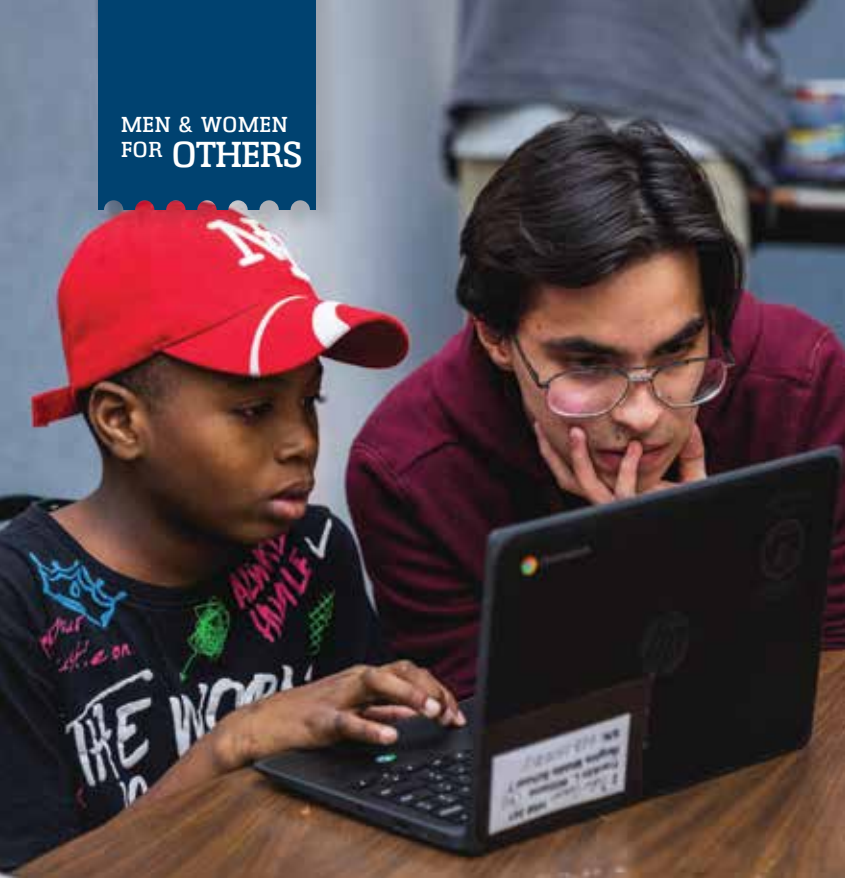


MEN & WOMEN
FOR OTHERS



WELCOME HOME JERSEY CITY





MISSION EXAMEN

How is Saint Peter's embodying the mission of a Jesuit university? How might we engage that mission better? These are the questions at the heart of the Mission Priority Examen, a nationwide intensive self-study of mission and identity involving every institution in the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. Now undertaking its second round of the MPE, the University's goal is to engage as much of the community as possible to ensure the findings reflect the true fabric of the campus. The past six years, since the first MPE, have been spent following up on the recommendations of the last report, and setting areas of focus for the next six years. This year's report identifies a few areas of focus, including: changes to the core curriculum—such as the incorporation of Ignatian seminars—to make for a distinctly Jesuit education, and examining how the University's thriving graduate program also reflects the values of a Jesuit education.

On Monday evenings, board meetings are exchanged for board games when the McIntyre Conference Center in Dinneen Hall is transformed into Fun Club. From pizza and homework help to tax preparation and resumé coaching, Monday nights at Fun Club are a place where refugees, asylees and asylum seekers in the Jersey City area can feel at home.

Welcome Home Jersey City, a community-based nonprofit organization that provides educational, employment and material support for refugees in the area, runs Fun Club with the support and help of Saint Peter's University professors and students.

David Gerlach, Ph.D., chairman of the history department and director of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, became involved in Welcome Home Jersey City and Fun Club when he was teaching a course about the history of migrants and refugees. "I wanted to add a service-learning component to the course and began putting students together with various organizations," he said. "Welcome Home Jersey City is helping out at the ground level, helping people get situated with day-to-day living. Then, they build in the community aspect, which is so important. Many refugees are really on their own."

For adults and parents, Fun Club offers practical resources such as English as a Second Language help, career coaching and tax preparation. Sometimes they attend to simply chat and socialize, while for their children it's a place where they can work on homework or play games. "School is tough," Dr. Gerlach said. "The kids don't really speak the language, and this is a place they can feel comfortable and are accepted—no questions asked."

Can it get a little chaotic with 30 to 40 children running around, playing games and eating pizza? "Sure," Dr. Gerlach continued. "But it's a lovely energy, and the Saint Peter's students who attend always enjoy their experience—seeing the different cultural aspects at work, too, is a rewarding experience for our students."

Jennifer Moranchel '21 began working for Welcome Home Jersey City right after graduation. In her role as the organization's executive assistant, Moranchel does everything from conducting intakes of new families to attending grant meetings to assisting Spanish speaking families.

"Working with the families is the best part," she said. "If something comes up, and you're able to find a solution, you know that you just made their lives a little bit easier. Welcome Home Jersey City is so connected to the Saint Peter's mission because we do not make any assumptions about the refugees; rather we feel empathy for what they have gone through. Helping them is the right thing to do."

Dr. Gerlach and Moranchel spoke about the importance of having a local organization. Both cite that while there are many bigger organizations doing important work, they do not have the time or the resources to help refugees on a day-to-day level and ensure they are finding community and help. Established in 2016, Welcome Home "operates from the philosophy that all people deserve the dignity of a decent home, and the resources they need to make a better life for themselves." The organization believes that it is the community's responsibility to help "our new neighbors" adjust to their new environment. Along with Fun Club, Welcome Home coordinates other programs, such as cleaning and furnishing apartments for new arrivals, helping with employment and school issues, organizing an annual back-to-school drive and hosting summer and winter clothing distribution.

The Compassionate Practice of Jesuit Principles

Identified in recent years as four focal points for Jesuit communities to embrace, the Universal Apostolic Preferences present an opportunity for the University to apply the principles in practical ways. One of the four UAPs is specifically to walk "with the poor, the outcasts of the world and those whose dignity has been violated, in the mission of reconciliation and justice." According to Vice President for Mission and Ministry Rev. Andrew N. Downing, S.J., Welcome Home Jersey City is very much keeping in line with the principles.

"Welcome Home Jersey City is helping out at the ground level, helping people get situated with day-to-day living."

"Walking with refugees and asylum seekers—people who are excluded from their home country and region and find themselves without friends or allies—is exactly what those of us at the University are called to do," Fr. Downing observed. "Welcome Home Jersey City," he said, "is explicitly connected to the UAP and is a wonderful example of Saint Peter's community members who are living the mission extending beyond their activities on campus."

Moranchel attributes her desire to work for an organization like Welcome Home to lessons she learned while studying at Saint Peter's, mainly that we should all be compassionately promoting justice.

"It's so important to have compassion with what refugees go through," she said. "They experience so much trauma, and it's very hard to adapt to a new country. But we try to make sure they know they're not here alone and there is help available to them."