During Assembly on Monday I shared some thoughts with the school regarding the recent election. I wanted to send this information to you as parents, as well.

First, I want to recognize and commend those who organized the solidarity walk last week. Your hopeful, inclusive actions during this uncertain time were courageous and thoughtful. Thank you for ensuring MA is a place for all to feel welcome.

I wanted to take a few moments to share some reflections that I have on this pivotal moment in time for our country. Over the course of the past week, there has been a wide range of feelings from members of our community. Marin Academy is a special community that does and always will, embrace our members with openness and compassion in any situation.

Our country’s founding emerged from acts of civil disobedience and evolved into a nation of democratic principles envied and emulated the world over.

First, when you join Marin Academy, you join a community. Everyone here is valued, everyone here has a voice. Whether your candidate won or not, we are a community. I know that some of you are worried that your families will lose their health care, while others are in fear of family members and friends being deported. I know that some of you feel that you have never had a voice at Marin Academy because yours is more conservative than the dominant culture. And you feel that you won’t be listened to. Everyone here is valued. We care for each individual and each family regardless of race, gender, gender identification, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, immigration status, political affiliation, nationality, or religion. At MA we will do everything that we can for each individual, for each family. We must stand up for each other’s rights. If we don’t, how can we expect anyone to stand up for ours?

Second, racist, homophobic, xenophobic, sexist, and misogynist comments, language and ideas were present and evident throughout the course of this election. I said in the fall that we would be a values-driven school that held respectful discourse, based on data driven facts as our standard. The language of this campaign cannot become the new normal, and it will not be tolerated at Marin Academy. No one should find that acceptable. We must hold ourselves
to the highest standards of respect in our language and discourse, with compassion and empathy at the core.

Although racist, homophobic and xenophobic statements were made, not everyone whose vote won in this election can be characterized by those words.

Three, respect for our institutions that have guided and buffeted us for 240 years is essential: The office of the Presidency, the Supreme Court and Congress. They transcend individuals. And survive over time. I do believe deeply in the goodness and the promise of individuals and also respect the institutions in place.

And individuals make a difference. Much has been written about Millennials. Your spirit and engagement in the world are notable and inspiring. And the majority of millennials identify NGO’s and social entrepreneurship as their calling. Less than 40% see leadership and participation in government as a way to influence our country or our world. I challenge that, and I challenge you to defy those who say that politics is too dirty, too tiresome, too cumbersome to be worthy of your attention. Get involved and see government service as a noble way to contribute as well.

At MA we have the privilege of participating in a transformative education in a loving and caring environment. Whether faculty or staff or administrator. Whether a 9th grader or a 12th grader. Whether you play sports, star in theater, play the best music ever, throw the best pots in ceramics. Whether you identify as a Republican, or a Democrat, or are a third party advocate. Everyone is responsible in and for our community. And that takes courage. It is easy, when you agree, to move forward. It requires listening, patience, discipline, clarity, and candor to find a way through principled disagreement to a shared vision for anything, including a school and a country. To do that, we must listen, debate with respect, recognize that the world gets bigger and possibilities multiply when we let others educate our judgment.

Although your candidate may or may not have won, the American democratic process prevailed. We must do three things, minimally: respect the office of the Presidency, speak our minds thoughtfully, and listen openly to each other.

Scott Young, Dean of Faculty, said they other day that he had never understood better than now the part of our mission statement that “challenges each person
to accept the responsibilities posed by education in a democratic society.” Let’s all lean into that challenge.

There have been requests for an open forum, and I would like to talk about the timing and the format for that with anyone who is interested. I hope that the group will reflect the diversity of thought, experience, and origin of our community.

Finally, I encourage each of you to reflect on Robert Frost’s poem *Mending Wall*. The speaker of this poem shares a stone wall with his neighbor, separating their property. Routinely, the neighbors meet in the spring to walk the line, to discuss mending it. As the poem starts, the speaker declares, “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall” and later he says, that something “makes gaps where even two can pass abreast.” This time that they meet the speaker anticipates that his neighbor will say what he always says, echoing his own father’s words, “Good fences make good neighbors.” This spring, however, the poem’s speaker will challenge his neighbor, put a notion in his head: “Why do they make good neighbors?” He then admits that: “Before I built a wall I’d ask to know. What I was walling in or walling out.”

Let us ask the questions first, and let us find the gaps where two can pass abreast. Let’s make those gaps into roads.

Travis