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Inspired by Opus

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Creighton University has always preached to its students to make a difference and to be inspired by the joy of helping others. Although these values can be seen daily on campus, I do not believe any event instilled these values within me to the extent that the Opus Prize inspired me in Fall 2016. Last year, when Creighton was fortunate enough to award the Opus Prize, the ongoing events became must-see events on campus. The Opus Prize presented countless opportunities for students to be involved in the process and missions of these three incredible finalist organizations both before and after the Opus Prize winner was announced at the award ceremony. These events would not only prove to be remarkably eye-opening to the many ways we can aid marginalized societies all around the world, they also affirmed everything about what it means to embody Jesuit values in all aspects of life.

Dating back to last October, the events leading up to Opus Prize Week were intended to inform students and community members about what the Opus Prize was, who the three finalists were, how the winner would be chosen, and of course about how these nonprofit organizations change the world. For me, everything began at the first Spark Session where campus constituents were invited to hear from panelists who had the opportunity to visit and report on these great organizations first-hand. Admittedly, despite many emails from President Fr. Daniel Hendrickson and the Provost, it was actually my professor Dr. Erika Kirby who influenced my decision to attend. She talked about the prize in my organizational communication class because we were going to be visited by one of the finalists, Fr. Peter Balleis. She offered an extra credit assignment for attending the first Spark Session. Little did I know that

going to this Spark Session would change my life forever. The panel was made up of people who visited Opus finalist Fr. Balleis and Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL), a non-profit organization dedicated to providing higher education to marginalized refugees in Africa. Within the first five minutes of learning about this organization and how the Opus Prize benefits and shines light on these amazing nonprofits, I was no longer there for extra credit. Instead, I saw an opportunity to be truly moved by the goodwill of others, something that was so pivotal to my decision to attend a Jesuit university in the first place. By the end of the first Spark Session, I had already decided that I would undoubtedly be attending the others, as well as the awards ceremony. However, when the time came for the first Spark Session to end, I already had a lingering sense of wonder about how I could help as I was left sitting in complete admiration for these nonprofit organizations. Fortunately, shortly thereafter, the Opus Prize provided me with an excellent opportunity.

At the end of the first session about Jesuit Worldwide Learning, Dr. Martha Habash informed students about an opportunity to take an 8-week course through JWL with refugees from all around the world, and explained that in the following 8 weeks we would use that knowledge to become a teaching assistant for the same course! I decided to jump at the opportunity, because not only was I thrilled about the idea of a global learning environment with students from over 20 countries, but mostly I cherished the opportunity of helping student refugees successfully complete the course. The icing on the cake, however, was the incredible experience that we were able to have by personally meeting these heroes behind the foundations. I was fortunate

enough to meet Fr. Balleis when he visited Dr. Kirby's classroom, and many other students had their classes visited by other finalists as well. Never before had I ever been so moved as when I heard Fr. Balleis speak, and for me, the opportunity to be able to ask him questions about JWL was an unforgettable experience.

Lucky for me, the experience did not end there. I was fortunate enough to be selected as a pilot student for a teaching assistant position through JWL, which immediately propelled me into a fulfilling process of learning and helping others even after Opus Prize events had concluded. Beginning in January, I took an 8-week course on "Political Thought" as a fellow student with 25 refugees from around world! This would quickly become a once in a lifetime experience as I was gifted the opportunity to hear from many different perspectives outside of the United States, opening my eyes to the many challenges marginalized people face on a daily basis. When I went on to be a teaching assistant in the same course 8 weeks later, it proved true that I had just as much to learn from the students in the class as they did from me, if not more. For example, I will never forget the words of one of my peers, Aladit Hassan, on political legitimacy—"In everything we do we need to do it with justice. We should accept other people's ideas for them to accept our ideas too. In doing so, we will be in a position to bring peace to the entire world." For me, this only reaffirmed my belief that everyone has a lot to learn from each other in this world and that we must fight for the rights of all humanity. This would ultimately end up being one of the most inspirational experiences of my life, as I met many extremely intelligent students who persevered through their education despite the many disadvantages they faced as refugees. Additionally, I finished the next semester with over 20 hours of community service, when I volunteered with local refugees in the Omaha area.

In short, I truly felt as though I was able to make the absolute most out of the Opus Prize events hosted on Creighton's campus. Before the Opus Prize came to Creighton, I would describe myself in a sort of lingering purgatory for social justice. I knew there were many fields and areas that needed to be addressed in society, and I also knew that I was fortunate enough to be in a situation to help

make a difference. However, it was not until I experienced the Opus Prize that I was pushed to go outside of my normal daily life and begin to focus on helping people at the margins. I also credit Opus for reminding me that some of the greatest things in life do not involve money, but rather establishing a sense of freedom, education, and love. 