Professors Craig Story and Jim Zingarelli took students on a service mission trip to assist ECHO’s Florida farm through their labor and artwork. ECHO—Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization—provides solutions for global hunger.

By James Zingarelli

It was while I was doing a watercolor of a collard green that I became acutely aware I was surrounded by living things. The sounds of tropical birds, the bleating goats, the rustling leaves of fruit trees and the scent of the earth contributed to this synaesthetic experience. But the convencer for me was the sheer abundance of plant life. More often I had come to think of plants as decorative accessories to a room or a garden’s colorful accents. Until our journey to ECHO, I had not thought about plants as being so alive—such a source of life biologically and aesthetically.

Most of us move and work in a world of artificial things. At ECHO I was reminded of God’s abundant creation and our call to responsibility within that creation to care for the world we’ve been given, and to feed individuals in the poorest parts of the world.

The Proposal
Last fall Dr. Craig Story of the Biology Department invited me to serve with him as coleader on the annual mission trip to ECHO in Fort Myers, Florida. ECHO is a nonprofit Christian organization which networks with missionaries and agricultural workers in 180 countries, offering solutions for growing food under difficult conditions. ECHO experiments with and provides seeds and plants, and trains workers in sustainable tropical agriculture. For 17 years...
Gordon has sent students and faculty for spring-break mission trips to work on ECHO’s seven-and-a-half-acre agricultural farm—planting, weeding, fertilizing, cleaning, serving. When Dr. Story approached me to go, I wondered how we might have art and biology students collaborate on this worthy mission.

We formed an interdisciplinary proposal of ways biology and art might serve ECHO and, therefore, serve the needs of the world’s hungry in a meaningful way. We proposed that the students assist with farming chores at ECHO during the mornings and during the afternoons have significant time to draw, paint and photograph various plants, seeds and tropical environments.

With a portfolio of artwork generated from these experiences, we would hold an exhibit and a silent auction, and give a presentation during the College’s annual Student Symposium in April—focused this year on global Christianity. One hundred percent of the sales would go to ECHO. We believed the Gordon community would be eager to invest in art with the proceeds going to help some of the world’s neediest people.

**The ECHO Project**

Dr. Story and I were joined by a committed team of 13 students (biology, art and other majors) who labored diligently on the farm—rain or shine. Some of us even milked one of the goats. The afternoons were spent making art: watercolors, pencil drawings, photographs and gouache paintings. The art dealt with everything from selected seeds to fully grown Moringa trees and ripened Loquats, to the unique landscape ECHO calls their Global Village—demonstration farming environments found in tropical climates: rain forest, rice paddy, semi-arid, and mountain terracing to name a few. Thanks to Dr. Grace Ju, ECHO’S seed bank manager and a Gordon adjunct professor, and other ECHO staff, members of our group were given freedom to wander about and choose individual areas to focus on each day.
The Gordon team shared meals with the farm’s interns, encouraged each other in words and prayer, and daily rendered new images, even into the late hours of the evening back in our dormitory’s common area. We did take a few ice cream breaks and ended our trip on Ormond Beach with some needed R&R. Even there, a number of us recorded the adventure with our watercolors and pencils.

The Exhibit, Silent Auction and Presentation

The exhibit, silent auction and presentation were a huge success with 80 works of art raising over $2,000 for ECHO. All of the framing and matting was donated by David and Lisa Cardarelli of The Great Frame Up in Amesbury, Massachusetts, making for a very professional exhibit of fine art. Participation was campus-wide and included parents and local churches as well. Dr. Story presented a comprehensive video on the trip, and many of the students gave reflections on their “life-changing” experiences. Several hope to return to ECHO.

It was a privilege to work with ECHO in serving Christ through serving others. How can I ever again look at a plant as merely decorative? I sense a greater kinship with the botanical world as well as with the world’s neediest people, who, like ourselves, seek to have life, and have it abundantly.

Professor Zingarelli (right in the photo) joined the Art Department in 1996, specializing in sculpture. He holds a B.F.A. from Pratt Institute and an M.A. from Trinity College. His wife, Katherine, is a nurse at Gordon’s Health Center. The Zingarellis live in Amesbury, Massachusetts, and have two daughters, both at Gordon: Gina, a senior, and Erin, a first-year student this fall.

Dr. Craig Story, a 1989 Gordon graduate, has been teaching biology at the College since 2002 and is director of the Health Professions program. He holds a Ph.D. in molecular biology from Brandeis University. His wife, Kelly (Mahuffy) ’88, a chemist, is a lab instructor at Gordon. The Storys live in Salem, Massachusetts, with their two children, Peter, 12, and Katherine, 10.

As Gordon students, Kelly and Craig were signed up for the first ECHO trip in 1987, but health problems for the late Dr. Tom Dent cancelled the trip. They were able to finally complete their goal by leading the 2003 trip together.