

## Alumni Spotlight: Doug Pratt (MDiv '79)



**Current title:** Pastor Emeritus, First Presbyterian Church, Bonita Springs, Florida

**Family:** Wife: Jeanne (married 49 years)

**Favorite professors:** Dr. Gwyn Walters & Dr. Doug Stuart

**Favorite class:** J-Term intensive Pastoral Ministry with Gordon MacDonald

**Favorite memory:** Sitting around the cafeteria with students and faculty, fine-tuning my theology (by “iron sharpening iron”) and discussing how to live a life of discipleship and faithful service to the Lord.

### **Would you tell us about the church you most recently served?**

After 19 years as Senior Pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Bonita Springs, I was able to accomplish the rare process of an orderly succession (serving as Co-Pastor with my successor for the final year). First Church has about 2,600 members, with a big seasonal variation between summer and winter. For ten years, we have been involved with the seminary in providing on-site mentoring opportunities for students during January.

### **How did God weave together your Gordon-Conwell education and other life events throughout your ministry career to bring you eventually to your ministry at Bonita Springs?**

The seminary not only taught me the Bible, it taught me how to *study* the Bible for myself; it created in me a desire to be a life-long learner. I also experienced a supportive Christian community while at Gordon-Conwell, which made my time there not only intellectually rewarding but spiritually uplifting as well. My first ministry position as an associate pastor was with a Gordon-Conwell graduate as my boss and mentor, which was a great way to start. Following my 11 years in a staff role in Wichita, Kansas, I served for 14 years as Senior Pastor of a church in suburban Pittsburgh, and for the past two decades have been here in southwest Florida—also as Senior Pastor.

### **What did you love about ministry work at larger churches?**

All sizes of churches are precious to the Lord, but larger churches have more capacity to make a great impact for the Kingdom. I have personally attempted to use the resources available to me to especially focus on missions, mentoring of future leaders, and ministry to men.

### **What are the particular challenges of serving in a large church in general, and in your specific context?**

When I was in seminary, I never envisioned how important it would be to develop my skills in management and leadership. Large churches are complex and require a lot of different competencies. The wisdom of Jim Collins in his book, *Good to Great*, has been especially helpful to me.

**How has your Gordon-Conwell education served you in ministry?**

I use the insights and skills I gained at Gordon-Conwell every day. I am so thankful for the full breadth of the Master of Divinity program. I also earned a Doctor of Ministry about ten years after my Master's, which was a great complement to my ministry

**What are your plans now that you have retired?**

I'm blessed to have been named by our board as Pastor Emeritus, and continue by their grace to have an office at the church. I am serving our local body of churches, the Presbytery, in various ways, but am also directing my efforts towards our church's online ministry. We have developed a great deal of original Christian programming (both video and audio podcasts) for our congregation. We call it our "Life Academy". It is a great way to reach people through technology, including our "snowbirds" who are away from us in the summer months. If a particular program speaks to them, they can easily share the link with family and friends.

**What piece of advice would you give to young alumni who are beginning in ministry?**

Don't try to do it alone. We need friends and colleagues and family. We also need mentors—including people who are older and more mature than we are, and also "peer mentors" who are traveling at a similar stage of ministry to us. If you can begin ministry on the staff of a healthy church, that is ideal. If not, intentionally build friendships with other pastors, in your community, or remotely.

**Do you have any publications or links you'd like to share?**

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