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Communications

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Childress, '19, '21, Answers Calling to Teach Christian Theology or History



The Accelerated Pastoral Ministries Program (APMP), launched in 2016 at Gardner-Webb University, provides students called to serve as pastors with both a bachelor's degree and master's degree in five years of study. The members of the first cohort received their Bachelor of Arts in discipleship studies in August 2019 and will earn their Master of Divinity degrees in 2021.

Austin Childress, of Mocksville, N.C., joined the program for its obvious benefits: financial aid and community. "Not only did APMP offer additional scholarship help, but also the opportunity to finish my degrees quicker," he offered. "The opportunity to accrue less college debt was attractive to me and my family. The APMP offered me a way to establish a community of friends from day one. This community was truly life changing and opened the door for longtime friendships."

Childress felt his call to ministry in high school, but his calling became more defined as he studied at Gardner-Webb. "I learned through my classes and social interactions, that I am not the best at connecting to people in a pastoral way," he shared. "However, I started getting opportunities to do presentations in class and teaching started to become an object of interest for me. After much prayer and dialogue with my peers, I began to feel the call

toward teaching. My call to ministry stems from my desire to help college students think critically about their faith and about the biblical text. I can do this best through teaching Christian theology and/or Christian history.”

His decision to attend Gardner-Webb was made after he toured the campus. “I knew that I felt called into God’s ministry at some capacity, but I wasn’t sure that I would enjoy a ministerial position, so I wrestled with my options,” he disclosed. “The tour set me on fire for Gardner-Webb. Every presentation, every interaction, and every moment of that tour affirmed my call to ministry, thus affirming my call to Gardner-Webb. Most people that I know say that either the beauty of Gardner-Webb’s campus or the presence of community is what sold them on the school. I, however, think that it was the commitment that I saw in the students, faculty, and staff. The people I interacted with bled Bulldog red both inside and outside the classroom. It was clear to me that people really were committed to the Christian identity statement of Gardner-Webb, Pro Deo et Humanitate, for God and for humanity.”

Childress said students considering the APMP should be prepared for the amount of work required. “Any student considering APMP needs to have a good work ethic,” he advised. “However, APMP does offer students the opportunity to make lifelong connections with their fellow cohort members. I would also add that the support of the Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy faculty is unlike that of any other department at Gardner-Webb. The professors have a genuine desire to see you learn and grow.”

[Learn more about the APMP.](#)