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Divinity School Experiences Prepared Allison Benfield '14 to Serve in Ministry

Allison Benfield, a 2014 alumna of Gardner-Webb University, inspires young and old to hear and explore the stories in the Bible. “I want to help children—and grown-ups—deepen their relationship with God by learning and wondering about God’s story,” shares Benfield, who serves as Minister with Children and Their Families at St. John’s Baptist Church (Charlotte, N.C.) “Stories meet us where we are, and let us take what we need from them at that moment—this is especially true of God’s story. I hope everyone with whom I minister knows that God made them. God always loves them. God loves everyone, and God wants us to love everyone, too.”



Many times when she engages with children, she is amazed by their insight. “The thing I love most about being a minister with children is how we end up teaching each other when we are wondering about the stories we find in the Bible,” Benfield observed. “Any amount of time you spend working with children and being open to God’s Spirit among you, the experience will quickly teach you that you learn just as much from them as they do from you.”

Benfield began working with children in church when she was in middle school and realized her calling to ministry during college. She wanted to be equipped to serve and chose to pursue her Master of Divinity in Christian Education at Gardner-Webb. “I’ve encountered so many people who have had deeply hurtful experiences as young people in the church, and I want to do everything I can to make sure that children are taught well and loved well in the church so that they don’t walk away because they’ve been hurt so badly,” Benfield asserted. “So, I decided I needed to attend divinity school to make sure I had all the tools I needed to be a good and responsible minister.”

She appreciated and learned important ideas from all of her professors, but two became mentors. She and her adviser, Dr. Sophia Steibel, talked many hours about coursework, ministry and life, and have stayed in touch. Dr. Cal Robertson, who taught Hebrew and Old Testament, instilled in her a love for studying the language. She spent a lot of time discussing with him the passages she chose to analyze.

Because spiritual formation is so important, Benfield writes the children's Sunday school curriculum for her church and works to equip parents and families to help shape their children's faith at home. She also helps write an arts-based curriculum for Vacation Bible School, which her church hosts with an Episcopal church in the neighborhood.

Her experiences in divinity school prepared her to write curricula and be an effective minister. "I appreciated the way in which the professors made us think for ourselves," Benfield explained. "It wasn't a system of indoctrination, where we were told what we needed to think about certain topics, but rather, we were expected to think and question and figure out what we thought and believed. The professors provide you with such good care and support as you wrestle with big questions and ideas. I think having to do all this reflection has made me a better and more articulate minister than I would have been otherwise."

If you are interested in learning more about the programs offered by the School of Divinity, [click here](#).



During the annual gathering of the Baptist World Alliance Commission on Christian Education and Nurture in Zürich, Switzerland, Allison Benfield toured Grossmuenster, a Romanesque-style Protestant church.