

Sierra Christian Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Our Faith is Always Within Reach

There was a time when I wore an Apple Watch and could keep track of all sorts of things, like emails and text messages, phone calls, my heart rate, and the number of steps I took during the day in the name of fitness. Then the watch's charger fell behind the refrigerator, where it stayed, and I got out of the practice of wearing that Apple Watch.

But before the battery lost all juice, I came to realize how many steps I walked during the day just living my life, just doing things like housework, grocery shopping, or cooking a meal for my family. Actions you would not define as fitness.

A homeless woman was once asked what was in the shopping cart she had wrapped in a tattered blue tarp and pushed in front of her everywhere she went. She said, simply, "Old shoes, a jacket, a frying pan, clothes, some books I like to read, newspaper I will read someday when I have the time. You know, everything's in there. Like Jesus—he's in there, too, keeping my faith warm."

walk 5 determined miles to accumulate steps, just as you don't have to pray, or attend church services, or formally celebrate a Holy Holiday to embolden and build your faith. Because when it comes to *spiritual* fitness—to bolstering our faith—there are a lot of spiritually unassuming parts of our lives that have an element of faith to them, and before you know it, you have a faith-rich life.

I have come to see how dreaming about a good future for my son is a form of faith. I am moved by the faith of my parents, and that, too, is a form of faith.

Having doubts about anything is also a form of faith, because it means I am still engaged in the question. Holding those I love in my heart when they are hurting and asking God to keep them close is nothing if it is not faith. Recognizing Jesus for who he was is also huge!

Recognizing the inherent dignity of other human beings is faith.

Have you ever asked someone to pray for you because you just don't know if you have it in you? That is faith!

Is there a feeling of gratitude for anything at all in your life—I mean AT ALL? That, too, is faith.

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.

Pitch

(Continued from page 1)

Here's a good one: do you ever complain or tell God off? In the Bible, that's called a lament, and you know what? It's a form of faith.

All of that is to say, on those days when we are convinced that there is no faith left in us, you—we, all of us—have all the faith we could ever need already there, in us like air in the lungs and blood in the heart, all the time, regardless.

My own faith morphs and shifts into things that my husband's old Sunday School teacher would never recognize, let alone acknowledge.

I guess I just no longer think of faith as intellectually assenting to theological propositions, or believing the wildest stories in the Bible are literally, factually, historically accurate. Faith functions in my life as something closer to gravity than ideology. It keeps me from floating away. It has me firmly on earth.

A homeless woman was once asked what was in the shopping cart she had wrapped in a tattered blue tarp and pushed in front of her everywhere she went. She said, simply, "Old shoes, a jacket, a frying pan, clothes, some books I like to read, newspaper I will read someday when I have the time. You know, everything's in there. Like Jesus—he's in there, too, keeping my faith warm."

If you are straining to access a faith that feels out of reach, I choose to remember what that woman said. God always makes sure our faith is within reach.

Perspectives in Artificial Intelligence Wednesday, March 19, 2025 from 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm

Artificial intelligence is an exciting phenomenon that is full of hype and promises. Since it is a very complex set of algorithms, trying to wrap one's head around it can be daunting. To that end, there is a Regional Workshop that will present a more down-to-Earth approach to understanding how AI works, the various types of tools available, and best practices for implementing AI efficiently and efficiently.

This is a foundational workshop and a pre-cursor to the "AI for Ministry" workshop at the Annual Gathering.

[Register here ...](#)

CGC WORK DAYS MAY 29-31, 2025

The Disciples's Community of the Great Commission needs work before the summer camp season begins. Volunteers and friends are being asked to prep the Bobbitt & Holland Areas before the kids and adults descend on the camp for all the adventures and peace and possibilities that await them.

Work begins on Thursday, May 29, mid morning, and concludes on Saturday afternoon, May 31.

Meals offered Thursday dinner thru Saturday lunch. The cost is \$5/meal, and there are no lodging fees. Bring your sleeping bag and work gloves. Folks will be staying in Claar House.

Please RSVP to Tina Heck at tinasueheck@uccr.org or 530-265-6636.

Let Tina know when you will arrive and depart and which meals you will be taking.

Books That Bind Next Meets in April

Sierra Christian's book Club, Books That Bind, next meets April 17 to discuss their latest reading, "The Violin Conspiracy," a novel by Brendan Slocumb. It is a story about great musical talent, racism, the theft of a Stradivarius, and the mystery surrounding it. Pick it up and join us on our Zoom site for a delightful evening of conversation, that sometimes even centers on the book we are reading.

The Changing Religious Landscape

Not that many years ago, the people who write and edit the magazines we read proclaimed that religion in America was dying. It was a Newsweek cover story as recently as 2015 that reported how 8% fewer people identified as Christians, and nearly 25% no longer considered themselves religious at all, and in 2021 Time Magazine reported that for the first time in history less than half of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue, or mosque.

People had stopped going to church. The Brookings Institute proclaimed that our churches were in “their twilight hour.” A 2023 book entitled “Losing Our Religion,” asked, “Can American Christianity survive?”

As things tend to do, from a teenagers’ hair color to national trends, there is change. A recent study released just one week ago by Pew Research, reveals that America’s secularization is on pause for now, perhaps in response to the Covid Pandemic and perhaps because of something the study’s authors call our “stubborn spirituality.”

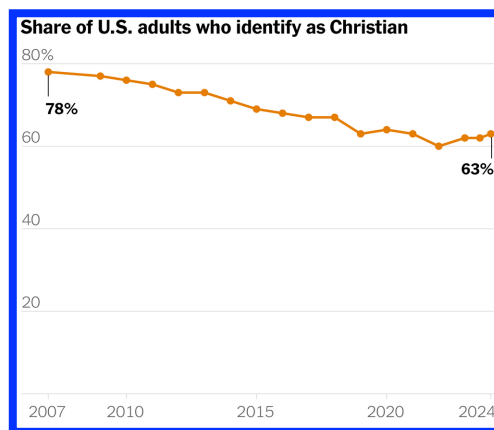
Church affiliated or not, most Americans—a eye popping 92%—say they hold one or more spiritual beliefs.

“Spirituality is not declining. And in fact, it’s high; it’s stable,” said Penny Edgell, a sociologist at the University of Minnesota.

The United States is an outlier compared with most other Western countries, which are far less religious. America’s persistent religious and spiritual curiosity is visible in its centers of power. In Washington, President Trump and JD Vance talk a lot about God in their quest to remake America in some fashion or another. In Silicon Valley, tech billionaires—long obsessed with religion-adjacent projects like artificial intelligence, transhumanism and immortality—are warming to Christianity. In Hollywood, films and shows about faith, such as “Conclave,” the latest season of “The White Lotus” and “The Secret Lives of

Mormon Wives,” have dominated streaming charts.

Sociologists have fallen over themselves analyzing why over the past 25 years tens of millions of people left American religion, a major shift no matter how you looked at it that affected how people voted, when they married, and where they lived. Christianity took the hardest hit: Around 15% of American adults who once went to church stopped going. While some people switched to new faiths, many walked away altogether.



Experts called this phenomenon the “rise of the nones,” a group that includes atheists, agnostics and people who said in surveys that they identified with “nothing in particular.” The nones grew to include about 30 percent of the country, which seems to me, no small number.

But the nones have peaked.

Pew’s study suggests that people are no longer leaving Christian churches en masse, and other major religions are apparently growing and well, largely because of immigration. The report’s authors are careful to say that the number of nones could swell once again, especially as the young, who tend to be more secular than the old, age.

Here is how it is being explained. First, there was the pandemic. Pew found that people turned to faith for support during those years, as the number of people going to religious services — either in person or virtually — remained consistent at about 40%. About a quarter of Americans even told Pew that the pandemic had strengthened their faith.

“Religion was in their psychological tool kit for dealing with the hard times,” said Alan Cooperman, one of the report’s authors.

Second, secularization apparently has a ceiling in the United States, which was, after all, partly founded so people could worship as they pleased, as long as it was, I should add, as the majority pleased.

Studies indicate that Americans pray

Please see STUDY, page 4

Study

(Continued from page 3)

more than adults in other wealthy democracies like Canada, Australia and most European countries. Americans—both religious and not—also report high levels of spirituality: 83% say they believe in God or a universal spirit.

Ryan Burge, a political scientist, argues that most people who disagree with their religion on political or social issues—on Trumpism, abortion or gay marriage, for instance—have already made the break, leaving religious practices altogether or switching faiths to one that more closely aligns with their view of the world.

“What’s left is like the bedrock of American religion, which is exceptionally large,” Burge surmised.

So, why does any of this matter? History provides some insight. Actually, a simple quote from history, circa 1928, provides all the reason in the world. “We tolerate no one in our ranks who attacks our ideas of Christianity—in fact our movement is Christian.” That was Adolph Hitler in 1928 Germany.

Today, the rise of White Christian Nationalism as a religion should put all people of faith on notice, because, of course, there is nothing Christian about

more often, are more likely to attend weekly religious services, and value faith in their lives

it, nor is there anything new about it. It is the product of a growing—er, resurgent—religious conservatism, which either spawned or was birthed by the political far right. Supreme Court has anointed prayer in public schools. Elon Musk said he believes in the teachings of Jesus and well... Religious “tradwives” reign supreme on Instagram. The right says it all amounts to a “vibe shift.”

White Christian Nationalism has been described more frequently as a political movement that seeks to topple church-state separation and declare America a “Christian nation, as long as the “Christian” in this case being far to the right and supremely fundamentalist. It sounds a little too familiar to me.

Studying these trends, crunching these numbers, helps us understand who are and where we’re headed. It is our heady GPS, providing not only measurable insights on the trends shaping American politics and culture, but reminding us of what is at stake.

The number of Americans turning their backs on organized religion has stopped growing for now, and it seems that when it comes to spiritual longing for the possible, the transcendent, Americans are surprisingly in agreement, and have long been.

—John Hartmire

2025 CCNC-N Disaster Recovery Mission Trip

This year, the CCNC Disaster Recovery effort will focus on Scotts Valley, CA to help the CZU lightning complex fire victims. “The CZU inferno destroyed about 700 homes in Santa Cruz County. Of those, 127 residences have been rebuilt and another 134 are under construction,

(<https://www.govtech.com/em/disaster/residents-struggle-to-recover-from-2020-santa-cruz-mountains-fire>).

The team will be working with The Santa Cruz Long Term Recovery Group (<https://www.sccltrg.org/>). They have indicated there will be a home that needs to be demolished, some brush removal on property that the residents are not currently living on, and some rebuilding projects too. Housing will be at a church in Scotts Valley (bring your air mattress).

The week runs from 5:00 on Sunday, the 13th, through 10:00 on Saturday, the 19th. You do not have to stay for the whole week but can come for just the days you are able to be there. The cost is \$30 per day, or \$180 for those who are staying the entire week (Sunday through Saturday). This is inclusive of food, housing, laundry, and transportation to and from the work sites. You will be responsible for getting yourself to the provided lodging. There is some scholarship assistance available.

Please **register** by April 4th so we can plan for meals and housing. We have a limit of 18 persons per day. We will be in contact with you after you register to give you more details.

If you have any questions please contact Lou Ann Hughes: loulou@hotmail.com.

Some Notes Worth Noting

1. Continued to prayers to Maurine and Jack Rollins. May they feel better, stronger, and more stable.
2. Books that Bind now meets every other month. The book club will next meet Thursday, April 17, at 6:30 pm on Zoom. We are reading, "The Violin Conspiracy," by Brendan Slocum
3. The Men's Fellowship Breakfast is scheduled for Saturday, March 1, at 9 am, on Zoom. (What are the odds this newsletter will be out before then?). In April, the fellowship will be on, you guessed, Saturday, April 5. This newsletter will be out before then, we promise.
4. CCNC-N Regional Disaster Recovery Mission Trip from April 13 to 19, 2025. It will most likely be spent in Northern California assisting the many victims of our state's wildfires. More details forthcoming.
5. The 2025 Annual Gathering will take place at the First Christian Church in Chico, on April 26-6, 2025.
6. The recently engaged to be married Lisa Coe has a birthday on March 28.
7. March 29 is Ms. Joy Reed's birthday.
8. Potluck at church after worship on Sunday, March 2. Taco bar, baby!
9. Prayers for insight and courage for Daven Stelter as he continues on the challenging road of recovery.

Transfiguration Sunday

Sunday, March 2 is Transfiguration Sunday, the Sunday that comes a few days before Ash Wednesday and the signifies the beginning of Lent.

This year, Luke 9:28-36 tells the story of Jesus, accompanied by Peter, James, and John, as he ascends a mountain to pray. While there he is so transformed by the experience that Jesus begins to shine. He talks with Moses and Elijah as he prepares to go back down the mountain and on to Jerusalem.

The Transfiguration is an affirmation of Jesus as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets; it is an affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah, and we receive a glimpse of the glory to come in a few weeks. Transfiguration Sunday offers a preview of the glory to come as we mark the season of Lent and the glory of Resurrection morning.

May our spirits shine as we enter this most spiritual of liturgical seasons. "It is good that we are here," and it is good that we know what to do down the mountain.



Sierra Christian Church Monthly Calendar

March 2025

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
30	31					1 9 am Men's Fellowship Breakfast
2 10:30 am Worship <u>Potluck following</u> Worship	3	4	5 Ash Wednesday	6	7	8
9 10:30 am Worship	10	11	12	13	14	15
16 10:30 am Worship	17	18	19 Board of Directors Meeting, 6:30 pm	20	21	22
23 10:30 am Worship	24	25	26	27	28	29

List & Links of Regional Events

- March 8, 2025: [Women's Spring Renewal 2025](#)
 March 19, 2025: [Perspectives in Artificial Intelligence](#)
 March 31, 2025: [Congregational Yearbook Reporting Deadline](#)
 April 13, 2025: [2025 Disaster Recovery Mission Trip](#)
 April 25, 2025: [171st CCNC-N Annual Gathering](#)
 May 29, 2025: [CGC Workdays May 2025](#)
 July 12, 2025: [2025 General Assembly](#)
 October 10, 2025: [Men's Ministries Retreat](#)
 October 17, 2025: [Women's Fall Retreat](#)

A Few Historical Dates in March

March 1, 1954—Yellowstone becomes the nation's first national park. More than 3 million people visit Yellowstone each year.

March 1, 1955—A University of California survey reported that Americans spent more money on comic books than all U.S. elementary and high schools spent on textbooks.

March 1, 1969—1969 – New York Yankees legend Mickey Mantle announces his retirement from baseball due to persistent knee injuries. He finished his 18-season career with 536 home runs and a .298 batting average. He played in 12 World Series, winning 8, and hit a record 18 World Series home runs. He died in 1995 at the age of 63 from liver cancer, a result of years of alcoholism, a disease that also claimed the lives of 2 of his 3 sons.

March 2, 1976—Bob Lurie and Bud Herseht bought the San Francisco Giants for \$8 million, saving it from being moved to Toronto.

March 2, 1872—California's first public library opened its doors in San Francisco. The library was founded by the San Francisco Mercantile Library Association, which had been in operation since 1850. The public library movement gained momentum in California in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and today there are over 1,100 public libraries in the state.

March 2, 1987—The Macintosh II computer was introduced. The first color Mac had a CPU speed of 16 MHz and sold for \$3,898.

March 3, 1855—The U.S. Congress appropriated \$30,000 for an experiment using camels as pack animals to cross the desert to California. The experiment ended but the camel barns are still standing in Benicia, in Solano County.

March 3, 1933—Thousands of women marched in Washington D.C., demanding the right to vote one day before President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration.

March 3, 1955—The U.S. Congress appropriated \$30,000 for an experiment using camels as pack animals to cross the desert to California. The experiment ended but the camel barns are still standing in Benicia, in Solano County.

March 4, 1940—Kings Canyon National Park, called General Grant National Park when it opened on October 1, 1890, had its name changed when it grew to 461,901 acres and included the protection of giant sequoias.

March 4, 1975—The California Supreme Court struck down the state's death penalty statute as unconstitutional. The decision was based on the court's finding that the law was applied in an arbitrary and capricious manner, and that it violated the state's prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment. The ruling was later overturned by a voter initiative in 1978, reinstating the death penalty in California.

March 6, 2000—Gasoline prices in California reached an average \$1.63 per gallon.

March 7, 1976—The California Supreme Court ruled in the case of *In re Marriage of Brown* that California's community property law applied to same-sex couples, making California the first state to grant rights to same-sex couples in property division.

March 8, 2017—The "Day Without a Woman" strike took place, with women around the country walking off their jobs and refraining from making purchases, in protest of gender inequality and discrimination.

March 9, 1959—Barbie, made by Mattel in El Segundo, debuted at the American International Toy Fair in New York. Today she is one of the most famous dolls in history—she's even a movie star!

March 10, 1968—Pro boxing legend Muhammad Ali was stripped of his heavyweight title after refusing to be drafted into the military for the Vietnam War. The decision sparked controversy and outrage, and Ali was ultimately vindicated years later when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that his objection to the war was a legitimate expression of his religious beliefs.

March 11, 1893—Riverside County was established between San Bernardi-

Please see HISTORY, page 10

HISTORY

(Continued from page 7)

no, San Diego and Madera Counties. Today it is the fourth most populous county in the state.

March 11, 1974—Rhino Record Store, in Claremont, gave people \$.05 to take home Danny Bonaduce's solo album. It was the only album by the former Partridge Family

TV actor.

March 11, 2011—A tsunami from the earthquake off Japan caused some \$17.1 million in damage to the Santa Cruz harbor and \$4 million to private boats. Governor Jerry Brown issued an emergency declaration for the harbor.

March 14, 1870—California legislators set aside 1,017 acres in an area called the Outside Lands to establish Golden Gate Park.

March 16, 1864—Alpine County was established in the Sierra Nevada between Lake Tahoe and Yosemite National Park. It is the least populated county in the state with 1,515 residents. Markleeville is the county seat.

March 17, 1860—Japanese diplomats arrived in San Francisco to ratify the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation. This was Japan's first diplomatic mission to the U.S.

March 17, 1992—The voice of Woody Woodpecker, Grace Stafford Lantz, known by her stage name Grace Stafford, died.

March 18, 1848—The California Star reported that the population of San Francisco was 575 males, 177 females and 60 children, not including Indians and Mexicans.

March 19, 1991—Sacramento Kings set a NBA record of 29 consecutive road losses.

March 21, 1942—Manzanar Detention Camp opened. This detention camp in the Owens Valley was part of the incarceration of nearly 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry during World War II. "Farewell to Manzanar." Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's 1973 memoir, poignantly depicts life in Manzanar and reflects on the national cost of the internment.

March 21, 1970—San Francisco mayor Joseph Alioto proclaimed the first Earth Day. It was celebrated on April 22, 1970.

March 21, 1993—Cesar Chavez died in his sleep while in San Luis, Arizona. He was 66.

March 23, 1868—University of California was established when the governor signed into law the Organic Act "to Create and Organize the University of California."

March 25, 1851—When Indians burned James Savage's trading camp on the Merced River, Savage led a militia on a reprisal raid, leading him to find Yosemite Valley. Savage had opened a trading post that made him so rich, supposedly he rolled a barrel of gold dust through the lobby of a San Francisco hotel.

March 27, 1861—John Muir landed in San Francisco and soon set off on a 300-mile walk to Yosemite Valley with Joseph Chilwell.

March 27, 1961—The hiring of the first African American milk route driver started a name-calling fight between San Francisco Mayor George Christopher and Terry Francois, head of the local NAACP, who owned Christopher Dairy Farms. He hired William Garrick to deliver milk to schools and restaurants in South San Francisco. Christopher said Teamsters Local 226 would not let African Americans join the union.

March 27, 2000—A San Francisco jury ordered Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds to pay \$20 million in punitive damages to Leslie Whiteley, who had lung cancer. It was a rare legal victory over the tobacco industry.

March 28, 1964—Much of Crescent City was demolished by a tsunami generated from the 8.6 earthquake that hit Valdez, Alaska, killing 11 people.

March 31, 1975—The UCLA Bruins beat the Kentucky Wildcats for the NCAA Championship, 92-55. It was coach John Wooden's final game and UCLA's 10th NCAA championship in 12 years.