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ACADEMICS

Gardner-Webb Divinity Student, Avery Woods, is First Recipient of Vernie W. Lewis Scholarship

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON OCTOBER 20, 2021



Awarded by the Charles B. Keesee Educational Fund, New Grant Named in Memory of 50-year Employee

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—A Gardner-Webb University student pursuing her Master of Divinity in Christian Education is the recipient of the first Vernie W. Lewis Scholarship from the Charles B. Keesee Educational Fund Inc. Avery L. Woods, also a 2020 alumna of GWU with a bachelor's degree in discipleship studies, is the youth coordinator at Hope Community Church (HCC) in Shelby, N.C.

“When I first found out about receiving the scholarship, I was so overjoyed and grateful,” Woods shared. “Divinity school was not a part of my plan for myself but something I felt God was leading me to step into; this scholarship affirms that.”

Woods explained that she hadn't considered going into the ministry as a vocation. Then, as she took on a volunteer role that led to a seven-week internship at HCC, she discovered, “God had different plans.”

She continued, “Every day, I get to point people to a hope that can only be found in Jesus! Probably one of my favorite parts of ministry is equipping people to be disciples who make disciples—developing leaders and then watching them step into their God-given calling.”



Woods represents who the Keesee Foundation wanted to help by establishing the award. “Vernie W. Lewis was always interested in helping women who were going into ministry,” noted the Foundation’s Vice President Doug Ramsey. “She appreciated those who were willing to work hard to achieve their goals in life.”

Lewis had been employed by the Keesee Fund for 50 years, most recently as the secretary-treasurer. She passed away in September 2020. “The Keesee Fund wanted to recognize her in an appropriate way, so the Trustees decided to award a scholarship in her memory,” Ramsey explained. “According to the guidelines the recipient of the scholarship must maintain a high GPA, and be planning on going into the paid Baptist ministry.”



▲ Vernie W. Lewis

Ramsey also stated that the Board stipulated the Vernie W. Lewis Scholarship would be the largest individual grant awarded by the organization each year. This year’s amount, \$9,500, was awarded to Woods and two other recipients at Campbell Divinity School and the Baptist House at Duke Divinity. They chose these schools, because Lewis had a close working relationship with them and their financial aid staff. Further, the Foundation hopes to award the Lewis Scholarship each year to students at these three schools.

The Keesee Fund was established in 1941 by Charles B. Keesee. He and his wife, Olivia Helms Simmons, had no children of their own and desired to help worthy young men and women obtain an education at Baptist institutions. Charles provided in his will for the establishment of an educational fund, and when Olivia died in 1944, she left the major part of her estate to the Fund. Since its inception, the Fund has assisted thousands of qualified students going into the Baptist ministry or religious work in the Baptist denomination.

Gardner-Webb University is North Carolina's recognized leader in private, Christian higher education. A Carnegie-Classified Doctoral/Professional University, GWU is home to six professional schools, 14 academic departments, more than 80 undergraduate and graduate majors, and a world-class faculty. Located on a beautiful 225-acre campus in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb prepares graduates to impact their chosen professions, equips them with the skills to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and inspires them to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of others. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.