

# Sacred Heart helps educate Zambian students

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A once in a lifetime trip to Zambia for local girls turned into the beginning of a new life for girls in the south central African nation. Along with making new friends on the mission trip, the Sacred Heart students provided the gift of education for the African students in the form of four years of tuition.

This past summer, 11 girls from Sacred Heart Academy in Amherst flew to Africa to learn about the education system there by shadowing students of Holy Cross Convent School, a Catholic school run by the Holy Cross Sisters. They also spent time volunteering in elementary schools and soaking up the foreign culture.

They discovered the unique way their African counterparts learned, by sitting in one classroom all day while the teachers changed rooms instead of the other way around.

"When the teacher first came into class and all the kids were sitting down, everyone would stand up and welcome the teacher into the room. Then the teacher would allow them to sit back down," said Vivienne Zacher, a sophomore at SHA.

The students had a day packed with numerous science classes and English as well.

"It was super comfortable to be in," said Rachel Pohle. "I remember the biology class I was in, there was lots of laughing, but they were learning at the same time. They were almost having a conversation with the teacher. Where here it seems like we're just being lectured to."

Students also quieted each other down when things got too rowdy.

Although the urban areas in Zambia experience economic growth, the rural areas, where the school sits, are underpopulated. Many residents live in mud huts and tin shacks without running water. The girls tried their hands at pumping water from an old well and farming the dry soil.

Pohle shadowed a girl named Gertrude, whose parents had died, so this 11th-grader has to work to help



COURTESY OF SACRED HEART ACADEMY

Students of Sacred Heart Academy play with the Zambian orphans they met in the summer of 2018 at preschool in Namushakende.

support her siblings as well as go to school.

"Parents often die when they're at a young age because of disease and everything, but we don't worry about that a whole ton," Pohle explained.

"The girl I shadowed has to walk 45 minutes to school and I'm just thankful that my parents drive me to school every day," said Emma Zwack. "It was a culture shock when she told me she had to walk 45 minutes."

The girls also visited the Cheshire Home, a school for disabled children, where they played with kids, and visited various preschools where orphaned children enjoyed playing with the girls.

Sacred Heart is now in the process of raising money to purchase a water pump and buy materials for houses students will build themselves when Meghan Dandrea, the religion teacher, and a new batch of girls return in 2020.

"When I went the previous year with my principal to scope things out we met with Sister Christina (a sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate who has served in Zambia for 30 years) and

she showed us the houses she built, the wells she built. She told us a lot about the girls she works with," Dandrea said. "So, when we took the girls there and they met Sister Christina and heard the same things we had discovered from her, they were really moved to continue to help support her ministries in Zambia. All of the money that we raised has gone through Sister Christina and what she established in the Diocese of Mongu, Zambia."

Sister Christina said the Diocese of Mongu used to provide money to her to build houses for elderly, disabled and needy, but funding has now been cut off.

"I think when we heard Sister Christina was doing all of this good work, then all of a sudden it was no longer available, yet Sister Christina was able to find money to provide for the people, I know that was the moment when I was like, 'We need to continue doing this,'" Dandrea explained.

Sacred Heart Academy donated money to cover for the tuition, uniforms and school supplies for 11 students

at Holy Cross, and has raised about \$2,500 to sponsor more girls since the fall. It costs \$720 to cover four years of education, and \$3,000 to build a house.

Under the banner of "One Gift for One Sisterhood," Sacred Heart students are asked to give up one Christmas gift this year, so that the money can go to Zambia.

"One of the most important and moving lessons my girls learned was that education, their most basic right was the biggest dream for young women in Zambia, most of whom stop school at the seventh grade due to lack of familial and financial support. We were able to sponsor 11 young women for four years of high school, scholarships that include tuition, uniform and supplies for each girl," said Dandrea.

Their efforts have earned them the respect of the village chief of the Lusaki tribe, who has requested an audience with them when they return in 2020.

"He was impressed with what we have done for his people," Dandrea said. "It's a big deal to be invited into his presence."