New and returning students, new and returning faculty and staff, old and new friends: Using the opening line from Rick Warren’s well-known book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, it’s not about you.

Even if you’re an anxious first-year student, overwhelmed by your first round of classes or dorm-mates down the hall, it’s not about you. If you’re a senior, figuring out how to squeeze in those last few requirements and start thinking about a job or grad school, it’s not about you. If you’re a returning staff member, gearing up for another year with a sense of either enthusiasm or dread, it’s not about you. If you’re a new faculty member, struggling to learn Angel and teach three new courses, it’s not about you. And if you’re the president of Trinity trying to keep all of the plates spinning without crashing, it’s also not about me.

We live in a society where we often conclude it is about me: it’s about my career, my happiness, my needs, my relationships, it’s about my plans. No it’s not. You and I sometimes have it all wrong.

A few months ago I was at a meeting of Christian college representatives hosted by the Christian Community Development Association in the Chicago Lawndale neighborhood. When it came time for each of us to introduce ourselves, the host jumped in before I could speak and said: “Steve’s from Trinity, and they get the kingdom-thing right.” He went on to explain how, as Christians, we focus on many things, but often not the essential: Yes, the great commission is of the utmost importance, but do you know what the most frequently mentioned theme in the bible is? The kingdom.

Well, if others think Trinity gets the kingdom-thing right, then you and I, as ambassadors of Trinity, better make sure we get it right, too. It’s not about you, it’s not about me, it’s about the kingdom.

As you leave the auditorium this morning, take a good look at the stained glass windows along the south wall of the Grand Lobby. Read what it says and look at what it represents: From Colossians 1: He, Christ, is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together.

That’s the primary kingdom lesson: it’s all God’s. All things—here or in heaven—all things are God’s. Another way to say it is that God’s sovereignty extends to everything. Not just on Sunday. Not just the “spiritual” domain. Not just my devotions.

No wonder it’s not about me or you. Because it’s about God. Everything is God’s. True, we live in the in-between times, between Christ’s first coming and his eventual return. Sometimes the tempter’s devilish work confuses things, causing us to forget that it’s God’s world. Flooding an
entire city; blowing away entire gulf towns. But God is in control….of everything—including you and me.

SO, if it’s not about you and it’s not about me and instead it’s about God, how should we begin this year—as we strive to begin every year—at Trinity? Listen to the words of the apostle Paul from Romans 12, this time as paraphrased in The Message:

So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

I’d like to draw your attention to two of his instructions.

First, don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Amen. When you watch movies, DVDs, and television, are you startled or disturbed when you see that the storyline includes unmarried couples living together? Do you delve behind the sitcoms, reality shows, and movies to examine life in the entertainment zone? What do you see in Ashton and Demi’s relationship?

When we seek to join in the work of God’s kingdom, it doesn’t mean that we can do anything we want. It means that we “fix our attention on God.” I’m not suggesting that we go back to a 1950s “happy days” world here, asking you to shun all forms of entertainment. But I am asking you to live with your attention fixed on God, using that gaze as a means of discerning what you do in your everyday ordinary life—letting your life be placed before God as an offering.

Second, The Message says “readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it.” How do we recognize and respond? Allow me to offer a couple of ideas.

I think the number one challenge to being truly kingdom-oriented is to recognize—to see—what needs to be seen. Let me tell you a story to illustrate what I mean. I grew up in a suburb of Grand Rapids, Michigan. It was a great life. The racial unrest of the 60s was a whole world away—down south in Selma, Alabama or in central Grand Rapids when there was rioting in the streets the summer of 1968. Mission work meant going overseas to Nigeria or Japan. There was nothing to see, there was nothing to recognize, that compelled me to join in the work of God’s kingdom until, one day, I woke up.

My wake up call came during one week in my senior year of high school. I took a course that brought me to Baxter Community Center, in a neighborhood in Grand Rapids where I had never been. I had to go to a place that represented both the good and the bad: Christian service—a good thing, and much needed because of many bad things: poverty, racism, and white flight. I was blown away by what I experienced. Until then, I had no idea; I had no knowledge; I had no understanding. I hadn’t recognized or seen the hurt, pain, and devastation in my own city, nor
had I been aware of God’s kingdom call to do something about it. I was deeply disappointed that
I had been living what I thought was a Christian life, but failing to recognize the vast human
need and the Christ-like responses that were required.

Yes, we must see that which needs to be seen. We can try to ignore it; often we are shielded from
it, but in the final analysis, it is each of our responsibilities to see what must be seen. To
recognize what Christ sees daily and causes him so much pain.

My challenge for each of you this year and for every year thereafter is to recognize the obstacles
to what God has created, the roadblocks the tempter places in the way of the kingdom. Do this by
asking the important questions: What shall we conclude about embryonic stem cell research?
What type of vehicles should we drive and what are the alternatives if gasoline is more than
$3.00 a gallon? As 52 high-rise public housing units come down in Chicago, where will those
50,000 poorest of the poor live? How will the pandemic of AIDS in Africa be stopped? How will
those pushed over by Hurricane Katrina and flooded out by the failed levees pull their lives back
together? Ask questions. Don’t numb your mind or distract your heart with the irrelevance of this
week’s newest release at Blockbuster.

Next, respond quickly. But you say, “How do I respond quickly to embryonic stem cell research,
to the incredible demand on non-renewable energy resources, to the problem of public housing,
to AIDS in Africa, to relief efforts along the Gulf Coast?” Let me suggest this: respond quickly
with a resolve to make your life a continual offering to God. Notice, the instruction isn’t to
recognize and solve; the instruction is to recognize and respond. God is not looking for an
immediate outcome from you here; God is looking for a life-long pattern, a life-long posture, a
life-long purpose—a pattern, a posture, a purpose tuned to the kingdom.

So students, use the coming year to start fine-tuning your response. Don’t get dragged down to
the current level of our culture’s immaturity. Instead, at least ask the questions…and in asking
the questions, let the Holy Spirit shape you into a life-long responder. Faculty and staff: use the
coming year to help students not only ask the questions, but begin to uncover tentative
answers…in a way that will not only be a blessing to them, but also for your own lives.

Once you decide to become life-long responders, then whether it’s the Tsunami in Indonesia or
the events of this past week along the Gulf Coast, you’ll be poised for responding. Yesterday, a
number of faculty, staff members, and student leaders met to shape our collective response to the
disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina. Over the next few days, you’ll learn how you can respond
in this instance. And this morning, one of those opportunities is presented in the form of banks
available for the taking in the lobby. Take a bank—as a department, as an individual, as a
suite—and put your change into disaster relief.

Clearly, it’s not about you and it’s not about me. It’s about God and God’s kingdom. Each of us
has an important, demanding, and critical calling. May we use this academic year to improve our
vision and tune our hearing so to recognize what God would have us do—and then to be wholly
committed to placing our everyday ordinary lives before God as an offering.