

## Alumni Spotlight: Steve Clark (MDiv '19)



**Current Title:** Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Corinth

**Family:** Married to wife, Kim (MAR/MAOT '18)

**Favorite Professors:** Tom Pfizenmaier & Jim Singleton

**Favorite Class:** Pastoral Ministry or Transforming Leadership in the Local Church

**Favorite Memory:** Buying matching chicken costumes with my GCTS roommate and various ensuing antics, like playing chess in the elevator or crashing the Gordon College ball, while wearing said chicken costumes

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

The fall after I graduated from Gordon-Conwell, I started as a solo pastor of a small rural church in the village of Corinth, NY, about an hour north of Albany. It is an ECO Presbyterian Church with an average attendance of 40-50 people.



*Left: My ordination, with Dr. Jim Singleton and Dr. Tom Pfizenmaier*

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

I have found being a solo rural pastor, especially in Covid, really challenging. But the gift of that is it keeps driving me back to my walk with Christ as I keep running into situations I don't know how to handle

and am realizing how deeply I need to have my self-worth defined by Christ – and not by others' expectations. I love preaching each Sunday, but I find it difficult to do it well unless God's ministering to me through the text. I love leading a group of elders and developing leaders, but it's hard to be confident as a young pastor unless I lean on God's call. I love being present with people in major moments of their lives – but what do you say to someone in the face of death? So...a lot of challenges, but it has been really deepening for my relationship with God.

I'd say that, so far, the greatest joys have been getting to witness people's reactions to really big moments in their lives: embracing a middle-aged Russian immigrant after I baptized him; watching an old man's hands tremble as he bravely shared his testimony

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at our service about how God met him in the midst of his wife's death from cancer; getting to hand someone my age their first Bible after they decided to start coming to church one day and just kept coming back. The challenges have included: the community and church have a sense of decline and insignificance; the church is aging, so energy and volunteers are hard to find; finding peers and friendships has been difficult. Also, really weird things happen that seminary just doesn't prepare you for. Someone dug up and ate our tulips and the police asked if we wanted to press charges. A funeral director slipped and fell in a grave during a graveside service. Someone isn't sure if he's been baptized before, so you're not sure if you can baptize him or not. There's a lot of stuff you just can't prepare for – but, they make for great stories.

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

The parts of my Gordon-Conwell education that I have been most grateful for are spiritual formation and practical ministry courses. A few professors and students at Gordon-Conwell helped me see the value of attending to my own walk with God, prioritizing Sabbath and spiritual community, and that has been critical during my time as a pastor. The practical ministry courses have been really helpful; preaching courses have given me a helpful template for my weekly studies, and pastoral ministry case studies often come back to mind when navigating tricky situations.

The OMP experience in Dubai was tremendously helpful for me because through the trip, we learned about doing cross-cultural ministry among people of different backgrounds and perspectives, and ministering in a rural context has been somewhat cross-cultural as well. I think exposure to different perspectives and forms of ministry is so critical – I preached to large audiences in college, ministered overseas in Dubai, and now am learning how God is active in a small village.

## **What advice would you give to young alumni who are just entering pastoral ministry?**

I have found the most crucial thing is to take care of my own spiritual health. Sabbath, strong friendships, and prioritizing restorative spaces have been so important to keep care of my own soul, especially in the turbulence of Covid these past couple years. Intentionally keeping a Sabbath every week, where I don't touch work and focus on restorative activities, has been my most valuable spiritual discipline. Calling a good friend (and Gordon-Conwell MDiv '19 alumnus, Su Kim) once a week has also been really valuable to keep me accountable and help me process.

Also, there are about a million different opinions on how someone should be a pastor, from different pastors, different authors, and different churches. Reading and listening to all these voices gave me the sense that I could never do everything a pastor should or that I was always failing in someone's eyes. You *never* can be the ideal pastor in everyone's eyes; there are too many different versions. I am still trying to learn what it

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means to be the type of pastor God created me to be and have found it valuable to end each day asking the question: *Would God be pleased with my day?* (Instead of: Would a professor, friend, other pastor, or congregation member be pleased with my day?) This attitude helps me focus on caring for my soul, family, friends, and what matters most – because there are *always* more things you can or “should” do as a pastor in others’ eyes. You can’t do it all, so what does it mean for you to lean into God’s call for *you* as a pastor, as best as you can, and make sure you actually believe the grace you’re preaching?

## **Publications and Links:**

My church’s website ([www.corinthfirstpres.org](http://www.corinthfirstpres.org)) has a link to all my video sermons, as well as a link to a personal blog...which hasn’t been updated in a while but exists!