

# Sierra Christian Church

*An Open and Affirming Congregation*

## First We Celebrated Thanksgiving Together...



*(With Kailana the puppy)*





## ...Then We Celebrated Constance Cole's Life



*To love another  
person is to see  
the face of God*



The link to the recording of the Celebration of Life is: [Constance's Celebration of Life](#)



## *A Letter:*

# Dear Cliff and Everyone at Sierra Christian:

Connie was certainly a blessing to many. She was a very intentional person who thought the world of her family, her church, her career and her marriage to Cliff. Connie was so incredibly organized and talented!

She had several hobbies that she liked to keep busy, especially when she was not having her recent health troubles.

She really loved her roses and gardening. She loved talking and taking time to be with her grandson and his family.

She was also trying to complete her family genealogy research, which she kept organized. Connie also had a very interesting career in the NASA-Space Industry. She showed up some of her work pictures, awards and her memory books about her travel adventures with Cliff to Europe.

The most I remember about Connie was her sincerity and her goodness and goodwill towards others. It was important to her to keep in touch with those she loved, and to visit with when she could. There are not a lot of people like Connie that I have found.

So genuine, loving, takes pride in her marriage with Cliff, she always wanted to always look her best, she took pride in her home, and everything she touched. Connie always made an effort, and wanted to make sure it was the best she could do.

I truly loved Connie, and I miss her greatly. Heaven has a new Angel in Connie, and I was blessed to be her friend.



—Julia Crain



## Merry Christmas, Sierra Christian Church, and Friends Everywhere!



And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward all."



# Yes, Love is the Most Powerful Force I Know

I believe love is the most powerful force in the universe. I am not breaking any new ground here, and I am surely not alone. Jesus was pretty clear on this, the might and enduring grace of love. St. Francis had a few things to say about it. Gandhi brought an empire to its knees practicing love and non-violence as a political force, and Martin Luther King, Jr., was quite articulate and effective in both language and action that the world changes through the force of love, not hatred, through non-violent dissent, not anger and destruction. It is true that violence can be immediate and shocking, temporarily bring us to our knees, but it is love that lasts. It is love that transforms.

When I slow myself down and give those words the time and energy they deserve—*Love is the most powerful force in the Universe*—a light goes on inside me, a bell clangs somewhere, and sweet music falls from the skies because those words are, for me, *TRUTH!*

The problem is that too often I still live my life as if it were not true. In my heart, unless I pause and refocus, I still feel that evil has the power to crush out truth and love, because, frankly, evil has an intended effect—i.e., stun us into mindless submission. Yes, people living in poverty, dictators crush nations, and rebels fight and kill in response. There is injustice. There is pain. My fear, when I give into it, tells me that love cannot overcome all the pain and hate and darkness I see out there.

Yet when I look at my own life the only thing that has consistently and faithfully ministered to and inspired my hurt and fearful soul has been love. Love melts away my angry defenses, sharpens me into a more patient and generous person.

The truth is that for all my lifelong outrage at injustice and desire to change the world, I achieved so little because I wanted to force hate and inequity into righteousness. I wanted to shout them down and rise up for the meek—but I wanted to do all this in ways that were not humble.

Jesus taught us, Gandhi and King and Mandela proved it. To fight fire with fire only adds to the heat and hate. Injustice and hurt bows down to the cool, calm waters of love and compassion. Every time. It may take longer than we want, but it is in God's time.

And then there is this about evil—it will, eventually, destroy itself.

Jesus's interaction with the Legions—doing nothing but casting them into a herd of swine at their bequest where they then ran themselves off a cliff—suggests just that. Evil will, in time, and with faith and love nipping at its heels, destroy itself. I get to remind myself that everything is transformable, because Love can overcome evil. It only takes us to be willing to live it, to trust it, to embody it.

When I mull this over, when I think of the great people in the history of the world who lived love and trusted it to be greater than evil, I also think of two women who are not famous, though they are great. An elementary school principal and that school's psychologist.

They were in a staff meeting one morning when they heard the chilling sound of pop pop pop. Dawn, the principal, and Mary, the school psychologist, told the rest of the staff to dive under the table, which they smartly did. But Dawn and Mary left the meeting and ran toward the sound of what they recognized as gunshots. Their thinking, according to those who knew them best, was to save as many of their beloved

## Pastor's Pitch



*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.*

*Please see LOVE, page 7*



# Decreeing December the 'Month of Divine Love'

Tommy was a sophomore running back for the UC Davis Aggies with declared dreams of playing for the Dallas Cowboys he went to a party and took some bad drugs. The resulting seizure broke his brain and left him with the mind of a happy child. When I first met him, he was a decade removed from playing football and living in a group home. At our first meeting, and everyone after that, he would ask me if I had found his football. He had lost his football and could I help him look.

I saw him once a month for nearly three years, sometimes at my office and other times in his home. Every time he greeted me with a hug and asked if I had found his football. I eventually got the bright idea to buy a football and give it to him. He smiled and hugged me but said that it wasn't his football.

"We'll keep looking," he would say with more optimism and delight than I thought anyone who had lost his one big dream could summon.


On exceptionally nice days, we would walk to a nearby park and this 29-year-old manchild would run the park like a gazelle peering behind bushes and in trash cans, under benches and atop slides and jungle gyms looking for his football. All to no avail. I envied and admired his persistence, the way his eyes would narrow then widen when he thought he might have spotted it, this relentless, unflagging love of his search that I am thinking about this morning sitting at a table up in Tahoe-Donner, a light snow falling outside, the puppy scooting around like a short-circuited toy. Her mama is, not surprisingly, laying nearby, and my wife —your pastor, is, also not surprisingly, working on a jigsaw puzzle.

It's December (well, actually it's the day before Thanksgiving, but if you read this, it will be December, and I may be losing my mind trying to untangle lines of Christmas lights. It's the month of Advent, sappy movies, fun music, beautiful hymns, and crazy sweaters. It's the time of decorating trees and hanging lights, of sweet stories and meaningful allegories — "Why the Chimes Rang," "The Little Match Girl," "The Gift of the Magi." It's when we read Luke 2: 1-15 and cherish the chills running up and down our spine, when we eat too much and spend too much and

sit in front of the fire knowing that there is nothing quite as wonderful as sitting in front of a fire with people we love, recognizing for a brief glorious moment that this can be enough. This December also marks the two-year anniversary of my father's passing.

I think December should be declared among other things, the Month of Divine Love. Not the Haight Ashbury Summer of Love kind of love, but the love that rises and spreads from celebrating the birth of a baby in a stable, a birth that binds us together, when God shared His son with us out of a love so perfect words fail to describe it. People tend to be a bit nicer, jollier, if you will. Traffic is bad and lines are long, but we don't mind it quite as much in December, all because of a baby born long ago and far away. The pretty lights don't hurt either.


*Please see DECEMBER, page 8*




## PAIN IN THE PEWS

THE CHURCH AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:  
A CALL TO ACTION


### SPEAKERS



Deneshia Clemons



Rev. Dr. Davena Jones



Tysa Hayes


The Women of Spirit Action of the CCNC-N invite you to an intimate conversation exploring the church and domestic violence and how that intersects with our individual and collective faith journeys.

This is a free event, supportive space, and affirming community.

**Community Congregational Church, UCC**  
1305 W. 2nd St., Benicia, CA 94510  
JANUARY 25TH, 2025  
10:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Lunch will be provided!

Scan QR Code to register!



## LOVE

*(Continued from page 5)*

students as they could. They confronted the shooter—stood in front of him and then lunged at him—because that is all they knew to do to save their young students.

The love that fueled them did not save them. They were killed, two of the 26 who were murdered that heartbreaking morning. But their love probably saved lives, and the lesson here is that they acted out of love. They saved lives because they loved those lives,

The next time someone questions the knee-bending power of love, remember these two women. They both had daughters. They both loved to kneel down to care for small holy beings, and because they loved, they leapt out of their chairs and ran right at a crazed boy with the rifle. If we ever forget their names, and what they did, if we ever forget how there is something in us beyond sense and reason (it is called love, friends) that stares down evil and runs roaring at it to defend all that is worth protecting, then we are allowing evil to rule the day—risk allowing darkness to dominate the world. And in doing so, we forget that love is the most powerful force in the universe.

And yes, it can cost everything, but it also saves everything. Nothing else ever has.

## Some Notes Worth Noting

1. Books that Bind meets Thursday, December 19 at 6:30 pm on Zoom. We are reading, "Mad Honey," by the prolific Jodi Picoult. There is room in the group for anyone who loves to read and enjoys a robust discussion every other month—sometimes even about the book we just read
2. The Men's Fellowship Breakfast is scheduled for Saturday, December 7 at 9 am, on Zoom.
3. CGC is 60 years old and showing its age. You are invited to adopt a cabin as your very own project. With a paint job and some repairs our cabins would be fresh and welcoming. We would ask that a family, a church, an individual, or group of friends, take one cabin to refurbish for a one-year 2025 commitment (with an option to renew) with your own work days scheduled for at least three times during the year. For more information, email Leanne Stump at [leannestump925@gmail.com](mailto:leannestump925@gmail.com) to choose a cabin or for more information.
4. There will be a CCNC-N Regional Disaster Recovery Mission Trip from April 13 to 19, 2025—Holy Week/Holy Work—to assist fire victims here in our region.. You can come and go as your schedule allows. More



### The 27th Annual Ecumenical Global Holiday Faire

Jewelry, Gifts, Art, Ornaments

Crafts & Gift Baskets

Baked Goods

Lunch

Free Admission!

♪ Enjoy Choirs & Entertainment All Day ♪

All Proceeds go to Non-Profit Organizations:

Including - ♥UPAVIM Crafts♥Genesis House♥  
♥SERRV♥Project Have Hope♥Global Mamas♥  
♥Amador Street Hope Center♥Concern America♥  
♥dePaul Women's Center♥Heifer International♥  
♥World Central Kitchen♥Arbor Day Found. ♥  
and more...

**Sat., December 7th**  
**9:00-2:00**

First Christian Church, Vallejo

1035 Indiana St. (1 block north of Tennessee St.)

[globalholidayfaire.org](http://globalholidayfaire.org) [facebook.com/GlobalHolidayFaire](https://facebook.com/GlobalHolidayFaire)



## DECEMBER

*(Continued from page 6)*

So I am sitting here staring at the thin blanket of snow outside thinking about love, as I probably have my entire life, or at least since I learned to say, “I love you, Mama,” and then on through the necessary adolescent heartbreaks and headlong into adult relationships, and then luckily, by the grace of whatever sources of amazement you wish to summon to this sentence, married love, which I seem to understand less by the year and savor all the more. And then other rich, broad loves of life: a boy, mountain lakes, dear friends, puppies that bring joy and love to families, the bend in the river where the rocks are bleached white by the sun and perfect for sitting on and thinking about almost everything, or perhaps nothing whatsoever. And also, and maybe especially, waxing and waning, bewildering and comforting, delightful and puzzling, a love of God. Or our spiritual nature. Or of wonder. Or however you choose to describe that occasional overpowering sense of something intimate yet unimaginably infinite.

I used to dismiss it conveniently only as nature—the wind through the trees, the roar of river rapids, the reflection of stars seen appreciatively in a mountain lake—never attributing a divine touch to it. But then, slowly, over time, I came to realize it was something more than serenity, more than simply mystical and peaceful and beautiful—something even simpler. It was our world imbued with God filling the cracks and gaps and holes with a divine gift of un-earthly love, unlit except by those stars, impenetrable except to the gracious and the loving.

For the longest time I never talked—or thought—about God, because I conveniently equated God with religion, and I had come to believe that religion was so darn evil and greedy and bloody, and the matter of faith was one so quixotic and unreasonable, and then the idea of spirituality got hijacked by the new agers and became so overloaded with connotations as to be top heavy and tipping over onto itself. Somewhere along the way, however, I came to understand that just because we have issues with the label we

should not be turning our backs on the content, which now has me wondering up here in Tahoe-Donner if God’s Divine Love is not unlike Tommy looking for his football: nearby, sensed, remembered, yearned for, searched for day after day, eyes wide with possibility scanning the corners of this spectacularly inexplicable world as we look for it.

I also think this lush, troubled world, so ferociously lovely, so plundered and raped and endangered, is itself a seething river of December love in much the same way Tommy is. Like Tommy, that wiggling and darting puppy is a product of this world, and when Christine and I took on whelping Leinani’s

litter and raising those pups and finding them homes, including our own, our work was to cherish them, to protect them, to try and feel in them God’s music, and to hum a little of that music ourselves. I think Tommy’s ceaseless search for his football was his an-

them to God.

Love comes in so many guises, and a deep respect for tall pine trees and running rivers and mountain lakes and deep starry nights is no different (okay, maybe slightly) than a deep respect for lost footballs and puppies and communities and beautiful wives. Love really makes little distinction. It is what it is. Thankfully.

The truest words I ever heard about the Month of Divine Love were uttered by a Catholic priest at one of the UFW’s large community Thanksgiving meals at LaPaz, the farmworkers HQ in Keene, California. He was a dear friend of my father’s, and Cesar left it to them to decide who would deliver the prayer. Several glasses of wine later they flipped a coin to determine who would deliver grace. Father Ken lost. He stood up at the long table with food lined up from one end to the next and led us in prayer. He closed with, “And God, thank you for your love and allowing us to be part of your mystery. We do not understand it, and we are grateful.”

Lost footballs are like that.

And, by the way, Merry Christmas!

--John Hartmire

*... God’s Divine Love is not unlike Tommy looking for his football: nearby, sensed, remembered, yearned for, searched for day after day, eyes wide with possibility scanning the corners of this spectacularly inexplicable world as we look for it.*

Sierra Christian Church Monthly Calendar

# December 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1  1st Sunday Advent 10:30 am Worship	2	3	4	5	6	7  9 am Men's Fellowship Breakfast
8  2nd Sunday Advent 10:30 am Worship	9	10	11	12	13	14
15  3rd Sunday Advent 10:30 am Worship Zoon Only	16	17	18	19  6:30 pm Books That Bind	20	21
22  4th Sunday Advent 10:30 am Worship	23	24  Christmas Eve Service, 6:30 pm	25  <b>Christmas Day!</b>	26	27	28
29  10:30 am Worship	30	31  New Year's Eve	1  <b>New Years Day 2025</b>	2	3	4

*In case, and in all likelihood, the January newsletter is a few days late being released...*

**Happy New Year, Everyone**

**Welcome to 2025!**





# Some December Noteworthy Dates in History

**December 1, 2006** - Protesters in Berkeley began sitting in trees that U.C. Berkeley planned to cut near Memorial Stadium to build an athletic training center. The last 4 protesters came down on December 9, 2008.

**December 2, 1913** - The U.S. Senate passed the Raker Act. That let San Francisco dam the Tuolumne River in Yosemite National Park for water-collection and power-generation facilities.

**December 2, 2011** - Santa Clara city officials announced \$850 million in funding for a new 49ers football stadium estimated to cost \$1.02 billion.

**December 3, 1786** - The first marriage was performed at the Santa Barbara Presidio. Joseph Calisto, a 23-year-old Spanish soldier, wed Juana Vitala Feliz, who was around 13-years-old. They had 13 children.

**December 4, 1835** - Richard Henry Dana reached San Francisco Bay. The Harvard student shipped out from Boston and described his adventures in *Alta California in Two Years Before the Mast* (1840).

**December 4, 1965** - The Grateful Dead played their first show under the name Grateful Dead at Ken Kesey's Acid Test in San Jose.

**December 5, 1846**—Patrick Breen, traveling with the Donner Party, wrote in his diary: "Fine, clear day. Beautiful sunshine. Thawing a little. Looks delightful after the long snow storm."

**December 6, 1931** - The U.S. Senate approved Hetch Hetchy Dam in Yosemite National Park. It became the main water source for San Francisco and other Bay Area communities.

**December 6, 1935** - The San Francisco Chronicle reported that there were more rats than people in the city by a factor of 3 to 1

**December 6, 1969**- The Rolling Stones performed at Altamont Speedway in Livermore. Some 300,000 people attended. Hells Angels, hired for security, beat to death Meredith Hunter during the show. Another person drowned in a nearby canal and two were killed by a runaway car.

**December 6, 1994** - Orange County filed for bankruptcy protection due to some \$2 billion investment losses,

the biggest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history

**December 7, 1872** - Los Angeles Public Library was founded. Today, it is among the greatest U.S. libraries.

**December 10, 1846** - Patrick Breen, traveling with the Donner Party, wrote in his diary: "Snowed fast all night with heavy squalls of wind. Continues still to snow. The sun peeping through the clouds once in about three hours. Very difficult to get wood today. Now, about 2 o'clock, looks likely to continue snowing. Don't know the depth of the snow; may be 7 feet."

**December 10, 1941**- A Pan American Airways Clipper plane landed at the San Francisco Treasure Island seaplane harbor with bullet holes from Japanese guns at Wake Island on December 7.

**December 11, 1932** - San Francisco recorded a temperature of 27°F, its coldest day ever and it snowed.

**December 12, 1953** - Chuck Yeager reached Mach 2.43, or 1,620 mph, in the Bell X-1A rocket plane. He flew from Murac Army Airfield near Palmdale—the X-1 was the first manned airplane to exceed the speed of sound in level flight.

**December 13, 1944** - Los Angeles recorded a record low temperature, 28°F. The record high, 92°F, was in 1938.

**December 14, 1963** - Baldwin Hills Reservoir in Los Angeles, built above an active fault line, broke open. In three hours 250 million gallons of water flooded the surrounding neighborhood, destroying 277 homes and killing five people.

**December 15, 1997** - The San Francisco 49ers retired Joe Montana's jersey #16. Montana, as quarterback, lead them to four Super Bowl victories.

**December 16, 1913** - Charlie Chaplin began his film career at Keystone Studios in Edendale, earning \$150 a week

**December 16, 2009** - San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom struck a deal with the U.S. Navy to acquire Treasure Island for a guaranteed payment of \$55 million over several years.

**December 17, 1846** - Charles Burger and William Murphy, unable to keep up with the snowshoers, returned to



camp. Five women, nine men, and 12-year-old Lemuel Murphy keep going. Patrick Breen wrote in his diary: "Pleasant sunshine today. Wind about S.E. Bill Murphy returned from the mountain party last evening. Bealis died night before last. Milt. & Noah went to Donners 8 days since; not returned yet; thinks they got lost in the snow. J Denton here to day."

**December 18, 1999** - Julia "Butterfly" Hill climbed down from an ancient redwood in Humboldt County after living there for two years. She protested logging of old growth redwood forests.

**December 19, 1964** - Heavy rain from December 19, 1964 to January 7, 1965 flooded nearly every river in coastal Northern California. It was called the Christmas Flood.

**December 20, 1849** - Peter Burnett became the first state governor of California. He proposed that blacks, slave or free, be banned from the state and thought it necessary to exterminate the state's native people.

**December 21, 1946** - Frank Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life" premiered. The Christmas fantasy comedy drama, starring James Stewart and Donna Reed became a holiday classic.

**December 22, 1965** - The Byrds recorded "Eight Miles High" in Hollywood. It was one the first full-blown psychedelic rock recording and was banned from the radio shortly after release.

**December 24, 1775** - The first non-native child, christened Salvador Linares, was born in California on the trail near Borrego Springs. He is buried at the Santa Clara mission cemetery

**December 24, 1953** - Pierre Salinger, San Francisco Chronicle reporter and later press secretary to President John Kennedy, won the 1953 McQuade Memorial Award for his articles on poor conditions in Cali-

fornia county jails. He had himself arrested under an alias in Bakersfield and Stockton for an inside look.

**December 24, 1997** - The U.S. Air Force agreed to sell McClellan Air Force Base to Sacramento County for a some \$90 million, payments to begin in 2008 and continue for 45 years.

**December 25, 1846**- Patrick Breen, traveling with the Donner Party, wrote in his diary: "Began to snow yesterday about 12 o'clock. Snowed all night & snows yet rapidly. Wind about E. by N. Great difficulty in getting wood. John & Edwd. has to get: I am not able. Offered our prayers to God this Cherimass morning. The prospect is appalling; but hope in God. Amen."

**December 25, 1893** - Robert Ripley was born in Santa Rosa. He created "Ripley's Believe It Or Not!" newspaper panel series, radio show and television show featuring unbelievable facts from around the world.

**December 26, 1846** - Trapped in snow in the Sierra Nevada and without food, starving members of the Donner Party resorted to cannibalism.

**December 26, 1966** - Kwanzaa was first celebrated by Maulana Karenga, chair of Black Studies at California State University, Long Beach.

**December 28, 1902** - The Trans-Pacific cable that linked Hawaii to the U.S. landed at Ocean Beach in San Francisco near the Cliff House. It was met by a large crowd, dignitaries and a brass band.

**December 31, 1849**- Some 80,000 people lived in San Francisco. Roughly 42,000 arrived overland, 35,000 came by sea and another 3,000 were sailors who abandoned their ships.

**December 31, 1965** - California became the most populous state in the U.S.

## Upcoming Sierra Christian Dates to Put in Your Calendar

— 12/9 — Men's Breakfast Fellowship; 9 am on Zoom

— 12/19 — Books That Bind; 6:30 pm on Zoom: Jodi Picoult's "Bad Honey"

— 12/24 — Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, 6:30 pm in the Barn and on Zoom