

Sierra Christian Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Hang On, 2024 Is Here



Do We Really Have to Pack Up Christmas?

My late father-in-law loved Christmas. He loved shopping for his children and he loved the music and traditions, their simple Advent wreath, and trimming the tree on Christmas Eve with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir on the stereo. And he mostly loved 7 am Christmas morning when his kids (back when they were young) burst through the hallway door as if shot from a cannon into the living room where the presents were piled under

the tree and the stockings, hanging on a rope strung in a doorway, were stuffed with everything imaginable but coal.

Pastor's Pitch

Who doesn't love all that? What's not to enjoy and love about the Christmas season? I write this looking at two big plastic storage boxes that I know I will soon be filling with ornaments and decora-

PITCH

(Continued from page 2)

tions so John can place them back on the shelves up in the attic. I know that soon the tree will have to go out to the street to be recycled into writing paper for a young poet somewhere.

I was lamenting a short while ago how I don't necessarily enjoy this part of Christmas, packing it up until next year, when it dawned on me. Though I may pack up the ornaments and the Christmas gnomes, the stockings and Advent calendar, I can, if I choose, carry Christmas right along with me for the next 12 months.

When it starts to slip away, this marvelous Christmas joy, as it surely will, I can open the first chapter of Luke's Gospel and read Mary's Magnificat,

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.*

Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great



Sierra Christian Church's pastor is the Rev. Christine Pobanz-Hartmire. Her challenge to us is to embrace, the beautiful truth that everyone is always welcomed at Jesus' table.

Mercy, the unfathomable forgiveness given by those whom we have harmed, and what can feel at times like the impossibility of forgiving ourselves—the difficulty of remembering that we are forgiven, and the grace that comes with the prayers we plead on our knees at two in the morning when we seem to struggle most with all of it.

things for me, and holy is his name;

Indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him, from generation to generation.

Because then I am reminded of my own experiences with mercy, and my husband's, and those of the people I care about and have met along my journey to this place and time. Where else could I be? Mercy, the unfathomable forgiveness given by those whom we have harmed, and what can feel at times like the impossibility of forgiving ourselves—the difficulty of remembering that we are forgiven, and the grace that comes with the prayers we plead on our knees at two in the morning when we seem to struggle most with all of it.

Contemplating mercy is not limited to the holidays. Feeling joy and vibrant with good news is not unique to Christmas. As the days pass and Christmas, then New Years, become smaller than they are in the rearview mirror, instead of thinking about what I am missing, I am going to, instead, remember all that I have. I've never thought of the contemplation of mercy as a "holiday" thing until yesterday. But maybe instead of thinking about what seems to be missing, I can:

... think about my friends and family and how we have the capacity to fill each other with joy and love simply by being together;

... recall the nearly 34 years of sobriety that I have somehow been given,

... give thanks for all the people who have forgiven me who, in all fairness, had every right to withhold it.

... forgive some jerk who also doesn't "deserve" it.

... stop treating my life as a reward when it is really a gift.

Please see PITCH, page 3

PITCH

(Continued from page 2)

So, maybe, having John put those boxes of decorations back up in the attic will be an act of mercy and not defeat after all.

Perhaps you yourself are all goodness and light not just this season, or its ending, but year round. And if so, that is a blessing.

For the rest of us, a gentle reminder that Christ was born on Christmas with or without us "feeling" Christmas-y. Because this pattern of time, the story, those rituals and practices and songs have gone on long before us, and will continue long after us. Sometimes we are floating in that river of faith, just swimming in it and feeling the transcendent warmth of the season. And other times we seem to be standing in just a half inch of the stuff; not even enough to cover our feet. But the power of the forever river, its source and its destination changes not at all. And both things, don't you see—submerged in or barely having our feet wet—are the same. It's not a matter of degrees. One is not "better" than the other. One does not get you more points than the other. Just ask Jesus. Thank God.

So, my sweet friends, look back at Christmas if you would like, but focus, too, on 2024 with gratitude and grace, with joy and anticipation, with humility and love, and receive this blessing:

May this be the year that you delight in seeing how much joy you can extravagantly spread. May you discover just how much beauty you can recklessly shower upon this thirsty world.

May this be the year that you tune both the dusty piano in the corner and the inner listening of your care-worn heart. So that both can play in harmony with the chorus of creation.

May you break the invisible yardstick of impossible expectations and learn that just as you are, you are enough. May this be the year that you cease trying to march to an imagined ideal and instead, wrap your arms around the messy wonder your life really is, hold it close and do the tango.

Let this be the year you befriend your soul in its radical particularity, not forsaking it yet again for the bland demands and cravings of the masses.

Instead, may you elope with the wildness of your own true calling, marry your soul to its deepest longings and invite the hungry world to the wedding feast.

New Board Takes Office

It wasn't supposed to be like this. Steve Kindle was supposed to hold the gavel as chairman of the Sierra Christian Board of Directors, but when he was offered, and accepted, the interim pastor's position at Trinity Congregational church in Weaverville, a new chairman had to be found.

They didn't look far. John Hartmire will be the new chair, with Beth Murphy taking vice-chair responsibilities. Karen Steinke will continue on as Chief Financial Officer, as will Sandy Barry as Secretary.

Since pastors rarely work alone, Diane Kindle will also step away from her position as a director-at-large to keep Steve on the straight and narrow,, leaving a vacancy that has not yet been filled, though Diane Wilson was asked to consider the appointment.

The adjustment to the board was voted on at the December 31 Congregational Meeting

Chair—John Hartmire

Chief Financial Office—Karen Steinke

Vice-Chair—Beth Murphy

Secretary—Sandy Barry

Directors-At-Large: Liz Throne, Constance Cole, Cliff Cole

Christianity can be confusing, but
the way of Jesus was pretty clear.

Move toward the poor
Empower the woman
Create space at the table
Throw parties
Widen the family boundaries
Poke holes in oppressive systems
Don't retaliate with violence
Forgive your enemy
Don't store up wealth
Be present with people

Heal
Announce
Push back darkness


The kingdom of God is near

—Dan Sadlier

Some Notes Worth Noting

1. Books that Bind now meets every other month. The book club will next meet Thursday, February 15 at 6:30 pm on Zoom. We are reading, "Lessons In Chemistry," by Bonnie Gamus.
2. The Men's Fellowship Breakfast is scheduled for Saturday, January 13 at 9 am, on Zoom.
3. You are invited to join Diane Wilson and Pastor Christine walking the labyrinth after worship on Sunday, January 7. A simple spiritual stroll that really is not all that simple.
4. The 2024 Annual Gathering will take place at First Christian Church in Concord on April 19-20, 2024. For more information, please contact Leslie Taylor at Leslie@concordfcc.net.

JUST WOMEN
EMBRACING LIFE
2024 JUST WOMEN BIBLE STUDY



THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS:
SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH
MATTHEW 13:16 - 17

\$21

PRE-ORDERS

FOR

Just Women
2024

BEGIN

TODAY!!!

12 LESSONS | AMAZING WRITERS | FEATURE ARTICLES

PRE-ORDERS RECEIVE FREE SHIPPING

****ALL ORDERS MUST BE RECEIVED IN OFFICE BY DECEMBER 20TH
TO QUALIFY FOR FREE SHIPPING****

Visit the Disciples Women Online Store
at
www.discipleswomen.org

A New Year's Blessing for Realists

As you enter this new year, as you pack away the Christmas decorations and get out your stretchy pants,
As you face the onslaught of false promises offered you through new disciplines and elimination diets,
As you grasp for control of yourself and your life and this chaotic world -

May you remember that there is no resolution that, if kept, will make you more worthy of love.

There is no resolution that, if kept, will make life less uncertain and allow you to control your aging parents and your teenage children and the way other people act.

So this year (as every year),

May you just skip the part where you resolve to be better do better and look better this time.

Instead, may you give yourself the gift of really, really low expectations. Not out of resignation, but out of generosity.

May you expect so little of yourself that you can be super proud of the smallest of accomplishments.

May you expect so little of the people in your life that you actually notice and cherish every small, lovely thing about them.

May you expect so little of the service industry that you notice more of what you do get and less of what you don't and then just tip really well anyhow.

May you expect to get so little out of 2024 that you can celebrate every single thing it offers you, however small.

Because you deserve joy and not disappointment.

So, I wish you a Happy as possible New Year.

—Nadia Bolz-Weber

'Twas the Month After Christmas

*'Twas the month after Christmas and all through the
house,*

*Nothing would fit me, not even a blouse.
The cookies I'd nibbled, the eggnog I'd taste.
All the holiday parties had gone to my waist.*

*When I got on the scales there arose such a number!
When I walked to the store (less a walk than a lumber).*

*I'd remember the marvelous meals I'd prepared;
The gravies and sauces and beef nicely rared,*

*The wine and the rum balls, the bread and the cheese
And the way I'd never said, "No thank you, please."*

*As I dressed myself in my husband's old shirt,
And prepared once again to do battle with dirt—*

I said to myself, as I only can,

"You can't spend a winter disguised as a man!"

*So, away with the last of the sour cream dip,
Get rid of the fruit cake, every cracker and chip,
Every last bit of food that I like must be banished,
Till all the additional ounces have vanished.*

*I won't have a cookie—not even a lick.
I'll want only to chew on a long celery stick.
I won't have hot biscuits, or corn bread, or pie,
I'll munch on a carrot and quietly cry.*

*I'm hungry, I'm lonesome, and life is a bore—
But isn't that what January is for?*

*Unable to giggle, no longer a riot.
Happy New Year to all and to all a good diet!*

— Author unknown

Sierra Christian Church Monthly Calendar

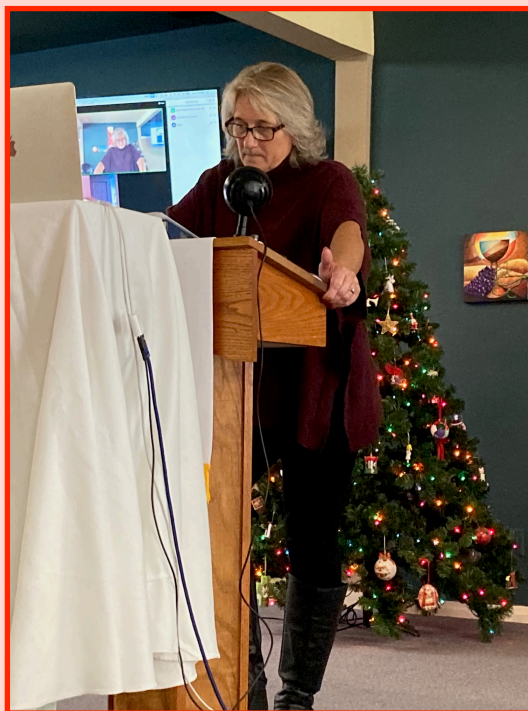
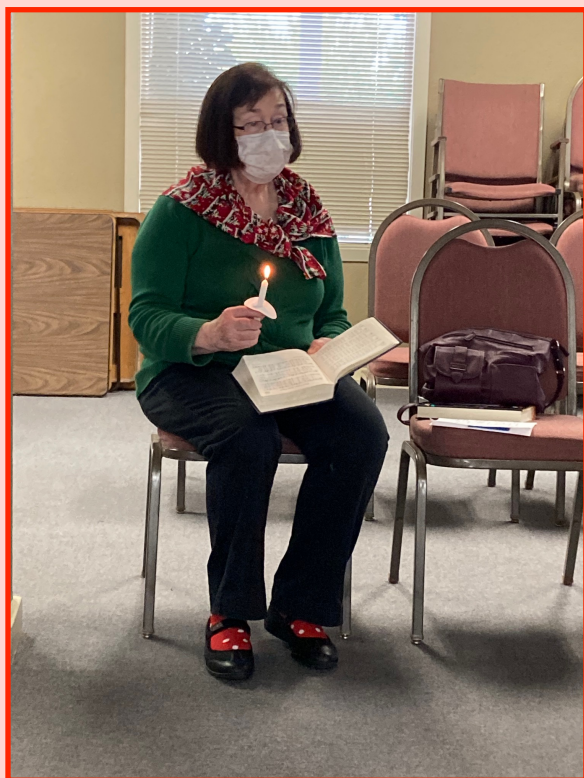
January 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31	1	2	3	4	5	6
7 10:30 am Worship Labyrinth Walk to follow	8	9	10	11	12	13 9 am Men's Fellowship Breakfast
14 10:30 am Worship	15	16	17 Board of Directors meeting, 6:30 pm	18	19	20
21 10:30 am Worship Zoom Only	22	23	24	25	26	27
28 10:30 am Worship	29	30	31	28	29	30

Annual Gathering 2024 Set

Annual Gathering 2024 will take place at First Christian Church in Concord on April 19-20, 2024, and will be a joint effort from East Bay churches! Volunteers from Lafayette Christian Church, First Christian Church in Vallejo, and First Christian Church in Vacaville will work with members of FCC-Concord to make this Annual Gathering a wonderful experience for all. Any members of other East Bay churches who would like to participate in planning the Annual Gathering, please contact Leslie Taylor (Leslie@concordfcc.net). Planning Team meetings have started.

Christmas Eve Morning at Sierra Christian Church





Photos Courtesy of
Beth Murphy



A Few Historical Dates in January

January 1, 1863 — The Emancipation Proclamation was made by Abraham Lincoln 1863. It freed all Confederate slaves, and had followed from the statements he made after 1862's Battle of Antietam.

January 1, 1892 — Ellis Island located in Upper New York Bay, starts As Immigration gateway into the United States replacing Castle Garden Immigration Depot in lower Manhattan which had processed over 8 million immigrants into the country. It operated in this role for more than 50 years closing in 1954 having processed more than 12 million immigrants into the United States. Did You Know over 100 million Americans - one third of the population - can trace their ancestry to the immigrants who first arrived in America at Ellis Island.

January 1, 1934— The Island of Alcatraz (The Rock) is turned into a federal prison, some of the most hardened criminals are sent to Alcatraz over the next few years.

January 3, 1959— Alaska became the 49th state of the United States of America.

January 4, 1923— A surprise attack by members of the Ku Klux Klan on a black residential area of Rosewood, Florida left 8 people dead. Over the next few days, the all-black town of Rosewood, a north Florida community of 120 people, was burned to the ground.

January 4, 1849— The first newspaper The California Star, was published in Yerba Buena. It later became The Alta California and became the first daily newspaper in California. Mark Twain wrote for it. The paper folded on June 2, 1891.

January 5, 1933— Construction began on the Golden Gate Bridge from the Marin shore. The bridge cost \$1.3 million less than the \$35 million budgeted and completed ahead of schedule in April 1937.

January 8, 1863— The Central Pacific Railroad broke ground in Sacramento. That was the first step in the 1,907-mile long Transcontinental Railroad, completed on May 10, 1869.

January 8, 1908— President Theodore Roosevelt established Muir Woods National Monument as a unit of the National Park Service. It protects one of the few old growth Coast Redwood forests left in the San Francisco Bay Area.

January 9, 1947— The Mexican-American War's Battle of Rio San Gabriel was fought at the ford of the San Gabriel River, at what are today parts of the cities of Whittier, Pico Rivera and Montebello, about ten miles south-east of downtown Los Angeles. The battle lasted all of 90 minutes, with American troops driving the Mexican force west, where they were defeated two days later. It effectively ended the war.

January 9, 1847— The Forlorn Hope party, which had set out from the larger Donner Party in search of hope, struggling to make it over the pass to Sutter's Fort for

Please see HISTORY, page 10

An optimist stays up until midnight to see the New Year in. A pessimist stays up to make sure the old year leaves.

&

Youth is when you're allowed to stay up late on New Year's Eve. Middle age is when you're forced to.

— Bill Vaughan

HISTORY

(Continued from page 2)

help, came across their two Indian guides, Luis and Salvador, who had left several days earlier for fear of being killed and cannibalized. Exhausted and near death, they were shot and eaten.

January 10, 1862— Gov. Leland Stanford traveled the six blocks from the governor's mansion to the State Capitol by rowboat for his Jan. 10, 1862, inauguration ceremony. After several weeks of heavy rains, the Sacramento River rose more than 22 feet and the city was under water. The American River, near Folsom, rose more than 60 feet. Trees were filled with people clinging to branches. More than more than 4,000 Californians — 1% of the state's population — were killed in the flood. A quarter of the state's cattle drowned. And there was more than \$100 million in damage; the equivalent of several billion in 2023 dollars. One observer noted, the only land that could be seen were the Sierra Mountains in the east.

January 14, 1963— George Wallace takes over as governor of Alabama . His main motto for his campaign and the way he would run the state was, "Segregation Forever."

January 22, 1849— Three robbers were hanged at Dry Diggins, later known as Hangtown. Today it's called Placerville. The stump of the original hanging tree, it's said, is in the cellar of The Hangman's Tree bar.

January 24, 2011— California Supreme Court ruled that cities and counties do not have to consult with unions before laying off workers to save money.

January 25, 2012— Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords officially resigned from the US House of Representatives in order to complete her recovery after being shot by a gunman in January of 2011.

January 26, 1929— Frances Orlando, 19, who lived as a man, age 19, was arrested in San Francisco for dressing in men's clothing.

January 31, 1950— President Truman approved U.S. development of the hydrogen bomb, a weapon potentially 1,000 times more powerful than the atomic bomb.

Prayers & Celebrations

- Prayers and promises of success to Steve and Diane Kindle. Trinity Congregational is in for a treat!
- Prayers for Janet Peck for her continued recovery and health
- Continued healing prayers and boisterous shouts of encouragement to Cliff & Connie Cole. Cliff heads home Tuesday, January 2024. A good way to start a New Year! Looking forward to seeing them on Zoom soon.
- Healing and loving prayers to anyone suffering, lonely, hurt, or a little lost.

Board of Directors meets Wed., Jan. 17, at 6:30 pm. on Zoom

Men's Fellowship gathers Sat., Jan. 13, 9:00 am on Zoom