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Following the Calling

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON SEPTEMBER 9, 2021

Dean Emeritus, Dr. Bob Lamb, Part of Transformational Moments at GWU and Beyond

By Kathryn Manning, 2018 Gardner-Webb alumna, Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies and Spanish

In the 116-year history of Gardner-Webb University, numerous faculty pioneers have engineered components of campus life and curriculum. One of those influential professors is Dr. Robert L. “Bob” Lamb, dean emeritus of the M. Christopher White School of Divinity.

Lovingly dubbed “The Energizer Bunny” by his friends and family, Lamb, who was also founding dean of the divinity school, has had a prolific career as educator, administrator, and pastor, among other duties. Even under hospice care, at the age of 91, his most fervent wish has been to remain “useful” for as long as the Lord allows.

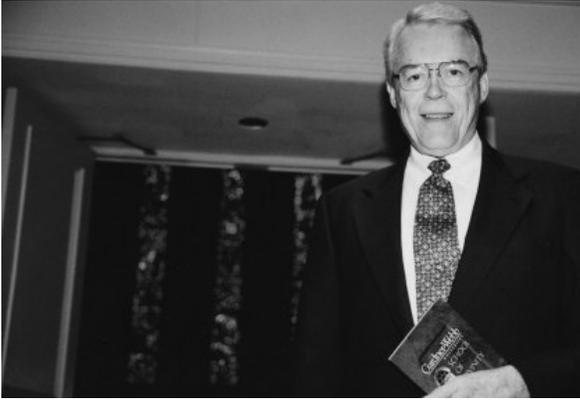


▲ Dr. Bob Lamb in his younger days

Lamb was born on Aug. 18, 1930, in Nevada, Missouri. He later moved to Mt. Pleasant, Texas, where his father, Rev. L.E. Lamb, was a Baptist minister. Lamb attended Stephen F. Austin State University (Nacogdoches, Texas) for undergraduate studies and pursued postgraduate degrees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Fort Worth, Texas), earning a master's degree in religious education and Ph.D. in church administration and missions. In his mid-20s, Lamb moved to Kaiserslautern, Germany, where he worked as civilian director of Christian education at Vogelweh Army Chapel.

While in seminary, he served as minister of music and education at Main Street Baptist in Grand Saline, Texas, where he met his future wife, Rhealene Bryant. They were married on Aug. 5, 1961. After they were married, they made plans to serve as missionaries through the Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board). Their application was denied due to Bob's severe allergies. They began seeking opportunities for employment within the United States, and in the summer of 1962, a number of job possibilities presented themselves, including a job offer from Dr. Eugene Poston, then Gardner-Webb College president. Lamb would teach Speech and Remedial English for one year and after that, could have the opportunity to join and assist with the growth of the religion department, specifically religious education. Although neither Lamb nor his wife had ever heard of Gardner-Webb, they agreed to move to Boiling Springs, N.C., and Lamb accepted the position.

After one year at the college, Lamb became professor of religious education and religion. During that time, he also assisted with the college's transition to senior college status in 1971, serving on accreditation committees and recruiting new students. He wrote letters to potential students and met with them and their families. Before the transition to senior college and right after, Gardner-Webb experienced a large influx of new students. He and his wife bought a large house in Boiling Springs and began renting upstairs bedrooms to freshman students.



- ▲ Dr. Bob Lamb served as chair of the Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy from 1988 to 1991.
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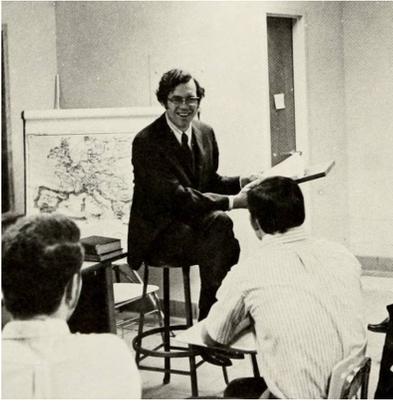
Upon his initial arrival, Boiling Springs Baptist Church was still located on Gardner-Webb's campus. Lamb had agreed to work at the church as Minister of Education, in addition to his duties at the college. He helped design a new educational wing for the church, with plans for the college and church to share it. Not long after, he assisted in finding separate property for a new church building, with plans for the school to take over the former church property. Although no longer physically intertwined, the school and church continued to work together, with the church hosting school events and inviting students for worship services.

Each year, Lamb was involved in planning a Fall Revival and Spring Emphasis Week, which included the administration and faculty working together to lead events and discussions with students. Lamb shared that it was a way to ensure that the students understood their own faith and Gardner-Webb's Baptist Christian background. He also helped to create Dimensions, a new weekly approach to Chapel, during which guest speakers would come to the school and lead discussions. The program still exists today.

In addition, Lamb served as chair of the Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy from 1988-1991, and along with other faculty, led the school's first freshman experience course, a precursor to today's University 111 class. Also during this time, he helped to establish a master's program in Christian education. This eventually led to the development of the M. Christopher White School of Divinity, with Lamb serving as the founding dean.

Following his retirement from Gardner-Webb in 1999, Lamb traveled the world, teaching and serving in the Philippines with his wife, starting a school for pastors in Belize, and enjoying excursions with family. He also served as interim pastor for dozens of churches in the area, even serving as guest pastor up until as late as February 2021. Lamb continues to enjoy spending time with family and friends, speaking about his personal faith journey, his years in education, and his many adventures.

Sources: *Personal Interview—Bob Lamb*; and *Robert L. Lamb Dean Emeritus, School of Divinity. Faculty Emeriti Book, (pp. 106-107).*



▲ This photo of Dr. Bob Lamb was published in the 1972 GWU yearbook.
