



**2021 Recipient ~ Nicholas Vianna
Fordham Preparatory School, Class of 2021**

As a student at a Jesuit high school, I am inspired by the life and teachings of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. He has become a role model for me, and I try to discern what he would advise doing in trying times. One lesson I learn from him and the Jesuits is how essential service is to a fulfilling life. I have experienced that first hand in a number of settings, as a weekly volunteer at Songcatchers teaching students how to play music, delivering food for Hillside Food Outreach to families in quarantine and isolation, and this year co-chairing my school's efforts the annual Great Ignatian Challenge to raise money and nonperishable food for the local community organizations. I'll highlight in this essay a service project I initiated. The ninety-four hours of this current service project in which I have been engaged has taught me much about charity, which is at the heart of the mission of Saint Vincent's Hospital. It has also instilled in me the values of respect and compassion for ourselves and others, excellence in service, the dignity of human life, and commitment to the community.

Forty-seven weeks ago, I responded to our church deacon's request to make sandwiches as part of my sister's confirmation project. In New Rochelle, where the poverty rate is 11.2%, we have several food pantries. Many clients at HOPE Community Services and Trinity Saint Paul Episcopal Church experienced food insecurity before the pandemic. Food pantries in my county saw a two hundred percent surge in demand due to canceled public school breakfast and lunch programs and unemployment, triggered in large part by the closing of restaurants and businesses.

As a man for others, I was obliged to help those in need. I enlisted my friends to spend 2 hours each week to help make brown bag takeaway lunches that I collected and delivered. I assigned each person food items such as bread, cheese, cold cuts, and fruit. As summer began, I started to organize and host socially distanced sandwich-making gatherings in my backyard. We divided ourselves into two groups of four and packed our meals. Our collaborative effort in representing our parish was a commitment to serving the community and helped us escape from stress, loneliness, and emotional insecurity related to social isolation. In addition, our project has served as an inspiration and model for younger members of my parish to volunteer in helping others.

We are now in our 48th week, providing over 2,700 hundred meals and counting to my local community. When I look back on this experience I helped create, I cannot help but hear Saint Ignatius' call to "go forth and set the world on fire." While I have often heard this phrase in my high school career, it has not been until this past summer that I feel that I lived this calling. Through these weekly service sessions, I have engaged my peers by providing consistent and substantial emotional support to become a positive force in my underserved community. I hope, like Ignatius, to make that a life-long habit.