

A Gathering of Unity
Austin College, Wynne Chapel
November 9, 2016

President Marjorie Hass

Thank you all for gathering in the spirit of community. I am going to tell you today things that you already know. But this is a moment when it is important to say them publicly and out loud.

Austin College is not a political institution. We are not Democrat or Republican; we are not pro-choice or pro-life; we don't take a stand on free trade, or congressional term limits, or trickle-down economics.

In fact, we openly invite into our community members with differing views and perspectives on each of these issues. We debate them. We teach and learn the tools for thinking critically about them. We foster reasoned debate and collegial disagreement.

Austin College is not a religious institution. While we draw great strength from our relationship with the Presbyterian Church, we are not sectarian. We do not preach or teach a particular religious world view, and we do not insist on adherence to any specific religious doctrine or practice.

Again, we openly invite into our community members with differing religious commitments or with none of all. Within our walls we make room for Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, atheists, agnostics, and more.

We are open wide. But we are not infinitely open.

We are an institution built on values. And here we do take stands. Here we do stand firm on community standards. Here we do say what we believe.

Our values grow from our mission. Dedicating ourselves to liberal arts education means that we must create a climate of openness not only to ideas but to persons. We must make certain that everyone who participates in the life of the College feels at its center. Respect for each other and care for the inherent dignity of all persons are not negotiable at Austin College.

No matter the political shifts or whims of the nation, we will continue to value our diverse community. We will continue to welcome those who want to participate in the spirit of respectful inquiry no matter their race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, sexual identity, economic circumstance, or country of birth. All are welcome. Not because we believe this is politically correct or religiously mandated, but because we cannot fulfill our mission without that inherent promise.

There will be time in the coming weeks for intellectual inquiry into this election and its causes and consequences. There will be time for political engagement. But today, at this moment, we simply enjoy being together in the midst of our differences and in the midst of our shared commitment to our community.