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### **Accelerated Pastoral Ministry Program Will Allow GWU Student to Begin Ministry Sooner**

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# Accelerated Pastoral Ministry Program Will Allow GWU Student to Begin Ministry Sooner

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Office of University  
Communications

March 23, 2020

## Annie Deaton, '21, Answers Call to Work With Teenagers



Annie Deaton, front row center, poses with a group at Young Life camp.

Annie Deaton realized her call to youth ministry as a senior in high school. After choosing to attend Gardner-Webb University, she learned that the Accelerated Pastoral Ministries Program (APMP) would allow her to answer her calling in less time than traditional programs, which generally take seven years to complete.

Launched in 2016 at Gardner-Webb, the APMP provides students who are called to serve as pastors with both a bachelor's degree and master's degree in five years of study. Deaton is a member of the first cohort, who received their Bachelor of Arts in discipleship studies in August 2019 and will earn their Master of Divinity degrees in 2021.

Because of the program's accelerated pace, Deaton said completing the work is a balancing act that requires diligence. "However, it will be worth it in the end," she advised. "You will have opportunities that a traditional undergraduate student may not be given. You will be surrounded by people who understand a call to ministry, and you will find some wonderful people who will become your biggest support system and your friends for the rest of your life. I have also learned how to work as a team and how to be confident in myself and in my calling."

While she's been in the program, Deaton has had several opportunities to minister to teenagers and young adults. As a graduate assistant for the Church Relations office at Gardner-Webb, she interacts with undergraduate and graduate students who have expressed a calling into some form of ministry. She is on the student staff through Young Life and volunteers with the youth group at First Baptist Church in Shelby, N.C., where she also served as an intern. "Young Life's mission statement is, 'Introducing adolescents to Jesus Christ and helping them grow in their faith,'" Deaton explained. "We get to know our kids on a very personal level while getting to walk through the ups and downs of life with them. As leaders, we go where kids are in every corner of the school in order to create a relationship with them. Part of this is going to the school for their lunch period, hanging out with kids after school, attending their concerts or games, and so much more."

Deaton quotes theologian Frederick Buechner to describe her calling to youth ministry. "Buechner said, 'Your vocation in life is where your greatest joy meets the world's greatest need,'" she expressed. "The years throughout middle and high school can either make or break a person. Nothing gives me more life and makes me more joyful than when I am hanging out with teenagers. It brings me joy to help them find out who they are as individuals or overcome the obstacles that stand in their way. When I was in middle and high school, I truly witnessed the need for teenagers to have a constant in their lives, which were full of change. Witnessing and experiencing this need in my own life gave me the desire to be that constant for teenagers."



[Learn more about the Accelerated Pastoral Ministry Program \(APMP\).](#)