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August 10, 2012

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Four Gardner-Webb students embraced the call of evangelism this summer as they worked with a group of Christian camps whose mission is to share Christ with children from various backgrounds and traditions. Mark Baker, Amy Brown, Chelsea Hearne and Zeke Stephenson were part of Passport Missions and their camps for children and youth from third through 12th grade.

Founded in 1993, Passport, Inc. (based in Birmingham, Ala.) has developed a reputation for creative, high-quality Christian programs for students. Their mission statement reads, “With Christ as our foundation, Passport empowers students to encounter Christ, embrace community, and extend grace to the world.” Camps are conducted at various locations from North Carolina to Texas. The group’s theme for this year was “Life Together” based on a book by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and 1 John 3:18.

Brown, from Kings Mountain, N.C., graduated from the GWU School of Divinity in May and has been a part of Passport Camps for several years, either as a camper, chaperone or staffer. For seven weeks this summer, she served as a camp director for the team at Wingate University in Wingate, N.C. “I guided a team of 18 other student ministers by supporting and supervising them in their areas of leadership and provided direction to the group leaders and chaperones, which included leading a daily bible study,” said Brown. Since her camp experience this summer, Brown has started work at Drexel (N.C.) First Baptist Church, where she will serve as the associate pastor of youth and education.

Hearne, originally from Tampa, Fla., also graduated in May as a religious studies major with a minor in classical languages. She spent time with a Passport Missions team at camp locations in Macon, Ga., and Danville, Va. Hearne’s main role was being a Bible study leader, which entailed getting campers ready for the day with morning celebration and a Bible lesson, coordinating a mission site in the afternoon, and participating in leading a worship service at night. “The community at Passport is unreal in its acceptance and genuine care for all,” said Hearne. “Passport is not a summer job, it’s an experience. Our entire team loves and supports each other, while we minister to young people.

Like Hearne, Stephenson served at the camps in Macon and Danville as a youth leader, participating in mission projects and Bible study. He said, “I believe these camps are changing campers and how they view the body of Christ. We taught our campers what it means to live life together as a community in love, grace, and acceptance for all.” Stephenson, from Rutherfordton, N.C., will begin his senior year at GWU this fall studying psychology.

Baker (Mooresville, N.C.) is a sophomore at GWU whose major is undecided. Baker's connection with Passport occurred after he attended a Christian conference last winter, where he met some of the group's coordinators. He participated at three different camps—

Wingate, Danville, and Tennessee—as a Bible study leader for third and forth-graders. Baker was also in charge of outdoor activities for the kids, including canoeing, soccer, and ultimate Frisbee. “My faith was strengthened during camp,” said Baker. “It was a great feeling to see my campers apply our theme to their own lives, but it also enriched me by giving me the ability to apply them to my own life.”

Brown added that being at Gardner-Webb gave her that same sense of community that Passport wants to share. “Gardner-Webb provided me with support in many ways. It was a community that truly cares, and for that, I am thankful.”

Hearne may offer the best summary about serving for Passport. “This experience has been a blinding reminder of the absolute necessity of a good community. The spirit of Christ is present, and the body of Christ is at work, whether we are serving communion or just playing games with campers.”

More information is available about Passports online at passportcamps.org.