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GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY SCHOOL of DIVINITY

Listening and Following: Alumni Stories

Meet Elizabeth Barnard (Class of 2013) and Brandon McKoy (Class of 2004)

Elizabeth Barnard

The same God who called Moses and Miriam and Lydia and Paul called Elizabeth Barnard and Brandon McKoy.

In 2003 Elizabeth Barnard began a journey that would turn her life upside down. It started with a mission trip to Belize. When Elizabeth landed in the tiny Central American country, it was the first time her feet had touched international soil. God spoke to Elizabeth through the culture and people of Belize. Her life was changed - forever.



As Elizabeth was finishing her degree at the University of North Carolina - Wilmington and entering a career, God began nudging her to remember that life-changing experience in Belize. She remembered and she yearned. Elizabeth's yearning led her to the Master of Divinity program at the School of Divinity at Gardner-Webb University.

When Elizabeth entered the School of Divinity, she did not know what she was going to do or how God was going to use her, but she loved learning and people. Doors were opened for Elizabeth to serve as a children's minister at a church in Statesville, North Carolina. As she ministered to the children, she watched with wonder as their eyes opened to the gift of being able to help people all around the world. Talking about local and international issues reminded Elizabeth of that moment when her feet touched the Belizean soil and her desire to serve God and God's people internationally deepened. She chose Intercultural Studies as her concentration for the Master of Divinity program.

God opened more doors for Elizabeth to serve. During the summers of 2012 and 2013, she interned with Thirst Missions in Belize. Thirst Missions partners with the people of Belize to sponsor mission trips to the country. When the summer of 2013 ended, Elizabeth left Belize not knowing what the future held.

She graduated from the School of Divinity in 2013 and began working with International Truck Driving Students, teaching community college classes, and serving her local church in the areas of mission and outreach. God placed her in those roles at those times for a special reason. Elizabeth listened and waited.

God is always preparing God's people for the unexpected. When Elizabeth received a call from Thirst Missions, it was the unexpected. God called her back to Belize. Elizabeth now helps set-up, plan for, consult with, and lead mission trips in Belize for Thirst Missions. Her most cherished moments in ministry are still watching with wonder as the eyes of other people open to international missions and as these Christ followers say yes to God's call to go and make disciples.

God called. Elizabeth followed.

Brandon McKoy

"Baseball," declared the legendary Leo Durocher "is like church. Many attend, but few understand."

Brandon McKoy understands. He spent evenings and weekends in his hometown of Burgaw, North Carolina playing baseball and going to church. Brandon's passion for the game landed him a scholarship and a position on the baseball team at Gardner-Webb University. Brandon's love for the church and for God's people landed him in the Department of Religious Studies at Gardner-Webb. Between pitches, swings, and the classroom, Brandon heard the voice of God calling him to vocational Christian ministry.



Brandon remained at Gardner-Webb University for the Master of Divinity degree. He graduated in 2004. In 2010 he earned the Doctor of Ministry degree at Fuller Theological Seminary.

For 16 years, Brandon ministered to the youth and families at New Hope Baptist Church in Gastonia, North Carolina. Earlier this year he was named pastor of the 60 year old congregation. When he is not ministering to congregants, you will find Brandon teaching adjunctively at Gardner-Webb University, where he offers youth discipleship classes. He is the author of Youth Ministry from the Outside In: How Relationships and Stories Shape Identity. His book has been published by InterVarsity Press. In his spare time, Brandon enjoys playing baseball with his children and working as a professional brick mason.

God called. Brandon followed.

The School of Divinity at Gardner-Webb University | 704.406.3205
kharmon@gardner-webb.edu | www.gardner-webb.edu

The same God who called Moses and Miriam and Lydia and Paul has called you.
We are here to walk the journey with you.