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Gardner-Webb University M. Christopher White School of Divinity Celebrates 20 Years

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Office of University Communications

September 10, 2013

Officials, Faculty and Guests Mark Milestone with Luncheon Celebration & Convocation Ceremony

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Individuals who dared to dream that a Baptist seminary could one day be established in the foothills of Western North Carolina gathered at Gardner-Webb University on Monday to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the M. Christopher White School of Divinity. Dozens of former and current faculty, staff members, and students attended a luncheon celebration followed by the 20th Anniversary Convocation, held in the Dover Chapel on the Gardner-Webb campus.

Since its establishment in 1993, hundreds of people have achieved their post-baccalaureate educational goals through the Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity, which also began offering the Doctor of Ministry degree in 2002. As the school passes its 20th anniversary, nearly 500 students have graduated with either a Master of Arts in Christian Ministry, a Master of Divinity, a Doctor of Ministry, or a dual-degree combination.

Special guests taking part in the convocation celebration were Kathryn Hamrick, former president of the general board of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Dr. Robert Lamb, the founding dean of the GWU School of Divinity, and Dr. Christopher White, former president of Gardner-Webb. Hamrick, White, and Lamb each offered tremendous leadership within the project from its initial conception to its full establishment,

“Southern Baptists had not had Schools of Divinity associated with universities. Instead, they sponsored six free-standing seminaries,” Lamb shared. “In order to launch an accredited professional divinity program on a university level, we had to locate classroom and office space, establish student services, admissions, curriculum, everything. We had to expand the library rapidly. And we had to locate a separate master’s program faculty.”



Watch Video At: https://youtu.be/_odkPzZTHjs

From the beginning, the new school sought accreditation from the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada. Because of the foundation laid by Lamb, White, and the early faculty, the Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity received full accreditation in 2000, the earliest possible year. Lamb had focused on this objective since the beginning, and he said many schools never get beyond the extensive application process, which takes multiple years to complete. “It’s tough, expensive, and time-consuming to be accredited,” he reflected.

When Lamb retired as dean, the reins of leadership at the school passed to Dr. Wayne Stacy in 1996, then to Dr. Chuck Bugg in 2004, and later to current dean Dr. Robert Canoy in 2006. Over the years, ministry focus areas were established. Within the school, a 60-hour core was developed, and beyond that, students were to complete an additional 30 hours of required courses within one of six areas of concentration: Biblical Studies, Spiritual Formation, Missiology, Intercultural Studies, Pastoral Care & Counseling, and Pastoral Studies. The purpose of these concentrations is to effectively prepare people for the specific area of ministry to which they had been called.

According to Canoy, the school embraces a model of theological education that believes all ministers on a church staff are better colleagues when they have similar Biblical, theological, and Biblical language preparations. At that time, he said, the school also tied a “Be, Know, and Do” statement to the curriculum. “Every course that is taught in the School of Divinity has a direct connection to what a graduate/minister ought to ‘Be,’ ‘Know,’ or be able to ‘Do,’” Canoy shared.

“You need to be doing ministry because God has called you,” he continued. “With God’s calling of you, that involves serious preparation. We ask students to take a look at their past, to take a good look at themselves. There are things in all of our lives that can be blinders to being effective in ministry. We’re as intentional about personal spiritual formation as we are anything else we do.”

No matter the focus area or ministry concentration, School of Divinity officials remain clear in their message to graduating students. “At commencement, I often tell students ‘You’ve come here to get a Master of Divinity degree,’” Canoy shared. “My prayer is that you leave here knowing how to allow the Divine to have mastered you.”

“Our graduates are God’s divine representatives in this world,” Canoy continued. “That takes on a variety of different shapes and complexions, and they go and do it as well as anybody I know.”

The Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity (SOD) is one of four graduate, professional schools at GWU offering graduate degrees within the academic program of the University. Celebrating its 20th year in 2013, nearly 500 people have graduated with a Master of Divinity or a Doctor of Ministry since the school’s inception in 1993. In honor of this achievement, Gardner-Webb will be profiling SOD programs, events, and people throughout the 2013-2014 academic year.