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1-19-2016

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Communications

Garin Hill ('15) Gained Valuable Insight into Areas of Ministry

In any given week—sometimes on any day—a pastor’s job could take him to the pulpit to preach, the hospital to pray, a home to rejoice or the funeral home to comfort. When the Rev. Garin Hill ('15), pastor of First Baptist Church in Forest City, N.C., encounters these situations, he recalls the wisdom shared by professors in the Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity.

“Truly, the conversations and work I engaged in at Gardner-Webb come to the fore every day in my life as a pastor,” Hill affirmed. “The Doctor of Ministry program certainly helps prepare ministers for their careers, but in the truest sense it recruits ministers who are already in their careers and gives them more tools in their ministerial tool belts. I took several seminar classes, and their names reflect their relevance in ministry. For example, I took “The Ministry of Preaching,” “The Ministry of Leadership,” “Biblical Hermeneutics,” and even “Conflict in the Church”—what relevant topics for what I do every day!”

Hill grew up in Gate City, Va., and has been in ministry for more than 15 years. He met his wife, Rachel, while he was a student at Baylor University’s George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas, where he earned a Master of Divinity with a specialty in education. They have two sons, Isaac and Eli. Hill was familiar with Gardner-Webb and its reputation for excellence. When a church near Boiling Springs, N.C., called him as pastor, he took advantage of the opportunity to go back to school.

“When I was considering moving to this area several years ago, I knew that I wanted to continue my educational journey by pursuing a doctorate degree,” he shared. “The proximity of a school the caliber of GWU just down the road was a huge draw for me in picking a place to serve in the local church. The church itself was a great fit, so it was only a matter of time before I wanted to find myself in a School of Divinity classroom learning from some of the brightest minds in the field.”

Beyond the classes, doctoral candidates have an opportunity to execute a year-long project. Hill chose to conduct an experiment in preaching and the insight he gained has helped him immensely.

“My project was interested in determining what a congregation member might remember when a preacher delivers the sermon on Sunday morning,” Hill described. “More specifically, I was curious to know if there were any memory cues the proclaimer could use to help aid in that memory, and which cues were most effective.”

His experiment involved creating and preaching four different sermons that engaged four different memory cues at the end of each sermon. The memory cues utilized were story, picture, object lesson, and a control sermon with no memory cue.

“In the end, my experiment concluded—unsurprisingly—that memory of sermons depends much less on the ability of the preacher to persuade and make the sermon memorable through memory cues, and depends much more on what is going on in the life of the hearer and how they connect individually with the gist of what is being said,” Hill assessed.

As he worked with the GWU faculty to complete his Doctor of Ministry in Christian Ministries, he found his professors to be “committed, experienced, down-to-earth, professional, caring, responsive, friendly, helpful, and genuinely want their students to succeed.”

Choosing one professor from the School of Divinity who went above and beyond expectations is not possible. “Every professor that I had went out of his/her way to help me meet my academic goals,” he acknowledged. “I guess if you made me narrow it down, my advisor, Dr. Gerald Keown, cannot go without mentioning. I could not have graduated without his guidance, in many senses of the word. However, I would be remiss to not mention Dr. Danny West and Dr. Guy Sayles, also. I had each of them for multiple classes, and they along with Keown comprised the academic council for my project. The experience and knowledge I gained under their instruction I will carry with me the rest of my life.”