WU celebrates commencement

By Cindy Lee Cumpton, for the Greene County Messenger

WAYNESBURG — It was a day of transitions at Waynesburg University on Sunday for about 650 undergraduate and graduate students.

The theme of every honored speaker at the university’s annual baccalaureate and commencement exercises centered on the transition students were making on their academic journeys and also the transition they were experiencing on their personal Christian journey.

The transition theme began during the baccalaureate service with the invocation by the Rev. Dr. Donald Wilson, interim director of Christian Life, when he challenged the graduates in their time of transition to renew their commitment to service and the calling of God on their lives.

“Christ has something He wants you to do where He sends you,” Wilson said.

The Rev. Dr. Andrew Purves delivered the sermon to students and their families at the baccalaureate service held at Roberts Chapel. In his sermon titled “How Big is Our God?” Purves entreated students to transition their concept of the “enormity of grace, forgiveness, love and mercy” of God.

“How big is your understanding of God, who gives us His spirit to be transformed?” Purves asked. “The universe and your future are in the hands of the one who died for you,” he said.

Purves is a native of Edinburgh, Scotland, and is currently a professor of reformed theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Commencement speaker the Rev. Dr. R. Bruce Bickel further challenged the Class of 2013 to transition their thought pattern in his commencement address titled “Not Success But Excellence.”

“The world says, I have to be something so I can become someone,” Bickel said, “but we need to change that to, I need to be someone so I can become something.”

“Don’t chase success, but seek personal excellence,” he added.

He is the senior vice president and managing director of Private Foundation Management Services at PNC Bank and is a decorated naval aviator having received his bachelor’s degree at the U.S. Naval Academy and his master’s degree from the U.S. Naval Flight School. In 1991, Bickel completed his master of divinity and doctor of theology at Luther Rice Seminary and received an honorary doctor of divinity degree from Waynesburg University and joined the university’s board of trustees.

In her address, Jordan Rachel Harvey, valedictorian of the Class of 2013, said as graduates of a Christian university, they needed to make the transition from the world’s view of success.

“Our diplomas are the talents in Matthew 25,” she said, “now it is up to us how we use them.”

“We have been made by God and given many talents not to be a success, but to bring glory to Him.”

During the commencement ceremony, honorary doctor of humane letters degrees were conferred upon the Rev. Dr. Andrew Purves; Robert Hackett, president of the Bonner Foundation; and Carolyn S. Thyreen, first lady of Waynesburg University for the past 23 years.

Founded in 1849 by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Waynesburg University is a Christian, liberal arts university. It has three adult centers in the Pittsburgh region.

The university’s board of trustees recently announced the unanimous election of Douglas G. Lee as president of the university, effective July 1.

Timothy R. Thyreen, who has served as university president since 1990, will assume the role of university chancellor.
The Rev. Dr. R. Bruce Bickel gave the commencement address to the 2013 Waynesburg University graduates on Sunday. He told students to not chase success but to chase excellence and also not to wear flip flops to a job interview. (Photo by Holly Tonini)
Jesse Hixson says hello to his daughter Addison, 15 months, as he proceeds to graduation at Waynesburg University on Sunday. (Photo by Holly Tonini)