

**In Memoriam:
John
Kennedy
Bingham '80C
(1958–2022)**



*“A Man
on a Mission”*



Written into St. John's University's formal mission statement and codified by the Board of Trustees in 1991 is aspirational language that reflects the global charge of the University.

“...In educating students we pledge to foster those qualities needed for our alumni to become effective leaders and responsible citizens in a vibrant city and dynamic world.”

For the late John Kennedy Bingham '80C, that global world view—fueled by an ever-present and bright burning compassion for others that navigated his professional career as a lawyer, a migrant, and a human rights defender—was sadly extinguished with his sudden passing on July 26, 2022.



← STUDENT GOVERNMENT, INC.



→ While at the University, John was an active member of Beta Epsilon Rho, a popular fraternity that also held sway in Student Government. He was active in Greek life, helped organize a dance marathon fundraiser to fight muscular dystrophy, and was a popular student leader.

“ Faith, family, and service to others were early lessons taught by our parents.

—Mary Bingham-Johnsen **”**



Raised in a large, loving “St. John's family” from Rockville Centre, NY, and molded by his early college experience that included two terms as President of Student Government, Inc. (SGI), John dedicated his life to advocating in far-flung regions of the globe for the promotion and protection of the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees.

The Bingham family is testament to the old Irish blessing that reads, “May love connect us, faith direct us, and God protect us.” The devout family had eight children born in eight years, including two sets of twins. The Bingham family included six boys and two girls—Claire '77C, Charlie, John '80C, Joe '82SVC, Mary '82C, Richard '85CBA, Jimmy '85C, and Bobby. All of them attended or graduated from St. John's, save for Bobby, who died tragically in an accident a month before he was to enroll.

“Faith, family, and service to others were early lessons taught by our parents,” shared Mary Bingham-Johnsen. “Our parents set the example for us, and we followed.” Mary, like her brothers John and Jimmy, also served as President of Student Government while attending St. John's, and all the siblings were actively engaged in campus life of the University, which was then a commuter school.

Like many Irish-Catholic families at the time, the larger-than-life influence of an ordained relative—in this case, the charisma and commitment of Rev. John Kennedy Bingham, S.J., a Jesuit missionary who spent 50 years overseas and was the namesake of John—would prove providential. ←

Now the Senior Vice President of Student Affairs at the University of Miami, Patricia A. Whitely, Ed.D. '80CBA was the Vice President of SGI, serving with John.

“As a two-time elected President of SGI, John personified the Vincentian charisma of service to the poor and marginalized,” Dr. Whitely recalled. “He was passionate, engaged, and deeply committed to his work, and his leadership was always impactful and profound. He truly brought the light and love of St. John's to all who were lucky to know and love him.”



“As a college student, he was a young man of action and compassion, and his many talents were already evident. John was an excellent organizer and listener, and his sense of fairness drew people to him. For all of his accomplishments, John maintained a very humble personality,” shared classmate Kathleen “Kitty” Prager ’78C.

After graduating from St. John’s, John secured a job at Kidder, Peabody & Co. and was rapidly climbing the corporate ladder while pursuing a law degree at Fordham School of Law at night. He had found professional success, and with a job on Wall Street, and a job title of Vice President, he was well on his way.

It was the 1980s, and the financial services industry at the time was characterized by the Hollywood movie *Wall Street* and the catchphrase, “Greed is good.” True to his intelligence, integrity, courage and moral character, John identified and sounded the alarm on an insider trading scandal. True to his faith, his selfless character, and his bright burning compassion to serve others, John would write his own Hollywood ending when he suddenly gave up everything, quit his job, and announced that he was headed to Thailand to work as a \$248-a-month Catholic Church volunteer with his uncle, the Jesuit missionary, to assist refugees from Cambodia’s “Killing Fields.”

“I was scared to death, but I just felt myself being drawn” to Cambodia, he would tell *Newsday*, his hometown newspaper, during a 2002 interview.

“*John literally gave away his suits and headed off to a life of service, ultimately advocating for immigration policy reform on a global stage.*”

—Salvatore Barcia, R.Ph.

John spent the next eight years teaching human rights and criminal justice in a refugee camp of 240,000 Cambodians in Thailand, and later business law at the university in Phnom Penh. While doing so he coauthored two books, *Free Market Contract Law* and an *English-Cambodian Law Dictionary*.

While toiling in the refugee camp, he met and fell in love with another volunteer, Agnès Dupré la Tour, who would become his wife and mother to four sons: John, Thomas, Jérémy, and Matthias.

After eight years in the camp, John returned to Long Island, where he went to work for the Catholic Church and became a major figure advocating for the rights of Hispanic immigrants. At Catholic Charities, he served as director of the departments of Immigrant and Refugee Services and later Capital Projects and Law. He was also Chair of the Board of the New York Immigration Coalition.



In 2005, he joined the Vatican-supported International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) as Head of Policy Director in Geneva, where he worked until 2018. After leaving the ICMC in 2018, he continued as an independent consultant and expert on global migration policy and governance, and continued to advise and serve as the Geneva Representative of the NGO Committee on Migration, which has consultative status with the United Nations. As an extraordinary leader for immigration rights and refugee services, he had a wide network, but always remained grounded and most at home with his family.



JONES BEACH, LONG ISLAND

“*His deep love for family was a powerful statement to the monument of generosity and selflessness that was John Bingham.*”

—John D. Bingham

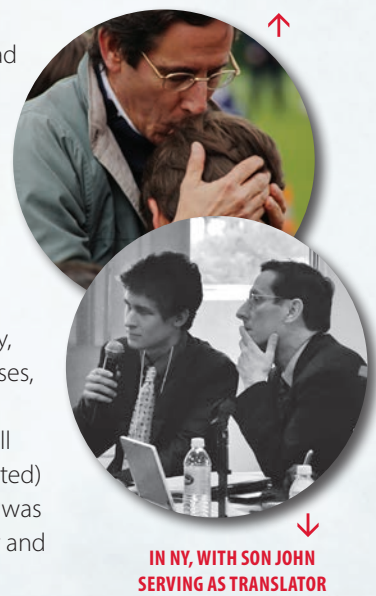
The Bingham family will hold a one-year anniversary celebration in memory of John on Tuesday, July 25, 2023. A memorial gathering will be held from 4 to 8 p.m. (with words in loving memory at 6:30 p.m.) at St. Agnes Cathedral Parish Service Center, 99 North Village Avenue, Rockville Centre, NY. Hors d'oeuvres and beverages will be served. Please RSVP on or before July 15 to marybinghamjohnsen@gmail.com. On Wednesday, July 26, 2023, at 3 p.m., a one-year anniversary memorial Mass of the Resurrection will be held at St. Agnes Cathedral, 29 Quealy Place, Rockville Centre, NY. **ALL ARE WELCOME!**

“John was always a man on a mission,” shared Salvatore Barcia, R.Ph. ’79P, ’86GP, a classmate and fraternity brother. “He put the global mission of St. John’s into action and his decision to volunteer in the Cambodian refugee camps reminds me of Jesus’ gospel encounter with the rich young man. Unlike the young man, who could not eschew his wealth to follow Jesus, John literally gave away his suits and headed off to a life of service, ultimately advocating for immigration policy reform on a global stage.”

“My three brothers, Thomas, Jérémy, Matthias, and I had the privilege of growing up in the footsteps of this extraordinary role model, who gave his life to fight for the destitute of the world at the highest summits of international diplomacy, while somehow always being available to cook up a Thai dish for the family, to give a hand on one of his boys’ essays, or to take care of his beloved garden,” reflected his son, John.

“He also served as a pillar for the wider Bingham family, following up on each of his six siblings and their spouses, his 14 nieces and nephews, and their young children, with diligence and a rare sense of community—and all that from France through (endless but much appreciated) phone calls,” John continued. “His deep love for family was a powerful statement to the monument of generosity and selflessness that was John Bingham.”

When he passed, the news of his death spread around the world: from France and beyond to Vatican City, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Thailand, Bangladesh, Korea, the Philippines, and back to where it all began in Rockville Centre, NY, and to the extended global alumni family of St. John’s. His mission over, the legacy of John Kennedy Bingham endures.



WITH MATTHIAS, HIS FOURTH SON, AFTER A SOCCER GAME

IN NY, WITH SON JOHN SERVING AS TRANSLATOR



L TO R: DIASPORA & DEVELOPMENT ROUNDTABLE, INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC MIGRATION COMMISSION, CIVIL SOCIETY PREP MEETING FOR HLD, AND PUERTA VALLARTA CLOSING OF CIVIL SOCIETY DAY

