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GWU President Names Interim VP for Christian Life and Service

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON JUNE 23, 2022



Neal Payne, Associate Minister for Student Ministries, Begins New Role on Aug. 1

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Gardner-Webb University President William Downs has appointed Neal Payne as interim vice president for Christian Life and Service, effective Aug. 1. Payne presently serves as associate minister for Student Ministries. He succeeds Tracy Jessup, who will retire at the end of July, after 30 years of service to the University.

“I have a tremendous amount of confidence in Neal,” praised Downs. “He is a proud GWU alumnus, he has authentic concern for the spiritual welfare of our students, and he has a proven 16-year record of empowering Gardner-Webb students in their worship and in their individual faith journeys. Neal Payne will be a wonderful addition to the University’s leadership team, and he will most certainly be a faithful steward of our Christian mission and identity.”

Payne joined the Gardner-Webb staff in 2006 and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in religious studies and a Master of Divinity in religious education from GWU. Previously, he was the youth minister at Boiling Springs Baptist Church.



"I am grateful for the leadership and friendship I received from Tracy over these many years of serving our Lord together, and am truly humbled by the opportunity to serve in this interim role," Payne shared. "My prayer is that we will glorify Christ in all we do here at Gardner-Webb as we serve these students He has entrusted to us."

Downs affirmed that a search for the next leader of the Office of Christian Life and Service will begin soon, and the University is planning to host a reception in July to honor Jessup.

"Please join me in thanking and celebrating Dr. Tracy Jessup for his exceptional service and leadership," Downs added. "We are all indeed grateful for everything that Tracy has done to advance our institutional mission as Vice President for Christian Life and Service/Senior Minister to the University. The legacy will be profound and enduring."

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.