitate to email or come by to talk.

Respectfully,

Warren Gould
Director of Trinity Upper School