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Office of University
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Madison Weavil '19 Documents Program for Inmates and Their Children

Gardner-Webb University senior Madison Weavil '19 is passionate about photography and prison ministry. The project she proposed as a 2018 Undergraduate Research Scholar was to develop her photojournalism skills while increasing awareness of the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the children of prisoners.

She is one of 13 GWU students who received a grant for dedicated research. Under the guidance of a faculty mentor, the students worked 40 hours a week for five weeks on their projects and are required to present them in a professional forum. Weavil's photographs will be displayed in a gallery show on the Gardner-Webb campus, and she will present them at the Southwestern Photojournalism Conference.

A native of Concord, N.C., Weavil discovered her heart for prison ministry after becoming involved with Prison Fellowship Ministries through the GWU Office of Christian Life and Service. She chose to follow and document the work of Forgiven Ministries in Taylorsville, N.C., as they went into prisons to host camps for inmates and their children.

"Day one of the camp is for the inmates to study on what being a godly parent means and how to be a godly parent to their children even from inside a correctional facility," Weavil



explained. “Day two is between the inmates and their children to have a fun day of bonding and experiencing the love of God and the love of their parent. I went into two male correctional institutions in North Carolina and one women’s institution in Michigan.”

Her mentor, Dr. Bob Carey, professor and chair of the Department of Communication and New Media, helped her gain approval for the unique venture. “I would never have been able to do this project without Dr. Carey,” Weavil affirmed. “I came to him with this idea, and he helped me find the proper gear and appropriate method to conduct this project.”

Before taking the photos, Weavil spent a week in the library researching photojournalism techniques and reading about how a child is affected when a parent is incarcerated. “Children are the silent—and most of the time forgotten—victims of incarceration,” Weavil observed. “The purpose of this project was to bring light to the need for education on the subject.”

Doing the work also required skills that she’s learned as a business administration major. “This project gave me the confidence and foundation I needed to start an individual project I would have to organize myself,” Weavil shared. “I would like to start a photography business that offers services to small businesses or a product-based business to help local photographers.”

