

Alumni Spotlight: Bonnie Gatchell (MDiv '09, ThM '14)



Current Title: Executive Director of Route One Ministry

Favorite professors: Dr. Gordon Isaac and Dr. Carol Kaminski

Favorite class: Exegesis of Genesis

Favorite memory: Traveling to Israel to study abroad with my roommate. Late nights in Lamont Hall, a group of us ladies would find ourselves sitting on the floor chatting, laughing, and sharing food with one another.

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

When I first left Gordon-Conwell in 2009 with my MDiv, I worked as a youth pastor and after-school director for a local church. I enjoyed my work and the community we were reaching, but I also knew that God was calling me to work outside the church. I started my ThM in 2010 and contemplated where God was leading me. Through a conversation at the North Beverly Starbucks, a question was asked, "How do we reach sexually exploited and trafficked women in the area?" The reply was, "To make baskets and take them to women working in strip clubs on Christmas Eve." My heart leaped at this idea, and the next day I called a strip club within walking distance from the church I was attending. The manager thought it was odd but harmless for us to bring baskets on Christmas Eve; there would be twenty-five women working in the strip club that night. As a church, we made twenty-five baskets filled with more than a dozen fun, cute, and girly items like lip gloss, earrings, and journals. We brought the baskets to the strip club and hand-delivered them to the women working that day. The women greeted us with tears; they wanted hugs, and one commented, "Who are you to remember strippers?"

From that one event, I knew an entire people group was not being reached with the gospel. From there, Route One's co-founder, Laurel Ann Copp, did research to find ways to connect with women who work in the clubs on a regular basis. We discovered a woman in Kentucky taking hot, homemade meals to women in strip clubs. I drove to Kentucky to shadow her and met my first stripper. She was 62 years old and still working in the strip club. It was in her strip club dressing room that I knew God was calling me to reach and serve sexually exploited women. From that one event, we launched an outreach effort from our local church.



Route One Ministry started as a one-time event for one strip club in Peabody, MA. Now, we are a multi-city, independent 501(c)3 serving Boston, Revere, Worcester, and Springfield, reaching 70 women a week. Our outreach teams continue to go into strip clubs, build trusting relationships with the women working there, and connect them to the resources they need to exit the sex industry for good. As an ordained minister with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, I use my ordination, serving sexually exploited women, and educating other pastors on the relationship between trafficking, trauma, and abuse in the United States.

What do you love about your work?

I love repeatedly seeing the connection between Jesus and his vulnerability as a human and the women we serve. I love when a woman decides to leave the strips and find work elsewhere. I love when a woman in the church finally feels free enough to share her story of past abuse, and to share it for the first time with me.

What are the particular challenges of non-profit work in general and/or in your specific context?

We face two particular challenges: funding and educating. The primary reason a woman leaves the strip clubs is when one trusting person encourages her to a different way of living. Most of the women who work in the strip clubs have suffered significant abuse from a very young age and they lack community. At Route One, our well-trained staff, and volunteers strive to be the community and support to help women exit the sex industry. This, however, requires funding. The second challenge is helping people, in general and in the church, understand the connection between exploitation, trafficking, and the women who work in the clubs. The more people are aware, the more equipped we are as the church to provide aid to those who suffer abuse and exploitation.

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 education at Gordon-Conwell is essential to my current work, both as an ordained minister and as the executive director of Route One. First, as an ordained minister within the EPC, Gordon-Conwell provided me with the tools needed to step into ordination. Our biblical translations and exegesis classes continue to allow me to create and preach Christ-centered, biblically-exegeted sermons as well as other pastoral disciplines. Secondly, my time at Gordon-Conwell prepared me to lead an anti-trafficking non-profit through the rigorous development of character, growth in sound theology, and transformative understanding of calling. Without a sound theology or other resources developed at Gordon-Conwell, I may have been persuaded to leave my call and work. The foundation built during my time at Gordon-Conwell has been essential for when I face more losses than wins.

What piece of advice would you give to young alumni who are considering working in the non-profit sector?

Surround yourself with at least 3 to 5 people who will be honest with you. These should not be 'yes' women and men, but people who see you, love you, love Jesus, and will love you enough to be honest. Set aside 3 months' worth of savings before you launch into the non-profit world. When things get hard, lean into your calling. Take regular breaks. Find a solid therapist.

Do you have any publications or links to share?

Learn about [Loved by Route One](#) and hear [Tanyka's Story: Route One Impact](#).