

Alumni Spotlight: Brandon Reagor (MACT '15)



Current Title: Pastor - Mountain Bible Church, Livingston, MT

Family: Wife, Kimberly; Kids: Gibson (13), Grant (12), Gage (11), and Garrison (9)

Favorite Professors: Ryan Reeves, Richard Lints

Favorite Classes: Lewis & Tolkien with Dr. Reeves

Favorite Memory: I started at Gordon-Conwell when the Jacksonville campus was just an extension center and was meeting at a historic Presbyterian church downtown. The classrooms we used were old Sunday School rooms and had aged illustrations of familiar

bible stories painted on the walls. It was always funny to see how each visiting professor would find a way to work these illustrations into their lectures.

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

Since completing my degree at Gordon-Conwell in my hometown of Jacksonville, FL, I continued in pastoral ministry and started pursuing doctoral studies. I completed a ThM at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and plan to continue doctoral research into how Christian theology intersects with the field of media ecology. I currently have the privilege of serving as the pastor of Mountain Bible Church in Livingston, MT and as an adjunct professor at Montana Bible College in nearby Bozeman.



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

Coming from the big city, my wife and I didn't know what to expect when God called our family to live and minister in rural Montana. We envisioned all kinds of challenges that could come along with making a life with our boys among cowboys and ranchers in a place where the temperatures drop to levels far below what our Floridian blood could handle. While our transition certainly had its challenges, what we found here was a lively and caring community of folks from various backgrounds. Livingston sits about 45 minutes away from Yellowstone National Park next to an idyllic stretch of land called Paradise Valley. Our town consists of ranchers and railway workers with long-time

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Montanan roots, artists who came to photograph, sing, paint, and write about the beauty here, and adventurers who make a living off taking other people along on their expeditions.

In addition to the lovely people, my family and I have found countless opportunities to enjoy the beauty of God's creation here through all the risky adventures our kids nudge us into. I couldn't ask for a more exciting place to be a minister of the gospel and to raise four energetic boys. Ministering outside of the "Bible Belt" has been refreshing, albeit challenging at times. Folks in this part of the country are brutally honest about their perceptions of religion. With such honesty, there is no facade of religiosity to work through. However, the sort of independent spirit that is so prevalent here means that organized religion is often avoided in favor of a more individualized spirituality. This often makes it difficult to emphasize regular involvement in Christian community and to help people see Jesus as infinitely more than just another spiritual guru.

Recently, challenges in our community have reminded me that our little town is not immune to national problems like the housing crisis. As the wealthy from other areas buy up property in this beautiful part of the country, it is becoming increasingly difficult for middle and lower classes to afford living in the area. Local business owners are having trouble finding employees who can afford housing, and the lack of affordable housing has forced low-income families into difficult living scenarios and a scramble to find enough work to afford rent. Our congregation is currently working with other churches and non-profits to determine the best way to help address these practical needs, and our church leadership is trying to equip our congregation to be a faithful presence of gospel hope in the midst of a difficult season.

How has your Gordon-Conwell education served you in your past and current work? What has been Gordon-Conwell's biggest impact/influence on your ministry?

As I think back to my time at Gordon-Conwell, one of the most helpful aspects of my experience there was being a part of an inter-denominational student body. I had grown up as a Southern Baptist with minimal exposure to other denominations. However, in my classes, I was able to engage with students from a variety of theological backgrounds. Their friendship, faithfulness to Christ, and unique contributions to our classroom discussions helped me develop a deep appreciation for the rich diversity of the Church. Now that I serve a nondenominational congregation, I realize how my time with the diverse community at Gordon-Conwell has equipped me to minister to the variety of folks who are a part of our congregation and to understand the various theological backgrounds from which they come. I'm able to better value their unique perspectives while also emphasizing the core Christian doctrines that unite us together in our God-given identity and mission. Beyond exposure to the diversity of the worldwide Christian community, I am forever indebted to the school for the time I was able to spend learning under such quality faculty. My professors were not only interested in pushing me academically, but also in helping me make the connection

between my studies and actual hands-on ministry. Gordon-Conwell's commitment to preparing thoughtful and biblically grounded Christian leaders equipped me with the education and experiences that I needed to faithfully and effectively serve my congregation and represent Christian thought and practice in my community.

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

For any young alumni preparing to enter pastoral ministry, I can't emphasize enough the importance of connecting regularly with ministry peers and mentors. In my town, I have the privilege of gathering each week with other nearby pastors to discuss ministry, pray together, and share some good laughs. I also have mentors with whom I've connected over the years who are a regular source of encouragement and challenge. Relationships with trusted friends and mentors offer a space to share your concerns and weaknesses, receive honest feedback and encouragement, and be reminded that you're not alone in the ebb and flow of ministry.

Links:

I'd love to connect to any alumni who are also doing rural ministry or interested in talking Bible, theology, or the outdoors. Find me on Twitter at @brandonreagor or my (very infrequent) ramblings at www.brandonreagor.com.