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Pioneering Shelby pastor reaches another milestone

Mt. Pisgah Baptist leader will be first black graduate of GWU divinity school

By Chris Hagen
Gazette Staff Reporter

SHELBY — Although the Rev. Charles Turner doesn't necessarily expect to make the history books, he believes he has made his mark.

On Saturday, Rev. Turner will become the first black to graduate from the 4-year-old Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity.

"I'm just a pioneer in these areas. God placed me in this arena at this hour," Rev. Turner said.

With two bachelor's and two master's degrees tucked under his belt, Rev. Turn-



Turner

er pastors Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church with 202 members in Bessemer City.

The 58-year-old Shelby man considers himself a leader.

"I felt my calling as clearly as Moses saw the burning bush," he said.

In 1970, Rev. Turner became the first black basketball coach in the history of Shelby High School and 41 other schools in that district, he said.

Paving the road for others in the field of sports was more tedious than being the first black graduate from a divinity school, he said.

"Then, there was a lot of racial tension. All the decisions went against me. But it was just part of the game."

Rev. Turner spent 33 years in the classroom both behind and in front of the teacher's desk, and he doesn't plan to stop now.

"Once you stop studying you're a has-been," he said. He plans to continue studying and preaching for the rest of his life.

"The guy is really a glutton for the classroom," said Matthew C. Webber, director of public relations for Gardner-Webb University.

Rev. Turner graduated from Allen University in Columbia, S.C., with a bachelor's degree in chemistry and math in 1963.

He taught high school in Pinehurst and

came to Shelby in 1970, when he became the school's first black basketball coach.

Rev. Turner studied at Wofford College, Spartanburg, S.C., and St. Andrews College, Laurinburg, and did graduate work at Western Carolina University.

In 1979, he went into the ministry and enrolled at Gardner-Webb, graduating in 1981 with a bachelor's degree in religion.

He spent a year at Hood Theological Seminary in Salisbury and then went to Mid-Atlantic Bible College/Seminary in Rock Hill, S.C., where he received his first masters of divinity degree.

In January 1993, he enrolled at Gardner-Webb University and will receive his second masters of Christian ministry degree on Saturday.