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Gardner-Webb Alumna Accepts Challenge to Minister Around the World

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Shelby Robinson '17 Takes God's Love to the Hungry and Hurting

“When will you come back?” The children’s innocent question tugged at Shelby Robinson’s heart. The 2017 alumna of Gardner-Webb University had played with them all afternoon in a slum in the Philippines. Her visit was arranged by World Race, an 11-country, 11-month mission trip around the world. She wouldn’t be back. Tomorrow, her team would move to Cambodia, and then on to Vietnam, Kosovo, Bosnia, Romania, Zambia, Lesotho and South Africa.



Shelby Robinson plays with kids in the slums in Manila, Philippines. This slum was located on a trash dump.

Other volunteers from Kids International Ministry (KIM) and World Race would bring food and offer the children a chance to go to school. “I am making the decision to trust,” Robinson wrote in her blog. “To trust that the Lord called me to this place. To trust that He is calling me to the next. To trust that those kids will remember the love of Jesus we showed them.”

A native of Marion, N.C., Robinson majored in biblical studies at Gardner-Webb. Equipped by her classes, she started a children’s ministry at Ross Grove Baptist Church in Shelby, N.C. After graduation, she worked part time at Airport Baptist Church in Greer, S.C., and attended her home church, New Hope Missionary Baptist in Old Fort, N.C. While exploring divinity schools and other options, she found the website for World Race. She felt called to join the adventure and take God’s love to people around the world. All three churches supported her decision with gifts and prayer.



Distributing Chinese Bibles on a pier in Pattaya, Thailand. In three weeks the team gave out over 5,500 Chinese Bibles to Chinese tourists.

Her first stops were in Indonesia and Thailand. While ministering to hungry children and victims of human trafficking, she realized that God’s amazing love extends to the victims and the criminals. She is also thankful that the GWU faculty taught her to study and apply scripture to her life. “At GWU, I was challenged to make my faith my own,” Robinson affirmed. “For the first time, I found a faith that was personal and not passed down.”

One religion professor who influenced her the most was Dr. Paula Qualls. Robinson had a class with Qualls every semester, except for one. “In addition to the standard classes, Dr.

Qualls was my honors thesis mentor,” she noted. “She pushed me to think outside of the box and encouraged me with every conversation.”

Robinson’s thesis, “African Hospitality: Building Bridges with a New Hermeneutic,” examined biblical hospitality in light of the culture found in Africa. She chose the topic after participating in a GWU-sponsored mission trip to East Africa. “Every culture has had its own form of hospitality, and because of this thesis, I am more aware of how some cultures have a form of biblical hospitality even if they aren’t followers of Christ,” she reflected. “It has been a really interesting way to see Jesus in the faces of those that I have met on the World Race.”

While her studies deepened her understanding of scripture, Robinson also grew in her faith by participating in the GWU Christian community. “The friendships I made pushed me closer and closer to Christ and encouraged me in my walk with Him,” she observed. “The student-led worship services were always a highlight of my week. The Religious Studies Association gave me the opportunity to step into leadership and brought memories that I won’t soon forget.”



Shelby Robinson, right, and her teammate, Alyssa Osburn, lead worship for a house church in Pattaya, Thailand.

[Click here to learn more about the World Race.](#)