I am very happy to be here with you for my first Founders’ Day at Trinity, and I am delighted to share a sociological perspective on why celebrating a day like this is so important to a university community.

The celebration of Founders’ Day allows us to take a moment at such a busy time of the academic year, to remind ourselves of why we do what we do. The celebration allows us to go back to the beginning, to recall the past in order to be more clear about choices in the present, and more focused in planning for the future.

But most of all it allows us to get in touch with the core of the institution. Why is it so important to touch an institution’s core? Because the core is essential, not incidental, to the very life of an institution. Like the backbone of the human body, it allows us to stand, to move and respond, to integrate and to advance. The core of an institution provides strength, stability and sustenance.

Trinity is part of the great constellation of institutions of higher education in the United States. Trinity is one of the 4, 703 colleges and universities in this country.[[1]](#endnote-1) The majority of the 4, 703 U.S. colleges and universities are private institutions—3, 054 of them. And of those, 884 are religiously affiliated.

These religiously- or faith-based colleges and universities cross all kinds of religious and denominational lines. To give a sample, there are:

35 Jewish universities in this country

And 4 Mormon

There are hundreds of colleges of various Protestant denominations, including:

13 Seventh Day Adventist

15 Assemblies of God

95 Methodist

And 22 Southern Baptist

Among the historic peace churches, there are:

7 Quaker

And 6 Mennonite

And among the Orthodox:

1 Greek Orthodox

And 1 Russian Orthodox

That gives a quick overview of thevariety of religious expressions in higher education in the U.S. But we turn now to the largest grouping of religious colleges: 234 are Catholic. And one of those is Trinity. Most of the 234 Catholic colleges and universities were founded by religious congregations of women, or of men.

But what does it mean when we say a college is religiously based?

It means that within the tradition of that religion is the belief that truth can and should be pursued through education, especially higher education.

It means that the pursuit of truth is both a scholarly and a sacred journey.

It means that the pursuit of truth is also a pursuit of God, because God is Truth.

In the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, it also means that faith and reason, belief in what we cannot see and in what we can see, co-exist and inform each other. In the Catholic tradition, it means that people of other faith traditions and no faith tradition are welcome to join us on our scholarly and sacred journey.

In Catholicism, it means that the pursuit of truth is not an end in itself, but a means toward the creation of the just and peaceful world that God envisions. That is a taste of the grand and broad Catholic Intellectual Tradition that informs 234 colleges and universities.

But we know that no two Catholic colleges are alike. How does each one take that tradition and make it real? Each does that by touching its core. And that is done by listening to the founding story of the religious congregation and the founding story of the university.

In doing that, we touch the “core of the core,” the charism, one of God’s most enduring gifts. It is the divine gift that keeps on giving. The charism is the gift which replenishes the institution and guides it on its journey; it is the gift which replenishes us and guides us on our journey.

Sr. Camilla will now tell us more about our particular founding stories—those at the core of who we are as Trinity.

Sr. Mary Johnson SND

April 24, 2013

1. All statistics in this paper are from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012 Digest of Education Statistics, Table 206. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)