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Peace by Piece: The National Jesuit Student Leadership Conference 2016

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The National Jesuit Student Leadership Conference (NJSLC) was founded at Regis University in 1997. A group of Regis students invited peers from other Jesuit institutions to come for a weekend to talk about student leadership at Regis University. Seated in what is now Walker's Pub, they shared what worked and what did not work on their campuses, discussing issues of the day and ways to continue creating opportunities for students. They talked about the challenges their campuses faced and how they overcame obstacles, as well as shared strategies that other universities could implement. This humble meeting of student leaders has blossomed over the years from 25 student leaders to a national conference with more than 300 attendees. This outstanding transformation of the conference has allowed for different universities to host the conference, showcase their city, and put their own unique spin on student leadership.

This summer, 380 delegates attended NJSLC at Regis University over July 27-30, 2016. Regis University brought the conference back to its roots and its original purpose: to foster growth and to facilitate leadership development and shared fellowship with likeminded student leaders. Students were encouraged to talk about the difficult topics, including diversity issues, sustainability, student engagement, and several urgent global issues. Students were asked what can student leaders of a Jesuit university do to foster peace? What does peace on a Jesuit campus look like? What about at the state? The nation? Or even our world? As Jesuit-educated students they were asked to reflect on and answer the question, "How ought we to live?"

The theme for NJSLC 2016, Peace by Piece, was constructed by focusing on Catholic social teaching's call for promotion of peace and disarmament. The focal point of this Catholic teaching was to promote peace through a positive, action-oriented concept. Students across Jesuit

institutions were encouraged to work toward internal and personal peace simultaneously as they worked toward global social justice. Peace by Piece promoted the idea that one cannot achieve either of those things alone. Throughout Jesuit institutions, students are different pieces of the puzzle working together to create the bigger picture, the larger masterpiece: worldwide peace. Through student-led workshops, faculty-led spark sessions, small group discussions and reflection, and serving side by side during community service, delegates had a unique opportunity to connect. Ultimately, delegates worked toward peace within themselves and their universities, strengthen their relationship amongst the other Jesuit schools, and eventually worked toward peace and social justice within their surrounding communities. As Mother Teresa pointed out, "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." The Peace by Piece theme of the 2016 conference at Regis was also explored through four lenses: My Piece, Our Pieces, Joining Pieces, and Pieces to Peace: Contemplatives in Action, each topic building on the learning objectives from the day before.

Over the course of the conference, students engaged in conversations, workshops, interactive presentations, activities, and excursions centered on the theme, Peace by Piece. The accompanying article presented in the journal is a synopsis of a spark session that greatly impacted student leaders at the conference, challenging their way of thinking as well as creating moments of reflection. Spark sessions such as "Compassion in Action: Empowering Refugees and Students Around the World" presented by representatives from the Jesuit Refugee Service/USA allowed conference attendees to partake in a refugee simulation, "Walk a Mile in My Shoes." This helped attendees to learn about the global refugee crisis and the work that Jesuit Refugee Service/USA is doing as they are called to work together toward a more peaceful world. Furthermore, conference

attendees were challenged to open their minds and find peace in themselves, community, and world as they engaged with like-minded people with vastly diverse opinions.

Overall, the peace-centered conference experience broadened conference attendees' minds, and the topics discussed were applicable to their lives as they carried pieces of what they learned back to their campuses in hopes of spreading peace. Attendees experienced, played, reflected, and shared with one another their conference experience as they grew together in peace. To view the events from NJSLC and the experiences that attendees lived through during their attendance at the conference, please watch the best of the best NJSLC video. 

