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An Alumnus Learns and Serves: Vincentian Mission in Education

Brian Crimmins, BS '99, MBA '01, HON '17

Editor's Note:

In this special edition of The Journal of Vincentian Social Action, it seems appropriate to hear from an alumnus educated and changed by the Vincentian charism at St. John's University. Below is a reflection by Brian Crimmins, MBA, Class of 2001. Brian writes how the Vincentian charism in education helped him realize that his main goal in life goal was not just to make a living, but to enable others to make their way. Here is Brian's story.

Service. It was a word heard often in my house growing up. My parents often spoke of the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul and his service to the poor and marginalized. My Dad would talk about the mission of St. John's University—and how going to St. John's was about more than just getting an education. It was also about a commitment to service. Funny thing was—at first, like many of my peers, I looked at St. John's and saw an opportunity to celebrate the great tradition of college basketball while also getting an education.

When the time came for college, St. John's was my only choice. I wanted to major in sports marketing; to write for the sports department; and, I wanted to manage the basketball team—all of which I was fortunate to do. My involvement with the basketball team provided me with exposure to various service initiatives. We volunteered at Bread and Life—a soup kitchen in Brooklyn. We served food and shared meals with people who weren't quite sure where or when they would eat next. Some of the players grew up in Brooklyn. If it wasn't for St. John's, some of the friends I made while at St. John's might have been eating in that very same soup kitchen. It was from this experience that I began to embrace the mission of St. Vincent de Paul.

In my junior year at St. John's, I was accepted

into the President's Society for my commitment and involvement in University activities and my dedication to our Vincentian mission. Serving as an official staff member of the Office of the President, I became an ambassador for St. John's. In this capacity, I was fortunate to have met great dignitaries, engaged with high-powered alumni, and most importantly to learn from honorees being recognized for service to others.

After obtaining my undergraduate degree, I became a graduate assistant while studying at the Peter J. Tobin College of Business Administration. I had the opportunity to serve in different departments, including the business school, Information Technology, Institutional Advancement and at the MBA office on our Rome campus. This continued my journey of learning from those around me—one I thought began as a member of the President's Society but in retrospect, it started long before and still continues every day.

While each experience helped shape me, working in the Office of Institutional Advancement at St. John's gave me my "start." My Dad had always been involved in fundraising for St. John's but I never really paid attention to why. It was only at this time I learned its true purpose: raising funds for scholarships for students in need; supporting faculty who would be educating and

training students; and together, these would allow students the experience and opportunity to live our Vincentian tradition. It always amazed me to hear stories from major executives who credited a St. John's scholarship for their "start."

A colleague suggested an internship with a firm called *Changing Our World*, a fundraising and philanthropic consulting firm. I wasn't quite sure why I should do this internship, as I was a sports marketing major. I reluctantly accepted this internship knowing experience outside the University would be important as I looked at future career opportunities. After working with organizations that provided services to the underserved, I began to have second thoughts, wondering if a career in sports marketing was really where I belonged.

A few months into my internship at *Changing Our World*, everything my parents said, all I heard and learned in Catholic school growing up, and certainly the Vincentian Mission I had embraced in my days at St. John's all came together. *I belonged at Changing Our World*. I was meant to serve nonprofit and corporate clients who wanted to make the world a better place.

As I became more familiar with the company and the clients, I wanted to do more. In working with my colleagues to figure out how we could continue to maximize the impact of our clients to better serve the needs of others, I realized quickly the world of philanthropy changes fast. I needed to become a student of this industry: always learning, thinking, and creating.

At *Changing our World*, I found myself in a very collaborative environment. We were not only responding to the changes around us, but actually driving change. Ten years later, I was named its Chief Executive Officer. I have worked alongside some of the most influential people in the philanthropic sector and served clients in the faith-based, education, human service, healthcare, and the corporate sectors.

My personal and professional life has become blended in ways quite congruent with the

Vincentian Mission. Beyond my clients, I have mentored students from Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business. I speak regularly at conferences on the latest trends in philanthropy. I also serve on the development committee of Catholic Charities of Rockville Centre and the boards of Tomorrow's Hope Foundation and St. John's University's Institute for Catholic Schools.

As I continued to learn about challenges our clients face, I realized that the services *Changing Our World* offers did not always address all these issues. I began to see the "siloes" within organizations that can inhibit their service delivery. For example, I worked with a client who had seven different vendors engaged to help mold public perception and mobilize external stakeholders. None of these vendors were unified in our agreed upon goals or strategies.

Something wasn't working. I spent months trying to nail down exactly what the gaps were in our sector. Finally, I started to piece together an idea: we needed an integrated approach that would bring together branding, marketing, communications and fundraising. This approach would provide a solution that was more efficient, effective, and engaging.

Fortunately, *Changing Our World* is part of Omnicom, a Fortune 200 company, consisting of world-class public relations, communications, marketing, branding, digital, research and advertising experts. I met with leaders of a number of agencies and found six agency leaders who wanted to develop a solution to better serve purpose-driven organizations and initiatives.

We focused on building awareness, driving engagement, and ultimately maximizing the impact of our clients. Together, we formed ONE HUNDRED, the first multi-disciplinary, fully integrated service collective for the modern nonprofit. Together, we can do things that most individual agencies and philanthropic organizations can only dream of. We are experts at helping the most fractured organization realign, re-focus, and re-discover the right way to mold public perception of a cause. We create

teams of top talent from across agencies— staff at all levels, with different professional backgrounds, across geographies and generations —to best meet each client’s needs. We have united to serve our client in a better way and to maximize their impact.

Looking back, I never thought working as a graduate assistant in the Office of Institutional Advancement at St. John’s would have such an impact on my future. I didn’t realize at first that what my parents were saying and

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doing as I grew up—namely the importance of the Vincentian mission—would ring true in my life in such a profound and lasting manner, day in and day out. It is this—a Vincentian education in the way of service that gave me the foundation to succeed. To this very day, it guides and helps me grow personally and professionally. This, in turn, helps my clients make a difference in the world. It is all this, that I am grateful for.