

Alumni Spotlight: Virginia Emery (MDiv '05)



Current Title & Military Branch: Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel), Chief of Religious Support, United States Army Reserve Command, Headquarters

Favorite professors: Dr. Sean McDonough, Dr. Timothy Tennant

Favorite class: Exegesis of Revelation

Favorite memory: I loved living in Retreat House with many other women pursuing their call to the ministry. We also threw the best parties!

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

After graduation I became a Chaplain in the United States Army Reserve. I deployed to Iraq from 2007–2008. Upon return, I served as an associate pastor at the Congregational Church of Topsfield, Massachusetts, while continuing to serve as a Reserve Chaplain. In 2010, I began full time work supporting the Army Reserve, becoming an Active Guard and Reserve (AGR) Chaplain in 2011. My current position is as the Chief of Religious Support, US Army Reserve Command.

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

I provide religious support for the men and women of the Army Reserve. We say the members of the Army Reserve are “Twice the Citizen.” I am amazed at the dedication of our soldiers who work and go to school in the civilian world and yet pick up the challenge to serve our nation as military members. I am so honored to support them.

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

As a member of the Active Guard and Reserve Program, much like Active Duty Chaplains, we move every three years or so. While that has allowed me to live in many beautiful parts of the country, moving can be difficult, and I often live far from my family. Chaplains also walk with soldiers through some of the most difficult times, ranging from combat to times of illness or injury or challenging personal situations. We represent the Divine Presence in some very dark places.



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?

Throughout my time at Gordon-Conwell I struggled with discerning God's call on my life. Part of the struggle came from my love of my classes! After one of Dr. McDonough's exegesis classes I would dream of life as an academic. After Dr. Swetland's class I prayed to go into pastoral ministry. After Dr. Tennent's missions' class I considered foreign missions work. However, it was in Hebrew class (one of my weakest subjects!), I believe the Lord spoke to me through Dr. Pratico. I don't remember the context, but he said, "you may be familiar with the King James expression "Lord of Hosts," but a modern translation would be "Lord of Armies." It was in that moment the Lord clarified my sense of purpose and calling—to serve the Lord of Armies as an Army Chaplain. Truly it is the Lord's purpose that prevails!



I've been privileged to have a wide variety of assignments in my years as a full time Reserve Chaplain. The Army Reserve tells me where they need me to serve, and I go. Currently, I work at Fort Liberty (formerly Fort Bragg), NC. My focus has been launching the Building Strong and Ready Teams initiative for the Army Reserve, by empowering and supporting over 500 Army Reserve Chaplains and Religious Affairs Specialists as they build the spiritual resiliency and wellness of our Soldiers.

What has been Gordon-Conwell's biggest impact/influence on the work you do now or the way you do your work?

The biggest influence of Gordon-Conwell came through my professors. They all emphasized and modeled the ideal that our academic pursuits, our talents, and ability to work are in service to the calling of the Lord Jesus Christ. We honor the Lord through our professionalism and preparation; it is our spiritual service. I do a lot of things that may not appear on the surface as "ministry." However, I attempt to do it all as "unto the Lord." Every email, every phone call, every presentation I develop or school I attend, I try to undertake with the same spiritual attention as a sermon I deliver.

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

Be careful to pray and discern this very particular calling. You will do the traditional ministerial duties such as preaching and performing rites and ordinances. However, you will also be ensuring the free exercise of religion for soldiers of all religions (and no religion), supporting them as they navigate the rigors of military life. Also, much of the

Alumni

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Army moves on paperwork, and training; it is important to recognize this as part of the Call. Finally, getting and staying physically fit in a healthy way will stand you in good stead throughout your military service.

Do you have any publications or links to share?

Learn more about the [Army Reserve](#) and becoming an [Army Chaplain](#).