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### **Both Classmates and Professors Contributed to Gardner-Webb Alum's Growth as a Minister**

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# Both Classmates and Professors Contributed to Gardner-Webb Alum's Growth as a Minister

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Office of University  
Communications

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## Andrew Corley '16 Appreciated Focus on Practical Application of Scripture



Andrew Corley, center, at the Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity Hooding Ceremony in 2016.

When Andrew Corley '16 answered God's call to ministry, he also sensed a responsibility to learn and develop his calling. While serving as a youth pastor, he chose to attend the School of Divinity at Gardner-Webb University. "I felt like having a degree would open up more opportunities in ministry, particularly as I got older," he offered. "Also, I love learning and I believe that knowledge and training is important. Passion is great, calling is great, but I wouldn't go to a doctor who loved medicine and felt called to it but didn't go to medical school. I felt like as a minister, I owed people that same commitment to training and preparation."

A native of Laurens, S.C., Corley serves as pastor of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Grover, N.C. "My church is made up of great people who are seeking to know and serve God better," Corley described. "They're kind and welcoming and forgiving of a young pastor who is still figuring things out. My ministry is serving them as best I can."

One important aspect of his Gardner-Webb education came from his classmates, who were a broad spectrum of age, race, gender, theological background and future goals. "What I continue to value from my Gardner-Webb experience was the diversity of the student

body,” related Corley, who earned a Master of Divinity in Pastoral Studies. “Working in church means being able to interact with folks from different backgrounds, different perspectives, and who bring different experiences and realities into anything that comes up. Classes at GWU rarely contained a homogenous group, and I was stretched and challenged and shown different perspectives because of that.”

Besides learning from each other, Corley and his classmates received valuable insight from the professors in the School of Divinity. “In classes at Gardner-Webb, the focus was always turned back to the local church,” Corley noted. “I love trivia; I love knowledge just for the sake of knowledge, but my church doesn’t need me to tell them all the things I find interesting about a text. They need me to tell them why something written thousands of years ago should still hold their attention and impact their lives. Our classes at GWU turned the focus to how whatever we were learning matters for the church today. Because of that focus from professors, I was able to develop that skill myself and continue to steer all that I do toward the practical. I can honestly say I enjoyed all my classes at Gardner-Webb and gained something from each of them that I continue to use in my ministry.”

While all of his professors provided important guidance, he was especially grateful for the influence of Dr. Danny West, Dr. Cal Robertson, Dr. Steven Harmon, Dr. Terry Casino and Dr. Sheri Adams. He served as youth minister at a church where West served as interim, and Robertson is the minister of music at Corley’s church.

“Knowing Dr. West and Dr. Robertson in a context outside of the classroom has made me strive to be better, because I know they’re there,” Corley affirmed. “Dr. Harmon challenged me to think about theology in practical terms and not just the abstract. Dr. Adams showed the importance of thinking about the big picture of church history and a church’s history instead of just focusing on the here and now. Dr. Casino made me think about the world outside of my personal context and globalize my ideas about missions and evangelism. Also, Dr. West’s preaching practicum had the most direct impact on my ministry, because I learned how to plan out a sermon schedule and develop my voice.”



Andrew Corley and his wife, Meghan