Alumni
GORDON CONWELL

Alumni Spotlight: Rachel Toone (MDiv ’17)

Current title: Dean of Spiritual Formation at Montreat College

Family: Fiancée: Stephen Pies

Favorite professor: Dr. Jim Singleton & Dr. Sean McDonough

Favorite class: Exegesis of Revelation

A favorite memory: Jumping off the roof of Retreat House during the snow-pocalypse.

Would you tell us about your role there at Montreat? What all does it entail?

Officially, I provide leadership for all of the college’s spiritual formation initiatives. This includes the chapel and convocation programs, small groups, Alpha, service/mission opportunities, and pastoral care for staff and students. I also preach frequently and serve as an adjunct faculty member in the Bible and Theology department. Unofficially, I’m the glorified spiritual mom of campus, which means I also spend a fair amount of time competing in dorm hot sauce competitions and teaching kids how to change a tire.

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

While studying at Gordon-Conwell I bartended at a local Italian jazz bar, which cultivated my heart for lost, postmodern people in a profound way. When I finished up at Gordon-Conwell, I thought I was heading to the international mission field. Long story short, I ended up serving on the mission field of a small, open-enrollment, Christian college in Appalachia full of agnostic students instead. I would never have expected the combination of my theological education at Gordon-Conwell and evangelistic practice as a bartender to be my preparation for ministry in higher education. Yet here I am, seven years later.

What do you love about the work you do?

So much, but I think my absolute favorite is the unique opportunity I have to pastor non-Christian college students. I cherish those moments when kids without any kind of faith background encounter Scripture for the first time and are shocked by how compelling Jesus really is. That moment when they shift from “this Jesus stuff is ridiculous” to “maybe, just maybe…”

What are the particular challenges in your role of ministering to and supporting the faith development of the students and campus community there at Montreat?

As anyone in ministry today knows, the most significant spiritually formative influence in a young adult's life is their iPhone. The process of counter-formation against the pull of social media, digital distraction, and isolation is a long game, and it can't be done quickly or efficiently. Discipleship at this point in my ministry happens one conversation and relationship at a time, as we seek to invite students into real, abundant life with Jesus and his people. It's slow work, and I am a deeply impatient person.

Also, our community was devastated by Hurricane Helene last fall, resulting in a host of new challenges. We have experienced to a whole new depth what it means to trust God as we grieve and rebuild, one day at a time.

How has your Gordon-Conwell education served you in this role?

During my time at Gordon-Conwell, I experienced signification formation in the intellectual, communal, and pastoral aspects of my life that continue to impact my day-to-day ministry. Intellectually, I learned to love God more with my mind through careful study, both of Scripture and the wisdom and folly of Church history. The community of Gordon-Conwell deepened my affection for the global Church and gave me relationships I still cherish to this day. And pastorally, I wouldn't trade my pastoral experience with all those angsty, atheistic New Englanders for the world.

Do you have any publications or links to share?

- "Redeeming the City: A Study of Book III of Chrysostom's *Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life*." *Cahiers de Biblia Patristica* 19 (2019): 59-92.
- "The Old Testament Highlight Reel Series: Dysfunctional People and Divine Promises." How to Study the Bible (podcast). October-December 2023.
- "Spiritual Rhythms Series." How to Study the Bible (podcast). June-July 2023.
- "The Greatest Sermon Ever Series." How to Study the Bible (podcast).