

December 2016

JoVSA: Editorial

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Recommended Citation

Gillespie, Marc E. (2016) "JoVSA: Editorial," *Journal of Vincentian Social Action*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.
Available at: <http://scholar.stjohns.edu/jovsa/vol1/iss2/4>

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JoVSA: Editorial

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Editor in Chief

Journal of Vincentian Social Action

St. John's University

As we prepared our second issue of JoVSA I received a letter from a friend noting that the Aims and Scope of the journal describe our focus on the “disadvantaged” and the “needy”.

Would anyone really like to be characterized as “disadvantaged” and “needy”, I was asked? Would I like to be described that way?

As we began to assemble articles for this issue I wondered: Who are we trying to serve? What must we do in order to help? We surely don't want to offend those whom we wish to serve. In that spirit, I have asked for help in sharpening our Aims and Scope, our mission statement, our statements on how we see the journal and who we are serving. I hope in coming issues to present these revised statements, not as policy, but as a means of entering into discussion.

In the meantime, articles came in and I was once again reminded of the service that happens every day in our community. Vincentian Universities are engaged in service at so many levels and in so many ways, yet it is easy to move through our day unaware of the herculean efforts that our students and colleagues are engaged in. I am lucky enough to be discussing articles, visiting sites, and hearing from faculty and students carrying out such research and service. When I entered academia, I feared I might fall into a silo of my own making, focusing on my research and my grants. In many ways, I think we do a better job than most of reaching out, not just across our campuses, but globally.

The Vincentian Universities seem rooted in the idea of service. For us, service is not another trend that we adopted, but rather it has always been part of our constitution. I like the word constitution and its varied meanings, but here I think of service as part of our vitality; without our commitment to serving others, we would become unhealthy and we would forget what we are striving for. We would be less.

I was lucky enough to attend this year's Vincentian Convocation on the 22nd of September. I sat in St. Thomas More Church on the Queens campus of St. John's University, initially caught in my own reflections on what we do, and whom we serve. To my great pleasure, I was struck by the different approaches that each honoree took and the successes that each had in humbly fulfilling the ideal of serving. The most notable of these honorees' description of service came from the Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, C.M., Ed.D., President of DePaul University. Rev. Holtschneider noted that the Vincentian Universities are in some ways still carrying on their original mission in putting those vast “resources of a great university to the service of the poor”. He noted that Universities serve as a platform from which we can help others, with real hope of achieving change.

It was a strong reminder of what we set out to do every day, and an equally strong citation of what our community achieves.

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Dr. Marc E. Gillespie Ph.D., received his doctorate in Oncological Sciences from the University of Utah in 1998 and is now a Professor in the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences at St. John's University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. As Chair of the College's Committee on Assessment and Outcomes he has been working and conducting research in assessment. He leads and develops the College's assessment program. As Chair of the Institutional Biosafety Committee he provides institutional oversight of recombinant DNA research.

Dr. Gillespie leads a research group focused on bioinformatics and biomarker discovery.

He teaches Pharmacogenomics, Public Health, Human Anatomy & Physiology and has experience from academia and industry to public health policy. He is currently an Editor/Curator for the Reactome Project, a pathway database of cellular level processes. This project is a multinational effort to integrate the overwhelming proliferation of genomic data into a human readable and computationally tractable database.

In this issue, we find two articles addressing education and needs. New approaches to healthcare education that engage students from communities that are traditionally underrepresented are presented by Cassagnol et al. A second article by Sciuchetti et al. describes the challenges that lie ahead as we ask teachers to use evidence-based practices in their teaching. Both articles provide important frameworks for engaging our community and methodologies that can be employed by others facing similar challenges.

It was a lot to think about as I settled in again four days after the Vincentian Convocation for the Founder's Week Faculty Research Luncheon. I was struck as Jerry Ross (Jerrold Ross, Dean [retired] of The School of Education, St. John's University) managed to tie all of what we do into one thought: compassion. Jerry has always seemed to have some strange connection to the pulse of the world. He has been known to lull me into thinking that he might not be listening, only to catch me off-guard with the most insightful questions. Perhaps I should have seen it coming, but I am neither that prescient nor smart. In the end, Jerry's thoughts and perceptiveness framed what challenges lie ahead and which of our strengths will get us through.

All of this brings me back to that original note that challenged me to think about whom we serve, and how we can best serve them. That friend pointed out that we are all disadvantaged or needy in some way. The work presented in this issue provides two direct examples of how we can better serve, while Rev. Holtschneider and Dean Ross note that though we may have flaws, it is by partnering with those whom we help, by compassionately committing ourselves to their needs, that we succeed.

I am thankful for you all, and look forward to sharing what you do so that others may benefit from your experiences and careful assessment of what works.