Tending Trinity's Talk: A Manifesto
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What's wrong with Trinity Christian College? No, really. You can ask that question. We're okay with it. Think of it as a multiple choice quiz: what's wrong with this place is that there’s...

A. Not enough construction: you need a bigger dorm room, two more computer labs, and another three parking lots.
B. Not enough chronology: you need more free time and fewer reading assignments.
C. Not enough cash: you need lower tuition and more discretionary money.
D. Not enough character: you need to meet more students more like, well, you

Do you find yourself wishing for a none-of-the-above option? Maybe you're noticing a dissatisfying pattern: all the answers tend to focus on scarcity. It’s not a bad idea to name scarcities: these may be things to lament, things to reform, things to pray through.

But what if our problem is not that we have too little, but too much? Sounds crazily counter-intuitive. But try thinking about it this way: as students at Trinity, you can’t help noticing stuff: wireless stuff, textbook stuff, IPOD stuff, fashion accessory stuff, building stuff, cafffeinated stuff at the Boot. Even the four scarcities above, construction, chronology, cash, and character are all about stuff. Cash and construction are obviously stuff. But chronology, too, becomes an object to manage; time itself becomes something to tuck into boxes on a calendar grid. Even character becomes an object, when we think of people as bodies filling a classroom or a residence hall or a cafeteria line. And when you think about stuff, there is always scarcity.

But what if the real challenge for this campus is not what we don’t have, but what we do have? And what we do have, always and in abundance, is talk.

Talking about talk doesn’t sound very important. Talk is cheap, right? Like the song says, we need a little less talk and a lot more action. Actually, maybe not. Not, that is, if St. James can be trusted. Here’s what he has to say about a wise relation between the world of stuff and the world of speech:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?” (ESV)

Notice how the apostle keeps a pretty tight weave between what we say and what we do. For him, speech acts, and action speaks. Or maybe we should say that speech completes action and action completes speech. So, although our instinct is to locate our troubles in the world of stuff; it may be just as wise to locate them in the world of talk. Here’s a little manifesto: job one on this campus just might be to work out a wise relation between lived experience and talk-about-lived-experience.

If it hasn’t happened yet, you’re about to become a busy person. You’ll be creating charts, planning presentations, using equations, and reading more articles than Apple has apps. But there’s also this: as a participant in Trinity’s learning community, you’re called to pay attention to the speech of this campus. As a keeper of the culture, you’re called to tend how well we talk together. On the sidewalk. In the residence hall. On the Op-Ed page of the Courier. In the smoke shack. On the track. Downstairs in South Hall. In the
parking lot. In chapel. On the Metra. On Facebook. In the thick of all you do, don’t stop seeking a close connection between the way we talk and the way we live.

Here’s an example. You ever notice how many people pray like this, “Lord, I just want... Lord, we just came here just to...”? Just, just, just. You ever notice how our everyday speech is full of “kindas” and “sortas”? But tend the talk for a minute. Maybe we qualify everything we say with “just” and “kinda” and “but that’s just me” because we want to get rid of complexity. Maybe we qualify everything because we want to be like that Meryl Streep character in the Nicholas Cage film *Adaptation*. She says, “There are too many ideas and things and people. Too many directions to go. I was starting to believe the reason it matters to care passionately about something, is that it whittles the world down to a more manageable size.” But what gets lost when we whittle the world down to a manageable size is tension. And when tension goes so does attention, especially attention to God and neighbor.

Years ago, a London newspaper asked its readership a question like the one that started this manifesto, “What’s wrong with the world?” One reader responded with a two-word answer: *I am*. But how about if we change the question? Let’s ask, What’s *right* about Trinity Christian College? Try this: *you are*. Here’s looking at you, one of Trinity’s newest attenders and, maybe even more importantly, one of the newest tenders of Trinity’s talk.