

Dear Woodlands Students,

I wanted to reach out to you today as we face the aftermath of a frightening and historic day yesterday. The violent protest that interrupted the election certification left me feeling confused, shocked, and disappointed. The events of the day were an assault on American democracy and, devastatingly, resulted in the loss of four lives. While it is easy to feel despair at times like this, it is also important to note the signs of hope. The bipartisan statements of support for our democracy, the rule of law, and the people of this country that came in the wake of the tragic events point to the good that can come from adversity.

We are a school community that thrives on the richness of our members and all the differences among us. I know I have felt a flurry of varied emotions in the last 24 hours, and I imagine that each of you has as well. You have been through so much in the last year—more than any group of young people in many generations. You have faced a pandemic, seen a summer marked by racial strife, witnessed one of the most contentious presidential elections in modern history, and watched a mob disrupt a joint session of Congress. There are plenty of reasons to feel frustrated and helpless, but you have handled all of these events with resilience, openness, creativity, and humor.

It is in our most challenging moments that the *Goals and Criteria* guide us most clearly. St. Madeleine Sophie Barat founded the Society of the Sacred Heart during war, civil unrest, and plague. What she knew in her heart, with great clarity, is that God is loving and that His love shines through each of you. That love is what calls us to rely on one another in good times and bad; to strive always to improve the world in any way we can.

Each of you is a child of God and the adults at Woodlands care deeply about you. Even though we are not together in person, we are here to support you. Please reach out to us if needed. Use the skills you have learned in your dialogue training. Connect with one another rather than retreating. Continue to be supportive friends to one another.

Please find a prayer adapted from one by Sr. Joan Chittester below. I found it particularly inspiring today. Know that we will weather this storm together and that I count each one of you among my reasons for hope.

With gratitude for each of you,  
Ms. Steele

## Prayer for world peace

Great God, who has told us  
*Vengeance is mine,*  
save us from ourselves,  
save us from the vengeance in our hearts  
and the acid in our souls.

Save us from our desire to hurt as we have been hurt,  
to punish as we have been punished,  
to terrorize as we have been terrorized.

Give us the strength it takes  
to listen rather than to judge,  
to trust rather than to fear,  
to try again and again  
to make peace even when peace eludes us.

We ask, O God, for the grace  
to be our best selves.  
We ask for the vision  
to be builders of the human community  
rather than its destroyers.  
We ask for the humility as a people  
to understand the fears and hopes of other peoples.  
We ask for the love it takes  
to bequeath to the children of the world to come  
more than the failures of our own making.  
We ask for the heart it takes  
to care for all the peoples  
of the world,  
as well as for ourselves.

Give us the depth of soul, O God,  
  
to constrain our might,  
to resist the  
temptations of power,  
to refuse to attack the attackable,  
to understand  
that vengeance begets violence,  
and to bring peace - not war - wherever we go.

For You, O God, have been merciful to us.  
For You, O God, have been patient with us.  
For You, O God, have been gracious to us.

And so may we be merciful

and patient  
and gracious  
and trusting  
with these others whom you also love.

This we ask through, Jesus  
the one without vengeance in his heart.  
This we ask forever and ever. Amen.

*Joan Chittister, OSB*