

Alumni Spotlight: Rob Belton (M.Div. '09, Th.M. '18—Hamilton)



Current title: Reverend, US Army Chaplain
Family: Married to Meredith; our children are Kendra, Jude, Danae, and Amara.
Favorite professor: Dr. Colin Nicholl
Favorite class: Exegesis of the Thessalonian Epistles
Favorite memory: Drinking deeply from God's Word under the leadership of faithful, passionate professors

"Plunder the text!" (see below!)

"My entire GCTS experience has been a critical component of my pastoral identity and continued growth in the Lord."

What have you been doing since you left Gordon-Conwell?

I pastored a church in Sanford, Maine from 2009-2011. Simultaneously, I served as a Chaplain in the Army National Guard. I came onto active duty as a full-time Army Chaplain in 2011. Since that time, I've gone on one long deployment to Afghanistan and two short deployments to Iraq. I entered the Anglican tradition in 2013 and continue to live out my priestly calling as an Army Chaplain. Army Chaplains have two required capabilities: provide religious support and advise the command. We provide religious support to soldiers and their family members by leading religious services and performing rites, sacraments, and personal pastoral care according to our own faith tradition. When there's a religious need we can't personally perform, we provide for the need by connecting the individual with the appropriate religious leader. This safeguards the free exercise of religion for all. Chaplains also advise the command: we offer advice to our leadership about how things like religion, morals, morale, and ethical decision-making impact our soldiers and their mission.

What are you doing now?

I'm completing my third year as an instructor at the US Army Chaplain Center and School in Columbia, South Carolina. I teach in the field of World Religions and Religious Advisement. This summer, I will begin serving as the Chaplain for the 7th Special Forces Group at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. In that capacity, I'll oversee five Unit Ministry Teams. Each team consists of a Chaplain and a Religious Affairs Specialist. I will also provide personal pastoral ministry as an Anglican Priest.

How has God woven together your Gordon-Conwell education with other life events to bring you to where you are now?

The M.Div. at GCTS opened the door to both the pastorate and the military chaplaincy. More recently, the Army allowed me to return to GCTS for a year to complete a Th.M. in preparation for my current role as an instructor. My entire GCTS experience has been a critical component of my pastoral identity and continued growth in the Lord.

How has your Gordon-Conwell education served you in your past and current work?

It equipped me to serve as a pastor in both the local church and the US Army. As a Chaplain, I have a pastoral relationship with soldiers of Christian faith. At the same time, I have the joy and privilege of bringing hope and the presence of Christ to many soldiers who do not know Jesus.

What has been Gordon-Conwell's biggest impact?

By the grace of God, GCTS helped guide and enrich my deep love for the Scriptures and connect it with a lively faith. The tools I received at GCTS continue to bear fruit in Gospel ministry through preaching, counseling, and outreach. When I prepare a sermon or a Bible study, I joyfully recall the words of Dr. Colin Nicholl and his approach to Scripture: "*Plunder the text!*"

What piece of advice would you give to young alumni who are just entering the working world?

Take your time; gain experience. Build deep friendships with Christians who will pray for you, encourage you, and hold you accountable. Love and serve God through the local church. Learn from the godly men and women who came before us throughout the history of the Church.

Do you have any publications or links you'd like to share?

Many of the issues I currently teach about are in a small book I put together called the *World Religions and Advisement Smart Book: 2021*. It is available on the following portion of the US Army Chaplain Center and School website: <https://usachcstraining.army.mil/world-religions>.