

Nelson Zimmerman



Good afternoon Dr. Fedewa, members of the Board of Trustees, educators, friends, family, and fellow graduates.

We don't write **letters** anymore. With texts, emails, videochats, what's the point? But most of you up there in the cheap seats probably remember the glory days, back when all you had was a pen, paper, and your thoughts...back when letters were the main way to communicate. My parents had told me the stories: people had to actually sit down, take out writing utensils, some stamps, paper, an envelope, a glass of water in case you break a sweat. It was tough: hand cramps, paper cuts, and then at the very end, you had to attach it to a pigeon and send it away, never sure it would reach its destination.

Despite the extra effort and possibility for injuries, **letters** have a certain significance to them. They're tangible, emotional, and personal; they possess a sense of power and permanence no technology could ever replace. Each of us, even young high school graduates know the power of written word.

Let's be honest, I don't think I'm the only one here who's ever received lunch notes from his mom throughout high school. I remember at an off-campus lunch during my last week of classes, sitting down with some friends. I opened my brown paper bag and out fell a little slip of paper. I quickly grabbed the slip and held it inside the bag to read it so no one else could see. It read, "Dear Nelson, these notes are coming to a close and I am sad. Love, **Mom** xoxo." I thought I was seeing double when it was just tears forming in my eyes. One of my mom's last lunch

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notes to me. After 14 years of school, it was ending. I just stared at the wall, realizing that I wouldn't be receiving little lunch notes anymore.

Currently, that note is in a blue rusted box with 446 other ones I've received from my mom throughout high school. I started collecting them sophomore year, and I plan to take them to college with me in the fall. Some have Bible verses, corny jokes, or words of encouragement to brighten my day, but all of them are priceless symbols of her love and support for me over the years. Thank you, Mom, for taking time every day to think and to give selflessly to me. I look forward to the day I'll be writing my children letters in their lunches, symbolically passing on your love. And I hope you will be proud to see how your small, selfless act greatly impacted and inspired me to go the extra mile in life.

Besides my mom's lunch notes, I plan to take other letters to college as well. They aren't necessarily physical, but are powerful moments from my career at Cardinal Gibbons. In student council my Junior year, I remember rushing into the room, trying to find a seat as members hectically ran around getting signed in before starting the meeting. Suddenly, one of my classmates stepped up and said, "Hey, we can't start without prayer." The room went silent, and before beginning with the sign of the cross, she reminded us of the importance of faith in everything we do. We had gotten so caught up in the busy struggles of our own personal lives that we forgot our priorities. This classmate gave me this letter by being thoughtful in a busy moment, helping me bring God back to the center of all that I do.

In a History class during my junior year, our teacher stopped his lesson, just weeks away from the AP exam, to tell us about a mentally handicapped child who was turning 5 years old. No one showed up to his party, so we all wrote cards to give him a birthday he'd never forget. As I sat at my desk writing his card, I paused, and realized that it only takes a little effort to make

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someone's day. Coincidentally, the birthday card I created would become this powerful moment, this powerful letter that would shape me into the man I am today. My teacher gave me this letter by taking the time out of his lessons, helping me care for others over myself.

And in my sophomore year, I remember sitting down after a tough loss during the soccer season, having our captains lead a talk session. They regrouped us, had us refocus our goals, and even opened up the floor to let anyone talk, because at the end of the day, it wasn't just their team, it was our team. And those captains made me feel like a real part of it, even letting me speak up about what we could do better. Me, a sophomore, actually having input. How easy it could have been for them to ignore me, but instead they welcomed my ideas and treated me as an equal. It didn't matter that we would go on to win a State Championship. What mattered was our captains' selflessness, what mattered was that every teammate was included...that's what got us to achieve our goals. Our captains gave me this letter by selflessly giving me the opportunity to contribute to the team, setting an example of true leadership for me to follow one day.

Over the past four years, we've all received letters. To truly receive them though, we must act upon them by becoming letters for others tomorrow. We can't simply move on, letting the sacrifices others have made for us go in vain. Just as Jesus approached some strangers on a beach and said "come, I will make you fishers of men" so too has he approached us in some way these past four years to be the letters for others.

But it's a sacrifice we must be willing to take. We must take time, be thoughtful, and be selfless. If we write them correctly, our letters will instruct, they will support, and they will love others. Only then will we do justice to the ones we've received. That classmate in Student Council was thoughtful, giving me the gift of prayer. That History class when we wrote cards took time, giving me the gift of making someone's day. And that soccer meeting with the

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captains was selfless, giving me the gift of feeling included. Now it's our turn to pick up our pens and paper, take some time, be thoughtful and give selflessly... love those around us and shape them, just as our teachers, coaches, mentors, and parents have done for us since the first day of school.

Saint Mother Teresa once said, "We can't always do great things, but we can do small things with great love." I believe that when we do the small things with great love, they become great. So when we choose to act, to write, to give, we can inspire an entire movement of letters. All we have to do is take some time, be thoughtful, and give selflessly to others, because the letters we write today become the lives we change tomorrow.