

Alumni Spotlight: Daniel Griswold (MDiv '09)



Current Title: Elder, Senior Pastor

Family: Amanda Dawn (wife), Ransom Kelly (son 7), Harper Gwenfair (daughter 4)

Favorite Professors: Dean Borgman, Garth Rosell

Favorite Class: Christian History I, II and Global Justice

Favorite Memory: Being the Resident Advisors for Building A and caring for the families from different places, denominations, and cultures was an incredible experience.

What have you been doing since you left Gordon-Conwell and where are you serving now?

During study at Gordon-Conwell, I also worked as a High School Youth Ministry Assistant at Grace Chapel in Lexington, MA. When graduating in 2009, I felt that someone else should have the great experience I had at Grace, so I resigned and began a search for a full time Youth Director position particularly in states more south as my wife is from North Carolina. I applied in many churches and denominations but on Facebook a Methodist friend from a hip-hop/folk band I rapped in during undergrad let me know of a church on Hilton Head Island that needed some help after some rough starts and stops. I interviewed and was offered the position, and then spent the next 6 years in the trenches serving at Saint Andrew By-The-Sea United Methodist Church. While serving, I began to read John Wesley's Sermons and realized that, while I had grown up Assemblies of God, I had drifted from my denomination. I was classically Wesleyan in my outlook and understanding of Holy Scripture, so I discerned and joined the United Methodist Church of South Carolina.

One year later the Lord began to call out to me and with the mentoring of the Senior Pastor, I began work to become an itinerant Elder. In that time, I did just about everything in ministry and putting all I learned at Gordon-Conwell to solid practice. While leading Middle and High School youth programs and outreach, I found myself ministering to all ages: preaching with the other ministers, helping launch a new campus, learning how to play guitar and lead worship, and becoming immersed in the liturgical worship and hymnody of the Wesley brothers John and Charles. The richness of faith and tradition fueled my Methodist studies through Asbury Theological Seminary (I attended online at night



after all the day's work had been completed). I can see the faces of the many people I ministered with and among during this very busy time in which my wife and I welcomed our son Ransom into the world.

The time came for me to go before the board of ordained ministry to present about 70 pages of theological and practical ministry work and, to God be the glory, I was accepted in Provisional connection in 2014. It was then that South Carolina Bishop Jonathan Holston assigned me to a rural 3-point (church) charge in Ridgeville, South Carolina. These small revival-oriented churches grew over six years of ministry together. My family dove into the agricultural and forest community surrounded by Charleston's growth and development. In this time my daughter Harper was born, I went before the boards again for my second round of paperwork, participated in Residency, also while working in Clinical Pastoral Education in Columbia, SC. In 2016 I passed the board and was made a Full Elder in Connection and ordained in the South Carolina Conference.

The last several years of ministry I've received inspiration and support with World Methodist Evangelism and have spoken at an "Order of the Flame" conference in Memphis and virtually at Moscow Methodist Seminary, preached at Camp Meetings and Revivals in the greater Charleston area, have been appointed (and moved) by my Bishop to a new charge in 2021 (North Charleston UMC) and have discerned through respected elders that I should pursue a PhD – so I'll be returning to Gordon-Conwell for the ThM in World Missions/Intercultural Studies while ministering among a new congregation and community. My wife says she's good with it as long as I find a way to pay for it. I'm excited to be back in the classroom as it has direct correlation to effectiveness in ministry.

What do you love about your work? What are the particular joys and challenges of serving a rural church?

During my six years in Ridgeville there were some distinct joys that I'll never forget. Rural churches often function as family chapels with several pillar families, but with these folks welcoming the growing members of the growing community into their care and into discipleship. The warmth my family enjoyed as the Pastoral Family will never be forgotten. Each church was completely different in disposition and culture despite being only miles apart, which added a neat complexity to learning leadership and developing sound structures for spiritual growth. In a lot of ways these folks trained me up in ministry and through trust and partnership they invited me to preach throughout the countryside which led us to enjoy wonderful potlucks, revival fellowship, camp meetings, and the discovery of Gospel music. I'd grown up with alternative rock, punk, and contemporary Christian music so I had to learn a lot on the fly. The grace of the people and love they still share with us was overwhelming. There were also hard times and crisis that bonded us together and you get really close when the community is smaller. The particulars of heart felt religion, traditional liturgical worship, and living out in the country grows into you real deep. The people work hard and they expect you as pastor to work hard – so I did. Visiting the sick and being in the hospital prior to Covid were especially holy times. The trust given to the pastor in country communities is to be treasured and not trampled on. I once was with a family as their patriarch passed, the next morning I led his grandchild in a prayer accepting Christ's salvation, this young man was then baptized in the Edisto River near his church and the whole community came out. It was good ministry and I'd do it again.

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

I knew in my prayer life after graduating from Flagler College that Gordon-Conwell was the next portion of my spiritual and intellectual journey. Every class at GC has been helpful in ministry and moments with the professors come back to mind all the time. The preaching classes were strong and challenged me to be bold and preach with diligence and preparation. The exegesis classes prepared me for lifelong study and revering the languages and historical and cultural backgrounds to truly understand the intent of the Word of God. Family Counseling, Youth Ministry, Global Justice, Church History, Doctrines of the Church, and the Old and New Testament Survey courses. These formed a foundation for ministry that have been immeasurably valuable to ministry and thriving where others might struggle.

What has been Gordon-Conwell's biggest impact/influence on your ministry?

Gordon-Conwell gifted me an affirmation of the marriage of the life of faith with rational inquiry which has produced, in my experience, the best possible foundation for a Spirit-filled ministry in the church in mission to the world. The professors and ministers among us inspired each toward pastoring with integrity and to be scripturally sound. As an itinerant minister too, the community formed while in seminary still exists on social media and it is inspiring to see what others are doing in ministry. Isolation in ministry can be crushing and being an alumnus of Gordon-Conwell means I read what's going on in the broader church through mailings and newsletters, and it is uplifting to see so much visionary leadership grow into the church.

What piece of advice would you give to young alumni who are just entering pastoral ministry?

Always do ministry while you learn. It is stressful and hard to balance life, but ministry is hard anyway. You'll need to develop a method of praxis (plan, act, reflect, replan) with all the knowledge and understanding that eventually becomes wisdom with action. I worked in Youth Ministry nearly fulltime during study because I had to pay for living on campus which forced me to put theology into context right away. That has become so valuable as an active reader and in engaging with current scholarship and reading the ancients. When you learn something and the Spirit moves you, make a plan and put it into action – You'll learn everything better and it will have dividends for a lifetime of ministry.

Do you have any publications or links to share?

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