

Alumni Spotlight: Erin Crider (MDiv '15)



Current Title: Ecclesiology and Church Planting Researcher

Favorite Professors: So many were wonderful, but Donna Petter and Joel Harlow went the extra mile as encouraging mentors.

Favorite Classes: I've most frequently quoted wisdom from Dr. Cooper's class on Managing Conflict and Dr. Singleton's Readiness for Ministry Seminar.

Favorite Memory: I was so blessed by lunch conversations with other students and professors; Burrito Gallery stands out in my mind. I still smile when I remember the elaborately decorated

preschool room that was our main classroom when I began studying at GCTS-Jacksonville.

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

After Gordon-Conwell, I went on to graduate theology studies at Oxford. I initially focused on New Testament studies, but then God shifted my focus to practical theology, specifically the theology at work in church planting movements. I'm now completing a PhD in that subject through the University of Aberdeen. While working on the PhD, I've served as an adjunct instructor at Gordon-Conwell's Jacksonville campus.

What do you love about your work?

I love seeing God's hand at work in my studies. He guided and directed me to this research, which is surprisingly neglected by academics. I love seeing how life-giving theological reflection can be, especially for church planting pastors and congregations.

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

The biggest joy of being involved in church planting is watching Christians recognize that mission includes all of us, in every church, not just trained specialists or churches in faraway locations. It's incredible to watch the Spirit weave together a new congregation of people who share a calling to make the gospel known in their communities. I'm often inspired by the creativity and enthusiasm of planted congregations. The biggest challenge with planting churches in the US is that our ruggedly individualistic culture can make the idea of a worshipping community, i.e., church, seem downright countercultural. It's becoming far too easy to confuse church with more consumeristic, feel-good "entertainment" and miss the richness of God's work in congregations.

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

I began my studies after years of being involved in a thriving planted church, where I served as an active volunteer in a range of ministries. Gordon-Conwell gave me much needed space to reflect on what I'd been doing and appreciate fresh dimensions of the gospel. I never imagined that my studies would lead anywhere beyond more informed volunteer ministry. Several professors and fellow students, though, helped me to see that God was bringing a new calling to my life. Professors helped me find opportunities to seriously explore that calling, including TA assignments and summer research seminars at Oxford.



In Dr. Isaac's class on Bonhoeffer, I remember being particularly struck by how he described church itself. Bonhoeffer was wrestling with what it meant to be the church in a complex, modern world. In Oxford, I began exploring how Bonhoeffer's theology of church might speak into the ministries of US church planting movements. As a result, I met Mike Moynagh, a leader in a UK church planting movement, Fresh Expressions. Mike challenged me to ask questions that remain at the heart of my studies, including: What exactly do we understand ourselves to be planting? And how is planting changing our understandings of church and mission? I also met the late Michael Green, a passionate evangelist and gifted New Testament scholar. It was inspiring to watch how he combined scholarship with an infectious love of the gospel.

When my studies in Oxford concluded, I considered a range of next steps, including church-based ministries and student missions in Europe. The path that God was clearly blessing, though, was PhD study at Aberdeen. At Aberdeen, I've met gifted theologians, pastors, and missionaries who are also wrestling with what it means to be the church in complex, modern cultures. Shortly after I began my PhD, I was offered my first adjunct teaching post at Gordon-Conwell, whose commitment to balancing rigorous scholarship and gospel-centered ministry resonates well with my current research and evolving calling.

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

The training in Biblical languages that I received at Gordon-Conwell has proven vitally important, equipping me to reflect more precisely on the theology and early history of the church. I also appreciated the wide range of confessional traditions represented at Gordon-Conwell. It's so important to see beyond the local congregation where we serve and appreciate the rich fellowship of Christians around the world and across history, who together are the Church.

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

You're not alone! We're all called to be part of the church, which is meant to minister to all of us, including the pastor. We often need the prayers and honest fellowship of other Christians to glimpse the Spirit's hand, which tends to work more slowly and creatively than we imagine. The body of Christ together has more insight into God's work and mission than any one person or congregation can see.

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

Learn more about [Erin's current research](#), and view [Writing Spiritual Autobiography: Discerning God in Your Personal Story](#), a short, practical guide Erin wrote to help Christians recognize and celebrate God's ongoing ministry in real, human lives.