

Alumni Spotlight: David Stroud (MDiv '96)



Current Title & Military Branch: Captain, U.S. Navy

Family: Spouse: Jamie, Children: Tressa, Lucas, and Katie

Favorite professors: Dr. Doug Stuart and Dr. Gary Pratico

Favorite class: Christ in the Old Testament with Dr. Hugenburger

Favorite memory: All the amazing adventures and theological discussions while working on the grounds crew with a great group of Christian men and our Old New Englander boss.

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

I worked as an Associate Pastor at Christ Church in Redford, MI right after graduation in 1996 and went on active duty in the Navy in June 1998. I have been on active duty ever since. In that time, I have had ten different assignments: six with the Navy, two with the Coast Guard, and two with the Marine Corps. I am currently the Region Chaplain for Naval District Washington in Washington, DC. I supervise eight chaplains and three enlisted Religious Program Specialists at eight installations, and I oversee the Navy's funeral mission at Arlington National Cemetery.

What do you love about your work as a military chaplain?

I love serving alongside my congregation. I am with them in their work every day. I have served on shore installations, ships at sea, and in the desert of Afghanistan, and in each place, I was right there with my "flock." This is something that civilian clergy will, most likely, never experience, and it is great. It gives you instant credibility when you are living each day out right next to your people, closely sharing many of the same struggles, joys, and sorrows. It also places you in direct, daily contact with people of other faiths, or no faith at all. It allows you to be an ambassador for Christ to those who may not encounter one anywhere else. You get to do some cool stuff too. I have flown in an F-18 and an F-14. I have been on surface ships and submarines at sea. I have been in the field with Marines. It is truly an adventure, and you don't have to raise support.

What are the particular challenges of serving as a military chaplain in general and/or in your specific context?

The frequent moving is challenging. This is even more significant for family members. You must uproot your life every few years and move to a new location. That can be

rough, especially on a spouse and children. From a ministry perspective, you don't get to see long term or generational growth. My father was a pastor at the same church for thirty-six years. He ministered to generations, and I think that would be rewarding. My "congregation" and I move every few years, so you only get about three years together at the most. However, you minister with them every day and through some very challenging circumstances. The "sacrifices" allow you to participate in some significant moments where the gospel and the love of Christ can really come to light for people. That makes it very worthwhile. Now that I am more senior, my ministry is filled with much more administration. I spend more time preparing budgets to enable others to minister than I do preparing sermons. That is a challenge in itself, but I do get satisfaction from seeing the successful ministry of those I enable.

How has God woven together your Gordon-Conwell education with other life events to bring you to where you are now? How did you come to be doing your current work?

My undergraduate degree was studying the Soviet Union, which disappeared my senior year. I could not find a job after graduation and went to seminary basically for something to do and to find some direction. I was encouraged to consider the Navy's Chaplain Candidate Program by a family friend prior to my arrival at GCTS. He said, if nothing else it will be the best summer job you ever had. He was right, and from the moment I got to experience the ministry of a chaplain, I knew it was what God had called me to do. Learning that early on allowed me to focus my education at Gordon-Conwell to prepare for this great ministry. I get to represent God to great Americans who are trying to serve their country while navigating the challenges of life. I have never regretted the decision to be an active-duty chaplain.

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

I feel that Gordon-Conwell equipped me very well to handle all that I have been asked to do as a chaplain. From day one in the Navy, I felt I had the skills I needed to minister to the people in my care, whether through preaching, teaching, counseling, or whatever was else was necessary. I think Gordon-Conwell had a lot to do with that. I have always been grateful that God led me to Gordon-Conwell for my training. They taught me to fish, and I have been feeding others ever since.

What piece of advice would you give to young alumni who are considering serving as a military chaplain?

Do it, and join the Navy! The diversity of your ministry opportunities in the Navy is, in my opinion, greater than the other services. Navy chaplains serve the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard. Every assignment is very different with unique challenges and rewards.

Alumni

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More generally for all services, make sure your family is on board. There are some great opportunities for families to go places and do things that their civilian counterparts would never experience, but the moving around and the family separation during deployments takes a toll. If you feel God's call and are up for an adventure, I would say to give it a try. You only have to commit initially for three years and, I think, you'll want to stay longer. For those still in seminary, I absolutely recommend the Chaplain Candidate Program. You can try out the military while you are still a student without any future commitment. As my friend said, if nothing else, it will be the best summer job you ever had. And there is a good chance that you, like me, will want to continue in this ministry as a career.