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### **GWU Community Supports Divinity Student in Educational Journey**

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# GWU Community Supports Divinity Student in Educational Journey

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Office of University  
Communications

March 4, 2016

## ***Sherlene Alford ('18) Pursues Pastoral Care and Counseling Degree to Enhance her Ministry***

After attending a School of Divinity Preview Day at Gardner-Webb University and meeting students and faculty, Sherlene Alford ('18) was nearly convinced she'd found the right place to obtain her Master of Divinity in Pastoral Care and Counseling. The one thing holding her back was the three-hour drive from her home in Laurinburg, N.C.

"The deal sealer on attending Gardner-Webb actually occurred the very next day when I received a follow-up call from Kheresa Harmon (School of Divinity Director of Admissions)," Alford elaborated. "I explained that everything was wonderful, and I would really love to begin my studies, but at my age and with my other responsibilities there was no way I could be on the road three hours, in class from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., drive home and return to work the next morning. She shared that it was not uncommon for traveling students to have that concern, and for me not to worry. She connected me with another student who allowed me to room with her for the first year."

She worked out a schedule to stay in Boiling Springs, N.C., for two nights, drive home and work at her job in a dialysis clinic Wednesday through Saturday. When the student graduated, Alford began searching for another place to stay. "God was working on a divine plan that included Pastor Keith McKinney (GWU Alum) at Boiling Springs Baptist Church," Alford asserted. "His desire to support the students at the School of Divinity has led me to a member of the church who serves as a deaconess. She is a woman full of faith and the love of God. She has opened her home to me for the duration of my time in seminary. She is a gift from God. She has made my stay more than comfortable. Now that's a sense of community."

Alford has been a social worker for 25 years and serves as an associate minister at her church. She decided to pursue Pastoral Care and Counseling as an extension of her work. "It is safe to say that I did not choose ministry, God chose me," Alford assessed. "I enjoy working with people, providing support and education, while assisting them in meeting their needs. Sometimes that is walking along with them as they move through issues of life. People need more than a sermon on Sunday."

Her Gardner-Webb experience has been everything she expected and more. “I value the opportunity to study with students from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds,” she observed. “The faculty and staff have been accessible beyond the classroom setting. I value the academic and spiritual challenges as I am expanding my Christian growth and development. The in-depth study of the scripture to include the historical background has been enlightening. The interventions and approaches learned in Pastoral Care and Counseling have been valuable resources and have truly enhanced ways to connect spiritually with people of different faiths. The classes have done a masterful job in enhancing my current career in social work, sermon preparation, teaching Sunday school, and growth in my private devotion.”

The professors in the School of Divinity are committed to academic excellence and have contributed to her growth as a minister. “Dr. Hebert Palamino has challenged my practice of counseling. Dr. Robert Canoy has challenged me to really think about what I believe and why,” she offered. “Dr. Sheri Adams has broadened my knowledge of the foundation and expansion of the Christian faith. Dr. Steven Harmon has helped me to recognize my theological thinking is not too bad. Dr. Gerald Keown’s lectures of the Old Testament are second to none. They all tell excellent stories of their journey, and this has kept the learning experience practical. Although the school is traditionally Baptist, the application is culturally and denominationally diverse. The professors encourage you to expand your theology development.”

She thanks God for the educational opportunity and appreciates the support she’s received from everyone. “My husband and daughter, our parents, extended relatives, church family, my employer and many others are helping me to achieve this remarkable goal,” she praised. “To God be the glory.”