



Geneva
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Loving God • Loving Others • Making Disciples



Greetings from Pastor Darren

What a joy and blessing it is to be joining the Geneva Presbyterian family as your new pastor! To the Pastor Nominating Committee and the many wonderful folks I met during my candidating weekend, thank you for such a warm and enthusiastic welcome; and to those of you I have yet to meet, I am eager for the chance to do that. I am very excited for the season ahead of us at Geneva, as we prayerfully discern together where God is leading us into the future and learn how God will continue to use this church to glorify him and to reflect Christ's light throughout the greater Laguna Woods metropolitan region. I was drawn to the love of Christ and of Scripture, the missional heart, the strong music program, the invested leadership, and the inquisitive spirit that is evident at Geneva, and I look forward to helping to foster further growth in these and other areas. Let me tell you a bit about myself, and then I'll conclude with how I am envisioning my first six-or-so months at the church.

I have been married to my beautiful wife Ashley for 13 ½ years, having met while on staff together at La Crescenta Presbyterian Church. We have two spirited children, Charlotte (or "Charlie"), who is 10, and Carter, who is 7. We also have two cats—my stepcat Fannie and Charlie's cat Chip—who do not get along well with each other, but still manage to scheme together about ways to make me miserable. We currently live in Temple City (just southeast of Pasadena), and I will be commuting from there through the rest of this school year before relocating to an area nearer to the church over the summer—you'll get to see my family a bit before then, but they will be a more regular presence after we move.

I grew up in the Los Angeles area, being born in North Hollywood and then moving to La Cañada when I was 7 (my mom still lives in that house). I played basketball and ran track in high school through my junior year, when I decided to shift my extracurricular gears, serving as Student Body President and jumping into the all-school musical (during which I inadvertently discovered a love of singing) my senior year. I was also very active in my church youth group the second half of high school, forming interests and forging relationships that would help set my vocational course toward ministry.

I went to UC Davis for undergrad, majoring in classical civilization (with most of those classes focusing on Greek and New Testament), with minors in music and English. During these years I also started singing choral music, which would grow to be a great passion, and during my junior year I was a lead in the college musical (*Cabaret*, playing Cliff Bradshaw). During my college summers I interned with the junior high group at my home church, and by the time the end of college was nigh my academic passions, work experience, and input from mentors all seemed to direct me to seminary. Upon

graduation I moved to New Jersey to begin a Master of Divinity program at Princeton Theological Seminary. During these summers I interned at La Crescenta Presbyterian Church (where, if you've been paying attention, you will remember I would eventually meet my wife). Soon before my graduation in 2004 a position opened up at LCPC, and I had enjoyed my summers there so I accepted a (non-ordainable) position there as Director of Student Ministries (junior and senior high). In 2008 Ashley was brought on as the Children's Ministry Director, and the congregation prevailed upon us to start dating in 2009. I enjoyed many parts of my youth ministry position—especially teaching Confirmation classes, helping students lead worship services (like the “Seven Last Words” Good Friday service), planning and leading road trips, and creating unbelievably amazing games (some of which I will share with Saul).

But after six years in that role I felt a call toward academia, so I applied for PhD programs, and in 2010 I moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan to begin a doctoral program in historical theology, studying under Richard Muller. I was in residence there for two years for my coursework (a long stretch of long distance relating with Ashley), and when we got married the summer of 2012 we decided to settle in Pasadena so that we could be near our families. I did a lot of flying back and forth to Michigan for my battery of comprehensive exams in 2013, and then started work on my dissertation, which was three years of researching and writing at the Huntington Library, the Fuller Seminary Library, and various fine coffee shops in the Los Angeles area. The dissertation, entitled *Early Stuart Polemical Hermeneutics*, focused on a 1611 Romans commentary by the preacher and controversialist Andrew Willet, who was famous for his earlier anti-Catholic treatise *Synopsis Papismi*. My main thesis was that his move toward biblical commentary represented not a turn away from anti-Catholic polemics, but rather a shift in genre, and I demonstrate how the polemical lens focuses his presentation of Paul's teachings in the epistle. A book version of the dissertation (for which I regrettably retained the same un-catchy title) was published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in 2017. It is a perfect choice for book clubs, and makes a wonderful Christmas present. I applied for various academic positions during the year after getting my PhD, while providing regular pulpit supply at Panorama Presbyterian Church, in Panorama City, CA, which was searching for a new pastor. I was able (through the advocacy of a professor friend and mentor) to get a foot in the door at Fuller Seminary as an adjunct professor, but all other academic doors seemed to slam shut during that year—and Panorama was not finding candidates they were happy with—so I eventually became their designated pastor in 2017 (when I was finally ordained—13 years after graduating with my MDiv!). I initially expected this to be about a 2-year commitment while I sought out a tenure-track professor position, but it turned out to be a 7 ½ year tenure there, ending with my overseeing the closing of the church in 2024 (I'm happy to share that journey/story, but it would be a separate article).

Over the past year plus, as I have discerned the next stage in my ministry, I have worked part time as a Parish Associate for Christian Education at a friend's church in Tarzana while doing various other part-time work, including doing research for the

Synod on the history of Presbyterians in Los Angeles (to commemorate the 170th anniversary of the founding of the first Presbyterian church in the city, in 1855). I am continuing to teach a class or two each year at Fuller (mostly Presbyterian-focused), and I have appreciated how being engaged in full-time ministry helps me to teach future pastors, and (conversely) how maintaining an occasional/part-time academic connection has helped me to always be growing in my own faith and understanding, and thinking in new ways about the practice of ministry.

I still love basketball (although I made the ill-fated choice in college to become a Sacramento Kings fan), I have become a coffee aficionado since my PhD program, and I love word games (especially Scrabble and crossword puzzles). My love for choral music has only grown over the years (Bach is probably my favorite composer overall, although the Brahms Requiem might be my favorite single work), and I love exploring God's creation (Zion National Park is my favorite place on earth). All of these hobbies bring me added joy when I get to share them with my family—whether going to basketball games with Carter, getting coffee with Charlie, sharing a piece of music with Ashley, or exploring beautiful places all together as a family.

My early months at Geneva will focus on getting to know you all through larger events and smaller gatherings, and my learning more about the spirit of the congregation. I look forward to hearing your stories, both about your broader lives and about what Geneva means to you. With our position right next to the Village (and with so many of our members residing there), I look forward to investing in that community as well, whether by leading a Scrabble group or a support group for fans of chronically hopeless sports teams, or just meeting or praying with neighbors and friends of our members. And I am excited to connect with the preschool families, and hopefully draw any of those families who don't have a church home into our church family. I am grateful for the work that Pastor Elizabeth has done to prepare the church for this new season, and my early meetings with staff, session, and deacons will build on her work as we discern the Spirit's directing together and seek to be faithful stewards of the gifts and calling that God has blessed us with.

In Christ,

Pastor Darren