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### **Former Brazilian Banker Finds Growth, Opportunities in America, Gardner-Webb University**

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# Former Brazilian Banker Finds Growth, Opportunities in America, Gardner-Webb University

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Office of University  
Communications

December 14, 2015

## *Pastor Antonio Duarte ('15) Completes Master of Divinity Degree*

For 30 years, Antonio Duarte worked as a successful banker in Brazil. He was thriving in his career, furthering his education and teaching business on the side. Still, something was missing.

“My wife always dreamt of coming to the United States,” Duarte said. “She begged me for about 20 years to move here. I said, ‘No way. I’m comfortable here teaching and banking.’”

His sentiment changed dramatically when a gang of criminals broke into his home to gain access to the bank’s safe, kidnapping him and his family for several hours.

“They sent the youngest to kill me,” Duarte said. “In Brazil, if you shoot someone while under 16 years of age, you don’t go to jail. You go to a children’s jail. In there, you can escape very easily. This young man could have shot me in front of my children like a dog. God preserved my life that night. It was a turning point. I said ‘I must get out of this business.’”

With newfound conviction, Duarte left the financial world to move with his wife and three children to America, where he strengthened his English-speaking skills and began to earn a master’s degree in divinity at Gardner-Webb. On Dec. 14, Duarte received his Master of Divinity degree as one of more than 250 graduates honored in GWU’s fall commencement ceremony.

Soon after arriving in the United States, Duarte found himself in yet another life-altering transition at 56 years old. “I always said that I would never be a pastor. When I came to divinity school, I thought I would work on the business side of things. I said, ‘Lord, maybe this can wait until I graduate, because I want to serve in finance. I’m good in finance.’ But serving God is not about what you can do. Pleasing God means obedience, nothing else. Working in finance was not God’s plan, and I always prayed that I would not go to the grave without fulfilling God’s will for my life.”

Duarte is now pastor of a Hispanic ministry in Gaffney, S.C. For this role, he had to learn to speak Spanish—a language both similar to and different from his native Portuguese—after having just learned English.

“The people I serve make about \$10 an hour, \_\_\_\_\_ and usually only one of them in a large family works,” Duarte explained. “As a pastor, I try to live in a very frugal way. I live with the money God gave me, and when I’m in need, I pray, and we manage to finish the month. After graduating from Gardner-Webb, I will continue to pastor the congregation.”

Duarte, who earned a master’s degree in business while in Brazil, has also worked as a graduate assistant in the GWU Godbold School of Business while working on his Master of Divinity degree, providing income to pay for his oldest daughter’s college education. “I am most grateful for the people of Gardner-Webb,” Duarte said.

After living in America for four years, Duarte and his family are purchasing their first home in Gaffney. Raised in a populated Brazilian city, he has come to appreciate rural life in the Carolinas.

“Psalm 68:20 says, ‘Our god is a God of salvation, and to God, the Lord, belongs escape from death.’ What is this if not God?” Duarte posed. “How can a foreigner come to a country like this and be given the opportunities I’ve been given? I have a new beginning. Everything is new. It’s a miracle.”