

Sierra Christian Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation

General Assembly Passes Resolutions of Note

When the Disciples held their 2023 General Assembly last month in Louisville, it was both a call for the Church to strengthen its relationship to God as individuals and as a community created by shared values and worship. It was also a grand opportunity to remind us, and everyone, that the Disciples of Christ is a church of acceptance and inclusiveness. Gratefully, the opportunity was not wasted.

The General Assembly passed a handful of stirring resolutions, the most notable being:

GA-2339 COMPELLED TO WITNESS: ANSWERING THE CRY OF OUR PALESTINIAN SIBLINGS

Passing with overwhelming support, with only a modicum of dissent, this resolution calls on Israel to end its occupation of Palestinian Territories, while simultaneously condemning speech and acts of antisemitism, adding the significant monition criticizing Israel's practices and policies is not inherently antisemitic. In essence, the resolution, which only one dissenter spoke out against, serves as a reminder that the Disciples of Christ reject any theology or ideology, that would privilege or exclude any one nation, race, culture, or religion.

GA-2341 CALLING THE CHURCH TO OPPOSE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Not surprisingly, GA-2341 drew passionate dialogue. Calling on all church leaders and members to take "every possible opportunity to speak out and act boldly against Christian Nationalism, ensuring that the love of God known to us in Jesus Christ may not be distorted by this ugly and false appropriation of our faith, but proclaimed with generosity and grace to all peoples, from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth," a few hardened dissenters argued that the resolution flies in the face of the Disciples' culture of inclusivity. Christian Nationalism being the hot button topic it is, some firmly argued that the resolution is not consistent with the church's basic tenet to accept all people no matter their beliefs. Another argument against the resolution, sounding a bit desperate to anyone without waxy buildup in their ears, was that being both a Christian and a patriot, coupled with the historical fact that the Disciples had its beginning during the formation of this nation, all Disciples of Christ are, in a very real sense, Christian Nationalists.

But, as the resolution described, and as pastors and churches across the nation are noting, Christian Nationalism has very little relationship to what Jesus taught. It "promotes, with violent rhetoric and authoritarian approaches to civic life and public policy, an extremist ideology of social hierarchy, including white supremacy, antisemitism (and other forms of religious bigotry), xenophobia, persecution and scapegoating of LGBTQ+ persons, misogyny, and ableism."



Pastor Christine and a Hawaiian sunset, Charley Young Beach, Kihei, South Maui, July 17, 2023

The newsletter may have been hybernating, but not...



... the Reeds. On the left, Joy and Dick Reed flank Dick's grandson, Zach, and his bride Shelby Schweiger. Above, 9 of the 29 graduates from Joy Reed's Arapahoe High School senior class in Arapahoe, Nebraska gather for their 70th reunion. Just another summer for Reeds.



... nor the Pobanz-Hartmire-Stelter household, who on April 6-7 welcomed Leinani's first litter of Golden Retriever puppies into the world. Nine weeks later they were off to their forever homes but the delight and joy they provided remains thick in the air. From the moment of birth till the last one drove off with his new family, they changed our lives, and continue to do so.



Prayers & Celebrations

- ➡ Pastor Christine turns a brilliant 56-years-old on the 20th. Her light has never shone brighter!.
- ➡ Birthday salutations to the (now) Fresno residing Constance Cole, also born on September 20.
- ➡ And Sept. 19th birthday wishes to dear friend, Diane Wilson.
- ➡ Speaking of the Coles, moving, traveling, unpacking boxes, and figuring out where the Cincinnati Reds poster goes are reasons enough for prayers, and all manner of sincere and loud shouts of encouragement to Cliff and Connie Cole as they moved to Fresno September 1. Always in our prayers and thoughts and best wishes.
- ➡ Continued prayers and support to Pastor Casey Martinez-Tinnin and the Loomis Basin Congregational United Church of Christ. It continues to astonish us the price we sometimes have to pay for doing the right thing.
- ➡ Prayers that Norma Almeida remains pain free.
- ➡ Prayers for Janet Pecks's continued recovery.
- ➡ And that Diane Kindle upcoming procedure will work as well as the doctor's hope and believe and intend.

Some Notes Worth Noting

1. Sierra Christian Church is sponsoring a fascinating Zoom workshop every Wednesday evening in September. Moderated by Rev. Steve Kindle, it will explore how Jesus's notion of the Kingdom of God was diametrically opposed to Rome's notion of Empire. See the following page!
2. Books that Bind meets Thursday, September 21 at 6:30 pm on Zoom. We are reading, Sue Monk Kidd's novel "The Book of Longings."
3. The Men's Fellowship Breakfast is scheduled for Saturday, September 9, at 9 am, on Zoom.
4. Speaking of men, the Disciples' Men's Ministries will be holding their Fall retreat October 27-29 at Camp Arroyo in Livermore. Registrations are due by October 20. The following link provides more information: <https://ccncn.regfox.com/2023-ccncn-mens-retreat>
5. The National Benevolent Association, a general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will hold its annual SENT seminar for people feeling a call to entrepreneurial ministry. Thursdays, September 7-28, 2023, at 4 pm. This year's theme, "Changing the Narrative" will focus on storytelling. Speakers include Rev. Dr. William Barber, Rev. Dr. Mary Donovan Turner, Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, III, and Dr. Jennifer Madden. Sessions will also include pre-recorded material. For more information and to register and add the dates to your calendar go to <https://www.nbacares.org/event/2023-sent-seminar>

I shall
Gather up
All the lost souls
That wander this earth
All the ones that are alone

All the ones that are broken
All the ones that never really fitted in
I shall gather them all up
And together we shall find our home
—Athey Thompson

Jesus Versus Caesar: The Conflict of Empires Continues



The New Testament may be the most important political document ever written. It displays for all to see how Jesus' understanding of the Realm of God was diametrically opposed to Rome's notion of Empire. But unless the Empire's influence is moved from lurking in the background to front and center of the New Testament, we miss seeing what Jesus came to teach us.

This webinar will uncover Rome's presence on virtually every page and lead to a rich understanding of the gospel then and our place in the world now.

Wednesdays in September: 6:00 pm to 7:30 PST

Zoom webinar led by Rev. Steve Kindle

Sponsored by Sierra Christian Church of Loomis

Did you know that:

To pray the Lord's Prayer put one's life in danger in Bible times?

Jews couldn't walk a mile without a reminder that Rome owned them?

Jesus was executed as an enemy of the state because he was an enemy of the state?

"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," is one of the most misunderstood sayings of Jesus, and how its true meaning is an act of sedition? And the marching orders for the church?

An overview of the Roman Empire and its notions of power, piety, and purpose

How they clash with Jesus' understanding of the Realm of God

The Gospels and the Roman Empire

How Jesus undermined Rome's influence with his message of equality, servanthood, and self-sacrificing love, and why this led to his death

Paul's Epistles and the Book of Revelation

How Paul built his congregations on Jesus' understanding of God's intentions for the world, and how ours can learn from it

The Powers and Principalities: Empire in our day

How the values of the Roman Empire continue to corrupt governments today, including our own. Why the message of Jesus continues to inflame the powers and principalities, yet can be their salvation

Q&A session

Register by sending an email to revskindle@comcast.net saying you wish to attend.
You will receive the Zoom sign in credentials.

The Youth Fall Festival & Lock-In

First Christian Church, Sacramento

Begins October 28, 2023 at 4 pm

Ends October 29 at noon, following worship

A combination of a Fall festival, Trunk-or-Treat, and an overnight lock-in for youth.

Participants are encouraged to come in costumes for the Trunk-or-Treat portion of the event. Trunk-or-Treat, where people decorate the trunks of their cars and hand out candy to children

The festival will offer various games and activities, including pumpkin decorating.

Gluten-free and casein-free treats

It is free to attend!

For more information, please call (916) 452-7661.

In the gospels, Jesus is asked 187 questions.

He answers (maybe) 8 of them.

He himself asks 307.

Maybe faith isn't about certainty—but rather, learning to ask—and sit in the complexity of good questions.

“Nietzsche was the one who did the job for me. At a certain moment in his life, the idea came to him of what he called ‘the love of your fate.’ Whatever your fate is, whatever the hell happens, you say, ‘This is what I need.’ It may look like a wreck, but go at it as though it were an opportunity, a challenge. If you bring love to that moment—not discouragement—you will find the strength is there. Any disaster you can survive is an improvement in your character, your stature, and your life. What a privilege! This is when the spontaneity of your own nature will have a chance to flow.

“Then, when looking back at your life, you will see that the moments which seemed to be great failures followed by wreckage were the incidents that shaped the life you have now. You’ll see that this is really true. Nothing can happen to you that is not positive. Even though it looks and feels at the moment like a negative crisis, it is not. The crisis throws you back, and when you are required to exhibit strength, it comes.”

~Joseph Campbell (*Book: Reflections on the Art of Living*)

RESOLUTIONS

(Continued from page 1)

As one writer wrote in a simple criticism of Christian Nationalism, “Remember John 3:16: ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.’ *God loved the world*. God is in the world-loving business—not the America-blessing business.”

There was one vote opposing the resolution.

GA2352 – INVITATION TO OPPOSE ANTI-TRANS LEGISLATION AND AFFIRM THE DIGNITY OF TRANSGENDER AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE

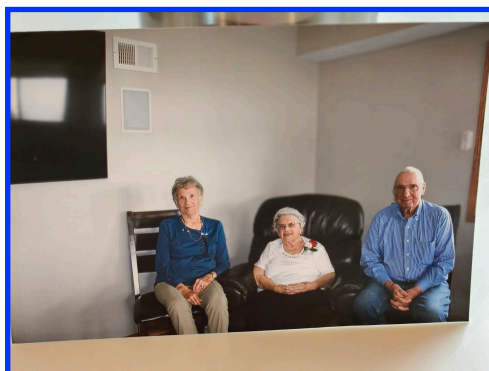
The resolution was an invitation to the church to oppose the growing number [anti-trans legislation](#) being introduced and signed into law across the county, and to affirm the dignity of transgender and gender-diverse people. After the Human Rights Campaign officially declared a state of emergency for LGBTQ+ Americans, the Church drafted the resolution, which avows support for those Americans and Canadians who have done no harm and only wish to live the lives God created them to live. It was passed with no opposition votes.

Note: In 2023, [83 anti-trans bills](#) have thus far passed and been signed into law. To put that in perspective, in 2022 there were [26 bills](#) passed.

Sierra Christian Church Monthly Calendar

September 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
27	28	29	30	31	1 Cliff & Connie Cole move to Fresno, CA, population, 544,510 544,512	2
3 10:30 am Worship	4	5	6 6 pm Webinar led by Steve Kindle	7	8	9 9 am Men's Fellow- ship Breakfast
10 10:30 am Worship	11	12	13 6 pm Webinar led by Steve Kindle	14	15	16
17 10:30 am Worship	18	19	20 6 pm Webinar led by Steve Kindle	21 6:30 pm Books That Bind	22	23
24 10:30 am Worship	25	26	27 6 pm Webinar led by Steve Kindle	28	29	30



More Summertime easy living: Pastor Christine & John in Maui; Joy Reed (above) celebrating a cousin's 90th birthday, and Joy & Dick with cousins in Nebraska (right).



Joy and the excavation of suffering

By Nadia Bolz-Weber

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning. -Psalm 30:5

Prison

At Church inside the women's prison,, Pastor Samm raised her hands after communion and said, *receive this blessing*. Immediately ear-bending screeching of feedback from the mics and monitors behind her angrily filled the room.

A gal rushed to the stage and shut off the extra mic.

Geez. Worst blessing ever, someone said loud enough to be heard above the dimming feedback.

Everyone, including Samm, laughed. Then, raising her hands again she said "OK, well...receive THIS blessing...." and went on as scheduled:

May we who have been fed at Wisdom's table, take her welcome out to where doors are locked and tables are bolted to the floor. May The Spirit drive us to break our bread on the altar of the world.

The thing that I think would surprise people the most about church services inside the women's prison isn't the possibility of a lock down, or the congregation's predilection for facial tattoos, or even the fact that at any point the service may or may not be interrupted by two residents being busted for having sex in the gym bathroom.

I think what would surprise folks the most is the joy.

The joy is unbelievable. But so is the suffering. I am starting to believe these two things are related.

There's just no way to successfully hide hardship in a place like a women's prison. The accumulated effects of generational trauma, addiction, neglect, poverty and under education are written indelibly on everyone who lines up for communion in their shapeless green pants and aggressively yellow T-shirts.

Basements

Unlike many of us on the outside, the suffering these women have both *caused* and *endured* is not so easily hidden. Maybe this is why I feel so comfortable at [New Beginnings](#); because like in AA, most folks don't end up there because everything has gone really well for them. There is a *conspicuousness* to the difficulties of life in both prison and in AA, which I find very relaxing; because you just know what you're dealing with. And I think maybe this "no way to hide how shitty life is" dynamic in prison allows for something else as well, and that is (perhaps counterintuitively): joy. A bursting out loud, celebration of life. More than I have experienced in most churches, if I'm honest.

I just wonder if perhaps there is a relationship between a community's ability to hold suffering with honesty and its ability to also experience joy with abandon.

See, often what I hear in most churches ... in the prayers or the preaching ... is, I guess, *true*. It's just (in my estimation) seldom *honest*. But what I hear shared in AA meetings is entirely brutal and compelling in its *verisimilitude* AND almost always accompanied at some point by raucous laughter. As I have said many times before, I have experienced people speaking honestly about their lives and connecting to God and to one another more frequently in church basements than in church sanctuaries.

I have experienced people speaking honestly about their lives and connecting to God and to one another more frequently in our church basements than in our church sanctuaries.

Hearts

Facing, holding, and speaking honestly of our own suffering and the suffering of others can feel brutal. Like pieces of ourselves are being scooped out. True. But what is also true is the way that it excavates something in us that joy can then fill that much deeper. It

Please see BOLZ-WEBER, next page

BOLZ-WEBER

(Continued from previous page)

doesn't justify the suffering, it just follows it.

All I know is, every time someone has sat with me as I wept, that eventually... *eventually* we usually end up laughing. I love those bleary-eyed laughing fits, even if I will do anything to avoid the breaking down in tears part that precedes them.

But the thing is, there is no protecting ourselves from suffering in this life. Not really. What we *can* hold at bay is *joy*. Through formality. And legalism. And pride. And fear.

And the older I get, the less interest I have in any of that.

So receive *this* blessing:

As you wander through your bafflingly painful and breathtakingly beautiful life, may you find the most honest words possible to speak of it all. May you find people who will not say stupid shit to you when the bottom has fallen out. And may they not try and fix you, but simply allow their own tears to join yours, soaking the holy ground of your broken heart until that same heart is filled again with the joy that comes from a perfectly timed fart joke.

Amen?

Nadia Bolz-Weber is a Lutheran minister, who, in her own words is too foul-mouthed for a preacher, too grammatically challenged for a bestselling author, and too surprisingly hopeful for a cynic. This essay is reprinted with permission.

Some Interesting September Dates in History

- **September 1, 1939:** Germany invades Poland, justifying the action by claiming Poland was persecuting Germans living in Poland, and that Poland was planning, along with England and France, to encircle and dismember Germany.
- **September 3, 1939:** In response to Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland two days earlier, Britain and France Declare War On Germany,
- **September 4, 1972:** Mark Spits wins his 7th Gold Medal at the Summer Olympics held in Munich, German. The next day, **September 5,** eight members of the Palestinian terrorist group Black September, took nine members of the Israeli Olympic team hostage, after killing two more. Five of the eight Black September members were killed during a failed attempt to rescue the hostages, all of whom were killed.
- **September 6, 1941:** Jews living in Germany are ordered to wear the Yellow Star of David. Eight years earlier, theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote "The Church and the Jewish Question," a landmark essay outlining the church's obligations to fight political injustice. The church, he wrote, must fight evil in three stages: The first was to question state injustice and call the state to responsibility; the second was to help the victims of injustice, whether they were church members or not. Ultimately, however, the church might find itself called "not only to help the victims who have fallen under the wheel, but to fall into the spokes of the wheel itself" in order to halt the machinery of injustice.
- **September 6, 1968:** Latin American bishops gathered in Medellín, Colombia, issue a document titled "Justice," which calls for a more equitable distribution of goods, decrying both Marxism and capitalism, the former because of its totalitarian tendencies, the latter because it puts profits above people. This is often credited for the birth of Liberation Theology, a Christian theological approach emphasizing the liberation of the oppressed.
- **September 8, 1947:** C. S. Lewis appears on the cover of Time magazine.
- **September 9, 1956:** Elvis Presley appears on Ed Sullivan's show Toast of the Town and scandalized audiences with his suggestive hip gyrations.

Please see DATES, page 9

DATES

(Continued from previous page)

- **September 10, 1930:** Al Capone has taken former rivals into partnership with him to form a giant Co-Operative organization known as The Syndicate. It controlled the Beer, Vice and Gambling Industries in Chicago.
- **September 11, 2001:** 2,996 people die as a result of the terrorist attacks, including 265 on the four planes (from which there were no survivors); 2,606 in the World Trade Center and in the surrounding area; and 125 at the Pentagon. Most who died were civilians; the rest included 343 firefighters, 72 law enforcement officers, 55 military personnel, and the 19 terrorists.
- **September 11, 1922:** A woman was admitted to the hospital following a flogging by four masked women; they were members of "Ladies of The Invisible Eye," a KKK auxiliary from Dallas in Texas; they administered 100 lashes for ruining her own daughter's life.
- **September 12, 1977:** Steve Biko, a strong anti apartheid activist, was killed in an African prison while in police custody.
- **September 14, 1932:** While in jail, Mahatma Gandhi begins his hunger strike in protest of the British government's decision to separate India's electoral system by caste. The fast lasted 6 days and ended when the British government reversed their decision.
- **September 15, 1853:** Antoinette Brown becomes the first female minister ordained in America.
- **September 15, 1963:** In a racially motivated attack, the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, was bombed, killing four girls. The sermon that day was "The Love That Forgives," based on Matthew 5:43-44.
- **September 17, 1982:** Over 1,000 Palestinian Refugees have been massacred in refugee camps in West Beirut by Lebanese militia, many are blaming Israeli troops who are believed to have stood by and watched the massacre of men, women and children in the camps.
- **September 20, 1224:** On Italy's secluded Mount Alvernia, Francis of Assisi reportedly prayed, "O Lord, I beg of you two graces before I die—to experience in myself in all possible fullness the pains of your cruel passion, and to feel for you the same love that made you sacrifice yourself for us."
- **September 22, 1862:** Abraham Lincoln issues the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation after the costly Union victory at the battle of Antietam. The final proclamation was issued on January 1, 1863, and the 13th Amendment officially abolishing slavery was ratified by congress two years later on December 18, 1865
- **September 24, 1968:** The trial of the Chicago 7, accused of anti-riot provisions of Title X of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 which made it a federal crime to cross state lines with the intent to incite a riot, or to conspire to do so began. During the prosecution's opening statement, one of the defendants, Abbie Hoffman, stood up and blew the jury a kiss.
- **September 25, 1789:** Congress amends The U.S. Constitution to prohibit establishment of a state church or governmental interference with the free exercise of religion.
- **September 27, 1964:** The Warren Commission releases their findings on the President John Kennedy assassination. The 888-page report concluded that Kennedy was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald, who acted alone.
- **September 28, 1928:** While working at his laboratory at St Mary's Hospital, London Alexander Fleming discovers penicillin by accident when he noticed that many of his culture dishes were contaminated with a fungus that had a positive anti bacterial effect on multiple organisms providing the basic block for the start of modern antibiotics. Many believe that the discovery of penicillin is one of the most important discoveries of the last century.

The most influential person in your life is the one you refuse to forgive.