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# Gardner-Webb Student Club Fights Human Trafficking Through Annual Awareness Week

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Office of University  
Communications

February 6, 2017

## *“Release the Captives” Announces Schedule of Events for Human Trafficking Awareness Week Feb. 20-25*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – An estimated 5.5 million children have been abducted, sold, or forced into slavery and around 21 million people worldwide are considered victims of modern-day slavery. In an effort to bring awareness to the global tragedy of human trafficking and empower members of the community to stand against it, the Gardner-Webb University club “Release the Captives” will host its annual Human Trafficking Awareness Week Feb. 20-25, featuring a range of events highlighting the issue.

Planned by students under the guidance of club advisor Dr. Joseph Moore, GWU Assistant Professor of History and Special Assistant to the President for Academic Enhancement, several activities are scheduled to take place throughout the week. According to Mariah Case ('17), a biblical studies major from Hendersonville, N.C., the group's intention is to offer tangible ways for advocates to get involved.

“This awareness week is a small portion of a much larger movement, and it is our hope that the community uses this time of awareness to reflect on their own potential for action,” Case reflected. “Only through working with others can there be hope for systemic action that will make a difference in the world.”

Release the Captives, which was launched in 2013 by former Gardner-Webb University students Julie Sliwinski ('13) and Caroline Nethery ('14), raises funds and awareness for local and international non-profits who are directly fighting human trafficking. The group educates the campus and local community on issues surrounding human trafficking, equipping and empowering people to live in intentional opposition to this international crisis.

“Gardner-Webb's students are some of the most active in the nation on this issue,” Moore declared. “Our campus has been the epicenter of tremendous service to trafficked people, and many of our students have gone on to careers and volunteer in life changing work around the world. I look forward to seeing a new generation of students rise up to that kind of service.”

Jessica Francis ('17), a nursing major from High Point, N.C., is still amazed by the fact that the GWU club was able to rescue three enslaved African children last December. "We hosted the Rescue Race 5K last fall in partnership with Challenging Heights of Ghana, West Africa," she shared. "This organization is the leading anti-trafficking force in Ghana and oversees the entire rescue process from recovering children from their enslavement to their rehabilitation, education, and eventual reintegration into the community."

Francis continued, "Through the race, we were able to raise nearly \$3,000, which was used to rescue three children from slavery on Dec. 10. Witnessing God work through our seemingly insufficient efforts to bring about amazing things has been the greatest blessing I could have ever hoped to receive from my time at Gardner-Webb."

Club members hope the campus community will connect to the global movement for social justice. "I think if people know about the gravity of modern-day slavery, they will want to do something about it," offered Sarah Grace Moxley ('18) of Bluefield, Va. "Our goal is to empower that awareness by giving people the opportunity to take action as part of the solution."

Moore agreed. "As a historian of slavery, it is easy to treat slavery like it is a relic of the past. It isn't," he stated. "Estimates suggest there are more people in forced labor today than there were before the Civil War. Our students are making sure we don't forget that this issue is alive in our own era. They are modern-day abolitionists and I hope our entire community learns from what they are doing."

For a schedule of GWU Human Trafficking Awareness Week student events, click [here](#). To learn more about Challenging Heights and their efforts to end child trafficking in Ghana, visit [ChallengingHeights.org](http://ChallengingHeights.org).