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How Four Schools Tackle Mission Integration

Gonzaga Students Harvest Gold in Zambia

By Josh Armstrong

“I crave to know.” Christopher, an 80-year-old Zambian man, made this proclamation while attending daily computer lessons at the Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Parish in Zambezi, Zambia. Each day, Christopher left his thatched roof home to walk two miles in order to attend the courses facilitated by Gonzaga University students. Christopher is one of many African students who modeled a sincere commitment to education and personal development, in an area of the world often lacking in opportunity.

Christopher, like so many of his fellow students, became a teacher and cultural mentor

for Gonzaga students developing intercultural competencies.

Each May since 2007, Gonzaga University students have traveled to Zambezi, a community in the southern central African nation of Zambia, to participate in a faculty-led study abroad program. Zambia/Malawi has the distinction of being a “twinned province” with the Oregon Jesuits, with many needs and opportunities for collaboration. The worldwide mission of the Society of Jesus is focusing increased energy and attention to areas of the world where those in greatest poverty and disease live, especially Africa.

Gonzaga-in-Zambezi provides a transformational opportunity for students to develop leadership skills and immerse themselves in another culture. Students return home with a deeper understanding of culturally intelligent leadership, a greater sense of self-awareness, and critical engagement with intercultural competencies. Essential to this learning is student involvement in community development projects, including leadership development/capacity-

building training, literacy projects in local schools, health education partnerships, and basic computer education. Each day in class, Gonzaga students are grounding their experience in leadership and intercultural research and receiving lectures from local leaders pertaining to health care, legal systems, political structures, and local language. The essence of the program, however, is rooted in accompaniment – meaning that, while in Zambezi, students generate opportunities *to receive* in the places they are serving, become mutually indebted to the community, and develop meaningful relationships that assist them in operating at eye-level within this community.

One exemplary “learning lab” for students has been Zambia Gold Honey, an eye-level partnership built between Zambian beekeepers and Gonzaga students. Zambia Gold is a non-profit organization run by students from Gonzaga University’s Comprehensive Leadership Program (CLP) that exports fair trade goods from the Northwest Province of Zambia. The Zambia Gold Honey project began unexpectedly in 2007, when ten students participating in our study abroad program were encouraged to build collaborative relationships with the



people of the community in hopes of bringing more opportunity to the region. After tasting this pure African honey, students spent time with local bee farmers, exploring ways to provide a sustainable market for fair trade organic forest honey in the US.

During the past seven years, sales from Zambia Gold Honey and other goods have raised over \$35,000 for a school library and other community projects. In the process, Gonzaga students have learned deep lessons about community partnerships and international development. This intersection of Gonzaga students and the Zambezi community lies at the heart of the mission of Gonzaga University. It is our intention that students will be exposed to the realities of a global community to prepare them to enter, succeed, and provide leadership wherever their professions may call them.

Josh Armstrong, a faculty member at Gonzaga University, directs the Comprehensive Leadership Program for undergraduates.

