

My name is Sammy Risma, I'm a senior on the Blue Ash Y swim team.

The actual sport of swimming can teach you many things: a good work ethic, strong mental discipline, the ability to perform under pressure, time management skills, and commitment. These are all very important things that swimmers will carry with them for the rest of their lives and are what make us very successful people. But there are a few character traits that the act of swimming itself can't teach you, and these traits are not what make you successful, but ensure that you are remembered.

A very select few people will be remembered by how fast they were, or how much money they made, or any other quantifiable measure of success. But anyone can be remembered for their character and their impact on others. Swimming itself can't teach you this. It comes from the relationships you have with the people around you: teammates, opponents, coaches, family, or friends.

The YMCA holds a special role in the development of character by teaching swimmers to live a life of service. At our age, the word "service" is typically associated with "community service" or "volunteering." And while volunteer work is incredibly important, there are so many more ways to selflessly serve others around you that don't entail racking up volunteer hours for school or for a resume. When you live a life of service, you go into any situation thinking "what can I do to make someone's day better." And this is different for every person, but this mentality forces people to consider life from someone else's perspective which develops empathy and compassion for the people around you.

As we begin this year's Y nationals, I'd like to challenge everyone to live a life of service this week. What can YOU do to make the lives your teammates, coaches, and even opponents better? How can YOU show empathy and compassion to the people around you? Thinking this way will make your swimming experience more memorable for both you and your teammates and will create lifelong habits of good character.

Please join me in prayer,

Dear God, thank you for blessing us with the opportunity to swim at Y nationals. Watch over us as we tackle whatever challenges come our way this week but fill our hearts with love and selflessness to serve the people around us. Help us learn to care for one another and seek common ground across our differences. Bless us with a fun week of fast swimming and fellowship with those we love the most. In your name we pray, Amen.