

## Alumni Spotlight: David Dwight (DMin '95)



**Current title:** Senior Pastor, Hope Church, Richmond, VA

**Family:** Wife: Elisabeth, Children: Laura & David Jr.

**Favorite Professors:** Garth Rosell and David Wells

**Favorite Class:** Church History

**Favorite Memory:** Most poignant was a time when I was at GCTS for my MDiv. For a host of reasons, I was at a very low point and feeling deeply discouraged and depressed. I had a regularly scheduled meeting with David Wells who was my faculty advisor. At the beginning of the meeting, he asked me how I was doing. I told him I was really

struggling. From that moment, he came out from behind his desk and invited me to come sit together at a different spot in his office where he gave me his full attention, listened to me, and offered me much needed encouragement. I will never forget it—and I wonder if I would have dropped out of seminary if I hadn't received that encouragement that day.

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

After transferring and completing my MDiv at Union Theological Seminary, I became a missions pastor at Third Presbyterian Church in Richmond, VA. While in that position, I worked on my DMin at Gordon-Conwell and completed it in May of 1995. My DMin thesis, "Seasons of Change: Presbyterian Trends and Mainline Futures," which felt like a burden at the time, became very significant in shaping my career and vision. After serving at Third Presbyterian for seven years, I planted Hope Church with close friend, colleague, and fellow GCTS alumnus, Pete Bowell (MDiv '97). We started Hope Church in the fall of 1997 with a fledgling group. The church now has about 6,000 people, and we have experienced the Lord's presence and faithfulness through many seasons, some really happy and some really hard.



L-R: Pastors Pete (MDiv '97) and David at Hope Church's 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary in 2020.

**What do you love about your work?**

Preaching and teaching scripture and our life in Christ.

**What are the particular joys and biggest challenges of planting a church in your context?**

In our view, Richmond had many good churches, but we felt strongly that there was room and a need for a fresh expression of the church that was warmly relational, committed to helping people come to Christ, and solidly biblical. In our setting, we were not aware of any church like the one we dreamed about. Change doesn't come easily in Richmond, all the more so back in 1997. So, the challenges were the weekly effort to keep seeking to reach people while we were meeting in a school. It was 11 years after our start that we were able to move into the first building that was our own. For a host of complex reasons related to the construction of our first building, we were faced with some very difficult financial challenges. The stress was enormous, and the perseverance and endurance required was huge.

In the 25 years we've been at it, we have seen hundreds of people come to faith in Christ. We have seen many others energized and encouraged in their faith and growing in their joy and desire for God. We have seen God work in ways that are remarkable to us, in so many different ways and places. We have seen many people develop a vibrant vision for the church that is alive, winsome, engaging, and devoted to honoring the Lord. Behind the scenes, Pete Bowell and I have been committed to our close partnership and friendship in Christ. The fact that we are still working together and growing in our relationship with each other and the Lord is a gift and a joy to us.

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

Gordon-Conwell's emphasis on core orthodoxies and biblical authority set a foundation for my ministry. The seminary helped shape my vision for the church by teaching about the richness of the church's past while also encouraging a commitment to the importance of the church in our day. The way Gordon-Conwell taught me about different views on a host of matters gave me a sharpened capacity for reasoning and understanding. Having completed my MDiv at two seminaries, I was able to compare my experiences at both. Gordon-Conwell taught that we should know different views and how to discern between arguments while my other experience didn't open itself to different views in the same way, which increased my appreciation for GCTS.

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

I think my answer above covers this question too. My only addition would be that the multi-denominational nature of Gordon-Conwell was very helpful—to see the larger Church and sense a camaraderie. The missions ethos at GCTS has also influenced me.

# Alumni

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## **What piece of advice would you give to young alumni who are just entering pastoral ministry or are considering church planting?**

For Church planting – a lot of cliché phrases and ideas apply: Don't try to do it alone—build a team. Be patient and persevering—it's a marathon not a sprint.

Calling is essential. It's exceptionally hard work, so being clear that God is calling you to it is very important. That sense of calling is what has kept me at it when there have been various times I wanted to throw in the towel.

## **Do you have any publications, links, or resources to share?**

- Books Authored: [Start Here – Beginning a Relationship with God](#) and [The Way](#)
- Learn more about [Hope Church](#) and listen to their recent [sermons](#) and [podcasts](#).