

Meet Carter Conlon

What leads a former Canadian “Mountie” to uproot family and plunk himself smack in the middle of Manhattan? Meet Carter Conlon whose Spirit-led path made possible the extraordinary outreach during 9/11 and the days thereafter—and whose heart’s passion continues to be for the Christian’s focus on prayer—and the “readiness” that comes when we give our heart fully to that spiritual discipline.



You had a fairly unusual “preface” to your life as a pastor. Tell us about what you did professionally before entering the pastorate.

Before I entered the pastorate, I earned an undergraduate degree in Law and Sociology from Carleton University, in Canada. Following this, I worked as a police officer for the city of Ottawa. In that twelve year period, I worked in uniform patrol, youth squad, crime prevention, in-service training and finally finishing in criminal investigation division, intelligence section. My wife Teresa and I also ran a small sheep ranch east of Ottawa.

Undoubtedly there was learning from both farming and law enforcement that have been helpful as you moved into a pastoral role. What would you name in that regard?

I credit these past life experiences with both an understanding of the struggles of average persons as well the ability to understand the peril of unchecked sin in society as well as the individual. As a pastor I do sincerely thank God for not losing touch with where people live, what they experience and how they think.

You’ve now led the iconic Times Square Church for a decade. What was your “biggest learning” as you moved from Canada to New York City to lead a congregation?

Moving to New York City from rural Canada was about the same as Neil Armstrong landing on the moon! It was an incredible learning curve but with prayer, guidance and literally throwing myself in with the people all has seemingly turned out well. For several years, as a police officer, I was involved in cross-cultural sensitivity training, as an instructor. It involved hour upon hour of study about and interaction with many ethnic groups. I can see today how the Lord was preparing me to lead a congregation of over 100 nationalities.

You followed in the footsteps of a rather “larger than life” Christian leader—David Wilkerson. How did that impact your leading at TSC?

David Wilkerson and I were very similar in preaching style yet socially very different people. I loved and appreciated him as a friend, yet was able to retain my own identity without feeling intimidated by his reputation. He was indeed the most unique person I have possibly ever known. I benefited greatly from his mentorship, especially in the area of learning to distinctly hear the voice of God.

Obviously, you were smack in the middle of Manhattan when all eyes turned that direction on 9/11/01. How did TSC navigate that day—and the days of grief and impact that followed?

The whole process of navigating 9/11 is in the half-hour radio special that was just created for the anniversary of that event.

What energizes you the most as you pastor from, literally, what most of us would consider to be the heart of the largest city in the country?

I am motivated by the desire to see a spiritual awakening in New York City as well as throughout this country. To this extent we are given to much prayer and outreach to other churches in our immediate area. (See tsnyc.org and feednewyork.org).

You have a deep passion to see God’s people engaged in a significant prayer life. What was the catalyst for that in your own life?

I have always known that prayer is the key to all that Jesus is willing to do. A simple study of the scriptures leave that without argument. I have personally known some incredible and miraculous moments which have come from God’s whispers to my heart during times of prayer. The Christian life is meant to be a miraculous life. The moment God’s own people truly understand that, we will be on the way to a genuine awakening. I believe that God is willing to show His mercy to us once again, in spite of how far we have gotten away from truth as a society. I love to pray and I love to pray with people of faith.

Though you pastor a diverse congregation, you also travel the globe to minister. What do you wish Americans better understood about Christianity in other parts of the world?

I truly wish that America would return to biblical Christianity. Throughout the world I have found that people share essentially the same problems and struggles that we do here. Once you get past the ‘romanticizing’ thought of Christianity in other parts of the world somehow being more fervent and pure, we see that all mankind share common struggles. I have known many influential church leaders who, behind the scenes, have shared the difficulties being faced by their own church movements. The saddest part of it all, however, is seeing the false concepts of Christian Truth which portions of the American church have exported to many struggling and poor nations.

With as full a schedule as you have, what do you do to “recharge your batteries”?

I recharge my batteries by making it a personal goal to stay spiritually alive, in spite of and in addition to the ministry entrusted to me. Someday all ministry in my life will be over and who Christ really is to and in me will come to the fore. As Paul did, I want to “finish well...and having done all, to stand.”

If we could take a look at your desk, what new reading is awaiting you?

I have just finished the biography of Frederick Douglass and am on to Sojourner Truth and Samuel Morris in the next two weeks.

You are married to Teresa—how do you maintain a strong marriage while serving a congregation together of over 8000 people?

Teresa and I simply love each other and we both love Jesus Christ. He is first and out of that relationship our love has grown, and the ministry He entrusts to our hands prospers. We have always been the best of friends and that continues today. It is hopeless for us to try and have our devotional time in the same room for we always end up talking!

You’re also a dad—and grandfather! What would you like your grandchildren to say was the biggest legacy of your life into theirs?

I would simply like my grandchildren to remember me as a man of God...especially one worth following after.