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### **GWU Alumna Becomes First Woman to Serve Mississippi Congregation as Senior Pastor**

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# GWU Alumna Becomes First Woman to Serve Mississippi Congregation as Senior Pastor

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Office of University  
Communications

April 12, 2018

## *Courtney F. Stamey '12 is Eighth Pastor in Church's 48-Year History*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—A Mississippi church is celebrating a milestone in 48 years of history by calling a woman to serve as

Courtney Finocchiaro Stamey

senior pastor. Courtney Finocchiaro Stamey, a 2012 alumna of Gardner-Webb University, will be the eighth pastor to lead Northside Baptist Church in Clinton, Miss. She joins the church's associate pastor of 23 years, the Rev. Susan Meadors, to become the church's first all-female pastoral staff.

"I feel completely honored to serve Northside," Stamey affirmed. "I know the church has prepared for this for a long time, by making the decision to ordain women to the diaconate in 1981 and ordaining Susan to pastoral ministry in 2000. Additionally, there are many women, and men, who have served in ministry and are now members of this church. They paved the way for me and celebrate that the time is here. This is not a change in course for Northside or for me. It is a continued desire to follow where the Holy Spirit is leading—even when, and especially when—following takes you in unprecedented ways."

There is one other Baptist church in Mississippi led by a woman senior pastor, but according to the Rev. Dr. Jason Coker, field coordinator for Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), Stamey is the first woman senior pastor to serve a CBF-affiliated church in the state. "We are all excited and happy for Pastor Courtney, Northside, and CBF Mississippi," Coker said. "She's fantastic, and we feel blessed and lucky to have her."

A native of DeLand, Fla., Stamey came to Northside after serving as a pastoral resident in Greensboro, N.C. Near the end of her two-year residency, she began looking for a church with a deep love for its community. Dr. Pam Durso, executive director of Baptist Women in Ministry, told her about Northside. Founded as a church to serve the neighborhood, Northside's mission was a match for Stamey. "One of my goals will be to become pastor not only for the church but for the community," she asserted. "My work will include building new and fostering existing partnerships with faith communities, non-profits, and community leaders. I think there are many folks who are searching for a place like Northside. I want to make sure folks know it exists. Ultimately, my goal is that we, as Christians, can know and live out the truth that belonging is the center of the Kingdom of God."

Stamey majored in public relations and religious studies at Gardner-Webb, where she was a member of the golf team. She chose GWU because of the rigorous academic program and the family atmosphere on campus. “I came with a call, and was met with questions,” she reflected. “Gardner-Webb was a safe space to confront the questions, to critically engage with professors, and to be comforted by colleagues. At GWU, I found my love and giftedness for preaching. This was a practice I previously thought was off limits for women. I also gained real ministerial experience through Campus Ministries United. Gardner-Webb showed me possibilities and gave me the tools to succeed—in my Master of Divinity at Wake Forest, my chaplaincy experience, and now my pastoral ministry.”

She met her husband, Michael, at Gardner-Webb. A 2013 alumnus with a degree in religious thought and philosophy, he will look for a position in youth ministry. “He is my biggest supporter, and supporter of women in ministry in general,” Stamey praised. “Through the search and call process, he has encouraged me to pursue God’s call when obstacles like gender, age, experience, or precedent got in the way.”

When she was a student at Gardner-Webb, Stamey was asked to speak at a donors’ luncheon. “I told them they were not investing in who we are now, but in who we are becoming,” she recalled. “Thanks to the scholarships they provided, I am who I am now, because someone believed in what I could become.”

*Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university that prepares students to become critical thinkers, effective leaders and compassionate servants in the global community. Emphasizing a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics, Gardner-Webb ignites learning and service opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.*