

Citation for Dr. Gustave Prinsell
Alumnus of the Year
Homecoming 2018

Each year, in addition to recognizing alumni who have made an IMPACT by their service in particular areas of service, and a young alumni who is exhibiting already the potential of making an IMPACT on the world, we choose to honor one alumnus as the Alumnus of the Year. This award is made to a Houghton alumnus, who has embodied over the course of a lifetime what it means to be a “Scholar Servant.”

If someone asked, “What does Houghton mean by a ‘scholar servant’ we could point to this year’s recipient of the Alumnus of the Year award. Dr. Gustave Prinsell has brought together over the 7 decades since he graduated from Houghton what it means to steward the gifts of Houghton education, not for his own professional gain, but as a partner in God’s creative, redemptive and reconciling purposes in the midst of a rapidly changing world.

Dr. Prinsell’s signaled his commitment to being, first of all, a willing partner in God’s global purposes when, upon returning from service in the Second World War, he chose to sacrifice his current income and job and move, along with his new bride, Louise, to Houghton, New York to pursue pre-medical training in preparation for being a medical missionary.

After completing his studies at Houghton in 1948, Gustave continued his studies at Columbia University Medical School, followed by his internship and residency in Saginaw, Michigan. At that moment in his journey, Dr. Prinsell and Louise made another of those life-changing decisions typical of a “scholar servant.” Instead of taking up an offer to do private practice in the United States, the Prinsells moved to the United Kingdom so that Dr. Prinsell could pursue a diploma in tropical medicine and hygiene at the University of London.

Following the completion of this diploma, the Prinsells entered into what turned out to be a life-long relationship with Kamakwie Wesleyan Hospital in northern Sierra Leone. During his seven years of full-time service at Kamakwie—when he saw nearly 150 patients a day—Dr. Prinsell helped to establish Kamakwie as the most respected provider of health care for hundreds of miles around in northern Sierra Leone as well as in neighboring Guinea. It was at this hospital that the current president of Sierra Leone—Ernst Bai Koroma—was born. When Kamakwie Hospital celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2010, Dr. Prinsell was invited by President Koroma to be an honored guest at the celebration.

In 1964, the Prinsells returned to the United States to become the college physician at Houghton College. For the next 50 years, he attended to the health needs of our own students, as well as providing medical care for the students of Fillmore and Rushford Central Schools. His acute diagnostic ability, developed through years of working alone with the wide ranging needs of patients at Kamakwie Hospital served him well as he continued to serve the diverse needs of the students here at Houghton and in the surrounding communities of Western New York.

During this time, Dr. Prinsell continued to steward his calling as a “scholar servant” not only here in Allegany County, but around the world. Over the years he returned for short terms of service to Wesleyan medical facilities not only in Sierra Leone, but also to Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Haiti. He also helped to found the Wesleyan Medical Fellowship, whose members are committed to serve the financial and personnel needs of short term medical missions to the Wesleyan medical facilities throughout the world. In 1980, Dr. Prinsell assumed the directorship of this organization.

In returning to Houghton as the college physician, Dr. Prinsell’s journey as a “scholar-servant” came full circle as here at Houghton he and Louise have been able to mentor several generations of Houghton students in what it means to develop one’s gifts to serve the needs of the world to the Glory of God—and not for one’s own gain.

He and Louise have connected with generations of students like 2002 graduate Lynne Learned Orozco through their attendance at chapel, their presence at athletic events, and their support of their academic achievements. Lynne received scholarship support through the endowed scholarship that the children of Dr. and Mrs. Prinsell had established in their honor. Now a physician in her own right, serving underserved diverse populations in urban Texas, Dr. Orozco has recently founded her own endowed scholarship to support Houghton students. She credits the Prinsells with inspiring her journey through Houghton and medical school and with the shape of her own pilgrimage as a “scholar servant.”

Dr. and Mrs. Prinsell’s lifelong adventurous journey has been thoroughly documented recently in his autobiography *The Papa Bear*—which his eldest son Jonathan helped to edit and publish. Together they have preserved the gift of the Prinsells’ story of faithfulness for generations to come.

For your lifetime of IMPACT in God’s Kingdom as a Houghton College “scholar servant” in the changing world of the 20th and 21st centuries both in this country and around the world, we are privileged to honor you with the 2018 Alumni of the Year award.