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Family Remembers Bobby M. Pettyjohn '52 with Prayer Garden at GWU



Carolyn and Bobby Pettyjohn and their three children, from left, Max, Marcy and Robert.

Bobby M. Pettyjohn was a man of prayer who spent his life witnessing to others about Jesus. When he passed away, his family wanted to honor his memory with a gift to Gardner-Webb, the University that helped Pettyjohn earn a college degree and the place where he met Carolyn, his wife of 55 years.

“The things we learned there he used all his life,” shared Mrs. Pettyjohn, who lives in Camden, S.C. “He was a successful but humble person. I felt extremely blessed to be his wife.”


Pettyjohn was retired from the DuPont Company after 32 years as a research chemist. He held leadership positions at First Baptist Church in Camden. He had a bachelor’s degree from Carson Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., and a master’s degree in chemistry from the University of Mississippi in Oxford. He was an Army veteran having served in the Korean era.

As she prayed about the best way to honor her husband’s memory, Mrs. Pettyjohn dropped to her knees. When she did, an idea for a prayer garden came to her. She wanted to create a quiet place where people could talk to God. The Pettyjohn Prayer Garden is situated in front of Webb Hall near Main Street in Boiling Springs. Benches are placed in the circular area, which is surrounded by bushes. The Suttle-Wall Tower of Light stands in the center.



A white stone placed in the brick sidewalk

A white stone placed in the brick sidewalk at the entrance is engraved with the names of his wife and children, who are also GWU graduates. The stone reads: “Pettyjohn Prayer Garden in loving memory of Bobby M. Pettyjohn ’52, Pro Deo et Humanitate, by his family, Carolyn H. Pettyjohn ’53, Robert C. Pettyjohn ’77 (Karen C. ’77), Max S. Pettyjohn ’81 (Pamela H.), Marcy P. Jowers ’85 (James Robert, Sr. ’84) II Tim 2:1-2.”



The Pettyjohn Prayer Garden is located in front of Webb Hall.

“When the joys, opportunities, and demands of college life seem overwhelming, the Pettyjohn family encourages faculty, staff, and students alike to visit this prayer garden and to take these matters to the Lord,” Robert Pettyjohn affirmed.

The scripture on the stone, II Timothy 2:1-2, is a reference to Pettyjohn’s firm faith and ability to teach others. “Bobby was the Sunday school director at First Baptist Church in Camden for over 25 years, and also led a visitation program,” Mrs. Pettyjohn elaborated. “We were always a part of outreach and visitation programs in every church we attended.”

A native of Georgia, Pettyjohn came to GWU in 1951 on a football scholarship. He was the first person in his family to attend college, and he was determined to be a leader in class and on campus. Mrs. Pettyjohn was a native of Lenoir, N.C., and transferred to GWU in 1952. On their third date, she asked Pettyjohn to share his testimony with her. When he did, she knew he was the one for her.



Carolyn Pettyjohn cuts the ribbon to open the Pettyjohn Prayer Garden.

The Pettyjohns treasured the time they spent at GWU. They were excited when their three children and two grandchildren—Katie Pettyjohn Reuther and Wendy Pettyjohn Poole—also graduated from the University. Son Robert met his wife on campus, and he was honored as a Distinguished Alumnus in 2012. While Daughter Marcy didn’t meet her husband at GWU, she began dating him there. Pettyjohn served on the board of advisors, three terms as president of the Alumni Board of Directors, and was president of the Board of Directors for the Christian Service Organization (CSO). The CSO provides scholarship assistance to students preparing for full-time Christian vocational ministry. Mrs. Pettyjohn also served on the CSO board, and the couple established a CSO scholarship in 1995. Pettyjohn was awarded Alumnus of the Year in 1985, and Mrs. Pettyjohn was named a Distinguished Alumna in 2000.

Mrs. Pettyjohn concluded, “Throughout his life, Bobby was completely involved in what Gardner-Webb stood for—Pro Deo et Humanitate, for God and Humanity.”

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.