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Reflection on Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins

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In March 2010, Dr. William Husson, then Vice President for Professional Studies and Strategic Alliances, asserted that Regis University was committed to making higher education accessible to people at the margins. These words of confidence and optimism enabled the Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins (JC:HEM) to begin a partnership with Regis University to make higher education accessible to people at the margins. Dr. Husson went further, asserting that Regis would serve as the awarding institution for a 15-course, 45-credit online Diploma in Liberal Studies for learners throughout the world.

JC:HEM believes tertiary learning and the formation of a global community of learners address the root causes of poverty, isolation, despair, conflict, and displacement in order to build a more peaceful and humane world.

JC:HEM is a work of the Society of Jesus that builds on more than 450 years of tradition of transformative tertiary education to form women and men for others.

JC:HEM developed a blended model of higher education using online courses. The model was built on four cornerstones: a global model, collaboration, the Ignatian learning experience, and high quality at affordable costs. Following evaluation of the model in 2012, the decision was made to expand this model from three sites in Malawi, Kenya, and Jordan to other countries in collaboration with new partners.

With Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Jesuit universities as strategic partners, JC:HEM has reached over 5,000 young women and men who have benefited from English language courses and vocational training/certificate courses also available through JC:HEM. About 500

students are pursuing the Diploma in Liberal Studies and 148 have graduated as regular students of Regis University with a diploma of 45 credits. At present, approximately 348 are still enrolled as Regis students in this program. Learners are dominantly refugees from over 20 countries and they study in Malawi, Kenya, Jordan, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and the USA. Other certificate students are studying in Sri Lanka and Chad.

One of the richest experiences of the model is the global virtual classroom. Students from all parts of the world, from the margins, diverse cultures, and religions reflect together about questions of leadership, cultures, religions, war, and peace in their countries. They are learning together with the intention to transform their lives, their communities, and hopefully, their countries.

The abundant learning experiences and increased demand for the program have led JC:HEM to enhance its name to “Jesuit Worldwide Learning – Higher Education at the Margins.” In September 2016, Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) was registered as organization in Switzerland with a seat in Geneva. This move makes JWL an even more global organization, bringing together the United States Jesuit universities, the higher education universities in Europe, South Asia, and other parts of the world with a prime focus of serving the poor through education.

Jesuit Worldwide Learning will extend its services to four learning sites in North Iraq in November 2016 and to Mozambique later in the year. Asking Regis if it were possible to take on more diploma students, President John Fitzgibbons, S.J. responded that there is no limit set for students. “Regis will manage,” he added. Jesuit optimism, openness, and other centeredness continue to guide Jesuit Worldwide Learning to provide education at the margins. ☩