

Sierra Christian Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation

If God is Love...

(A Response to the National Prayer Rally)

This pitch had a very different opening when I started working on it. Then May 17th happened, when in OUR nation's capital thousands of people streamed onto the National Mall for a daylong prayer rally billed as a "rededication of our country as One Nation under God." What it actually was, and designed to be, was the continued effort to dismantle the separation of church and state tenant as long as the "church" was Christian nationalism, which the event organizers believe should be this country's national religion. The day was also a reminder that hate and intolerance is alive and well under the name of God and Jesus.

Along with President Trump reading from the Bible, and Speaker Mike Johnson telling the largely debunked story of George Washington falling to his knees praying for victory at Valley Forge, Franklin Graham took to the microphone to once again denounce the "gay lifestyle," equating same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ rights with the moral decline in our society. His point is that there is no room in America for same-sex marriages, and it is his, and our nation's, moral duty to denounce it because a marriage can only be defined as a union between one man and one woman as ordained by God.

Though Mr. Graham will never see what is written here, the least a woman and pastor and anyone can do is react and declare themselves and tell where they stand. None of this will come as much of a surprise, but I am going to go at it, nevertheless.

The courts of this land have no business taking away such elemental freedoms as marrying the person your heart calls to, and neither do the supposed Christian leaders who relentlessly implore the courts to do just that, who preach and take Scripture out of context to defend their positions. I believe the church should be the pots and pans banging champion of marriage equality.

Because, and I believe this with the same burning delight, the same faith, the same intense abandon which attended Jesus's life and teachings more than two thousand years ago, Franklin Graham does not need to bless same-gender unions.

The Heritage Foundation doesn't need to.
 The Evangelical Church doesn't need to.
 The Southern Baptist Church doesn't.
 The United Methodist Church doesn't.
 No church truly needs to.

No one needs to bless same-gender unions because God already has—that is, if God is love in the way these churches all claim that God is.

Sierra Christian Church is gladly an open and affirming congregation, but it is not something we should have to declare like a half-off sale. It is, golly gosh, utterly redundant. How can any church that follows God and Jesus not be open and affirming?

See, if God *is* really love, and the evidence

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.

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PITCH

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of eons certainly points that way—if love truly *is* the essence of the Divine, and we have Jesus’s word to lean on here, than God is for same-gender marriages for the same reason God is for any loving, respectful, interdependent union.

If God is love, God is for a mutually-beneficial relationship between two human beings where they each find connection, affection, and devotion in the other; where they are fully seen and fully known, where they are encouraged and accepted and allowed to become all that they dream of becoming and can do all they are created to do.

If God is love, God is for sharing the celebrations and sorrows of this life alongside someone who is truly for you; someone who makes you a better version of yourself: someone who tolerates your morning breath, who doesn’t throw a frying pan at you because you stubbornly refuse to wear your hearing aids, who silently holds you when you grieve the loss of your father, who forgives you when you are at less than your best—who advocates for you and fights for you and stands with you when no one else will.

If God is love, God is for the new families created when two lives intersect and a new tribe is created, bound by their commitment to surrounding their loved ones with support and wisdom—and God is for the family that these two people get to lovingly define, because that is the nature of family and of marriage.

If God is love, than God is for more fidelity in a world of deceit,
 God is for more affection in a place that grows ever colder,
 God is for more joy in a world that is often so starved for it,
 God is for more compassion in a time it can be tough to come by,
 God is for more love because God is love, no matter how you slice it.

Since God is love, than God is for butterflies in the stomach and awkward first dates and more awkward first fights; for navigating differences and sacrificial decisions and crafting compromise and growing older together, and God is for more people finding a home for their hearts because life is already so very difficult and so much better when not alone.

So yes, the Rev. Graham’s of the world, the Evangelical Church, the Southern Baptist Church, the United Methodist Church, the Heritage Foundation, and every other religious person or organization interested in being agents of compassion in the world should absolutely bless, affirm, celebrate, and officiate marriages between LGBTQ+ human beings. Doing so would mean they are truly perpetuating the character of God in the world and honoring the fact that God created every human being in God’s image without exception. About that, Jesus had plenty to say.

They should do that because it would begin to undo the millennia of discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community in the name of religion, because this would make a powerful declaration of the nature of God, and because it would expand our table in a way that pulls people together and does not push them away.

Churches should champion love wherever love breaks out.

But if these religious institutions refuse to bless the dignity of queer human beings and insist on not acknowledging the supportive, challenging, beautiful, complex relationships that make them feel seen, known, respected, and whole, it will not be the last word.

Because if God truly *is* love, as these people of God are telling us God is, God has already blessed them.

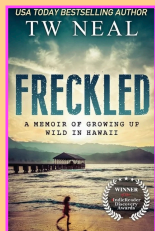
What God has joined together, let no phobic religious person or church tear apart.

MEN'S FELLOWSHIP



Sat., June 6,
 9 am. Have your
 breakfast ready, your
 fellowship bib on and
 let's Zoom.

BOOKS THAT BIND



Sierra Christian’s Book Club,
 Books That Bind, next meets
 Thursday, June 18, at 6:30 on
 Zoom. We are reading “Freckled.” It is a memoir about growing up wild in Hawaii.

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

We will have our annual congregational meeting to approve the church’s budget, Sunday, June 21 following Worship. It will be a hybrid meeting.

A note to all you graduates

as you look out in front of you at all that awaits. It is our hope that you have learned, and continue to learn, how to really pay attention to the world around you, to see it as something sacred, on fire with the same force that made the stars: love, fellowship, the mystical oneness of all things deep down.



If you can, there comes with it a freedom like no other. But it involves attention and awareness and discipline, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them over and over in myriad petty, unsexy ways every day.

That is real freedom. That is being educated, and understanding how to think and truly see. The alternative, we have learned, is living with the constant gnawing sense of having had, and lost, some infinite, beautiful thing. So go out and see and experience and cherish the wonder of it all.

As that renowned philosopher Dr. Seuss put it, "You're off to great places. Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So ... get on your way."

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Meet 2nd Lt. Elyce Wages Stolle United States Air Force Academy



Assigned to Air base in Columbus, Mississippi

Initial flight training at Pensacola, FL, April, 2026

Met 2nd Lt. John Paul Stolle at the Academy and married him on May 9, 2026 in Savannah, GA

Father is Steve Wages; mother is Suzanne Cole Wages

Grandfather is Cliff Cole; step grandmother is Constance Cole



"Life loves to be taken by the lapel and be told, 'I am with you kid. Let's go!'"

—Maya Angelou

Meet Daven L. Stelter, Westlake Charter High School



Son of Pastor Christine, stepson of John Hartmire, grandson of Norm Pobanz, Daven has plans to attend Sacramento State in the fall, with an eye on a degree in business marketing, perhaps focusing on Real Estate.



"I took a deep breath and listened to the old brag of my heart: I am, I am, I am."

— Sylvia Plath

Meet Nolan Barry, Graduate of Illinois State, 2026

Son of Michelle Steinke Barry & Jorge Pietro

Grandson of Karen and Phil Steinke

Nolan is an infielder for the Illinois State, and is currently in Kentucky for the NCAA playoffs.

Graduation was earlier in May, but Nolan was still playing ball, as Illinois State moved to the playoffs KY.



"Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself."

— George Bernard Shaw

Meet Anna Rebecca Leonard Woodcreek High School Graduate, 2026



Granddaughter of Diane Wilson, Anna Rebecca Leonard, is graduating from Woodcreek High School with honors this month. She will be attending Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego in the Fall.



"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the one who'll decide where to go..."

— Dr. Seuss

"Becoming isn't about arriving somewhere or achieving a certain aim. I see it instead as forward motion, a means of evolving, a way to reach continuously toward a better self. The journey doesn't end."

— Michelle Obama

Meet Connor Coe, Natomas Performing Fine Arts Academy Graduate, 2026



Son of Lisa Coe, after his June 11 graduation, Connor will be moving with his family to Santa Rosa, where he plans on continuing his education with the goal of a career in video game design.

"Why fit in when you were born to stand out?" — Dr. Seuss



GRAD NOTE*(Continued from page 5)*

A final thought, asked for or not: It is more than likely that if you're looking for something to fulfill you, it is already inside you. You've heard this before, but the holy thing inside you really is that which causes you to seek it. Only spirit feeds spirit, in the same way only your own blood type can sustain you.

There is not much left to say, other than, we know you are not what you look like, or how much you weigh, or how you did in school, and whether you get to start a job next Monday or not. Spirit isn't what you do, and while we don't know exactly what it is, we know, it seems to be made made visible in people being kind to each other, especially when it's a really busy person, taking care of a needy annoying person.

Or even if it's the terribly busy you,

You don't love someone for their looks, their clothes or their fancy cars... but because they sing a song only you can hear.

--Oscar Wilde

stopping to take care of

the sad, grieving you. In fact, that's often when we see spirit most brightly. It's magic to see spirit largely because it's not all that often you do.

You're not the cold clay lump with a big belly you leave behind when you die. You're not your collection of walking personality disorders. You are spirit, you are love, and, you're here to love, and be loved, freely. If you find out next week that you are terminally ill, what will matter most is memories of beauty, that people loved you, and you loved them, and that you tried to help the poor and innocent.

You are loved, folks! You are capable of lives of great joy and meaning. It's what you are made of. And it's what you're for. So, take care of yourselves; take care of each other. And we—every last one of us—thank you in advance for the incredible work that lies ahead for you.

Congratulations!

If you went back and fixed all the mistakes you ever made you would erase yourself.

... And that's all I've ever needed to hear.

The newsletter staff will be taking its annual summer break July and August. The next edition, such as it is, will be in September. The staff will most likely still be around, and will, again most likely, see you in the spiritually splendid barn, and on Zoom, when not at a lake somewhere.



Some Notes Worth Noting

1. Birthday wishes to Mr. Daven Stelter, high school graduate, turning 18 on the 27th.
2. There will be a congregational meeting to approve the 2026-2027 church budget following worship on Sunday, June 21.
3. To all fathers everywhere: Happy Father's Day. (Selfish note #1: a most special salute to the memory and love of my father, Rev. Wayne C. Hartmire, who would have turned 94 on June 5!)
4. Woo Hoo! Wedding anniversary celebration #8 to Pastor Christine and John on the 9th. (Selfish note #2: John is still getting used to having made the most astonishingly beautiful decision of his life, marrying her!)
5. Books That Bind meets Thursday, June 18 at 6:30 pm on Zoom. We are reading "Freckled," by T.W. Neal. It is her memoir of growing up "wild" in a quasi-commune on Kauai. As one reviewer wrote, "For anyone who's ever been bullied, threatened, beaten or otherwise harassed, Neal's life is an inspiring example of what it means to grow, to move on, and to heal."
6. June 4-7 is the date for the Disciples' Adult Camp held at the Community of the Great Commission. Key noter is Dr. Sharon Jacob, the John Wesley Associate Professor of New Testament and Postcolonial Studies at Claremont School of Theology. Registration information to come.
7. Men's Fellowship meets Saturday, June 6 at 9 am on Zoom.
8. Work on updating the Sierra Christian Church directory is wrapping up. If you have moved in the past year, don't think you have to wait for an invitation—feel free to send any and all changes you may have to your listing to jhartmire1@mac.com. Here is the link to the most recent version: [Sierra Christian Church Directory](#). Please confirm that the information contained in the most recent version of the directory is correct. It will be completed this month and sent out.
9. Pastor Christine, Sidney Stone and the architects will meet with the Loomis development director and staff at the church to tour the property and discuss amending the preliminary plans for affordable housing on the site. June 5, 11:30 am. Loomis has expressed its support for the idea.

Congregational Meeting on Sunday, June 21, following worship.
The agenda is the church's 2026-2027 operating budget.
All are encouraged to stay around and online for the brief meeting.

Sierra Christian Church Monthly Calendar

June 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5 Tour of Church grounds with Loomis staff	6 9 am Men's Fellowship Breakfast
7 10:30 am Worship	8	9 Pastor Christine's 8th wedding anniversary	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18 Books That Bind, 6:30 pm on Zoom	19	20
21 Father's Day Congregational meeting to follow worship	22	23	24	25	26 !	27
28 10:30 am Worship	29	30				

List & Links of Regional Events

June 4-7, 2026: Adult Camp, Community of the Great Commission

June 21-25, 2026: Junior Camp

June 21-27, 2026: Chi-Rho Camp

June 27-29, 2026: Joy Camp

Dialogue and Screening

The Christian Church of Woodland invites you to a dialogue and screening of the movie "1946: The Mis-translation that Shifted Culture." A light dinner and continued conversation will follow. Please register here: <https://1946-CCW.eventbrite.com> and share with your family and friends. "1946" is a documentary film that follows the story of researchers who trace the origins of the anti-gay movement among Christians to a grave mistranslation of the Bible in 1946. The film's producers will be available to discuss the film, as well.

Some Significant June Dates in History

June is named after the Roman goddess Juno, patroness of marriage and the well-being of women. It also comes from the Latin word *juvenis* meaning "young people."

June 1—National Go Barefoot Day

June 1, 1927--The Delta King steamboat made its debut voyage from San Francisco to Sacramento. The Delta Queen, its twin, followed the next day. The 81-mile trip took nearly all night.

June 1, 1992--Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer were nominated to U.S. Senate seats, making California the first state to have two women in the U.S. Senate.

June 2, 1999 -St. Ignatius College Preparatory School in San Francisco announced plans to accept young women beginning in the Fall of 1999.

June 3, 1956--Santa Cruz city authorities announced a total ban on rock & roll at public gatherings, calling the music "Detrimental to both the health and morals of our youth and community."

June 4, 1849--The USS Panama anchored in San Francisco Bay. There were already about 200 deserted ships in the harbor because their crews had abandoned them for the gold fields.

June 4, 1863--One man was killed and another died of wounds a few days later in a shootout over eggs on the Farallon Islands. Eggs, valuable in San Francisco, were free for gathering on the islands off the coast. David Batchelder and 27 armed men sailed there to harvest them, challenging the Egg Co. for the business.

June 4, 1999--Senators Diane Feinstein of California and Harry Reid of Nevada announced the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act. It authorized \$300 million over 10 years to restore the lake's water.

June 5, 1959--Forty San Francisco Bay Area teachers, accused of being Communists, were subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee.

June 5, 1968--Robert F. Kennedy, U.S. presidential candidate, was shot at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, by Sirhan Sirhan, a Palestinian. Kennedy died the next day.

June 6, 1944—D-day, the massive Allied invasion of Normandy, France, during World War II was codenamed Overlord, and was the largest amphibious assault in history. The primary reason for D-Day was to open a second major front in Western Europe to defeat Nazi Germany.

June 6, 1850--Levi Strauss made his first pair of sturdy pants for sale to gold miners. Today Levi Strauss & Co. is the world's largest brand-name apparel manufacturer.

June 7, 1893—Mohandas K. Gandhi was forcibly ejected from a first-class train compartment at Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Traveling as a young lawyer with a valid ticket, he refused an officer's order to move to a lower-class car based on his race. This defiance marked his first act of civil disobedience. This seminal incident on the South African railway galvanized Gandhi's commitment to fighting institutionalized racism. It sparked a two-decade journey of political activism where he developed *Satyagraha*—a philosophy of nonviolent, mass civil disobedience— which he later famously employed to help lead India's independence movement.

June 9, 1934—Donald Duck made his debut in the *Silly Symphony* animated short film "The Wise Little Hen," in which Donald and his friend Peter Pig try to avoid helping a hardworking hen harvest her corn. The mischievous duck was an instant hit, quickly becoming a fan favorite for his iconic sailor outfit and famously volatile temper.

June 10, 1935—A.A. began in 1935 in Akron, Ohio, as the outcome of a meeting between Bill Wilson, a New York stockbroker, and Dr. Bob Smith, an Akron

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HISTORY

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went into hiding from the Nazis.

June 12, 1963 — Civil rights leader Medgar Evers was assassinated in Jackson, Mississippi, by a rifle bullet from an ambush.

June 12, 1967 — The U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously in *Loving v. Virginia* that state laws banning interracial marriage were unconstitutional. Today, this is celebrated as Loving Day.

June 16, 600 — Pope Gregory the Great issued a decree instructing people to say "God bless you" after someone sneezed. He hoped this quick prayer would protect the sneezer from the bubonic plague, as sneezing was one of its early symptoms.

June 18, 1812 — The United States formally declared war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812, marking the beginning of a conflict fought over maritime rights, the impressment of American sailors, and territorial expansion into Canada. The war concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent on December 24, 1814. It essentially restored the status quo, but not until the White House had been burned by the British and Francis Scott Key wrote the lyrics to what would become the U.S. National Anthem after the British failed to capture Baltimore.

June 19, 1865 (Juneteenth) — Union General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas, to announce General Order No. 3, finally enforcing the Emancipation Proclamation and effectively liberating enslaved people in one of the last Confederate states.

June 19, 1964 — Senate minority leader Everett Dirksen was able to negotiate a compromise to what would become the Civil Rights Act, ending the longest filibuster in American history, that had brought the U.S. Senate to a virtual standstill. The House moved quickly to approve the Senate bill, and within hours of its passage on July 2, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the bill into law, declaring once and for all that discrimination for any reason on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin was illegal in the United States of America.

June 21 — The Summer Solstice is the official start of summer and the longest day(light) of the year.

June 21, 1964 — Three white civil rights workers - James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner - left Meridian, Mississippi, at 9 a.m. to investigate a church burning. They were expected back by 4 p.m. When they failed to return, a search was begun. Their murdered bodies were discovered on August 4th.

June 22, 1851 — San Francisco burned for the sixth time in two years. As before, it was set on purpose. Sea-breezes quickly spread the flames. City Hall burned, a \$3 million loss, and the Jenny Lind Theater burned for the sixth time. San Franciscans rebuilt with water tanks on many roofs and began to organize a fire department.

June 27, 1933 — California voters repealed Prohibition by a margin of over 75%. During Prohibition, grape juice came with a "warning" that if the juice sat for a specified amount of time, it would become alcoholic. California's grape production quadrupled during Prohibition.

June 26, 1997 — National Chocolate Pudding Day is celebrated for the first time. It shares this date with the United Nations' International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

June 28, 1969 — A routine police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village, New York City, sparked days of protests. These riots are universally regarded as the catalyst for the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement in the United States.

June 30, 1971 - The 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was enacted, granting the right to vote in all federal, state and local elections to American citizens 18 years or older. The U.S. thus gained an additional 11 million voters. The minimum voting age in most states had been 21.

surgeon. Both had been hopeless alcoholics.

June 12, 1942 — Anne Frank received a small red-and-white checkered diary for her 13th birthday in Amsterdam. She described it as one of her "nicest presents" and began documenting her life just a month before her family