



**2024 Recipient ~ Ojilvy Sanchez
Fordham Preparatory School**

Among the goals of a Jesuit high school are to form young men to be open to growth and to be compassionate and committed to justice. I can honestly say that my experience serving others over the past few years has probably been the greatest contributor to my personal growth and to broadening my understanding of the world and those around me.

One of my most formative service experiences happened as I was applying to Fordham Prep. I knew that the Prep valued faith, scholarship, and service, so I thought it would help my application to have membership in the National Honor Society listed on my application. Impressing the Prep was my initial goal; little did I know how that experience would shape me forever. I volunteered at a school called P.S. 100, a local elementary school in the Bronx, where my mom was and still is the assistant principal. I joined an annual drive to give away bundles of food during Thanksgiving and the holidays. We didn't adequately advertise the program to potential beneficiaries in the neighborhood, so initially we gave out only a few bags of food to people who randomly passed by. However, as these folks made their way home with their food and supplies, they made sure to let their neighbors know about what was going on, and in no time we had before us a line going around the block full of people hoping for food.

I recall being surprised and exhausted by the amount of people who really needed our help. I had developed a new insight into the world, because I was now living and breathing the call to feed the hungry, instead of just hearing about it as an ideal. I remember how sad it was to see so many people in need. However, as I look back, I now see a certain beauty in the experience. The first few people who just so happened to pass by, could have been selfish, could have taken their food home and gone about their day, maybe even come back for seconds. Instead, they went around and told their friends, told their neighbors, and spread the word. They created a "butterfly effect" that allowed more and more families to eat that day, families that otherwise would have suffered. Having been cared for by us, they then cared for those around them. I think that powerful and positive experience has fueled my ongoing commitment to service.

As a new arrival at the Prep, I remember being scared, lost and confused as I ventured forth into this new world of high school. I remember being nervous, unsure, maybe even stressed trying to navigate my new home. However, the Prep's upperclassmen and staff quickly show you that you are welcome, that you belong, and that you are needed to help the school live out its mission. Kind gestures as simple as helping me find a classroom on my schedule to advising me on what courses to take made me realize I was cared for and that I would be ok. Our journey of service began with simple projects like creating Christmas crafts and writing Valentine's Day cards that were sent to assisted living facilities where upperclassmen serve. I also was able to help out with our annual Great Ignatian Food Drive each November.

It was when I became an upperclassman that I realized how integral service is to our education and development and that it was time to give back in a serious way. Service became more and more meaningful and prevalent in my life. Inspired by those who came before me, I have committed myself to care for others. I have sought out ways to use leadership roles, team captain positions, and other ways to be a role model of service for others. Like students who came before me I have tried to inspire others to become "men for and with others," as the Jesuit motto goes. I was asked to be a senior leader on a recent Junior Emmaus retreat that requires lots of preparation in order to make the experience the best possible one for the junior retreatants. I was further honored to be asked to give the final talk of the retreat on discipleship—encouraging the juniors to live out not only what they had learned on the retreat, but all the values that their parents and the Prep have tried to instill in them over the years.

Currently, I am thrilled to serve every weekend at an assisted living community called Sunrise of Crestwood. There I assist with programs offered by the recreation department for the residents. I am a jack-of-all trades—one day I am playing Bingo (who knew senior citizens were deadly serious about Bingo?), the next day I am serving dinner; the following day I might have a quiet conversation with a resident. I realized through my time at Sunrise that sometimes our greatest gift is simply our presence and our greatest superpower is simply to listen. Listening allows people to reminisce, it gives them a chance to share hard-earned wisdom, and enables them to feel like they have something to contribute. I have learned a lot not only about how challenging and rewarding life was in the past, but I have come to appreciate what it means to deal with aging and infirmity with grace. Listening to the rich experiences of older people, and how they have come to live out their dreams and values, has helped me recognize what is most important in life and what it means to live a life of integrity. They have helped me to shape my own hopes and dreams and to keep them in perspective.

When I started this journey of service, I asked myself, "What possible connection would I have with people who were poor. What I have learned was that poverty takes all kinds of forms. As I was judging others, I realized that in some ways I was poorer than they were. People who may have had no money, no status, or little opportunity could be rich in wisdom, rich in hope, and rich in a deep-spirited love for their families and neighbors.

One thing I and my classmates at Fordham Prep share alike is opportunity. We share a chance to do so many great things in life; a chance to become almost anything we can possibly imagine. However, we learn that we can't be truly successful in this life unless we commit ourselves to lives of service built on compassion and always seeking justice.