

Features

Denominations vary at Gardner-Webb

Katie Main
Pilot Staff

The plaque that stands outside the chapel next to Main St. reads, "Gardner-Webb University; Baptist. Founded 1905"

Much of the atmosphere and attitudes on campus attest to the fact that GWU has stayed true to its roots — it is indeed predominantly Baptist. Southern Baptist.

But not everyone on campus grew up going to revivals and eating fried chicken at every congregational gathering. In reality, GWU is more denominationally diverse than it may seem.

Sophomore Abbie Crago came to Boiling Springs from central Ohio, where she grew up in the Methodist church. She found that the differences between her beliefs and those of the students she met here are not as vast as she predicted.

"I think that my stereotyped opinion of Southern Baptists wasn't really true," Crago said. "People seem to have more of the same beliefs as I do."

The "minor differences" she saw were doctrinal ones.

"They do baptism by immersion ... I was sprinkled as an infant," she said. "And we have confirmation in seventh grade. I was surprised to learn that people think of Methodists as more liberal than Baptists — I had never really thought of it that way."

David Parker, associate professor of English, is an active member of Church of the Redeemer, an Episcopalian church in Shelby. Originally from Atlanta, Parker has been Episcopalian all his life.

"I'm one of the few 'cradle Episcopalians,' which aren't all that common," Parker said. "We pick up a lot of members from other denominations along the way."

Now in his seventh year at GWU, Parker had no reservations about teaching in a Southern Baptist environment. After getting a degree at Furman, he had become familiar with the denomination and its thought.

"I have a lot of respect for the Southern Baptist church," he said.

Parker offered some of the Episcopalians' defining

characteristics.

"We are a very liturgical church, a very Eucharistic church — we take the Eucharist almost every Sunday. It's a central part of our liturgy," he said.

As for their doctrine, Parker described the church as much more inclusive of different beliefs than most Protestant churches.

"As far as what we believe, the Episcopal church is very wide-open," he said. "We encourage discussion and we encourage varied points of view."

As the oldest denomination in America (it was originally the Church of England), Parker said the church is comprised of different types of members.

"We have a lot of 'old family' types that are hard Republican and very right-wing, but we've also attracted far-left, tree-hugging people as well," said Parker.

This diversity of thought probably accounts for the heated debate within the denomination over the ordaining of openly gay bishop V. Gene Robinson in Concord, New Hampshire in June 2003.

"There's been a lot of

pain because of it," Parker said of the situation.

Church of the Redeemer, however has suffered only mild repercussions because of the event. "We probably had five or six or seven people leave," he said.

Parker said that denominational disparities have not hindered his ability to work with faculty and students with varied beliefs.

"I think any time you have a lot of people who think hard about their faith ... there are going to be differences," he said.

Susan Bell, assistant professor of fine arts, attends Shelby Presbyterian Church. Though she grew up Presbyterian, she didn't realize she was a "low Protestant" until she attended a High Episcopal Church while living in Massachusetts.

"As an artist, I sure do appreciate their stained glass," she said. After moving south, however, she settled back into the Presbyterian church.

"Traditionally, the Presbyterian church is in the Reformed tradition, and there is enormous significance given to the

Scriptures," Bell said. "I think that's both its strength and its weakness -- we all need to worship more."

Bell likes the way the church's doctrine is articulated.

"I like us on paper — we have a good understanding of the Scriptures, evangelism, teaching and social responsibility," she said.

After teaching at GWU for 18 years, Bell said her challenges come not from people with differing religious views, but from those without a foundation of knowledge about their religion.

The art teacher most emphasized the importance of unity among believers.

"We need each other to be the full body of Christ," she said.

And in order to work together, she said, members of the body must return to the basics.

"The most crucial thing is that you have a relationship with Jesus Christ," she said. "If that is true, it doesn't really matter what your denomination is."

Amanda Wood
Pilot Staff

When it comes to politics, the Gardner-Webb University College Democrats and the College Republicans provide GWU with political discussion from both sides of the aisle.

The clubs are student-led organizations that function on campus to represent both sides of the political spectrum and provide students with a chance to participate in politics.

Last week, the GWU College Democrats held a student voter registration

Students involved in political clubs at Gardner-Webb



event in the cafeteria.

"We had a good turnout — about 15 to 20 people registered to vote," said Dave Merryman, chairman.

College Republicans are planning a voter registration event in the cafeteria the week after spring break.

Voter registration will also take place on April 8, when the College Republicans will host a gubernatorial debate in Dover Theater.

Michael Pardue, chairman of the College Republicans, will moderate the debate, which will feature five Republican candi-

dates for governor of N.C.

"It's going to be a good opportunity for students to be involved in government and see how the North Carolina political system works," Pardue said.

Both clubs participate in local and state politics as well as national politics, and after spring break the College Democrats are planning to work with Cleveland County Democrats in another voter registration effort.

"We're in constant contact with them. If they need help, we get calls all the time," Merryman said.

The College Democrats

are also planning a door to door campaign next fall in support of the Democratic nominee for president of the United States. The College Republicans plan to campaign this fall.

Though they support different candidates, the club members are able to maintain a civil relationship.

"We're civil with each other. There's no reason not to be," Merryman said.

Pardue shares Merryman's sentiments.

"Actually, a lot of my friends are democrats, and we get along well. There are usually arguments and dis-

agreements, but they usually stay political. It doesn't get personal," Pardue said.

Students must be registered Democrats in order to be involved with the College Democrats. "You have to support the Democratic party," Merryman said.

Students who wish to be involved with the College Republicans are not required to be registered voters. Students interested in the College Democrats can contact Merryman or Ortavia Barron, and students interested in the College Republicans can contact Pardue or Sky DeBoever.