**6th: Summer**

I am thankful for the community Priory has created. Before I came to Priory I didn't really have any community, or group of people that all cared about each other. My community was my family of four, and sometimes I was a little lonely. Now at Priory I have a really awesome community full of people who support each other and want the best for each other. I was really excited when I heard we went to chapel every Tuesday. Religion has never been a huge part of my life, and I wanted to experience that. From the moment I walked in, I knew I would be accepted. The way people were singing together I could tell this was really a special time, with really kind, caring, and understanding people. Ever since this I have been excited for school everyday, and even more excited for chapel. I really hope that the joy of this experience carries on through my next years. I am also thankful for the opportunities Priory has provided. Here at Priory you can participate in sports to connect with your friends and have fun. Also when you get older you can go on trips and learn through hands-on experience. I cannot wait to spend more time at this incredible place.

**7th: Vivi**

I am grateful for the teachers at Priory.  They all understand what they are doing and know what they are talking about. At this time of the year I appreciate all the work and effort the teachers put in to help me learn. I like the food at Priory because it is really good. When I try to think of what my favorite food is, I can’t pick just one.  I am thankful for all of the friends I have made here because everyone is really nice and understanding. The memories that I'm making here are truly incredible and amazing. Everything here is so much fun and I learn so much here. But I am most thankful for the teachers and my friends. The teachers will always help you when you're stuck. And they are so patient with you, and always are kind. They will help you when you are unsure or scared and always reassure you. Friends are like your siblings, they will stay with you and support you through the hardest parts of your life. The friends that I have found at Priory are the best people in the world. If we're about to have a test, my friends will always quiz me to make sure I'm ready for it. They always laugh along with me and they make me truly happy, and I'm grateful for that. I couldn't ask for a better home at the Woodside Priory School.

**8th: Ethan**

When I first thought about why I was grateful for the Priory community, I knew immediately what makes it so great. There are so many nice people that welcome you. Friends saying hi, teachers that you have never had that say good morning and even the daily nod from a student that you don't know. It doesn't stop there or even at the end of school hours, for most students they will have another community with their sports team. If sports aren't your thing maybe a club, or even just walking and laughing with friends on your way to get a snack at Roberts. This community’s hospitality renews everyday, but it all started the second you first stepped into Founders Hall to see where to go. There are immediately multiple people smiling, greeting you or pointing which way to go. To be honest it is almost overwhelming, but it is the good kind of overwhelming, it is the amount of help you only feel one place else. That is at home with your family. Priory isn't just a community, it is a family.

**9th: Carmen**

This is my first year at Priory and most people don't know me, so let me tell you a little bit about myself. My favorite color is black because light always comes from the darkest places, I'm a dog person because cats kinda scare me, I do *a lot* of theatre because I get to try on a new personality every day, and my favorite food is pizza. Margherita pizza. This is where my speech gets cheesy.

To you, pizza might be a gross and greasy junk food or the most glorious mixture of flavors you've ever tasted. But to me, pizza is the meal I eat with people after an energy draining show. Pizza is the meal I eat with my friends on movie night.  Pizza is the meal that I want to share with people.

Ever since I was young, whether it be breakfast or a snack during break, sharing meals was time spent with family and friends where we can talk about our day and get back in sync with people. We get to share food that everyone likes and tell jokes while eating it. I'm so grateful that here at Priory I can find good food, amazing food actually, but more importantly, I'm grateful that I have people to share it with during lunch. I'm grateful for the people that hold doors for me and the people that hold my hand when I'm tired. I'm grateful for the people that helped my transition from a tiny middle school to a larger world. Thank you for making memories with me and thank you for sharing this wonderful community with me.

**10th: Billy**

Hi, my name is Billy. I am grateful for the priory because of how we hold ourselves to our Benedictine values. I have been at this school since 7th grade, and every year I’ve been here, I’ve seen just how much our values play into our everyday school life. Take one of our values, hospitality, for example. I have never seen someone harassed or diminished because of their race, sexual orientation, or gender at this school. I feel like that is something we all take for granted. Being able to have a community where everyone is accepted for who they are is special. We achieve this by holding ourselves to a higher standard and following all of our values. I know our values are talked about a lot by teachers and people with authority, and how sometimes us students don't really think about them as much as I feel we all should. I came from a school without any such values. This school, while not bad, was not a place where I could be myself. My individuality was boarded up, stashed away somewhere, waiting to be let out. These values that we hold ourselves to, they let me be myself for the first time in years. Just having this idea, this mindset that we all try to uphold these values whenever we can, that is what makes priory so special to me. Not that we are perfect. Not that we are all flawless human beings. But that we try to be the best people we can. Thank you for letting me set myself free.

**11th: Joseph**

Hey, I’m Joe! I’ve been at Priory since 7th grade and I’m proud to say that this is my second home. I remember being skeptical about leaving my old school because I didn’t want to have to start all over, but I’m really happy now because the people I have met in this school are outstanding. I think it’s remarkable that I’m still making friends here after 5 years. Every year we hear “Always we begin again” and it’s true. There’s always someone to meet even though we’re such a small community. One example, I’ve been doing choir since the first year here and I always go back because singing is fun, but also because every year there’s a different atmosphere and I get to meet people who I didn’t really talk to before. Ms. Paulson says that we are a community within a community and I agree with that. On the other hand, sports are also a big part of my life here, and I think that they have helped me grow as a person as well. Playing football was something I tried in freshman year and I always loved it. It teaches my responsibility, discipline and teamwork. The team bond we create on and off the field is like no other, and I created friendships in this team that will last a lifetime. Even after a terrible injury, I received immediate support by some of my teammates, coaches, and friends to help me through. In Priory, I’m grateful for everything, but the people here, my friends especially, are what really makes this place special for me. Thank You!

**12th - Elise:**

There is no doubt that our country is divided right now. Regardless of your political leanings, people feel voiceless and forgotten and we’ve seen a wave of protests and hate crimes ripple throughout America. That’s why, in a time of conflict, sadness, and fear, I hope we can take a moment to give thanks for what we DO have.

We have our friends and our families to guide us and love us unconditionally. We have the future ahead of us, to find ourselves and share our gifts. We have our health, food on the table, and the knowledge to change the world. And we have the Priory community.

In my 5 and a half years here, this community has shaped me as I think forward towards college and beyond, and I am grateful for every second. I am grateful for the unity and kindness shown at this school. Shown by teachers, who go the extra mile to help us succeed. By the staff, who make this place clean, welcoming, and homey. And by the students. I admire the strength, resilience, and thoughtfulness shown by many of you, as you place the well-being of the community above your own.

I am grateful for the people in this room who love and support me at my strongest and my weakest. Who, when I showed up Wednesday morning in tears, let me cry on their shoulders. Who carry me off the cross country finish line when I can’t walk. Who inspire me to make a difference in the world and be a force for good.

And I am grateful for this community that is so accepting of everyone, regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or any other difference you can think of. So please, as you leave today, give someone a hug, and remind them that you care about them and are grateful for them. Because we need to be spreading all the love we can.

**Faculty/Staff: Mr. Morris**

As we move into this holiday season and season of giving thanks, and as we depart one by one this afternoon from our community and our school, and go our separate ways for a time, I wanted to first express my thanks to the students who organized the Healing Wall just outside of our chapel on the Benedictine stairs. It is a fitting place of testament to resilience at this time of change in our nation.

The recent election served to polarize the nation, and shined an unflattering light on the gaps that separate, even threaten us. The dialogue that has dominated the last 18 months has appealed to and uplifted many, but has also caused many to fear for their place at this country’s table. To understand another’s fear requires first an acknowledgement that fear exists. To bridge gaps, or overcome walls, we must first endeavor to understand what separates us. All of this requires respect, understanding, patience, and perhaps most of all empathy. People in our nation today have real fear, and that fear cannot be dismissed in the name of unifying a broken country. Behaviors or language that suggest racism, hatred of women, or intolerance of those not native to this country are not acceptable. Muslims, Jews, immigrants, women, members of the LGBT community, and those who fear retaliation because of the candidate they supported, or because of their political leanings – all must have a place together at our nation’s table.

Each of us, on this campus, possesses an inward light that may not lead to unity of sentiment, but that will allow us to proceed as a Way opens. To shine the light on that pathway to understanding requires not only listening with the ear of one’s heart, but also listening in the knowledge that others have something to teach us – but that can only be if we are open to learning. Using appropriate language, careful word choices, and tone – in one word *civility* – is the key to flourishing relationships.

Though I’ve only been here a short while, I am deeply thankful for you – it isn’t the buildings, or this beautiful, bucolic countryside, but *you* – the Priory community. I am thankful for the Benedictine values that are woven into the tapestry that is our community. May we always remember those values, and may they never unravel, even in the most difficult or heated times. As we move forward during the coming weeks and months may we respect each other, may we honor each person’s humanity, may we privilege listening over speaking, when we hear disrespectful words about others may we speak up to encourage more civil dialogue. Priory is a community in which all groups must feel safe – where no one should feel threatened. If you feel unsafe, or know someone who does, seek help, reach out to a teacher, to a counselor, to any of the many folks in our community who are here to help you. Ask questions when you don’t understand someone’s viewpoint. And if you still don’t understand, ask more questions. Understanding does not mean agreeing, it simply means: “I hear you, I value your right to speak, I value your place at the table.” May we always reaffirm our commitment to the Benedictine values that guide us. All are welcome, and loved, and safe – regardless of citizenship, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or political party.

Our nation, however divided right now, is the nation that you are inheriting. In uncertain times, or times of change, it’s normal to be afraid. Change implies that we don’t know what’s next. But change also begins within each of us, each of us can bring about positive change, each of us can work towards a more just nation, a more just world.

Together we can create a common ground of reflection and deeper understanding.

Together we can endeavor to live in the world that is;

Together we can strive to bring about a world that ought to be.