

Sierra Christian Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Fear Can Be a Treacherous Liar

When friends share that they're freaking out and afraid, I inevitably ask them to name what it is they are afraid of. I hear all manner of answers, from the fear of dying alone, to drinking again, to so and so being mad at me, to not having enough money to spend the evening on the couch shopping without restraint on Amazon, to running out of gas in Death Valley on a blistering Sunday evening.

And then because it is not my fear, I can calmly, rationally, ask, "Are any of those things actually happening?" Forty-seven out of forty-eight times, the answer is no.

The fear is real, but the thing feared is not.

An anthropologist might explain it by pointing out that we homo sapiens have been around for about 300,000 years, and for more than 290,000 of those we were hunter gatherers who survived by huddling together in caves and recognizing in a

primitive kind of way that it was our fear—collective and private—that kept us alive: *Don't eat the weird berries. Don't wade in those tar pits. Don't try and pet the saber-tooth tiger. Don't leave the cave and wander around the bend without having a big club in your hand.*

But those same survival mechanisms don't always translate well to modern life.

Now, instead of a tiger in the bushes, it's an email from our boss. Instead of running from predators,

it's reading comments on the internet. Our bodies respond the same way, however: adrenaline spikes, vision narrows, heart races, stupid choices are often made in response. The same chemicals that once saved our lives now keep us awake at 3 a.m.

I have shared in the past that my husband believes that storytelling, along with opposable thumbs, may be what elevates us as a species. But he will be the first to admit that he has told himself stories about threats and possibilities that do not yet exist. John can describe times in his life when he has been paralyzed by fear that comes from stories he tells himself about what might happen.

We have talked about this in worship. We are living through a period in history that seems especially good at keeping us on edge. The world can feel like it's unraveling right there on the glowing screen we hold in the palm of our hands.

But what we see on those glowing screens is not the *whole* world—it's a world filtered through ideology, algorithms, and the need to keep us clicking so some business rakes

A friend writes:

"As I was leaving a store, I returned to my car only to discover that I had locked my keys and cell phone inside. Frustrated, I kicked a tire because that always helps, and muttered a few choice words. A teenager riding his bike happened to see me and asked,

"What's wrong?"

"I explained my predicament, adding, "Even if I could call my wife, she can't bring me her car key because this is our only car."

"Without hesitation, he handed me his cell phone and said, 'Call your wife and tell her I'm coming to get her key.'"

"I hesitated, knowing it was a seven-mile round trip. 'That's a long way,' I said.

"Don't worry about it," he replied.

"An hour later, the teenager returned with the key. I offered him some money as a thank you, but he refused, saying, "Let's just say I needed the exercise."

"And just like that, he rode off down the street, into the sunset. Maybe angels have traded in their wings for two wheels."

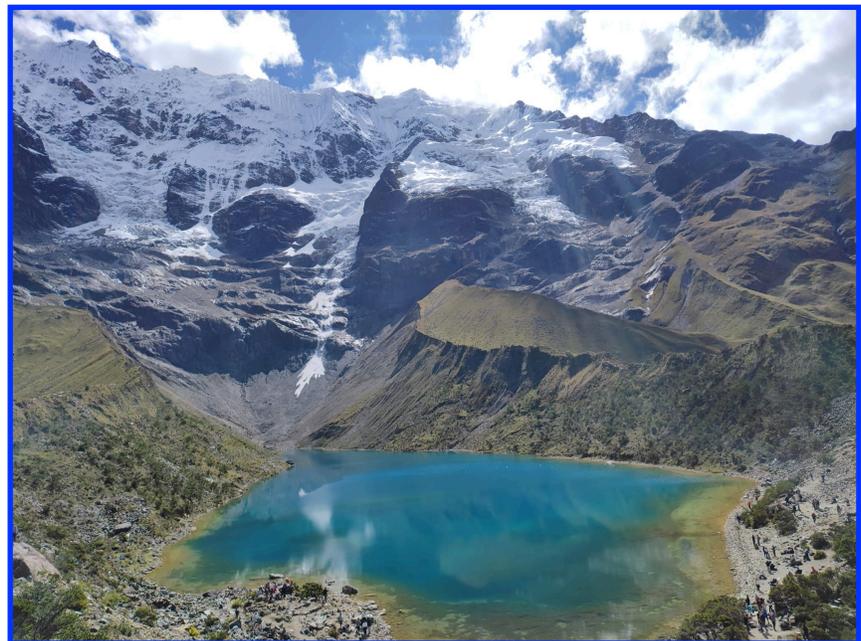
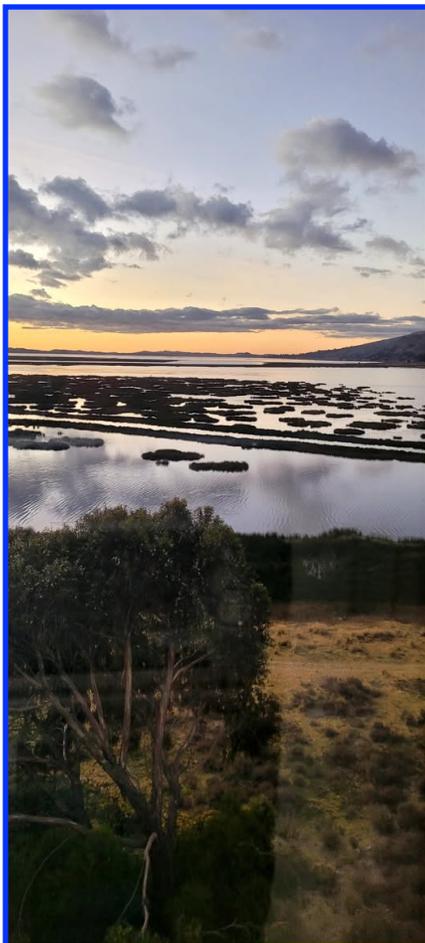
Pastor's Pitch



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.



While we were not thinking about the church newsletter for a few months, Pam Margo and Diane Wilson, along with Pam's husband, Randy, ventured to Peru, visiting places of historical and cultural greatness as Machu Picchu, which attracts millions of visitors annually,



Lake Hamantay, elevation 13,779 feet, one of the most beautiful and sacred lakes in the Cusco Region of southern Peru, within the Vilcabamba mountain range. This is where Pam and Diane hung out for a few hours breathing clean but thin air...

PITCH

(Continued from page 1)

will spike our neurochemicals and keep us scared so we keep scrolling.

The words, “do not be afraid” show up in the Bible all the time. Angels say it. Jesus says it. Over and over again. The Bible doesn’t tell us, “Be not ignorant,” or “Be not a terrible driver.” It tells us, “Be not afraid.”

It’s not, I assure you, because God doesn’t want us to fear saber-tooth tigers or anything that is a threat to our safety; nor is it because God wants us to add “Stop being afraid” to our ever-growing list of self-improvement projects, like take a yoga class, eat more vegetables, read Anthony Robbins. I suspect the reason is simply because fear isn’t good for our hearts.

And fear is tough. It’s an attention seeking liar, trying to convince us that it is more real and dire than what’s actually happening in the moment, or might happen. At best, fear exaggerates; at worst it’s a doomsday prophet who is wrong most of the time but still feels entitled to hang out rent free in our heads.

And this is where we again look to Jesus, who suggests we don’t have to be afraid, because “it is your father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” I think we are being advised to stop being afraid of what bad thing might happen because in doing so we risk missing the kingdom of God thing that is happening. I think it is better not to be on alert for some imagined danger but to be alert for God.

But it is not all that easy, because the kingdom of God isn’t necessarily flashy. It is not necessarily brilliant lights and booming trumpets.

I think the kingdom of God is comprised of the things in life that are easy to overlook, things that are so ordinary we almost don’t see them: seeds, yeast, the

in ad revenue. Most of what we see online is less about truth and more about engagement — what

two dimes lost in the couch cushions, a puppy coming when you call his name.

God’s kingdom grows quietly in the shade of small things.

When we lift up our hearts, and shake off the tunnel vision of fear, we can see that the quiet, beautiful work of the spirit is absolutely everywhere. In an infant grabbing your finger, a toddler’s finger-painting proudly given to a cranky neighbor, in a couple of friends forgiving each other and going out for tacos, in a shy teenager with self-harm scars being asked about their dreams instead of their wounds.

That’s the kingdom.

It’s not loud, but it is so much more worthy of our attention than anything our phones can offer us. The kingdom of God is relentless in its humble healing power, and I recognize it for what it plainly is. How can I not? As the world may appear and feel like it is falling apart, it is also, every single day, being

quietly, stubbornly, beautifully knit back together.

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As the world may appear and feel like it is falling apart, it is also, every single day, being quietly, stubbornly, beautifully knit back together.

My husband’s god-daughter is a school-teacher, a wife and mother. When she was a young, maybe five, John wrote her a godfather-to-goddaughter kind of letter. He alerted her that bad things happen in this world that can break her heart, and she will feel it. But this world is so overflowing with more beauty, mystery, goodness, (and M&Ms) that anyone can fully absorb, she will know less of the heartbreak and more of it grace and humble healing. He wrote that as she grows the people she loves and who love her will help lift her heart and open it, which is as close to experiencing God as is sometimes possible, a God who will always be with her, even when she’s lonely and scared. Okay, especially when she’s lonely and scared.

God is quietly holding the world together in love and we are part of that.

And it is so beautiful.

**Board of Directors meets Wednesday,
September 17, at 6:30 pm on Zoom**



Sierra Christian Church stayed busy this summer, celebrating Kailana, our Communion Dog, enjoying each other's company over lunch, and honoring the diversity of our world and our open and affirming congregation.



Some Church-Going Humor

One Sunday morning, the pastor noticed little Alex standing in the foyer of the church staring up at a large plaque. It was covered with names and small American flags mounted on either side of it. The six-year old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the pastor walked up, stood beside the little boy, and said quietly,

"Good morning Alex."

"Good morning Pastor," he replied, still focused on the plaque. "Pastor, what is this?"

The pastor said, "Well son, it's a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service."

Soberly, they just stood together, staring at the large plaque. Finally, little Alex's voice, barely audible and trembling with fear asked,

"Which service, the 9:00 or the 11:00?"

'Tis A Beauty Who Celebrates a Birthday

Precisely 59 years ago this month Pastor Christine was born. I first laid eyes on her some 37 years later, and though I did not utter a word to her when I first saw her, my insides were screaming loudly and poetically, like a swooning schoolboy, like I had stuck my finger in a light socket, like something lost had been found, a treasure discovered. I would see her around from time to time, until suddenly I didn't.

When I asked someone about the beautiful woman who sometimes wore sweats and sported an athletic tan much of the year, I was told she had gotten married and had a son. I took the news bravely—never let on—and managed to sulk off to a corner lost in my own private distress.

Then some 48 years after she was born, I bumped into her again. My soul seemed to kick its way through my bones, and when we spoke and made plans to meet for coffee, I felt a happiness so basic it was almost unbearable. She still had a son, but no husband, and she was still as unnervingly beautiful as when I first saw her.

“It is the kind of beauty,” I wrote in my journal that night, hand shaking, “that when it enters a room ugliness of all sorts falls to pieces.”

As I mentioned in the opening sentence, it is her birthday this month, and I am still coming to understand the baffling quality of her beauty; the truth is, from where I sit, it just isn't normal to see a woman who looks and lives like this. It was as if someone had fashioned her, as an example for the rest of us.

Beauty is considered a great big deal. Whether it's lethal or a form of salvation is sometimes hard to know. Beauty can make ugliness recede until its residue is all washed away. It's a matter of focus. It is also true that beauty can cause a fair amount of confusion, destabilizing (obsessive) behavior and various sorts of destruction. I am sure empires have been toppled, wars started, ships launched, because of it. But the truth I quickly learned is that in the company of human beauty a not-so-good-looking person can feel more good-looking than he actually is—a part of something larger than not feeling beautiful enough.

Even better—and I'm not sure how she does it—Christine's beauty can make a person feel secure, comfortable, calm, balanced, and inspired.

Her physical presence is striking, but it is her spiritual calling that makes her physical appearance even more compelling, because it informs an inner beauty—I'm afraid that's the only thing to call it—which makes her actual beauty a million times as forceful and divine as it naturally is. I have not recognized it in anyone else—this particularly unique double barrel beauty—though I am sure my father saw it in my mother, and legions of lovestruck young men would swear it is true of the focus of their love. I think it has the unintended blessing of when you are around it you feel as though it can free you of being too shallow, too ugly, too stupid, too rich, not rich enough, too high-minded, too preoccupied with business, or television, or the Dodgers, or whatever you might resent about yourself. Being close to this depth of beauty is like receiving absolution. It is going to be okay.



She is remarkably comfortable with her beauty because I think she has balanced it out. It is her spirituality that drives her, the good looks are just a bonus. They combine to create a gentleness that is soothing, as if nothing could ever go terribly wrong. And this is simply because she trusts her spiritual self, which has come at a price, as all great gifts seem to. There is nothing in life that can't be dealt with through the force of God and faith, something Christine reminds me of simply by her presence in my life. I am sure her good looks have proved beneficial—the trappings of her beauty are a salvation. But I tell you, it is never more true than with her, her actual salvation, like the actual beauty, is not on the surface.

To paraphrase the Bard, a good heart, is the sun and the moon—for it shines bright, and never changes, but keeps his course truly.

Now, what in the world do I get her for her birthday!

—John Hartmire

Some Notes Worth Noting

1. Birthday wishes to Pastor Christine, celebrating another adventure around the sun on the 20th. (See previous page, if you dare.)
2. Fresh from conquering the Andes, we wish a terrific birthday on the 19th to Diane Wilson.
3. And we remember her every day, but on the 20th we shall especially recall with appreciation and love Constance Cole. It is her birthday.
4. Books That Bind next meets October 16. Having just finished the great and astonishing "Heaven & Earth Grocery Store," by James McBride, we are now digging into "The Girl In His Shadow," by Audrey Blake, a historical novel about a woman aspiring to be a doctor when such dreams were heavily discouraged.
5. Huge prayers and positive energy and everything we can bring to bear to and for Brian Ridge, who underwent the first of three chemo treatments last week—a 4.5-hour endurance test—and the first of 34 radiation treatments the same day. He understands it's going to get worse before it gets better, this battle with cancer found at the base of his tongue, but he remains humbled by the support and compassion of the church.
6. The congregation and everyone who knows her celebrates with Sandy Barry on being accepted to the brand spanking new affordable housing complex in Roseville.
7. And that huge SIGH you hear, well, that's Susan Lane settling in and kicking back in her new home. Finally! (There might be a box or two left to unpack, but who's quibbling?)
8. Free tickets for admission to the Asian Art Museum, 200 Larkin Street San Francisco, CA 94102 in San Francisco. These tickets have been provided on behalf of the North American Pacific/Asian Disciples of Christ (NAPAD). Join us for an art museum visit by contacting Kevin Lue at 916-716-4631 and a date we may all attend. Carpooling groups may be formed. The NAPAD regional group would appreciate a written summary of your visit, thoughts, and impressions. Current art exhibits and museum information use the following link exhibitions.asianart.org
9. Men's Retreat at Camp Arroyo October 10-12, 2025. Reflect, Reform, and Resurrect! Comfortable cabins for overnight guest at Camp Arroyo. Bring your sleeping bag, pillow, toiletries, snacks, towel and clothing. Hiking and cool weather events possible. See the Regional website for registration information at ccncn.org Scholarships are available. Pastor Kevin Deibert is our guest speaker.
10. Women's fall retreat is October 31-November 2 at Christ the King Passionist Retreat Center, The Rev. Dr. Boyung Lee is the featured speaker, on the theme "Which Way is Up: No Not Let your Hearts Be Troubled." For more information, go to ccncn.org.

Sierra Christian Church Monthly Calendar

September 2025

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

List & Links of Regional Events

September 15-17, 2025: [Clergy Retreat](#)

September 20, 2025: [Sun Day at Niles Discovery Church](#)

October 10, 2025: [Men's Ministries Retreat](#)

October 17, 2025: [Women's Fall Retreat](#)

October 25, 2025: [What is Chronic Sorrow](#)

November 7-9, 2025: [Fall Fest](#)

Some Significant Sept. Dates in History

September 1, 1846—The Donner Party, 87 people in 23 wagons, ran out of water on their third day crossing the Great Salt Lake Desert. The Reed family oxen ran off at night and weren't found so the Reeds had to walk.

September 1, 1942--A Sacramento federal judge in upheld the wartime detention of Japanese-Americans as well as Japanese nationals. More than 10,000 people were forced from their homes and kept in primitive, remote camps in California and other states during World War II.

September 1, 1946—San Francisco 49ers played their first home game at Kezar Stadium before a crowd of 45,000. They beat the Chicago Rockets, 34-14.

September 1, 1979—A Los Angeles court ordered Clayton Moore to stop wearing his Lone Ranger mask. For years after "The Lone Ranger" (1949-1957), he made appearances wearing his costume. After the court order, he replaced the mask with similar-looking sunglasses. He counter-sued and won the right to wear his original costume.

September 1 2005,—The California Senate approved a bill to legalize same-sex marriage. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed it 5 days later.

September 2, 1863—The first railroad and ferry link between San Francisco and Oakland began operations.

September 2, 1969—The first Internet message was sent to UCLA from Bolt Beranek and Newman Corp. in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

September 3, 1913—The Oakland, Antioch and Eastern Railway began operating an electric train from Oakland to Sacramento; the Comet in the morning and Meteor in the afternoon.

September 3, 2013—Siskiyou County supervisors voted 4-1 to secede from the rest of the state. They hoped to revitalize the 1941 regional independence movement to form the new state of Jefferson

September 4, 1951—President Harry Truman made the first transcontinental television speech, broadcast from a conference in San Francisco. He formally accepted the treaty ended America's post-World War II occupation of Japan.

September 5, 1878—Clara Foltz passed the University of California bar exam to become the first female lawyer on the West Coast. She and Laura de Force Gordon applied to Hastings College of the Law. They were denied admission because of their gender. So Foltz and Gordon sued, argued their own case and won admission. The Criminal Courts Building in downtown Los Angeles was renamed the Clara Shortridge Folz Criminal Justice Center in 2002.

September 5, 1957—Viking Press published Jack Kerouac's On the Road. The Beatnik adventure partly set in California describes the cross-country adventures of Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty. Kerouac typed the book on a long roll of paper in three weeks of 1951.

September 5, 1975—Charles Manson family member Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme attempted to assassinate U.S. President Gerald Ford in Sacramento. Her gun failed to fire, no one was injured, and Ford continued walking to the California state house.

September 6 1876,—The Southern Pacific railroad line opened from San Francisco to Los Angeles, connecting Los Angeles to the transcontinental railroad.

September 6, 1936—Some 60,000 workers marched in the San Francisco Labor Day parade as around 250,000 spectators watched.

September 9, 1965—Sandy Koufax, the Los Angeles Dodgers Hall of Fame pitcher, became the sixth pitcher of the modern era, the eighth in history, to throw a perfect game. It was the first by a left-hander since 1880, a 1-0 victory over the Chicago Cubs. He struck out the last

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HISTORY

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6 hitters he faced.

September 11, 1812—The Russian-American Company established a fort on the Sonoma coast as a southern outpost to support Russia's North American colonies. Today Fort Ross is a California State Historic Park.

September 11, 1972—BART, Bay Area Rapid Transit, opened its first line. The 26-mile track ran from Oakland to Fremont. Today BART operates five routes on 104 miles of track, with 44 stations in four counties.

September 12, 1910—Alice Stebbins Wells became the first policewoman in the U.S. when the Los Angeles Police swore her in. She was given a badge, assigned a telephone call box, handed a rule book and first aid book. She founded the International Policewomen's Association and traveled throughout North America to promote female officers.

September 12, 1970—Dr. Timothy Leary, professor and LSD guru, escaped from prison in San Luis Obispo.. He was in on marijuana-related charges. When he got to prison, he was given psychological tests administered to all inmates to determine appropriate prison location and work details. Because he wrote some of the tests, Leary was able to easily manipulate his responses to get assigned to work as a gardener in a low-security prison.

September 12, 2008—A Union Pacific freight train crashed into a Metrolink commuter train, killing some 25 people. The Chatsworth wreck in was the deadliest U.S. passenger train accident in 15 years. Officials learned that the passenger train engineer, who died in the crash, was sending a text message and failed to stop at a red light just before the collision.

September 13, 1913— The temperature in San Francisco reached a record 101 degrees.

September 14, 1961— San Francisco Police Department vice squad San Francisco Police raided the Tay-Bush Inn and arrested 103 people. All but 14 were men accused of dancing together and kissing. Charges were dropped against 101 of them.

September 18, 1975—Patty Hearst was arrested after a year on the FBI Most Wanted List. The 19-year-old newspaper heiress was kidnapped from her Berkeley apartment by the Symbionese Liberation Army, a revolutionary group. She was brainwashed then joined them in a bank robbery. Hearst was found guilty and imprisoned for almost two years before her sentence was commuted by President Jimmy Carter.

September 23, 1962—"The Jetsons", an animated Hanna-Barbera cartoon series about a Space Age family, premiered. It was the first ABC-TV color program.

September 24, 1871—Three escaped convicts and lawmen shot it out at a lake in Mono County. Today Convict Lake is a popular recreation spot.—Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove became the first California State Park.

September 24, 1991—Theodor Seuss Geisel, known as Dr. Seuss, died in La Jolla at age 87.

September 25, 1890—Sequoia National Park, famous for its ancient enormous trees, opened. It includes Mount Whitney, which at 14,505 feet is the highest point in the lower 48 states. It borders Kings Canyon National Park so together they are known as the Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, and they are magnificent—no better place for a 10-year-old's first all day hike with his dad.

September 25, 2015—Governor Jerry Brown signed a bill making robotic vehicles legal in the state. California became the third state to legalize self-driving vehicles.

September 27, 2010—Downtown Los Angeles recorded a record temperature of 113 degrees.

September 28, 1991—Miles Davis, legendary trumpeter, bandleader and composer, died in Santa Monica at age 65. Davis was one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century. The U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution recognizing his album "Kind of Blue" on its 50th anniversary, "honoring the masterpiece and reaffirming jazz as a national treasure".

Reconciliation Ministry Offering Approaches

The Reconciliation Ministry Special Offering is received each year in congregations on the last Sunday in September and the first Sunday in October (in solidarity with World Communion Sunday). Funds generated by this special emphasis are used throughout the year to provide grants to ministries and congregations actively developing and implementing programs that promote our Church's Pro-Reconciliation and Anti-Racist identity. These programs and efforts seek to reveal, re-educate, and remove systemic and structural barriers in our communities that serve to deny the image of God and human thriving based on race.

Your gifts to Reconciliation Ministry strengthens our Church's witness to God's unending love for all of humanity. With your generosity, leaders, communities, and our congregations are being equipped to witness to God's love and justice in all times and in every season. The time is always ripe to stand up for justice to ensure that all of God's children are treated equitably. Thank you for joining us on this journey through your generosity.

Sunday, September 28th - Sunday, October 5th

2025 Reconciliation Ministry SPECIAL OFFERING



Beyond Brokenness - Building Beloved Community

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he committed to us the message of reconciliation.



We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

