

Alumni Spotlight: Rob Belton (MDiv '09, ThM '18)



Current Title & Military Branch: Reverend, US Army Chaplain

Family: Married to Meredith, Children: Kendra, Jude, Danae, and Amara

Favorite professors: Dr. Colin Nicholl, Dr. Robert Coleman

Favorite class: Exegesis of the Thessalonian Epistles

Favorite memory: Drinking deeply from God's Word under the leadership of faithful, passionate professors

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

I pastored a church in Sanford, Maine from 2009-2011. Simultaneously, I served as a chaplain in the Army National Guard. I came onto active duty as a full-time Army chaplain in 2011. Since that time, I've deployed to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Jordan. I entered the Anglican tradition in 2013 and continue to live out my priestly calling as an Army chaplain. I've served in direct ministry as a battalion chaplain, supervised Unit Ministry Teams as a brigade chaplain, and taught at the US Army Chaplain Center and School. I currently serve at Fort Liberty, North Carolina (our third time here).

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

I love being with Soldiers in places that few others can go. The opportunity to counsel, minister in Word and Sacrament, and ensure Soldiers receive the religious support they require—especially in austere locations—has a significant impact on Soldier wellness and the Army's ability to carry out its mission. It's an exciting and life-giving ministry.

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

The military is religiously pluralistic. It's incumbent upon each chaplain to faithfully administer religious rites and sacraments in accordance with our specific tradition. At the same time, we must ensure Soldiers of all religions are able to freely practice their faith. We "perform" religious support according to our faith and "provide" religious support by connecting Soldiers with the appropriate religious leader. Sometimes those leaders can be hard to locate. At other times, commanders expect chaplains to be religious generalists, which we are not. It can get tricky at times. But it's critical that we as chaplains understand how to operate faithfully within this context.

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

God has been so gracious in the way He's led our family. The spiritual and theological formation we received at Gordon-Conwell equipped us for faithful ministry both in the local church and the military. Classes in counseling, theology, exegesis, and preaching helped prepare me for pastoral ministry all over the United States and in countries across the Middle East and Southwest Asia.

By God's grace, our family had the opportunity to return to Gordon-Conwell in 2017-2018 for the ThM program in my preparation for a teaching position at the Army Chaplain School. That year was a wonderful time of reconnecting as a family, catching up with old friends and making new ones, studying intently, and further preparing not only for my next Army position, but for continued pastoral ministry for the rest of my life.



Belton speaks at an event celebrating his promotion to Lieutenant Colonel.

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

The firm biblical and theological foundation we received at Gordon-Conwell provided us a strong basis in orthodox, evangelical Christianity that launched us into the pastorate and chaplaincy. It remained at the heart of our movement into the Anglican tradition, which we now call home.

We're much closer to the end of our time in the Army chaplaincy now than when we began. Regardless of how long I stay in uniform, God's overarching call remains the same: to serve our Triune God as a priest in His Church, faithfully proclaiming the Gospel and ministering in Word and Sacrament. I have the joy and privilege of carrying out that calling now within the Army, and, Lord willing, will continue to carry out that calling in the local church in the next season of life. Gordon-Conwell was, and continues to be, pivotal to Christ's work in and through us. Thanks be to God!

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

Take your time; gain experience. Build deep friendships with Christians who will pray for you, encourage you, and hold you accountable. Love and serve God through the local church. Learn from the godly men and women who came before us throughout the history of the Church. Grow in your pastoral calling, and allow it to drive your specific ministry as a chaplain. Come into the military fit and flexible, ready for adventure and possibly danger. You're launching into an incredible mission and bringing the hope of Christ to brave men and women serving as Warriors during a very uncertain time on the global stage.