

Sierra Christian Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Aren't Christians Supposed to Care About People?

John Pavlovitz, author, ordained minister, Progressive Christian apologist, asked a question in one of his blogs more than three years ago that deserves space in this newsletter this month.

In his writings, he is constantly reminding us that Jesus was a Rabbi who spent his days as an itinerant street preacher, living off the generosity of strangers and speaking in parables about a new "Kingdom of God" — that is, a radical way of living where the poor were cared for, the oppressed freed, and the outcasts welcomed in.

Over the years, he has not been shy in labeling Christian Nationalism as an affront to the teachings of Jesus and a threat to the most basic tenets of Christianity. (Note: Christian Nationalism is an ideology that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic belonging and participation. It claims that the United States was one of the distinct points of the Gospels. To claim that America was at all the

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point of the Gospels is flat-out idiotic. To assume any God-ordained supremacy based on religion, nation of origin, pigmentation, orientation, or native language is a perversion of the work of Jesus.)



Pastor is the Rev. Christine Pobanz-Hartmire. She reminds us of the beautiful truth that everyone is always welcomed at Jesus' table.

Back in January of 2020, the White House and much of the country was preoccupied with refusing refugees, expelling immigrants, demonizing Muslims, vilifying people of color, worshiping political power, and neglecting the poor, Pavlovitz asked in response to Christian Nationalism's growing influence and extreme devotion to its politically driven doctrine, "Aren't Christians supposed to care about people?"

He reflected that the Christianity he was taught in school was a faith that demanded caring about people. That same premise informed my calling, and I think it is fair to acknowledge that we don't have to agree with people, or believe what they believe, or even like them, to care about them. Jesus' challenge to us was just that. I happen to believe that it is relatively easy, even natural, to care about people we like. The trick, Jesus taught and Pavlovitz wrote, is seeing everyone as specific and unique "image-bearers of the divine, and want for them wholeness, happiness, peace, safety, and rest."

He added, "I grew up believing that one of the markers of a life emulating Jesus was a heart capable of being broken at the distress of other human beings around you: when they are hungry and hurting, when they are homeless and afraid, when they grieve and feel alone, when they believe they are unloved and forgotten, when tragedy befalls them and when injustice assails them. These things are supposed to move the needle within

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us if Jesus is present.”

It is of course anybody’s privilege to believe that a good conception of Jesus may be one where he rejects and dismisses those people he sees as threats and dangerous, the unwashed and dispossessed; but is woefully wrong to do so, because Jesus was the guy who never piled burdens on already burdened people, or rejoiced in their despair, or tossed off insults and told them to go back to where they came from. As we celebrate every week at Sierra Christian, Jesus’ table had a place around it for anyone caring to sit down at it

Similarly, I don’t recall having ever encountered a Jesus lecturing the poor and the afflicted to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” Jesus never invited war or celebrated bloodshed or reveled in the loss of life for any reason. Nor do I recall ever reading about him mocking those who express sadness or worry or struggle. We all know a lot of things that can start with human misery and not bring anything except more human misery. Jesus and the Christianity brings something else entirely.

Like John Pavlovitz, I want to know if today’s professed Christians care about people. I am not talking about convenient Sunday morning Christianity, nor am I referring to the beliefs people profess or the values they claim to hold. I think the key is how we actually treat other people, how we love or don’t love our neighbor. It is not a stretch, I don’t think, to make the distinction between having the faith Jesus had and believing in Jesus. As Steve Kindle has pointed out in his wonderful webinar, Jesus vs. Caesar, we are ultimately saved and uplifted by having the faith *of* Jesus, not simply faith in Him.

In this divisive, angry age of ours, if you profess to be a follower of Jesus, your politics pretty much takes care of itself. Praying for victims of school shootings is nice but not much of a barometer of anything substantial. The more valuable questions are, Pavlovitz wrote, “Where is our working theology of empathy? How do we care about people? And not just Republican people or American people or Christian people or white people—but the disparate parade of human beings in every way you encounter them, in every condition they arrive, with whatever backstory they’ve lived through.”

This is what lies before us today.

I don’t know how John Pavlovitz spends his free time. I don’t know if he volunteers in a soup kitchen or hands out socks to homeless men. I don’t know if he is walking a picket line this week or pounding nails in a simple structure that can become someone’s home. Is he sitting with someone and humbly listening because the person needs someone to listen? Whatever he is doing, I suspect he is driven by a burden to live, as he puts it, “from a place of expansive, sacrificial, selfless love toward your neighbor... compelled to leave people better than you find them.”

My Christianity believes in a God of abundance. I can’t comprehend a Christianity that sees others as in competition with me for jobs or healthcare or a home, because an infinite maker has infinite resources—and because I’m supposedly trying to emulate a Jesus who was the greatest expression *of* that abundance.



Prayers & Celebrations

- ➡ October birthday blessings to Steve Kindle, born on October 15 a few years ago.
- ➡ Oh, and his wife, Diane Kindle, born on October 31.
- ➡ Birthday wishes and prayers for all good things to come her way to Sandy Barry, whose birthday is celebrated on October 22.
- ➡ Baseball glories to Hunter Morgan, finding joy in the great game!
- ➡ Continued support is sent out in waves of love and faith 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 Janet Peck strengthens and recovers.
- ➡ Continued cartwheels and jumping jacks that Diane Kindle is pain free and still not serving Steve hand and foot. A tip of the cap to you, Diane!

Some Notes Worth Noting

1. Rev. Steve Kindle will be at the pulpit in the barn on Sunday, October 1. It's a chance to see Steve and Diane in person (it's been awhile) and also hear what will no doubt be an intriguing sermon! It will be a hybrid event, in person and on Zoom.
2. Books that Bind meets Thursday, October 19 at 6:30 pm on Zoom. We are reading, Margaret Atwood's Booker Prize winning 2019 novel, "The Testaments."
3. The Men's Fellowship Breakfast is scheduled for Saturday, October 7 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-ccnc-n-mens-retreat>
5. The Northern California Nevada Region will offer an in person Anti-Racism training hosted by Arden Christian Church in Sacramento on October 7 from 9AM to 4PM. This training is open to all who are interested and we encourage clergy and laity alike to attend. The Revs. Paul Gafney, Godfree McIntyre, and Shayne Flowers will be co-facilitating this training. <https://ccncn.regfox.com/20231007-anti-racism-training>
6. Deeply care about unity and diversity, please look into [New Church Ministries](#), where the call is to establish sacred spaces where everyone feels embraced and valued regardless of their background.

The Youth Fall Festival & Lock-In—Trunk or Treat!

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. 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.

The Banning of Books is Coming to a School and Library Near You

The news that “Moms For Liberty” stormed a recent San Ramon Valley Board of Education meeting is a sobering alarm that the book banning we’ve been reading about in foreign lands like Texas, Florida, and South Carolina is coming for us. Like a swarm of locusts it is coming, devouring reason and thought right along with it.

Classified as both extremist and anti-government by the Southern Poverty Law Center, “Moms” was founded in Florida two years ago and now boasts 285 chapters in 44 states, including ones in Alameda, San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Contra Costa counties, where it claims to have 1,000 members and is taking dead aim at local LGBTQ+ groups and school curriculums.

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The least a church that is proudly inclusive and affirming can do in this day and age of division and fear, of growing exclusion and embraced ignorance of not only the Constitution but basic Christian tenets, is periodically remind itself (and others) where it stands. We believe in freedom, the dignity and grace of everyone, and one of our favorite sounds is the grateful thud of ideas in collision.



(and others) where it stands. We believe in the freedom Jesus preached, the dignity and grace of everyone, and one of our favorite sounds is the grateful thud of ideas in collision. Moms For Liberty is not interested in anything resembling liberty. They would not recognize it if it fell in their laps. They fear opinions and facts that do not align with their view of things, and ideas that don't cozy up with theirs. If there is any principle in the Constitution that more imperatively calls for devotion than any

other it is the principle of free thought—not free thought for the person who agrees with us but freedom for the thought we hate. Or fear.

In 1935 Germany, more than 25,000 books were burned by the Nazis, books by Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Ernest Hemingway, and Helen Keller, who, when told of the bonfires wrote, “History has taught you nothing if you think you can kill ideas.” Another writer prophetically wrote at the time, “Where one burns books, one will soon burn people.” We do not live in Nazi Germany, but some in 2023 America are trying their best, rejecting ideas and knowledge because they believe salvation lies in rejection. They are not doing any so obvious as burning books, they are, rather, trying to hide them where the light cannot penetrate.

According to the American Library Association, 2,571 different titles were banned or censored by school districts, states, and other government entities in 2022, a 38% increase from the previous year. Nearly 60% of those bans were aimed at classrooms and school libraries, and most of the targeted books were by, or about, racial minorities or LGBTQ+ people. Broad, vaguely defined prohibitions on teaching “critical race theory” and other allegedly divisive topics in classrooms have compelled 25% of our schoolteachers to alter their curricula.

Most of the restrictions enacted this school year have been passed by Republican-controlled legislatures in Texas, Florida, Missouri, Utah, and South Carolina. Spurred by those “Moms for Liberty,” these legislatures have passed laws with broad restrictions on topics they deem inappropriate. The mere presence of LGBTQ people in a book can be enough to be considered “obscene,” In Florida and several other states, all books must be screened by offi-

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junk art history textbooks and nonfiction accounts of the Holocaust. In Texas, which had more book bannings than any other state last year, a bill currently under consideration would ban textbooks that portray U.S. history in anything but a "positive" light.

Teachers report being "scared to death" to tell students anything about America's racial history. To pass muster, one textbook publisher even eliminated any mention of race in telling the story of Rosa Parks refusing to change her seat on a public bus. In Florida, a textbook publisher had to remove a purely factual passage on George Floyd's murder and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests. In at least a half-dozen states, teachers and school librarians now face potential prison time for violating the bans.

Publishers who sell or distribute books with "sexually explicit" material to Tennessee schools face felony charges and fines of up to \$100,000 per violation. Lawmakers in some companies already are letting state laws influence editorial decisions. Maggie Tokuda-Hall's grade-school picture book "Love in the Library," first published by a small press last year, recounts how her grandparents met in a Japanese internment camp during World War II. When children's book giant Scholastic offered to license it, they asked her to remove all references to anti-Japanese racism from her author's note, arguing that teachers might be dissuaded from using the book in this "politically sensitive" day and age.



cial censors before they are deemed acceptable, with wholesale bans on references to sex, race, and gender identity, regardless of context, becoming more common. In Missouri, a new law banning books containing "explicit sexual material" led school districts to



From the advent of the written word, books have enlightened us, instructed us, entertained us, and, yes, even offended us; some works were so skillfully written that they did it all at the same time.

She refused. "I'm typically a very compromising person," she said. "But when you omit the word 'racism' from a story about the mass incarceration of a single group of people based on their race, there's no compromise to be had."

For generations, the United States has offered the welcoming inclusivity of liberties, the grace of thought, and the privileges of freedom to most everyone. Citizens were invited to write plays and books, to paint their pictures, to meet for discussion, to dissent as well as to agree, to mount soapboxes in the public square, to write and mail out newsletters, to enjoy education in all subjects without censorship, to hold court and judge one another, to compose music, to talk politics with their neighbors without wondering if the secret police are listening, to exchange ideas as well as goods, to kid the government when it needs kidding, and to read real news

of events instead of phony news manufactured by a board of scared men in a dark room.

Sadly, the practice of book banning is not new. It has occurred in cultures all around the globe and throughout human history. A few decades ago, Charlotte's Web was banned from a Kansas school district because depicting pigs able to speak is blasphemous and writing about a spider dying is inappropriate for a children's book. From the advent of the written word, books have enlightened us, instructed us, entertained us, and, yes, even offended us; some works were so skillfully written that they did it all at the same time.

And I guess that is what scares so many people.

—John Hartmire

Note: After the writing of this piece, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed into law a bill barring school boards from banning books, instructional materials, or curricula labeled as inclusive or diverse.

Sierra Christian Church Monthly Calendar

October 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 10:30 am Worship	2	3	4 7 pm Prayer Fellowship	5	6	7 9 am Men's Fellowship Breakfast
8 10:30 am Worship	9	10	11 7pm Prayer Fellowship	12	13	14
15 10:30 am Worship	16	17	18 7 pm Prayer Fellowship	19 6:30 pm Books That Bind	20	21
22 10:30 am Worship	23	24	25 7 pm Prayer Fellowship	26	27	28
29 10:30 am Worship	30	31				

- Age 60 might be the new 40, but 9:00 pm is the new midnight.
- When I say, "The other day," I could be referring to any time between yesterday and 15 years ago.
- I remember being able to get up without making sound effects.
- If you lose a sock in the dryer, it comes back as a Tupperware lid that doesn't fit any of your containers.
- If you're sitting in public and a stranger takes the seat next to you, just stare straight ahead and say, "Did you bring the money?"
- I finally got eight hours of sleep. It took me three days, but whatever.
- Don't bother walking a mile in my shoes. That would be boring. Spend 30 seconds in my head. That'll freak you right out.
- I hate when a couple argues in public, and I missed the beginning and don't know whose side I'm on.
- When someone asks what I did over the weekend, I squint and ask, "Why, what did you hear?"
- When you do squats, are your knees supposed to sound like a goat chewing on an aluminum can stuffed with celery?

Some Interesting October Dates in History

- **October 1, 1890** – Spearheaded by none other than John Muir, the campaign to designate Yosemite a National Park is successful. It is the nation's third national park, following Yellowstone and Sequoia.
- **October 2, 1950** – Peanuts comic strip by Charles Schultz first appeared in newspapers. Seven of them to be precise. When he laid down his pen and pencil in late 1999, Peanuts was appearing in more 2,600 newspapers worldwide, and more than 20,000 products based on Peanuts had been manufactured.
- **October 3, 1974** – Frank Robinson becomes major league baseball's first black manager for the Cleveland Indians.
- **October 3, 1226:** Francis of Assisi, preacher and mystic who created monastic communities for men and women devoted to poverty and serving the poor, dies (see issue 42: Francis of Assisi).
- **October 3, 1789:** George Washington names November 26 as a day of national thanksgiving for the ratification of the Constitution. On the same date in 1863, Abraham Lincoln designates the last Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day.
- **October 4, 1965:** Paul VI becomes the first pope to visit the United States and to address the United Nations. In his speech he stressed the need to find peaceful resolutions to conflicts in a danger-ridden nuclear age.
- **October 4, 1883** – The Orient Express train takes off on its first trip from Paris to Istanbul. Trumpeted as the most fascinating train in the world, it left Paris for Constantinople with 40 passengers on board. The round trip lasted 7 days. With this one trip, the geography of Europe was turned upside down, and the notion of long-distance travel was completely redefined. No one was murdered.
- **October 5, 1921** – The World Series was broadcast on radio for the first time. The New York Yankees defeated the New York Giants 3-0. The Giants took the Series in 8 games. It was a best of 9 series back then.
- **October 8, 1871** – The Great Chicago Fire levels 3 1/2 square miles of the city. According to legend, it was started by Mrs. O'Leary's cow who kicked over a lantern.
- **October 9, 2018** – Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus performs its last show, a victim of falling attendance, animal rights protests, and high operating cost.
- **October 10, 1886** – Griswold Lorillard of Tuxedo Park, NY cuts the tails off a tailcoat, creating the first tuxedo.
- **October 10, 1973** – Spiro Agnew becomes just the second person to resign as Vice President of the United States. Pleaded no contest to income tax evasion.
- **October 11, 1984** – Space Shuttle Challenger astronaut Kathryn Sullivan became the first American woman to walk in space.
- **October 13, 1775** – The U.S. Continental Navy was created. See Navy Day
- **October 14, 1971** – Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. He was 35.
- **October 16, 1925:** The Texas State Textbook Board bans evolutionary theory from all its textbooks. And now, 98 years later....
- **October 16, 1962** – Cuban Missile Crisis began when President John Kennedy was shown photographs taken by an American U-2 spy plane of nuclear missile sites being built by the Soviet Union on the island of Cuba. Kennedy met in secret with his advisors for several days to discuss the problem. After many long and difficult meetings, Kennedy decided to place a naval blockade, or a ring of ships, around Cuba. The aim of this "quarantine," as he called it, was to prevent the Soviets from bringing in more military supplies. He demanded the removal of the missiles already there and the destruction of the site. Both the U.S. and Soviet Union recognized the devastating possibility of a nuclear war and publicly agreed to a deal in which the Soviets would dismantle the weapon sites in exchange for a pledge from the U.S. not to invade Cuba.

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- **October 17, 1480:** The Spanish Inquisition is activated. According to modern estimates, around 150,000 people were prosecuted for various offenses during the three-century duration of the Spanish Inquisition. Between 3,000 and 5,000 were executed. The Inquisition was originally intended to identify heretics. It was ended in 1834.
- **October 17, 1979:** Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She was 69.
- **October 18, 1867** –The United States purchased Alaska for \$7.2 million, or about 2 cents an acre. On January 3, 1959, Alaska became the 49th state.
- **October 19, 1983** – Martin Luther King’s Birthday became a national holiday.
- **October 19, 1781** – The Revolutionary War ended when British General Charles Cornwallis surrendered his army of 8,000 men to General George Washington at Yorktown, giving up any chance of winning the war. It took two more years of skillful diplomacy by John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay to formally secure America’s independence with the signing of the Treaty of Paris.
- **October 23, 1915** – 25,000 women marched in New York City demanding the right to vote. On August 18, 1920, the 19th amendment was ratified granting women the Constitutional right to vote.
- **October 24, 1945** – The United Nations was born. It was preceded by the League of Nations, which was founded on January 10, 1920 by the Paris Peace Conference that ended the WWI.
- **October 26, 1825** – The Erie Canal opens, providing overland water transportation from Lake Erie to the Hudson River for commercial shipping. It is the first manmade waterway and it made New York the preeminent commercial city in the United States. It became not only a popular conduit for freight and passengers, but also disease.
- **October 27, 1978:** The complete New International Version (NIV) of the Bible is published. As of March 2013, over 450 million printed copies of the translation had been distributed. The NIV is the best-selling translation in the United States.
- **October 28, 1636** – Harvard University was founded in Cambridge, MA. in anticipation of the need for training clergy for the new commonwealth. It was established by vote of the Great and General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.
- **October 29, 1969** – The Internet was created when the first bits and bytes of data were sent between computers at UCLA and Stanford.. So what was the first message sent on the Internet? UCLA intended to transmit the word, “Login,” but (perhaps prophetically) the system crashed after the first two letters were sent. The message ended up being, “Lo,” as in “Lo and behold.”
- **October 30, 1938** – Orson Wells’ “War of the Worlds” was broadcast on the radio, sparking panic as listeners believed the news bulletins about a Martian invasion. The fictional account reported that the aliens had landed in Grovers Mill, New Jersey. Grovers Mill now celebrates the anniversary of the broadcast with Mars-themed events. The community even erected a monument in its Van Nest Park, marking the spot where Martians supposedly landed.
- **October 31, 1517** – Martin Luther, angry and disappointed with the corruption of the wealthy Catholic church, nailed on the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, 95 theses to bring humans closer to God.
- **October 31, 1984** – Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards. One of the bodyguards died in the ensuing struggle, and the second was executed 5 years later. Following the assassination, more than 1,000 innocent Sikhs were killed in indiscriminate killings over the next few days. Her assassination was revenge for Operation Blue Star, a large Indian military operation carried out four months earlier designed to remove leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his militant Sikh followers from the buildings of the Harmandir Sahib. About 500 Sikh rebels were killed during the operation.
- **October 31, 1992:** Pope John Paul II formally admitted the Roman Catholic Church's error in condemning Galileo Galilei in 1633 for concluding through scientific observation that the sun, not the earth, was the center of the universe