Thanksgiving is a time to reflect and express gratitude for our many blessings, especially the people who fill our lives with laughter and love. At The Cathedral School, we are grateful for our articulate, confident, responsible students who are preparing to be leaders in our world; our extraordinary teachers and staff who bring their many talents and caring hearts to their work each day; we are grateful for our committed families who work in partnership with this school, and the generous trustees who work to sustain the health and future of this great institution. It is fitting that each year, on this day, we gather to celebrate the remarkable community of The Cathedral School.

Our tradition is to conclude each Thanksgiving Evensong by presenting the Z Award. Established in 1986, this award is the highest honor given at our school. It is named for Steven B. Zaslofsky, who served as a teacher, coach, dean, and business manager here from 1978 to 1986. Mr. Zaslofsky is best remembered for his good nature, good humor, and for completing any job tossed his way with skill, determination, and zest. It was in this spirit that the annual Z Award was founded, and it has been presented to a member of the Cathedral community ever since.

Today I present the Z Award to someone in our community who embodies Mr. Zaslofsky’s wonderful qualities, and who, in ways large and small, manifests the mission of our school.
Teaching is serious business. All educators know that they have been entrusted with the daunting responsibility — and wonderful privilege — of helping children develop into their best possible selves. So how do they do this? Certainly through learning, by putting into practice the pedagogical research and recommendations of the best minds in the field. Yet this is not enough. Far from it. For the finest teachers know that one size never fits all. They understand that we are not educating children; we are educating each individual child.

This year’s Z Award recipient begins each school year by doing what each teacher must: establishing classroom guidelines and norms, creating a safe and welcoming space, and building a lively learning community. At the same time, our recipient immediately starts to watch and listen, using her finely-honed powers of observation to record the often-missed but all-important details about the students under her care: the one who keeps losing pencils, the one who drifts alone during recess, the one who leans close with eyes wide open at the start of every story. Through these observations and conversations, our recipient truly gets each of her students, both as learners and as people. She then uses this knowledge, her experience, and her Santa-sized sack of teaching tools to support each child’s individual academic and social-emotional needs.

Even as she meets her students right where each one needs to be met, today’s recipient maintains the highest of expectations for all of the children in her class. Virtues matter to this teacher, and she instills lifelong values in her students. Responsibility matters. Kindness matters. Cooperation matters. Self-control matters. Respect matters. This teacher’s
students learn the right way to treat every member of this community. They learn that “please” and “thank you” aren’t just words, but symbols of appreciation and gratitude. They learn that calling out in the classroom does not just violate a classroom guideline, but that it inhibits the learning of their peers. And they learn that when it is 1:10 in the dining room, and this teacher is on lunch duty, silence — indeed — is golden.

Yes, this teacher is tough. And proud of it. But our recipient well knows that toughness alone cannot teach. There must also be joy. And this teacher brings the joy. She is fearlessly funny, perpetually playful, and seriously silly. Her students learn because they laugh. They learn because they see the immense pleasure their teacher takes in their antics. They learn because they know they are loved. Our honoree’s students know that they have an adult looking out for them and protecting them, someone they can talk to in times of frustration or pain, someone who will offer comfort and compassion when they need it most. Within such an environment, the possibilities for learning are limitless. And our recipient does not put limits on her students. She leads them on an exploration of the world’s largest Gothic Cathedral, passionately sharing her wonder at its wonders. Eagerly, they research this majestic Cathedral’s history, its architecture, its music, and its art. And then our honoree turns her students into teachers, as they lead their parents on a guided, educational tour of a space that has become their own.

A good teacher knows the importance of imbuing students with knowledge and skills. A great teacher adds another crucial element to the mix: character. Our recipient has made it her mission to provide students
opportunities to explore their own identities, to embrace diversity and inclusion, and to actively work to create a more equitable and just world. In her unit on the differently abled, our recipient leads students on walks through the neighborhood, encouraging them to carefully note the ways that local stores, buildings, and other places are — and more often — are not — welcoming to the physically challenged. She invites to class a blind guest who reveals the obstacles and shares the challenges inherent to navigating a world designed for the sighted. And as a culminating activity, she inspires her students to take action, as they lead a school-wide initiative to raise money for a guide dog for the Pennies for Puppies foundation. Yes, for this teacher, empathy matters.

So too does community. Our honoree embodies the spirit of the Cathedral School. Looking for a mentor? Try her. She guides her associate teachers with patience and purpose, and when they reluctantly leave her side, they confidently go on to become talented head teachers thanks to her expert instruction and model of excellence. Are you concerned about equity and justice? Thank her. Her leadership of faculty committees has helped to ensure that these values are woven throughout the school’s curriculum and culture. Is a teacher getting married or welcoming a new baby? Tell her. You can count on her to coordinate the celebration and collect money for a gift.

Perhaps you need a distinctive voice, one rich with wisdom and authority? Hire her. She can pack a punch as Miss Trunchbull, or sort your students into Slytherin. Pining for a pastry? Hoping for a homemade sweater? Or do you just need a little laughter in your life? Well, I may know where you can
find it. In the hallways and the stairwells, on the porch and the playgrounds, at Lower School Assemblies and after-school meetings. If you listen hard enough— and you don’t have to listen that hard — you will hear her laughter ringing through the school, bringing us together in the warmth of her light and love.

Please join me, as we honor our own 1st grade teacher and 2019 Z Award winner, Ms. Ann Bryant.