



REDEEMER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

An Evangelical Presbyterian Church

BENJAMIN D. GIFFONE, PHD, PASTOR

August 8, 2024

Dear Redeemer Church Family,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! I am honored to have been invited by your Session to serve as your Transitional Pastor. I have enjoyed my conversations with many of you during my visits to fill the pulpit since January. But I look forward to getting to know each of you even better in the weeks and months ahead.

I typically go by 'Benj,' so that or 'Pastor Benj' is fine. I have been married to Corrie, a teacher, for 17 years. We have two children: Daniel (14) and Elizabeth (11). We have lived in Grove City since 2022. We served as missionaries in Lithuania from 2014 to 2022, based in Eastern PA and NJ prior to that. At some point, I hope to share our story with you in more detail. But for now, I want to talk about some things that motivate me as a pastor, which I hope will resonate with you as a congregation.

Studying God's Word. I was raised in an evangelical Christian home, where my mom especially taught us the Bible. My love for studying Scripture blossomed at Cairn University, where I majored rather unexpectedly in biblical studies (chemical engineering was my initial inclination). I had the privilege of going on for seminary and graduate studies in Old Testament, and have now served as a professor at different universities and seminaries around the world. I continue to believe that God's Word is not solely for pastors or scholars, but for every man, woman and child. So I love to see every person grow in their knowledge of God's Word, which tells us who God is, what He has done, who we are, and what is our purpose. The goal of my teaching, preaching and writing is playing my small part toward the "planned obsolescence" of teaching that is envisioned in Jeremiah 31:34: "And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Worship. Music has been an important part of my Christian life since a young age, and continues to be important for my family (we all play various instruments and sing). As I embraced the Reformed expression of the Christian faith in young adulthood, I came to appreciate the depth of Reformed theology and how it is expressed in our forms of worship (not just music, but preaching, liturgy, and sacraments). I have been blessed to have worshipped with many different musical and liturgical styles, in many different types of churches and different denominations, in different countries. I have spent seasons worshipping in communities that are Baptist, Messianic, Wesleyan/Holiness, Presbyterian (PCA, ECO and EPC), Mennonite Brethren, and Anglican. I appreciate that much is beautiful and true about many of the ways our brothers and sisters in other traditions and other nations worship, even as I love and celebrate the Reformed expressions of worship as being the most vibrant and faithful to

Scripture. One of the reasons I was drawn to Redeemer was your congregation's commitment to Reformed worship, in a time when some confessional churches are softening or even abandoning our rich heritage.

Unity. I've observed many conflicts and disagreements between Christians, in churches and in other organizations. While some of these are over substantive matters of faith and holiness, most have been over less significant matters. On the other hand, I have also many good Christian friends across traditions who exemplify what it means to have theological convictions while maintaining the unity of the overall body of Christ.

Global Church. I have been blessed to observe God's work in the church in different parts of the world. Christ has made us one body, and we need one another. Alongside serving as your pastor, I will continue to serve as part-time graduate professor for a seminary in South Asia, where I've taught since 2022 (mainly remotely, with occasional visits). I hope that this work will not only benefit my students and the churches in South Asia, but serve as a bridge for more equal partnerships between U.S. churches like Redeemer and our brothers and sisters elsewhere. We can learn from their ways of worshipping, their joys, issues and concerns, and their love for Christ. As Christendom recedes in the West, we will need missionaries from places where the church is growing (like South Asia, China, and sub-Saharan Africa), to come here and help us rediscover and strengthen our witness to Christ in post-Christendom.

Hard Questions and Doubts. Speaking of post-Christendom, we all encounter many people in our everyday lives—including in our churches—who doubt whether Christ is the answer to life's most important and difficult questions. Some of these people have fallen away from faith or become "de-churched." I have such people in my own family and circle of close friends, so I have a soft spot in my heart for those who wrestle with difficult questions such as the problem of evil. We can continually be learning God's Word and equipping one another to love and serve these dear people with truth and love. In the words of Jude: "Have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire ..." (Jude 22b–23a)

Evangelism and the Glory of God. We serve a great God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in loyalty-love. His will is that none should perish but that people of all nations should come to put their hope in Him (Matt 12:21). We press on together, each playing our small part, so that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14).

I look forward to working with you, your Session, and the Church Development Committee of the Presbytery to strengthen your congregation, by God's grace.

In Christ,

Pastor Benj