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IN MEMORIAM

Gardner-Webb Community Remembers the Life of Dr. Bob Lamb, 91, Dean Emeritus of the School of Divinity

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON OCTOBER 20, 2021



Lamb's Career in Education and the Ministry Spanned Over Seven Decades

Written By Dr. Lamb's granddaughter, 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, Dr. Robert L. “Bob” Lamb, dean emeritus of the M. Christopher White School of Divinity, passed away on Oct. 19, 2021.

“While we are all deeply saddened by Dr. Lamb’s passing, we draw strength from knowing that his half-century association with Gardner-Webb has produced an indelible legacy,” reflected Gardner-Webb President Dr. William Downs. “Indeed, he is one of those giants on whose shoulders our institution now stands. Professor, Chair, Dean, and a dedicated servant-leader...Dr. Lamb did it all. For that and more, our University family looks with gratitude to a life well lived.”

Lovingly dubbed “The Energizer Bunny” by his friends and family, Lamb was also founding dean of the divinity school. He had a prolific career serving in education and ministry. Even under hospice care, at the age of 91, he conducted Bible studies with residents in the long-term care facility and his most fervent wish had been to remain “useful” for as long as the Lord allowed.

“Dr. Lamb truly was a Renaissance man,” observed Tracy C. Jessup, vice president for Christian Life and Service and senior minister to the University. “He was remarkably gifted, not only as a Christian educator in the university and the church, but also as a pastor, musician, and administrator.”

Jessup was hired by Dr. Lamb in 1994 as the first full-time director of admissions for the divinity school. “His love for and devotion to his family and his students was surpassed only by his love for and devotion to the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” Jessup added.

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. He was active in the Baptist Student Union and led the music in many revivals. In 1949, he was a summer missionary in rural Oklahoma with the Home Mission Board when that program was very new.



▲ A photo of Dr. Bob Lamb from the 1972 GWU yearbook

He 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. While there, he served First Baptist Church of Richardson, Texas, as its first minister of music and education. Over the years, the church has grown into a very large congregation.

In his mid-20s, Lamb moved to Kaiserslautern, Germany, where he worked as civilian director of Christian education at Vogelweh Army Chapel. While in Germany in 1956, Lamb led in organizing one of the first post-World War II English-speaking Baptist churches for Americans—the Kaiserslautern Baptist Church, American. The church ordained him to be a deacon.

Lamb met his future wife, Rhealene Bryant, when he served as minister of music and education at Main Street Baptist in Grand Saline, Texas. After they were married on Aug. 5, 1961, 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.

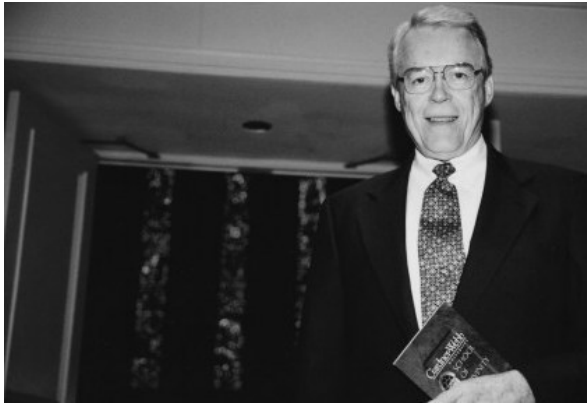


After one year at the college, Lamb became professor of religious education and religion. He enjoyed helping create a large Religion Department with a strong Religious Education concentration and worked with three of the Southern Baptist seminaries to better integrate the undergraduate and graduate programs. 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.

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. The church ordained him to the Christian ministry in 1966.

For 14 years, 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 and opening of the M. Christopher White School of Divinity in 1993, 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. In 2017, he retired from serving as the executive director of the Fellowship of Baptist Educators, a service organization of more than 1,000 educators across the world who use their educational skills to fulfill the Great Commission. He also served as interim pastor for dozens of churches in the area, even serving as guest pastor up until as late as January 2021.

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

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.