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Cardinal Newman's class of 2022 has been surrounded by disaster since before our high school experience began; and because of it, it has become a part of us. We all know the story, but since 2017 the class of 2022, and those in our community, have suffered from the numerous wildfires that have plagued Sonoma County. In 2020 our class, along with the rest of the world, had to work through the difficulties of COVID-19, adapting to online schooling, mask mandates, social distancing, and more. In 2021 the class of 2022 had to watch as countless of our beloved faculty members retired or left the school. All of these things were abnormal, having to dive head first into the uncertainty of: What direction will the fire come from this year? Will I ever attend a high school class in a classroom that has an architectural foundation again? Will I ever be able to attend an in-person class again? Who will be teaching AP Calculus AB next year?

This class also had to deal with the "normal" stresses found within high school. We had to navigate the stress of forgetting it was liturgy dress day, realizing you left your art portfolio on the kitchen table the day it was due, not liking what was being served for lunch on that random Tuesday, stuttering while reading the book *Persepolis* in front of the Honors English 10 class, and getting soaked at a rally and having to show up to your seventh period class feeling damp. We had to deal with the typical high school drama and the situations that truly felt like disasters at the time. We had to deal with everything that our parents, and their parents, and their parents before them had to deal with on top of the curveballs that came as extras.

This year's graduating class was thrown numerous curveballs. Curveballs are breaking pitches used to keep hitters off-balance with a hopeful outcome of failure. While they did keep us off balance at times, to say the least, we did not enter the batter's box to fail. With that being said, the class of 2022 did not strike out on curveballs, that was not an option. Despite all of the

challenges, there was little sympathy. Papers still needed to be typed, math problems still needed to be solved, money still needed to be fundraised, and the show had to go on. We were continuously forced into a sink or swim situation where the only option was to swim. This reality led to our hope, our hope for a better future.

With all of our worlds seemingly falling to pieces we stood strong in that batter's box. We put our heads down and our eye on the ball as we worked hard to improvise and overcome anything that came our way. We achieved academic excellence. We obtained numerous athletic achievements. We wrote compelling speeches, competed in competitions, ran school clubs, organized pep rallies, and got the job done. We were the batters in the box with a full count throughout all of high school and we continuously made contact, fouling the ball off, staying alive, waiting for that perfect pitch.

In these past couple of months our perfect pitches came in the form of acceptances to John Hopkins, University of Chicago, UCLA, Stanford, and so many more. These perfect pitches were granted because of what the admissions officers saw in our applications. They saw the patience, hard work, and resilience of each member of this year's graduating class. The extraordinary number of curveballs we saw in high school have only made us that much more prepared for what lies ahead in the furthering of our education and life.

The pitfalls and challenges that will come during our time at universities are unknown. I fear that there may be a new variant, or curveball, in the future. I fear that I may not have the opportunity to start my first day of college in person. I fear for the future of our nation as it is on the brink of entering a world war. What does the future hold? What is next? I am not sure. That is the unfortunate reality of being unable to predict the future. Although it is hard, I believe that we should not worry about what we cannot control. This class is proof that with hard work,

relentless tenacity, the support of loved ones, and the power of God, anything is possible. We cannot steal the catcher's signs, we just must stand, loaded in that box, ready to crush the next curveball that is thrown our way.