



December 3, 2020

Dear GreatHearts Community,

This is a message of appreciation to everyone – students, parents, faculty and staff – for your good will and resilience through what has been 10 months of uncertainty and continuous challenge. None of us has passed this way before across 19 years as a growing scholastic community. Still less have we done so amid the strains of national pain and unrest, and a virus which all along has reduced confident experts to educated guessers. As a founder and one servant among many to our GreatHearts community, I send along this post, even though I realize you already have too many demands on your attention.

This is a beautiful time in Texas, bringing us warmth without heat and blazing sunsets to stir us within. We receive these unbought blessings with gratitude as we stand between Thanksgiving and the winter break.

In reflecting on our November just passed, our month of gratitude, we celebrated both virtue and the virtuous. On the eleventh day it holds our annual tribute of Veterans' Day, when our nation brings thanks to its valiant. In the centuries-old religious expression of the frightful fun we know today at Halloween, the second day of November is also All-Soul's Day, on which we consider the dead and how they loved us before passing on.

Marcus Tullius Cicero was a polymathic statesman-lawyer of the Roman Republic who lived many Novembers ago, shortly before Christ. Because his thought has proven profound and consequential across the centuries – because he was right about important things – he is the namesake of a GreatHearts academy. Cicero professed that gratitude is not only the greatest of the virtues, but mother of all the others. If that's true, it's because gratitude is tantamount to love. If the two are not the same they are conjoined, so that one is not known without the other. Gratitude is the steady heart's call to the racing mind, to stop and remember what it cherishes, and cherish what it remembers.

GreatHearts is so named because its educational mission and philosophy stand on the proposition that "it is upon the trunk (the heart) that a human being works" – an assertion one finds in the ancient philosophical store of both Eastern and Western thought. This cuts against the modern grain, which inclines to exaltation of the human intellect. Our conviction, though, has always been that increasing what one knows without clarifying what one loves, and how, ranges between ineffectual and dangerous. And knowledge of the world, without knowledge of the self, is often a means to despair.

Just as the heart holds the real essence of a human being, at the heart of great nations one finds the family. The loving family, before and beyond the schoolhouse, is where the human heart is formed and first directed outward. GreatHearts was created as a knowledge enterprise in service to the family, and it will always be measured by how well it is serving yours. The test we most care about is the test of whether we are supporting the families of our students, teachers and staff with love and competence. We are grateful, today and always, for every



family who extends us the opportunity to pass that test, and for patience and constructive correction when we miss the mark.

In this challenging year of the PPP – pain, pestilence and politics – the heart as the seat of high human aspiration and achievement has been made all the more clear.

Our nation can transcend humanity's long travail of ethnic division and injustice, and every other dehumanizing effect of the will to power. For this misery, though, there will never be a vaccine. Only a great-hearted, truth-seeking people can make that hill. Only a longing to see another's experience, and know another's anguish, can serve.

In a year of pandemic disruption, it is not only our knowledge which carries us through; in fact the most stark reality of the thing has been just how limited and imperfect our knowledge has turned out to be. The judgments have been dim and the error rate has been high. The heroic will to love and assist one's neighbor – the heart's insistence to carry on and persevere – has been far more reliable.

And as we conclude another cycle of dysfunctional politics, we do well to ask: Given that our present politics is so broken, why does it seem at the very same moment there is such determination to politicize literally everything? Or rather, could it be that the latter has been the first cause of the former?

So our Thanksgiving holiday last week and its national call to gratitude are of deeper meaning in harder times. A writer once put down that all theories of determinism, all notions of fore-ordained outcomes, were refuted when the first person said "thank you" and the second said "you're welcome." The lives we will know – as individuals, as families, as a nation – are not written down somewhere. The future is not fixed by the past nor dictated by the present, but ours to envision and work out, come what may.

Our old friend Cicero, who could somehow see these United States from his Roman hill, had a good word about that, too. "I criticize by creation," he said, "and not by finding fault." As we continue the creation of GreatHearts, in pursuit of greater service and doing our part to make a more perfect union, you are invited more warmly than ever to this adventurous work, which has only just gotten started.

Gratefully yours,

Jay Heiler

Chief Executive Officer

GreatHearts