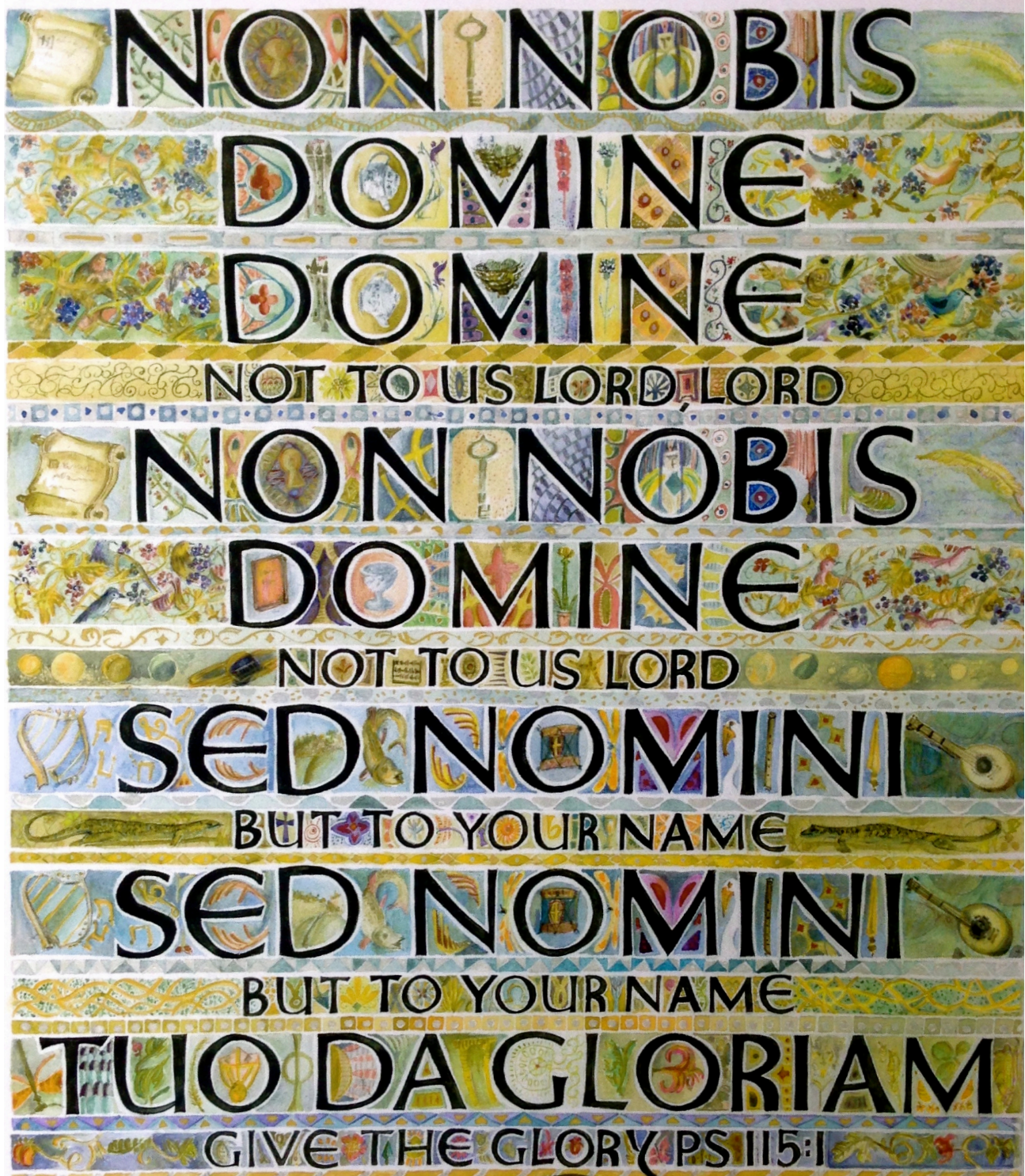




# PROVIDENCE

A CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOL



OUR VISION *for a Classical Christian School*





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# INTRODUCTION



## **How this Document Came to Be**

In October of 2012, the school board, along with representatives from the parents and faculty, met for several days to articulate more clearly our vision for classical Christian education at Providence. The result was the beginnings of a consensus around aspects of our school life that we hold dear and ideals that we desire to realize. Three broad areas continued to be discussed and highlighted; namely, our commitment to Christian education, our efforts toward classical education, and the gift of our community as a place of learning and service. It was decided that a document should be written to articulate and expand on these themes to provide further clarity and consensus.

## **Purpose and Function of this Document**

This articulation of our vision is to be our “stake” document. That is to say, as we climb our own Parnassus of classical Christian education, this document is like a stake driven deep into a hill, anchoring us in our strivings. It prevents us from wandering far from our set course. It also frees us to forgo the profusion of paths and good ideas that nevertheless do not embody our vision.

In practice, this document is to be used as a guide for all of our institutional decisions. Whether we are addressing our curriculum, our finances, our facilities, our faculty, or our policies, our efforts should continually be shaped by this vision.

This is a public document, produced by and for our school community. As such, it is our hope that it will be continually received as an opportunity to grow together toward the goals and ideals that it sets forth.

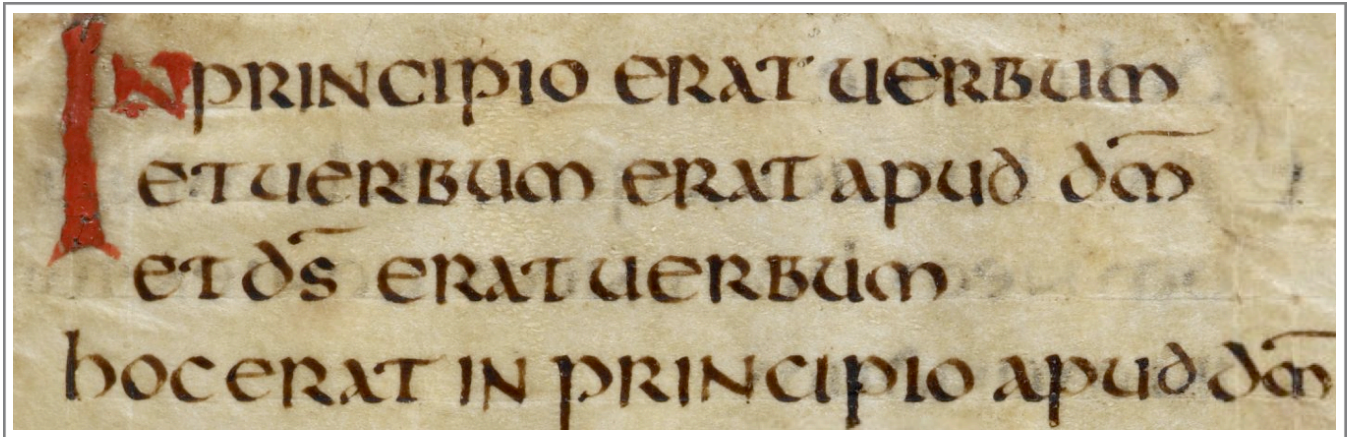
## **Soli Deo Gloria!**

It is with gratitude to our God and Lord that we have been given this opportunity to educate our children in such a time and place. We humbly recognize that even in the midst of our failings, God has granted us rich blessings. All that we have and all that we accomplish is a gift from our heavenly Father—grace from first to last. We pray that all who continue in this path at Providence will continue in gratitude and faith so that in all things God will be glorified.

The Board of Directors, May 2013



# A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL



**P**ROVIDENCE IS FIRST AND FOREMOST A Christian school. Its purpose and efforts are centered in the Gospel. The Gospel, which is the good news of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Christ Jesus, serves as the core of Providence's identity. Because Jesus died for sinners on the cross and rose again in triumph, God now forgives all who take refuge in Jesus by faith, that is, by trusting in his shed blood, his righteousness, his mercy, and his power to save. True human hope for today and forever is found not in our own goodness, our own planning, or our own powers, but in the goodness, mercy, and power of Jesus Christ and in the promise of his eternal kingdom. This Gospel of Jesus Christ rescues us not only from the guilt and power of our sins, but also from the meaningless ways of the world; additionally, it sets before us a path of love and service for others, placing us in a properly ordered relationship to our neighbors. The Christ of the Scriptures shapes all aspects of our lives and learning. Our teaching, culture, activities, and discipline are consciously brought under the lordship and grace of Jesus. Whereas we have formal Bible in-

struction, we also recognize that Christ reigns supreme over all of learning and interaction. Thus, our teaching of literature, science, grammar, and mathematics is set in the context of God's wisdom, order, will, and beauty.

Jesus has come to redeem not only the intellect, but the whole person. Thus, under his lordship, in accordance to his revealed will, and by his grace we seek to train the whole student: body and soul. The mind and soul of each child is cultivated by means of contemplating the true, the good, and the beautiful. Bodily fitness is developed through physical education and extracurricular programs. Because only the grace of God in Jesus Christ is sufficient to produce prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude, faith, hope, and love, we strive to instruct formally and model faithfully the Gospel and its implications throughout our community. Moreover, as the eternal Son of God took upon himself flesh and has given us hope through his resurrection, we recognize that the body, bodily service, and physical activity are good. In light of all of this, we would deem our goal as unreached if self-serving,



proud, and loveless graduates, albeit intelligent and persuasive, were our fruit. Thus, we strive by that grace to see that Providence magnifies the Gospel of Christ Jesus crucified, risen, reigning, and returning.

## CHRISTIANITY AND OUR FAMILIES

As a Christian school, we affirm that a child's education is preeminently the responsibility of the parents. Providence, therefore, carries out its work on behalf of parents and seeks their ongoing support and participation in the life of the school. Although the parents delegate authority and certain responsibilities to us, we prize and protect the relationship the Lord has instituted between parents and children. This is why we are committed to cultivating and maintaining a shared set of Christian values throughout our community. In an effort to ensure that a common and united culture is maintained, we require that at least one parent is a professed believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that this parent is a member in good standing with a local Christian congregation. Such commitments help us to join with the parents in the training of their children.

Such regular participation by our families in the body of Christ gives evidence of humility before the Lord and one another, delight in the ordinances Christ has ordained for his people, prizing of fellowship among the saints, and the recognition that we stand in need of one another. Not only is such membership and regular participation in a local congregation right and beneficial in and of itself, but it also provides the students with the necessary and proper context for hearing about and receiving the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our school's community and labor both benefit from and contribute to the weekly worship of the triune

God. As students gain insight into God's world, order, and providence through their learning, they are then properly reminded that God is to be praised and thanked for his wonderful works. Additionally, such participation in the body of Christ by our families contributes to the cultivation of humility, submission, love, and honor in our students.

In light of this, we expect that our families will share our commitment to the orthodox faith of all generations as set forth in the ecumenical creeds and that they will appreciate the clarity and trajectories regained at the Protestant Reformation. Whereas we desire to avoid a reductionist approach to Christianity, which provides a simple list of orthodox doctrines which we demand our families to embrace, we wish to recognize that there is a "common house" of all faithful denominations worshipping the one, true, and triune God; founded upon the Lord Jesus as he is prophet, priest, and king over all of his people; and established by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

## CHRISTIANITY AND OUR FACULTY

We take seriously the fact that parents delegate to us an important portion of their children's education, training, and development. In light of this we place a high priority upon the Christian profession and lifestyle of our faculty. Whereas we desire well-educated teachers who love and teach truth, beauty, and goodness, we desire these teachers to evidence the highest standards of Christian belief and conduct. To this end we interview each candidate thoroughly regarding his understanding of the Scriptures. Furthermore, we require character and pastoral recommendations addressing the candidate's faith and

practice. Additionally, we ensure that each of our faculty is regularly involved in an orthodox and evangelical congregation.

We realize that there are multiple contemporary expressions of orthodox Christianity. In our own community we have members of different denominations. As we are not a denominational school, we do not demand that a member of our faculty be committed to any particular denomination's confession of faith. Nevertheless, we do recognize a difference between an individual-centered approach and a community-centered approach to the Scriptures. This community centered approach sets oneself in a position of submission, first, to the authority of Christ in and through the Scriptures and, second, to the officers he has given to the church. The individual-centered approach treats theology and Christianity as if Christ has been inactive in the church prior to the individual's experience and insight. The community-centered approach, while conceding that no Christian tradition is free from the potential or existence of error and that Scripture alone stands as the supreme standard by which every belief and practice will be judged, recognizes that Christ has been active in and through the church throughout all generations. Thus there is a prizing and searching of what our forefathers have left us as a heritage.

## TEACHING CHRISTIANITY

Whereas Providence is distinctively Christian, it is not a church; neither is the school aligned with a particular denomination. In teaching Christianity we seek to focus on what we hold in common for the sake of the Gospel. We find this common faith especially in the three ecumenical creeds as well as among the chief confessions of the Protestant Reformation (see

"STATEMENT OF FAITH"). In holding fast to the core doctrine of orthodox Christianity, we also recognize the diversity and divisions within Christendom and approach these differences with honesty and respect. This shapes not only the content of the doctrine that we teach, but also our approach.

For example, when it comes to teaching the history of Christianity, the primary goal is to gain understanding and appreciation of various past thinkers and actors in the church, not merely to glean support for one's particular view or theological confession. This gives us freedom to study and learn from those in the past, even if we ultimately find their positions in conflict with our own. Likewise, when we teach theology, our teachers are honest and transparent about their perspective and presuppositions, but also represent differing traditions and confessions fairly. Even so, since we privilege what we hold in common, the emphasis in teaching theology remains on that which we share in the truth of the Gospel.

Furthermore, we recognize the benefit and virtue of exposing our children to the classic creeds, confessions, and catechisms of the orthodox and Reformation heritage that is ours. Whereas we do not wish to elevate a particular Protestant heritage above another, we do desire to provide our students with certain categories and definitions which help develop and form one's doctrinal understanding. To this end, we memorize and recite Scripture and creeds, and we study and discuss material from the confessions and catechisms of the Reformation. In the classroom, we are careful to avoid endorsing particular views of the sacraments, church polity, or practices which are peculiar to the different denominations within our community. Whereas we do openly



discuss these at a level appropriate to a given class, we represent each view fairly, and we emphasize a charitable treatment of such issues throughout our school. Each student is encouraged to give priority to and seek counsel from his family and the church to which he belongs.

## CHRISTIANITY AND HOPE

As a Christian school we undertake our work with confidence, for we approach education with the high goals of people who have been made for a purpose. Created in God's image to reflect his attributes of care and love for all that he has made, we have been endowed with gifts unique among all of God's creatures. God has given humans particular gifts distinguishing us from the rest of creation. Our gifts of language, the capacity to think, to seek virtue, and to delight in beauty distinguish us from the rest of terrestrial creation. Having physical bodies which were created as good distinguish us from the angels which are spirit. Thus, education is fundamentally about cultivating these gifts so that they may flourish among us for God's glory. For this reason, we emphasize the classical liberal arts as central to our efforts.

As a Christian school we also approach our task in humility for we acknowledge that all we do is subject to our own limitations. First, we acknowledge that our knowledge of God and the world does not come from our own objective standpoint, but in every case we are subject to our creaturely limitations. We cannot speak about God with any certainty apart from his revelation. We cannot begin to understand our world without the collaboration and sharing of knowledge and perspectives throughout the ages. In both cases, we are in-

debted to others—we are always students and learners.

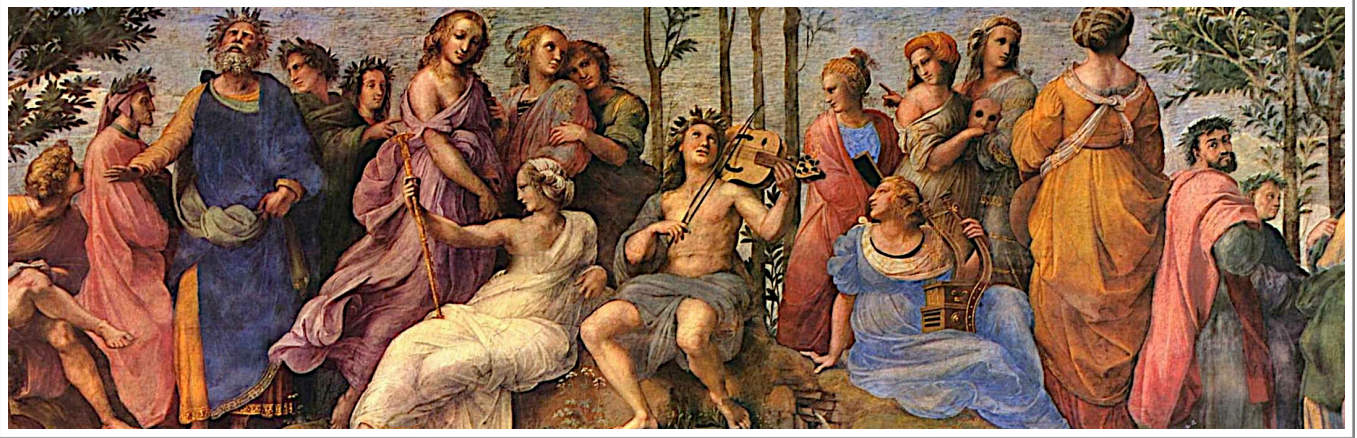
Yet even more importantly we acknowledge our limitations as sinners. Though we set our goals high, for we desire to honor God, we also recognize that we will fail in realizing them fully. Our seeking after truth, our efforts toward virtue and goodness, and our desires to promote excellence and beauty all fall short; indeed, they are often hijacked by our proclivity to serve ourselves rather than God and our neighbor. What we are able to achieve and accomplish remains from beginning to end a gift of God's grace.

And the gifts of God are many and new every morning. His promises to uphold us and make us new are sure, begun already in the resurrection of his Son. Thus, as a Christian school, our work as parents, students, and teachers is filled with hope. Though we face deep obstacles in a world filled with failings and false hopes, our horizon is defined by the hope that in Christ Jesus, God is making all things new. Our task of teaching and learning is thus honest about the reality of our life in this fallen world, but is roused and animated by a sure confidence in "the life of the world to come."

This hope, freely given by our gracious God through Jesus Christ—in whose image we are made and being remade—leads us to labor with diligence for the good of our neighbor and the praise of our God. Having been freely loved by God, we love others, counting them as of greater value than ourselves. Such love extends beyond the classroom proper into the greater classroom of our Father's world and the lives of those in our community.



# A CLASSICAL SCHOOL



PROVIDENCE IS ALSO A CLASSICAL school. In other words, it is a school inspired by a long and varied tradition of education stretching back to the time of classical antiquity. For us, the term “classical” entails both the purpose and approach to education as well as the kinds of skills, methods, and subjects that are valued and emphasized. In its broadest sense, the classical model of education sets its sights on the *whole person*. The “product,” if you will, is not merely a databank of facts, a marketable skill set, or training for a particular career, but the product is the person—the students themselves. It seeks to cultivate wisdom as well as knowledge, virtue as well as proficiency, so that the student may be nourished and grow in appreciation of what is *good*, what is *true*, and what is *beautiful*.

Education in classical antiquity focused on the “liberal arts”—the learning of a free person, or perhaps better, the kind of learning that makes one free (Latin: *liber*). Though it originated among the pagans of Greece and Rome, Christians often found a happy confluence of the

goals and values of the classical liberal arts with the biblical vision of what it means to be human, created in God's image. Thus, from the time of the early church onward, many Christians continued to promote and foster variations of the liberal arts in service to the church. Originally, the liberal arts numbered seven and were divided into the language arts of grammar, logic, and rhetoric—the *Trivium*—and the numeric arts of arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy, or the *Quadrivium*. The *Trivium* developed creative and critical skills in language and thinking, and the *Quadrivium* cultivated the ability to discover and grasp the world in which we live.

This curriculum of study was carried on into the Middle Ages primarily in the monastic and cathedral schools with varying degrees of success until the rise of the first universities. With the founding of the medieval university the liberal arts found a new home, but also a new emphasis as they were pressed in service to the development of the three professions: theology, medicine, and law. In this new setting,



the liberal arts were increasingly handled in a more utilitarian fashion with an inordinate emphasis on logic to the detriment of the other arts. And so, beginning in the 14th century, some began to respond to this shift, emphasizing a somewhat different list of subjects, the *studia humanitatis*—namely, grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy. For the humanists of the Renaissance (as they would be called), these subjects recaptured the spirit of the classical approach, stressing the breadth and integration of human thought and engagement with the world. The Reformers, too, were particularly inspired by this rebirth of education and its call, *ad fontes!*—“back to the sources!”—as they eagerly returned to the original texts of classical and Christian thought, especially the Scriptures.

Since that time, new subjects and areas of study beyond those cultivated in antiquity or the Renaissance have been developed (e.g., physics, chemistry, biology, geology, calculus), and these have expanded our understanding of ourselves and our world. But the classical approach and purpose of education has not always accompanied this expansion of knowledge. One of the unfortunate tendencies of modernity has been specialization. As the amount and availability of information increases, subjects are increasingly regarded in isolation as discrete topics, their relationship to one another severed. Calls to return to the heart and spirit of the classical model of education have been sounded time and again in modern times with some of the most important voices from the likes of John Milton Gregory, Mortimer Adler, C.S. Lewis, and Dorothy Sayers.

So what does this story have to do with classi-

cal education at Providence? Providence sees itself as an heir and participant in this conversation to rediscover classical education. There is no golden age of education, for every age has had its strengths and weaknesses. Yet there is a living tradition that has continued to develop and grow from the time of classical antiquity that we believe can flourish among us in our own “soil and clime.” At Providence the classical liberal arts inspire our vision for education, but they are framed within our broader aspirations to teach and form our children as life-long learners who relish new discovery, who think critically and fairly about ideas new and old, who explore with gratitude the gifts of creation, and most of all who seek to give glory to God as a people animated by faith, possessed by love, and filled with the hope of the Gospel.

In developing and maintaining our curriculum, we recognize certain common elements that one should expect when seeking a classical education. These elements are not necessarily more important than other subjects in the curriculum but they do comprise a core of what is classical. These are the language arts with the *Trivium* at its center; classical languages, especially Latin; history, especially that of Western civilization; literature and the “Great Books”; mathematics and the sciences; and the fine arts, both visual and musical arts.

## LANGUAGE ARTS

Language is undoubtedly one of the unique gifts of God that stands at the center of our humanity. It is a matter of considerable importance that the creativity of God “in the beginning” ensued from his speaking, “let there

be.” We who are made in His image reflect like creativity—we have been given minds filled with words that give names, fashion relationships, imagine, sing, establish community, and long for God in the poetry of prayer. Humanity’s great achievements and failures, ideas and discoveries all rely on language and the cultivation of the word. It is no wonder that the art of language has always stood at the core of education. The traditional *Trivium* of grammar, logic, and rhetoric has long embodied this core. At Providence, the purpose and pattern of the *Trivium* shapes our approach to the development of language skills in our students.

In her essay, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, Dorothy Sayers famously used the *Trivium* as a metaphor for three stages of child development. This picture of Sayers was admittedly “a modern Trivium ‘with modifications,’” intended to inspire an appreciation for the liberal arts and its relevance for modern times. However, her metaphor—a playful “progressive retrogression,” as she calls it—has been interpreted by others as a definition of classical education as such and consequently has taken on a curricular life of its own. On the positive side, Sayers helped many understand with simplicity the pedagogical sequence of the *Trivium*; namely, that grammar laid the foundational language skills for the practice and testing of logical argument, and logic then helped students to better formulate and organize ideas in order to persuade their hearers according to the principles of rhetoric. More confusing, however, has been the tendency to replace the *Trivium* in the curriculum with these developmental stages, losing the sense that the *Trivium* is first and foremost instruction in the “art” or skills of language. Naturally, due attention to developmental stages in children is important for pedagogy. Neverthe-

less, recognition of such stages of development are neither unique to classical education nor are they the *Trivium* in any proper sense of the term.

Likewise, Sayer’s language that the *Trivium* runs through every subject, e.g., the “grammar of history,” has led to even further confusion. What she means, of course, is that every subject is based on fundamental knowledge from which is built an ability to grasp concepts and their connections on a deeper level, culminating in a mastery that enables deep analysis, evaluation, and creativity. And while this is true—Benjamin Bloom’s Taxonomy of cognition and learning being perhaps the most thorough and well known description of this process—still, this is not the *Trivium*.

Thus, for the sake of clarity and consistency, when we speak of the *Trivium* at Providence, we are referring specifically to the three language arts themselves; namely, the subjects of grammar, logic, and rhetoric. It is particularly important to do so that these three areas receive the curricular attention and focus that they merit.

By *grammar* we mean all that is entailed in the fundamentals of language: phonemes, spelling, vocabulary, syntax, morphology, and the like. The goal of grammar is to become thoroughly familiar with the rules and rhythms of the English language. *Logic* is the art of thinking and the use of language to construct meaningful argument. Finally, *rhetoric* is the art of discourse conveying one’s argument in order to persuade or move others. In classical rhetoric, the student focuses in particular on five canons—invention, style, arrangement, deliv-



ery, and memory. Other exercises are also commonly used, for example, *copia* or the practice of alternative expressions and turns of phrase, and the *progymnasmata*.

One feature of the language arts that deserves special mention is critical thinking. In the *Trivium*, logic is a key component of learning to think critically, though logic in the narrow sense does not encompass it totally. In addition to logic, excellence in thinking also attends to clarity of thought, its breadth, depth, relevance, accuracy, precision, and fairness. It assesses the fundamental elements of thought, i.e., its purpose, the question at issue, its frame of reference or point of view, the evidence and concepts it uses, its working assumptions, inferences, and implications. In short, critical thinking not only seeks to understand and evaluate someone else's argument, but even more importantly, it is learning to critique one's own reasoning in order to better it.

Cultivating this skill is essential for several reasons. First, if left to ourselves, our thinking will often be egocentric and self-serving. The undisciplined mind too easily relates to the world according to a self-validating structure, recognizing only what it wants to recognize and ignoring what is inconvenient, challenging, or uncomfortable. Even the seasoned thinker can confuse the love of truth with the love of being right. Moreover, learning to think critically is to acknowledge that all our knowledge is partial, fragmented, and dependent on others. This does not mean that truth is relative or inaccessible, yet its pursuit requires humility, empathy, and a willingness to listen to others. Even in our firmest of convictions, we are nevertheless heirs and debtors. Stu-

dents at Providence will learn the virtue of disciplined, critical thought, so that their love and pursuit of truth may benefit not only themselves but also be of service to others.

## CLASSICAL LANGUAGES

"Only those languages can properly be called dead in which nothing living has been written. If the classic languages are dead, they yet speak to us, and with a clearer voice than that of any living tongue."

*James Russell Lowell*

While it is true that it is no longer necessary to know Greek or Latin in order to read the literature of classical antiquity—English translations abound—the study of classical languages continues to be a *sine qua non* of classical education. The classical languages reinforce universal language skills. They deepen our understanding of our own language, its grammatical structures, and its vocabulary, and prepare one better to learn other languages. Indeed, the classical languages assist growth and maturity in the *Trivium* itself. It is hardly surprising that one learns English grammar better by studying a language that contributes to almost sixty percent of its vocabulary, as does Latin. But the exactness of the syntactical structure of the classical languages also helps form the logical habits of the mind, and its clarity forms the habits of fluency and eloquence in expression. Greek and Latin require an attention to detail and the kind of discipline and precision that benefits the student in other areas of study. Furthermore, they remain a pathway into much of the history of Western civilization.

The Latin language, even more so than Greek, is particularly significant in this regard as it

continued to shape the history of the West long after the fall of Rome. Through most of the history of Western Christendom, Latin was the living language of the church, its Scriptures, its theology, its liturgy, hymns, poetry and prayers. In the academy, Latin continued to be used in lecture and in writing well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For these reasons, Latin is the primary classical language studied at Providence, with instruction beginning in the lower school and continued on into the final years of the upper school. The end goal of such study, realized in the final grades of the upper school, is the ability to read important texts from classical antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Reformation in order to gain greater appreciation of their style, vocabulary, and content, which cannot be discovered fully when limited to translations.

## HISTORY

*Nescire autem quid antequam natus sis acciderit, id est semper esse puerum: "To be ignorant of what happened before one's birth is to remain always a child."*

*Cicero*

At Providence history is often called the "backbone" of our curriculum. This can be understood in several ways. First, it is the backbone in so far as it runs through the curriculum as a guidepost for the integration of subjects. Historical epochs function as thematic threads extended throughout the year to encourage familiarity with the period of history studied, but also to reinforce the idea that all subjects, in fact, have a history. For example, third grade might focus on ancient Greek and Roman history. In addition to learning the story of this period, the student might also

read ancient myths or literature that are set in this time period. Math and science might include reading stories about Archimedes and his contributions of the lever-pulley, the measurement of volume in a sphere, or the invention of the irrigation screw that bears his name. Art class may be an occasion to make models of different kinds of Greek capitals or architecture.

Yet such a thematic use of history ought to be approached as an opportunity for the curriculum rather than a constraint upon it. The chronology of history as such does not govern the sequence of skills taught. Each subject determines its own foundational skills and progression. For instance, though a third grade class may be learning about Greek and Roman history, it would hardly be appropriate to begin music instruction with ancient Aristoxenian Greek scales! Instead the subject matter calls for such fundamentals as "do, re, mi" and the like. Simply put, history lives as a companion in the curriculum, not as captain.

But the most important aspect to the study of history is when it teaches us to *listen*—to hear voices from strange places and times and learn from them. History teaches us the patience of empathy and the humility that accompanies an appreciation that ideas are larger than any one person or period—that we are indebted to the people of our past. What Mark Twain said of travel might also be said of studying history: "it is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness... Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime." History teaches us that ideas arise in a particular climate and context and



yet nearly always have consequences that extend to the present. And when viewed through the eyes of faith, history gives us ample opportunity for gratitude and repentance.

## LITERATURE AND THE “GREAT BOOKS”

Providence sets out to instill in our students a life-long love of learning. Alongside this affection—never its rival—is a love affair with reading. From the earliest grades our students are taught to love stories, to learn poems, to relish beautiful words, and to enjoy good literature. Books are chosen for the excellence of their language, the values they inculcate, and the sheer delight they bring. Good books become models for our own speaking and writing and thus remain integral to the cultivation of the art of language that we find in the *Trivium*. Reading by itself will not make one into a great writer or speaker, but neither will happen without it.

As one progresses at Providence, reading literature becomes more focused, moving from good books to those books that, over time, have been designated as “great.” The notion of a curriculum of “Great Books” began especially with John Erskine, a professor of music and literature at Columbia University in the early twentieth century. There he began a general honors course in which he compiled a list of 52 books—“Classics of Western Civilization.” But rather than holding a series of lectures, he approached the books with a discussion group format, i.e., a Socratic seminar. The popularity of this course deeply influenced Erskine’s students and colleagues including Mortimer Adler, Mark Van Doren, and Charles Hutchins. Eventually through these seminars and other

opportunities for collaboration the list of “Great Books” was enlarged, even though there has never been a final, unalterable canon of such books. These texts encompass a broad range of topics and genre: philosophical dialogues, theological treatises, epic, poetry, novels, essays—all contributing to the great ideas that have influenced and continue to shape human history.

In the upper school, students focus their reading on the “Great Books,” and discuss them with their teachers. Gathered around tables in conversation rather than sitting in the rows of a lecture hall, student and teacher dialogue, ask questions, debate, and grapple with some of the most important texts ever written. They soon find that they are part of what Hutchins dubbed “the Great Conversation” through the ages—that they are students in dialogue with “speechless masters.” As Sir Richard Livingstone once noted, “In their company we are still in the ordinary world, but it is the ordinary world transfigured and seen through the eyes of wisdom and genius. And some of their vision becomes our own.”

But there is a challenge to implementing such a curriculum, a tension between two competing directions: there are some books that are worthy of living in for a time, circling back to a number of times, sharing together and conversing over, and integrating into our souls as part of our lens on life. And yet there is an ongoing and cumulative “Great Conversation” deposited in creative ways in many classic, great books. To be truly educated, to enter fully into this conversation, we must read and become familiar with all of the books (or as many as possible) on this ever-growing canon-

ical list.

At Providence this is a tension that we do not try fully to overcome. It is perhaps best to privilege the first in order to set our students on the life-long path for the second. For many of our goals—critical thinking, the discernment and embracing of truth and beauty, moral imagination, internalizing of models of rhetoric and eloquence—a deep, extended interaction around a few, limited, key, central texts seems crucial. There is also room in the curriculum for exposure to the breadth of literature with faster paced reading, but the heart of our teaching lies in the first approach.

## MATHEMATICS AND THE SCIENCES

<i>Omnis mundi creatura quasi liber et pictura nobis est in speculum; nostrae vitae, nostrae mortis, nostri status, nostrae sortis fidele signaculum</i>	All the world's creatures, as a book and a picture, are to us as a mirror; our life, our death, our present condition, our destiny are faithfully signified.
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*Alain de Lille, 1128-1202*

As the poem above indicates, the books that we must read are not only etched onto the page in ink but are engraved into our very environs: nature. God's creation lies open before us as a book to be studied, learned, and enjoyed. For the ancient Greeks, philosophy's seeking after truth and wisdom was not separate from attempts to understand the natural world. The cosmos in its order and movements reflected something about the good, the true, and the beautiful that had implications for how we ought to live. The biblical writers go even further, insisting that the wonders of creation declare the glory of the Lord, that the

marvels of his handiwork in the heavens and the earth testify to his goodness and his majesty, and that contemplation of the same ought to move mankind toward gratitude and worship.

Christians in the Middle Ages, inspired by both traditions, pursued the study of the world in part through the numeric arts of the *Quadrivium*—arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. In addition, the study of medicine, physics, and the natural sciences continued to grow through the Renaissance and flourish in the centuries that followed, so that today we have inherited a vast treasure house of learning and discovery. At Providence, we place a high value on mathematics and the sciences and pursue them with rigor and excellence. We do not approach these subjects as merely a set of facts to be memorized and parroted, but rather through them we seek to inculcate the art of inquiry and observation, to grasp concepts and mathematical insight, to cultivate curiosity and deep perception.

Through the modern sciences great advances have been made in medicine, technology, and in our understanding of the world and universe. And yet, two great dangers coexist with these achievements. Too often pride will ascribe a kind of divinity to our accumulated knowledge and accomplishments so that man deludes himself into believing that the ultimate solutions to our ills lie with us, rather than our Creator. Along with such misplaced confidence is the lack of a moral compass to guide our use and stewardship of what we have been given by our Creator. Aware of such dangers, we hope to teach our students these disciplines with the Christian humility and

gratitude that recognizes through faith that all of creation is a gift to be cherished and cared for.

## MUSIC AND ART

In classical antiquity music and the visual arts were integral to education. Both demonstrated the numeric study of ratio and proportion, even as these were vehicles for the expression of beauty. Later Christian reflection—for example, Augustine’s treatise on *de musica*—took the classical pagan emphasis on order and harmony a step further, so that music expressed in its harmonies the *ordo amoris*, the order of divine love that pervades all of creation and progresses toward the great symphony of salvation. Such a blend of classical aesthetics and Christian praise is particularly fitting for our goals at Providence. In both the musical and visual arts, we have the opportunity to experience beauty more deeply as a gift of God that draws us beyond the transience and decay of our fallen world into a longing for the eternal. Furthermore, to behold, hear, and participate in such beauty requires community. In their efforts with the artist’s brush and the musician’s song, our students are further called to share their gifts with one another.

Our goals for both music and art focus in three main areas. First, our curriculum will foster appropriate skills—in music, for example, notation literacy and performance; in art, drawing and painting techniques. Second, in both music and art, students will gain an appreciation for the great masters and their works. Finally, students will be encouraged to see music and art as vehicles for devotion to God and for the edification and enjoyment of his people.

## ASSESSMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY

A word needs to be said about the place of grades and tests. It should be quite clear from the preceding pages that the approach of classical Christian education has much higher aims than simply achieving a certain grade point average or test score. Grades and tests are not goals or ends in themselves, nor are they regarded as a primary means toward reaching our goals. Nevertheless, grades and tests are important at Providence. They are so for two main reasons. First, they are assessment tools. They help the teacher measure whether a student is grasping the content taught and developing the skills practiced. They do not determine our objectives or methods; they simply help us evaluate whether teacher and student together are reaching them. This then holds student, teacher, and the entire school accountable to the standards set by each course, for each grade, in accordance with the school’s entire educational vision. For this reason, artificial grade inflation or deflation, and grading “on the curve” are inappropriate.

Second, Providence is preparing our students for life-long learning and service in the wider world. Even though the broader educational culture can over stress the place and importance of grades, responsible care of our students requires us to provide them with the proper resources for continuing their education in institutions of higher learning. This includes aligning grades (and thus GPAs) with their generally recognized significance, so that we communicate effectively and truthfully to other institutions about our students. It also includes giving due attention to and preparation for standardized testing.



## CONCLUSION

There are certainly other subjects and activities beyond these that shape our curricula at Providence. But these are detailed here in order to clarify what makes our educational endeavors “classical.” These curricula are tools; for us, they are means to a greater end. As a classical, Christian school, all our efforts strain toward a single unifying goal and purpose. Desiderius Erasmus, that well known classical scholar of the Renaissance, perhaps put it best: “All studies, philosophy, and rhetoric are learned for this purpose: that we may know Christ and praise His glory. This is the end of all learning and eloquence.”



# OUR COMMUNITY



**A**S A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL, PROVIDENCE recognizes the school community as a gift from God. Our community encompasses the students and teachers, staff and administrators, parents and families, extended family members and supporters. God has given us to one another so that we might serve one another, forgive one another, encourage one another, enjoy one another, and together enjoy God and His good gifts.

As a classical school, Providence teaches its students to stand on the shoulders of the great thinkers of the past. Such humble dependence, however, also recognizes our need for one another. Thus, we also strive to stand shoulder-to-shoulder, learning from and with one another how to discern, love, and champion all that is good, true, and beautiful. Classical education seeks to form the whole person, and the quality and character of our school community will always be essential in realizing this goal.

## A SWEET HOME

In his children's classic *The Wind in the Willows*, alongside the well-known misadventures of Mr. Toad, Kenneth Grahame unfolds the poignant tale of Mr. Mole. One spring day, Mole sets out from his hole and discovers the world beyond, full of wonders, new experiences, vistas of endless diversity, and sweet friendship. Yet after all this, later in the book, passing by his old and nearly-forgotten residence, Mole catches its familiar, earthy smell. He is overcome with emotion and can be consoled only by returning and spending the evening there. Though his world had grown much larger and richer, in Mole's heart this humble hole would always be *dulce domum*—his sweet home.

Of all the ingredients that constitute and cultivate our humanity, our home, and especially the home of our childhood, is one of the most powerful. A child's home is, first of all, father and mother, siblings, pets, house, yard, and neighborhood. Alongside these, the home of

childhood encompasses the other familiar places, people, groups, and recurring events, which undergird a child and work their way into his heart and soul, shaping his identity.

From pre-kindergarten through 12th grade, the Providence community becomes a firmly-laid foundation stone in our students' childhood "homesteads"—a sweet part of their *dulce domum*. For this reason, then, we give serious attention to the scope, dynamics, and quality of our school community.

### BREADTH AND UNITY

*Pre-Kindergarten through Grade Twelve:* The PreK–12 span at Providence is important to our educational goals, but also to our cultivation of community, yielding a number of concrete benefits. Older students serve as role models for younger, and younger students present teaching, helping, and encouraging opportunities for older. As younger students observe the older, they anticipate their own future projects and activities, which promotes dedication and enthusiasm for learning. The PreK–12 span also brings parents into shared involvement over many years, years in which parent relationships can build gradually and naturally. A final benefit of our PreK–12 school is family time and coherence: families with multiple children revolve around a single school "hub." For all these reasons, we maintain a PreK–12 school with a single PreK–12 campus.

*Small Size:* Providence intentionally limits its size to one excellent, vibrant classroom per grade level and maintains a cap on per-grade enrollment. These limits safeguard effective teaching and learning, but they also aim to foster a robust community. We are a school in which students know other students beyond

their grade level, teachers know the students beyond their own classroom, parents get to know students, and parents get to know one another. The school's limited size allows for a truly "all school" PreK–12 culture to develop. A small school also multiplies opportunities for student interaction with teachers and other parents outside the classroom. As students approach the culmination of their studies in the upper school, their teachers have come to know them well, over a period of time, as individuals with unique hearts and unique gifts. Teachers are, thus, well-poised to draw out the best from students in the classroom and to provide wise counsel for students' educational and vocational decisions beyond Providence.

*Beyond the Classroom:* Student friendship and collaboration are promoted beyond the classroom. The shared excitement and struggle of a close basketball game, the shared laughter or tragedy as the students perform a play, the shared sweat and purpose of volunteer projects for the school or for the community—these kind of shared activities knit us together as a single community. Life as a school community extends to athletics, music concerts and contests, play week, service projects, and other school groups and activities. Theme weeks, annual fundraisers, lower school history festivals, and end of the year activities become school traditions. Upper school students plan numerous social events. Activities beyond the classroom are well-communicated and welcoming to all students.

*Community of Parents/Families:* Providence partners with parents in the God-given responsibility of teaching and training their children. In this role, our community prizes the involvement, interaction, and mutual friendship and encouragement of parents. Our par-



ent volunteer program involves parents with one another, with teachers, and with students. The Providence board is comprised mainly of school parents, which both embodies and promotes the strong community among parents which characterizes our school.

*Whole Community Events:* Providence values and creates occasions for the gathering of the entire school community (students, parents, teachers, leaders, and available alumni). Such occasions are well planned, embody and exhibit the values and vision of the school, and foster a joyful sense of shared identity and purpose. School enrollment, facilities, and calendar are planned with this priority in mind.

*Beyond Graduation:* We do not quickly forget about students and families after graduation from Providence. Alumni are warmly welcomed to visit the school. We energetically implement a program of regular communication and alumni events. The maintenance of long-term relationships with our alumni (a) demonstrates the genuineness of our love for our students, (b) cultivates a strong, unifying, and enduring sense of school identity (“some-day I will be, and then will always be, a graduate of Providence”), and (c) builds a long-term constituency for the school. Alumni are involved in the ongoing planning and life of the school in meaningful ways. We hope that some of our graduates will eventually become Providence parents, board members, or teachers.

## QUALITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS

*Protection of Time with Family and Church:* Providence places high value on the time which families spend together in their homes, in their churches, and in their activities. Reasonable and restricted homework levels are

essential to the home life of our families, and this will be an ongoing emphasis in our teacher training. We pursue scholarly excellence through optimizing our classroom time with students. Also, our administrators establish prudent limits to the school activities and obligations into which we invite our children, parents, and teachers. The school is not a substitute for a Christian congregation; instead, we acknowledge the God-given gifts of pastors and congregations as each family’s primary spiritual community. Therefore, every care is taken to enable families to place first priority on the worship and other activities of their congregations. No Providence activities are held on Sundays.

*Christian Actions and Approaches:* As a Christian community, we strive, by God’s grace, to show Christian care for one another, to pray together and for one another, and to demonstrate shared love and service for those outside our school community. Such Christian service emerges in countless informal ways. We also designate formal opportunities for volunteer service as a part of the school’s curriculum and calendar. When conflicts or frustrations arise, we exercise a straightforward, respectful approach to conflict resolution with one another, and we humble ourselves to ask for and to extend forgiveness, forgiving as God has forgiven us. Finally, Providence is a community of families who parent with shared Christian values. This provides good, edifying friendships for our children, and other parents reinforce our values and convictions. Still, even with many shared values, different parents navigate parenting in differing ways, and we seek to honor the decisions of other parents when they differ from our own.

*Community of Learning:* Our students learn together, and, together, they value learning. Our classrooms are characterized by orderliness, decorum, safety, attentiveness, and a focus on learning. Our teachers are themselves active learners, both independently and cooperatively, and in this way they model learning and a love of learning for their students. Collaborative learning among our faculty takes place spontaneously, but regular opportunities will also be planned by the administration. Also, our school community is marked by parents who are learners and who also enjoy learning together. Therefore, Providence publicizes outside learning opportunities and occasionally offers symposia or other in-house opportunities for the whole community to join together in learning—students, teachers, and parents. This overall culture of learning is one of Providence’s key strengths. We desire to guard and foster it with every decision.

*Teachers Are Honored and Valued:* The board, administrators, and parents take formal and informal actions which will encourage, support, improve, and retain our teachers. Even as we expect our teachers to strive for continual improvement, growth, and excellence, so also the school leadership and parents regard them with proper dignity, treasuring them as more than mere employees or “hired hands.” Their crucial work is publicly celebrated and highlighted in the community. Excellent training and resources are provided to maximize their effectiveness and ongoing pursuit of excellence. School families regard teachers as professionals and as partners in the education of their children. Teachers honor one another and their shared work through mutual learning and collaboration.

*Due Respect and Diversity:* The Apostle Paul exhorts: “Render to all what is owed them: If taxes, then taxes... if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor” (Rom. 13:8). At Providence, both younger and older students are expected to show respect and deference to adults. Older students are to encourage and look out for the younger children. Older students may be invited into limited planning and decision-making roles, yet always under the instruction and direction of adults, with the adults assuming ultimate responsibility for exhibiting excellence as a school. Parents honor teachers, as teachers. Teachers honor parents, as parents. Teachers and staff show respect and deference to administrators. Love and respect are due from all, to all, as children of God. At Providence, we value, respect, and seek to accommodate our differences from one another: varying racial or ethnic identities, church and confessional commitments, social or economic backgrounds, vocations, one- or two-working-parent households, varying giftedness among students, natural interests, etc.

*High Standards for Student Behavior:* A central goal of a classical education is the cultivation of virtue. While seeking to avoid a heavy-handed or legalistic tone to our life in the school, Providence maintains clear and high expectations for student conduct in terms of personal responsibility, honesty, self-control, orderliness, respect for teachers and other adults, respect for other students, courtesy and etiquette, propriety of speech and dress, and cleanliness.

*Community of Beauty:* Cultivating the love of beauty is not restricted to the classroom study of art. Concern for beauty and aesthetics is embodied throughout the life of the community. Providence students and faculty adorn

themselves and their community with neat dress and good grooming. Students, teachers, parents, and administrators exhibit a sense of shared responsibility for and pride in the care, cleaning, and appearance of the school building and grounds. School programs are marked by decorum and attention to decoration, and they exhibit a love of beauty in words, music, dramatic or visual arts, etc.

*Community of Levity and Leisure:* In the culture of our day, high academic standards are often accompanied by performance anxiety and an unhealthy perfectionism, so that the value of a student's work, and even the value of what the student has learned, is reckoned in direct proportion to the difficulty of the tasks involved. In contrast, at Providence we embrace laughter in the daily life of our school. We embrace the enjoyment of one another and of the topics and tasks pursued together. And we embrace leisure as a vital posture for a life of wisdom, eloquence, and joy. By leisure we mean more than free time, although leisure does require time and is thwarted by relentless, busying tasks, no matter how "educational." Josef Pieper, in his book *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, writes, "Leisure implies (in the first place) an attitude of non-activity, of inward calm, of silence; it means not being 'busy', but letting things happen... For leisure is a receptive attitude of mind, a contemplative attitude, and it is not only the occasion but also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of creation."

*Communication:* Providence values frequent, clear, and redundant communication as an essential ingredient in building and guarding a sense of belonging and community. Providence teachers invite frequent conversation with parents and provide regular updates regarding

student progress, significant classroom events or incidents, etc. Parents and teachers engage in two-way collaboration regarding the best ways to cultivate virtue and learning in each student. The Providence administration regularly inform school parents and supporters of significant news and plans. Administrators also seek regular feedback and input from parents regarding their experiences, concerns, and ideas.

## SUMMARY

Providence seeks to be a small, close-knit community of PreK–12 students, their teachers, their families, the graduates who have preceded them, and other friends and supporters of the school. We value the ways in which our lives intertwine and the opportunities thereby afforded to support one another, to learn from one another, to enjoy one another, and to further the project of classical, Christian education. Together we delight in and labor toward all that is good, true, and beautiful. We gladly affirm the priority of households and Christian congregations, yet we strive to make the Providence community one more sweet part of our students' *dulce domum*.





WISDOM, VIRTUE, AND ELOQUENCE  
*to the Glory of God*