

Alumni Spotlight: Valerie Osterbrock (M.Div. '14, Th.M. '15)



Current title: International Ministries Global Servant

Family: husband – Aaron Osterbrock (M.Div 2014, Th.M. 2015), children – Theophilus (6), Anastasia (4), Azariah (2) and Micah (baby)

Favorite professor: I loved them all, so this is an impossible question for me.

Favorite class: Dynamics of Spiritual Life with Dr. Gwenfair Adams

Favorite memory: Walking around campus in the autumn: glorious foliage, crisp air, and my head and heart full of spiritual food from classes

Where are you currently serving as a missionary and what is your work there?

Aaron and I are currently serving in Sabah, Malaysia, as missionaries. We teach and train pastors at Sabah Theological Seminary, which is an interdenominational seminary. I do this part-time while raising and homeschooling our four children (Aaron teaches full-time). We are privileged to be able to teach students from the Southeast Asian area at our seminary, including many indigenous Malaysians from the different tribes who are native to the island of Borneo.



Tell us about your path from your Gordon-Conwell graduation to now. Have you always been a missionary, or did you serve in other positions before becoming a missionary?

After graduating from Gordon-Conwell, Aaron and I moved to Ohio where he pastored a church and we paid off undergrad debt so that we could go on the mission field debt-free. I was a middle and high school teacher in Australia when God nudged me into missions, and, just prior to coming to Gordon-Conwell, I taught missionary

kids in Kyrgyzstan for two and a half years.

How has God woven together your time at Gordon-Conwell with other life events to lead you to where you are now?

I came to Gordon-Conwell to be equipped theologically to serve in overseas mission in the long-term, but I thought that God was calling me to teach MKs. (I also thought that I

would be serving Him overseas as a single person, not married and with four children, but that is another story.) While I was at Gordon-Conwell, I attended a missionary conference in which a doctor was talking about doing medical missions work and, shortly after, a missions night at which Dr. Yao and others talked about the great need for theological education in China. God used both of these to reshape my calling to think about serving Him through theological education of locals rather than middle/high school education of MKs.

The summer after Aaron and I got married, we spent 11 weeks in Chitipa, Malawi, teaching at a seminary there, and this confirmed our sense of call to theological education overseas. We were open to going wherever the need was, and since God is growing His kingdom all over the world, there were many options that we talked and prayed through. Though I was born in Boston, I grew up in Singapore and Australia, and all things being equal I never intended to go back to SE Asia with its year-round tropical mugginess. When I was a teacher in Australia praying for God to guide me in His will, I had prayed, “God, send me anywhere to teach MKs, except a Muslim country because that doesn’t make sense as a single woman.” God has a sense of humour, and He sent me to Kyrgyzstan, which is a Muslim country. So it was perhaps unsurprising that one day Aaron and I were walking and talking about where God might lead us to serve Him, and as we were musing on how God has guided us in the past, I said, “Wouldn’t it be funny if He called us to teach at a seminary in a Muslim country, maybe even Malaysia?” We laughed at this—and the next day received an email from our sending agency about an invitation from STS to send lecturers over. The rest is history, or should I say His story.

What do you love about your work?

I love getting to train and equip students in God’s Word and knowing that they will graduate and bring the light of the gospel to places where I would not thrive, like the middle of the jungle in Borneo, where the postal service doesn’t even go. I love being able to help students at STS to understand and apply all of God’s Word and, for many of them, to learn to understand and love the Old Testament for the first time. I love being able to teach part-time while being a mum and homeschooling our children.

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

Going to Gordon-Conwell was one of the best decisions I ever made, and we thank God for our Gordon-Conwell education. I learned so much from professors both in classes and outside of classes; I was mentored and spiritually formed by the community at GCTS, including the Pierce Fellowship; I was encouraged and humbled by the many international peers we had at Gordon-Conwell, and overall, I was very well-equipped to teach and train students at STS. Where we are, we are not at the cutting edge of theological research and thinking, and much that we take for granted if we grow up in a church with Gospel-focused pastors who are well-trained in biblical theology and the

careful exegesis of God's Word is not the norm in SE Asia, and it's such a joy to be able to use and adapt things that we have learned at Gordon-Conwell in our classes. For example, Aaron and I have adapted and taught CASKET EMPTY in Malay and it's been a delight to watch God using that to open students' eyes to His Word as one big, connected story with Jesus at its heart – despite our very deep sense of being jars of clay who speak Malay about as well as a four-year-old. (You can learn a lot from a four-year-old. In all seriousness, being a missionary is a daily reminder that unless the Lord builds the house, the builders indeed labour in vain.)

What piece of advice would you give to alumni who are considering the mission field?

If you are considering the mission field, I would encourage you to take a few months off and go on a short-term mission trip, if you can, to give cross-cultural living a go. Even though a short-term trip is vastly different from committing to living as an alien in the long-term, there is still so much that God can do through an experience like that to sharpen your sense of call and help you to know yourself and your strengths and limitations better. Our time teaching students in Malawi was really helpful for confirming our sense of God's call to theological training.

I would also talk with missionaries who are in the kind of work that you are thinking about doing and ask them about what their daily lives look like. Many of them will be able to share more in person than they would be able to publicly, especially if they minister in religiously or politically sensitive areas. You, like me, might suffer from email fatigue, but come alongside missionaries and faithfully read their updates to give you an insight into the daily realities of missionary life.

Especially in our globalized world, mission is also from everywhere to everywhere, so one thing that could be really helpful is to get involved in cross-cultural ministry right where you are, which will, among other things, develop your cultural intelligence and perhaps deepen your love for a particular people group and sharpen your sense of call, whether it is to serve God overseas in the long-term or to serve Him wherever home is for you while praying for, encouraging, and financially supporting overseas missionaries.