



*The following is my annual senior letter. I sent this letter earlier in the week to the members of the Class of 2017:*

Dear Class of 2017,

You are entering a special time of your lives, preparing to transition from the high school scene to a time of much more independence.

I hope you won't get so caught up in what's next that you fail to appreciate what you have now and acknowledge the love others have for you.

I tried to share that sentiment with you on your senior retreat. Here are some thoughts I like to share with seniors around this time each year, beginning with the time leading up to your departure for college:

- Allow for some parental smothering. Your parents will want to hug you more than usual. You will often catch them just staring at you. Mom will have tears in her eyes most of the time. They will say things like, "Do you have to go out tonight? Can't you just stay home with us?" and "Come sit by me for a few minutes." Don't be surprised if they ask, "How are you feeling about going away to college?" The correct response is, "You have prepared me well, so I am excited to go...but I will miss you guys." Follow this up with a smile and a hug. (Note: The hugging thing is big. If you're not a hugger, get over it for the next several weeks.)
- There will be pictures of you everywhere. Memories captured at many different stages of your life. Here are some insights: You look at a picture of yourself and see a 2-year-old sitting in a high chair, face covered with chocolate cake. Your parents look at that picture and see the same thing. You look at another picture of yourself and see a 5-year-old wearing a fireman's hat and holding the garden hose. Your parents look at that same picture and see a 2-year-old sitting in a high chair, face covered with chocolate cake. You look at yet another picture of yourself playing freshmen basketball. Your parents look at that same picture and see a 2-year-old sitting in a high chair, face covered with chocolate cake. See the pattern? Understand that you will *always* be your parent's baby. I have a 30+ year-old daughter that I worry about every bit as much now as I did when she was a baby – maybe *more* because these days I am not able to pick her up, hold her, and let her know how much I love her.
- Show your gratitude. Parenting is tough. It is a 24-7 gig and parents get no reference manual; it is all on-the-job training. They did the very best job they could in raising you. Chances are they screwed some things up at times – you know it and they know it. But the mistakes they made were made out of love. Cut them some slack. Take the time to thank them for all they have done for you. Thank them both in words and in how you treat them.

Once you are away at college, here are a few more things to consider:

- Phone call suggestions: Don't always allow your parents to make the first move. They will call you, and that's great, but occasionally *you* need to call *them*. By the way, texting doesn't count – they need to hear your voice. It's likely to make them miss you even more, but they need to hear your voice. When you do call them, give them something. They want details about your classes or some stories about new people you have met. Know that a simple phone call helps fill the void left by your departure. Note: It is OK to occasionally slip in a request for money, but don't make it the primary reason for the call.
- Here's an interesting 'first few months of college' phenomenon: Your parents will miss you, but they won't want to tell you because they will be afraid that it will make you feel guilty. You're homesick, but you won't want to tell them because you're afraid that they will worry. So parent and child talk and neither admits their vulnerability. Then the parent gets off the phone and thinks, "My child doesn't even miss us." The child hangs up the phone and thinks, "I can't believe my parents don't miss me." All phone calls should end with, "I miss you" and "I love you" – a little guilt or a little worry is a small price to pay to know you are missed and loved.
- Your parents are back home telling everyone how smart you are. *Be smart*. Make the most of the opportunity you've been given to go to college by working hard on school and making good decisions.
- Pack your faith and take it with you. Pray. Go to church. Find faith-based groups or clubs to join. Look for opportunities to serve others. Use your God-given gifts to their full potential. Honor your father and mother.

You are so blessed. Your parents' hearts are bursting with love and pride. Dad may not know how to say it because he tends to be awkward with that kind of thing. Mom may not be able to say it because she's crying. But you can see it in their eyes and feel it in their hugs. Their baby has made it through high school and is ready to head out into the world – sitting in a high chair, faced covered with chocolate cake.

*May God bless the Class of 2017! Bishop Chatard is proud of you!*