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by James V. Grimaldi

Executive Editor

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My first memory of the National Catholic Reporter involves a Jesuit telling me that I should read it.

I was a student at Rockhurst High School in Kansas City, Missouri, and my interest in journalism began at a very early age. One of my brothers did a neighborhood newspaper and I was his staff writer. I wrote for the student newspaper at my parochial school, St. Francis Xavier in Kansas City.

I wrote for every edition of my high school newspaper, The Prep News, all four years. Knowing of my interest in journalism, a Jesuit priest (or novice) suggested I might want to read the National Catholic Reporter. Of course, it often could be found in the back of my parish church, next to the Key to the News, the diocesan newspaper, and the Sunday bulletin.

So when a friend asked me if I would be interested in applying to be executive editor of NCR, I replied, "I might."

And here I am, writing my first column from the mother ship, NCR's brick building on Armour Boulevard in my old hometown, where I still have family.

After 12 years at The Wall Street Journal and a long career in what I guess I am supposed to call the "secular media," I feel blessed to be taking the helm of a newspaper and news website with such a stellar and storied history.

The old saying among public-service-minded journalists is, 'Afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted,' which seems Christian in its essence, reminiscent of Jesus overturning the tables of the moneychangers or caring for the sick.

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It isn't that much of a stretch to see me in this job. As a practicing cradle Catholic (I've been practicing for years, and one day I might get it right), I am familiar with the issues. I was baptized by a Jesuit and went to a Jesuit high school, where I so admired the order I thought about a life in the priesthood. But it was clear to me that

religious life was not my calling.

God called me to journalism, and investigative journalism in particular, the kind of reporting that shines a light on injustice, wrongdoing, corruption and the ills of the world so that society can correct them. I possess a degree of fearlessness about challenging authority with my primary regulator being the truth.

As I told the search committee for NCR, I particularly admire the saint [recommended by Pope Francis](#) to be considered as the patron saint of journalists: St. Maximilian Kolbe, a Franciscan priest, journalist and martyr, who was arrested in 1941 on charges of aiding Jewish refugees and the Polish resistance to the Nazis. The righteous fearlessness of St. Maximilian is what is needed in an era where journalists are often under siege from politicians, the government and some in the public.

Pursuing the truth is something that I have done my entire career, beginning in Southern California when I investigated abuses in a woman's correctional facility. At the California Institution of Women, we exposed unnecessary deaths, including one of an inmate who died in her cell as her meal trays piled up.

A particular interest and specialty of mine has been examining the failing of large institutions, primarily governmental and political entities. I also am drawn to obscure and sometimes atypical investigative reporting on the fringes. For example, I exposed serious problems with [animal deaths](#) at the Smithsonian National Zoo and later with [expense account excesses](#) of the secretary of the Smithsonian.

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My stories often result in corrective action, such as firings, indictments and new legislation. The Jack Abramoff lobbying bribery scandal, for [which I shared a Pulitzer](#) with two other reporters, resulted in the convictions of more than a dozen people and new rules and legislative ethics reforms. My idea to examine federal judges' financial disclosure forms found 150 jurists breaking ethics law and resulted in a new transparency law, passed by a bipartisan group of lawmakers in seemingly record time in this partisan Congress. And our subsequent ["Capital Assets" investigation](#) exposing federal regulators who invest in companies they regulate won a Pulitzer for investigative reporting.

The old saying among public-service-minded journalists is, "Afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted," which seems Christian in its essence, reminiscent of Jesus overturning the tables of the moneychangers or caring for the sick. While journalists can't raise the dead, they can right wrongs to prevent future deaths. Or in the case of the National Catholic Reporter, they can expose pedophile priests and drum them out of the priesthood so they can't violate any more children.

As I was taught by the Jesuits, I strive to [be a "man for others,"](#) which has translated into lots of volunteering in my life. So it was natural that I would become involved in organizations with public service in mind. That includes [Investigative Reporters and Editors Inc.](#), a Columbia, Missouri-based professional-development organization that teaches journalists how to root out corruption, hold power accountable and expose harms to the vulnerable and poor. I served on the board and as president of Investigative Reporters and Editors and still volunteer as a speaker and mentor. I also serve on the steering committee of the [Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press](#).

Now I am going to be bringing that ethic to NCR. After I reached out to one of our best writers at NCR, he responded with a direct message on social media confessing he was feeling a bit intimidated. I told him not to worry and referred to an old gung-ho military phrase — we're going to kick butt and take names. And, I added, we're going to have fun doing it.