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### Moving Toward Shalom

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# Moving Toward Shalom

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Office of University Communications

September 19, 2011

## *GWU Divinity Professors, Student, Participate in “Healing Communities” Conference at Wake Forest*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Three representatives from Gardner-Webb University’s School of Divinity will participate in an upcoming conference focused on the intersection of physical health and spiritual wellbeing in the community. The conference, titled “Healing Communities: Conversations Toward Shalom,” will take place at Wake Forest University on Sept. 30.

GWU Divinity Professors Dr. Jim McConnell and Dr. Sherri Adams helped plan the conference, and McConnell will give a presentation focused on the communal nature of peace and wholeness in the biblical story. Barbara Massey, a longtime nurse and current divinity student, will present a spiritual care ministry she designed to train churches to meet community members’ holistic health needs.

McConnell said the purposes of the “Healing Communities” conversations are best expressed in the event’s title.

“The main definition people think of with ‘Shalom’ is ‘peace,’” he said, “but the definition also includes the idea of wholeness. We really want to explore the way peace and wholeness are community ideas, not just individual ideas.” He called the workshop’s title “an intentional double entendre.” They will promote the healing of communities, he said, but they will also explore the ways communities are agents of healing.

“We’re trying to promote the idea that, if a person is a member of the community, and that person is suffering, then that’s not just the person’s problem—that’s everybody’s problem,” he said.

McConnell noted that, like the ministry of Jesus and the early church, the work of communal restoration today is carried out by “people like Barbara [Massey] who are on the front lines actually doing these things we’re talking about.”

During her 40 years as a registered nurse, Massey felt a growing interest in providing spiritual care for her patients, but it wasn’t until she retired that she began pursuing that interest full-time. Now working toward her master’s in divinity, with an emphasis in pastoral care, Massey has designed a unique spiritual care ministry geared toward local faith communities.

Her approach combines physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual care. She trains people to recognize and assess individuals' specific needs, to develop a care plan, and to guide the person through various stages of care, providing necessary referrals along the way.

"I think the church sometimes tends to treat people's needs in silos," Massey said. "We treat your physical needs, and then we jump over and want to talk about your spiritual or social or emotional needs, and we never look at the interdependence of those and how they affect one another. That interdependence is the core of this ministry."

Massey has already begun implementing her ministry in her home church, Taylors First Baptist Church in Taylors, S.C., and she has presented it to several churches through the Saluda Baptist Association in Anderson, S.C. She said some churches have focused on training support groups to meet specific local needs, and to refer individuals to experts for the resources they need. But she maintains that the emphasis has to begin with individuals committed to working for peace in their individual relationships.

"It has to begin with the individual believer," she said, "because that's who comes in contact with people when they're hurting."

McConnell says Massey's presentation, and the others at the conference, will "offer some very simple, practical things churches can do to assist their communities." Ultimately, if the conversation is successful, McConnell says people will "catch a vision" not only for health and wellness, but for communal peace, restoration, and reconciliation.