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Office of University
Communications

August 7, 2017

Dr. Michael C. Blackwell Receives Doctor of Humane Letters Degree During Ceremony

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Gardner-Webb University bestowed its highest recognition of merit, the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree, to Dr. Michael C. Blackwell during its Summer Commencement ceremonies on Saturday, Aug. 5.

For nearly 35 years, Blackwell has served as president of Baptist Children's Homes (BCH) in Thomasville, N.C. Founded in 1885, the organization has ministry points in 22 North Carolina communities with an affiliated orphanage in Guatemala. Through all its ministries, BCH serves more than 20,000 people annually, providing programs and placement services for children, teen and single mothers and their children, developmentally disabled adults, and frail and aging adults.

Noting Blackwell's achievements, Gardner-Webb President Dr. Frank Bonner described him as a person of true distinction. "Conferring an honorary doctorate is a hallowed tradition at GWU, a singular and serious way of honoring not just the individual himself but also that person's service and leadership in a chosen area," Bonner stated. "Under Michael's leadership, Baptist Children's Homes has adopted a simple, but powerful vision statement—'Sharing hope, changing lives.' At Gardner-Webb, we feel a sense of kinship with the Baptist Children's Homes as Christian organizations with a clear commitment to service and leadership."

Dr. Michael C. Blackwell with Dr. Frank Bonner

Blackwell, a native of Gastonia, N.C., graduated from UNC Chapel Hill, where he worked at the local radio station as well as writing for The Daily Tar Heel (Chapel Hill) and two major dailies, the Charlotte (N.C.) Observer and Raleigh (N.C.) Times. Following three years as news director at a radio station in Charlotte, Blackwell entered Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., where he earned three degrees and worked part time as news anchor at WRAL-TV in Raleigh and held two interim pastorates. After seminary, he pastored two churches over a 10-year period.

Dr. Michael C. Blackwell, president of Baptist Children's Homes in Thomasville, N.C., received the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree at Gardner-Webb University during Summer Commencement ceremonies on Saturday, Aug. 5.

Since accepting the leadership position at BCH in 1983, his accomplishments include establishing homes for adults with developmental disabilities, therapeutic camping programs for boys and girls and a new outreach center. He is also the founder of the North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry, which serves the frail elderly. A popular motivational speaker, Blackwell has authored five books. His latest is “Above the Clouds—9 Essentials for Thriving at the Peak.” He and his wife, the former Kathy Kanipe, have two children and two granddaughters.

Since 1971, GWU has presented honorary doctorates in various disciplines to more than 60 deserving individuals, including O. Max Gardner, Fay Webb Gardner, Johnny Cash, Earl Scruggs, and more. The practice of awarding honorary doctorate degrees dates back to the 15th century. In the latter part of the 16th century, the practice became common at Oxford and Cambridge universities in England.

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.