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Office of University
Communications

July 15, 2020

Lauren Evans Hamilton, '20, is One of '25 Young Leaders to Know'

While COVID-19 has prevented congregations from meeting in person, Lauren Evans Hamilton, a student in the Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity, recognizes the positive outcomes of streaming church services and Bible studies online. Not only does it provide regular attendees a chance to connect, but it also gives people who sometimes can't attend in person another opportunity to engage.

"For instance, one of our families lives quite a ways from our church—too far to make it to church and back home at a decent hour on a school night," Hamilton observed. "Zoom Bible study has allowed this family to participate in our Wednesday evening gatherings more than they were able to when we met in person."



In recognition of her leadership skills and desire to serve God and his people, Hamilton was recently honored as one of the "25 Young Leaders to Know" by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF). She is director of Children and Family Ministries at First Baptist Clemson, S.C.

The CBF Ministries Council launched its "25 Young Leaders to Know" initiative in 2017 as a way of honoring outstanding leadership across the Fellowship. In a story in "fellowship!" magazine introducing the honorees, Devita Parnell wrote: "They know the church will look different post COVID-19, and are excited to refocus on the things that matter, while embracing new technology and modes of gathering. To them bold faith requires action. It means speaking truth to power, pursuing justice even when it is uncomfortable, and stepping out without understanding—trusting in the Holy Spirit."



In this screenshot of a virtual worship service from the Facebook page of First Baptist Clemson, S.C., Lauren Hamilton presents a children's sermon.

Hamilton has served almost eight years as children's minister at her church. She receives her Master of Divinity in Pastoral Care and Counseling in December 2020 from GWU. She didn't realize her calling into the ministry until God kept closing doors to her as an elementary school teacher. "After two consecutive years of searching for a full-time teaching position, I came up with two part time jobs: one as a reading interventionist, and one as a dental office assistant," she shared. "Then, I received a call from my campus minister at First Baptist Clemson. He told me that the church was looking for an interim children's minister and asked if I would be interested in sending my resumé. As soon as I got off the phone, I cried tears of joy and excitement, honored that God would even consider me to do this job."

The church asked her to serve as an interim minister to children, and nine months later, offered her the job of full-time director of Children and Family Ministries. "Now that this call to ministry has become more clear, I often think about my wonderful first memories of church, of meeting God, and learning about God, who's love for us is so big and so unconditional," she affirmed. "It is my hope and prayer that I can help to foster the same kind of wonderful, healthy, and worshipful experiences for children and their families that my parents, pastors, and mentors did for me."

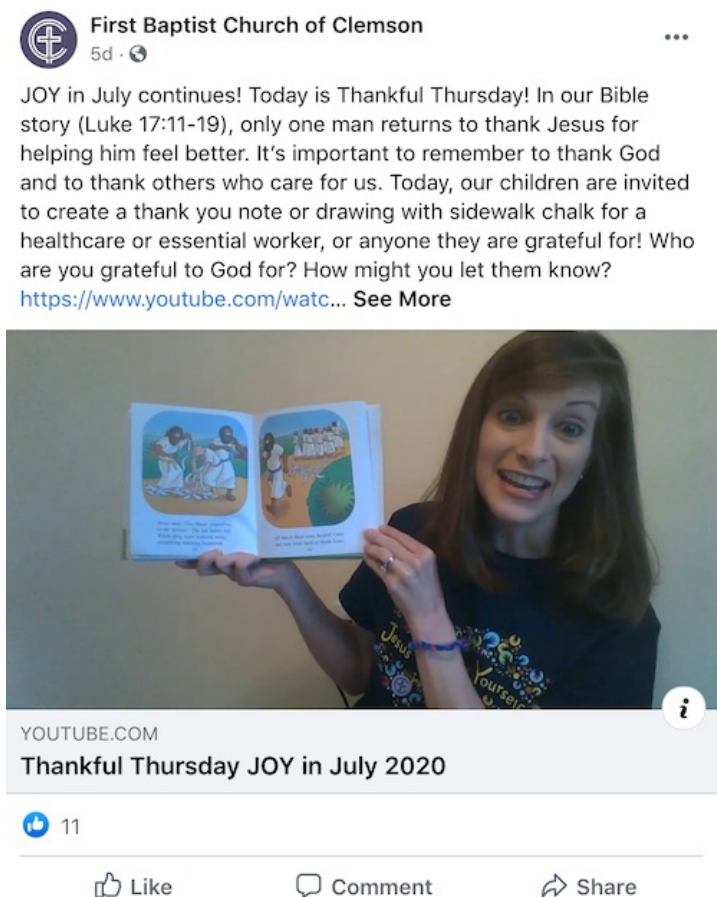
After serving the church for two years, Hamilton decided to pursue her Master of Divinity. Gardner-Webb was close to Clemson, so she planned a visit. "As soon as I came on a fall preview day, I realized Gardner-Webb was a home filled with people who were like a family," Hamilton asserted. "And now, even though I commute back and forth between Boiling Springs and Clemson, Gardner-Webb surely has become another place I feel at home, with people whom I consider like family."

During COVID-19 she's found new—and some old—ways of staying in touch with children and families. “Weekly children’s sermons, although recorded and posted online, and snail mail have made comebacks, while Zoom has become a new way for us to gather for Sunday School, Bible Study, and even a Wednesday Evening Vespers Service,” she explained. “Special days on the church calendar have called for extra special activities and deliveries. For Holy Week, families received packages that included the book, “Easter Love Letters From God,” by Glenys Nellist, with an accompanying devotional activity pack.”

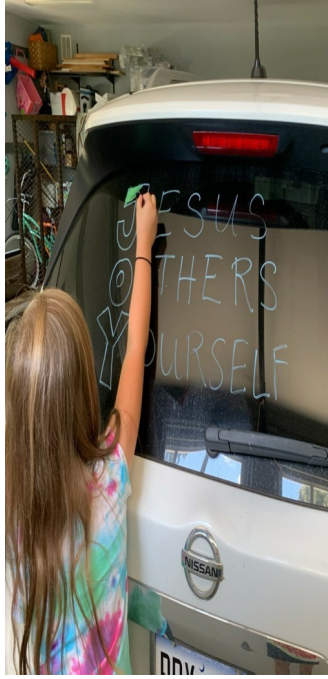
Instead of the usual in-person Vacation Bible School, Hamilton coordinated a week of “JOY in July!” JOY stands for Jesus, Others, Yourself, and stems from Jesus’ command to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39). Each day, Hamilton recorded a Bible story and presented it on the church’s Facebook page. She also challenged the children and families to respond to the story with an act of service. Some of the acts of kindness included making muffins for a person who could use a little extra joy, drawing a word or picture of thanks with chalk in the driveway of a healthcare or essential worker, and participating in a drive-by parade to spread joy to their neighbors.

“This pandemic time of isolating and distancing has not been easy, that’s for sure,” Hamilton noted. “But, life has not stopped, and God has not stopped moving. Amid this pandemic, we have welcomed three new babies to our church family and celebrated a child’s profession of faith. All in all, I pray that these ways of ministering outside the box and outside the church are fruitful, that our children and their families feel spiritually connected and uplifted, and that we all know, without a doubt, that God is with us, that God can be found in unfamiliar places, and that God is always working to squeeze goodness even out of the most bleak situations.”

[Learn more about the GWU School of Divinity.](#)



A screenshot of a Joy in July Facebook post, where Lauren Hamilton reads a story to the children.



These images are from the JOY parade sponsored by First Baptist Church Clemson, S.C.



Children were able to listen and participate from their home as Lauren Hamilton read a Bible story during the Week of Joy.