

*Personal Reflection on a College-Related  
Service Immersion Experience  
By Elizabeth Garneau, parishioner*

Over my spring break from Saint Joseph's University, I attended an amazing service trip and I want to share some of my experiences. The Appalachian Experience, or APEX as we call it was one of the best weeks of my entire life. The APEX program is so popular at SJU, they filled 500 spots in just under 8 minutes this year! APEX is a week-long service immersion program during our spring break. There are 18 different sites in the Appalachian region and each site is very special and unique. We spend the semester leading up to the trip with our groups, learning about the poverty and injustices that our site faces. This year the site that I went to was Honaker, Virginia, along with a group of 27 students including 2 student leaders and 2 adult facilitators. During the week we worked with many churches in the community of Honaker doing projects such as spring cleaning, painting, and even building new steps for a member of one church. We ate a lot of food!!! We went to an amazing pizza buffet called pizza plus and a very nice restaurant called Bonanza. We spent a lot of time with the people of Honaker and getting to know them. They have so much love and pride for their small community it was truly beautiful. They welcomed us with such warm hospitality. One church hosted us so we slept at that church on cots, which were surprisingly comfortable. Each church we worked with took a turn hosting us for dinner and boy can those people cook!!!! We did some fun activities as well, including a bonfire, a talent show and a hike at Breaks National Park!

It was a week full of love and solidarity with the people of this community and with the members of my group. In closing, here is one of my favorite quotes from Pedro Arupe that I have learned at Saint Joes that I try to live by.

“Nothing is more practical than  
finding God, than  
falling in Love  
in a quite absolute, final way.  
What you are in love with,  
what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.  
It will decide  
what will get you out of bed in the morning,  
what you do with your evenings,  
how you spend your weekends,  
what you read, whom you know,  
what breaks your heart,  
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.  
Fall in Love, stay in love,  
and it will decide everything.”