



PASTOR'S PEN

**For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.**  
**Ephesians 2:10**

We are in the midst of discerning God's masterpiece within us! On Saturday the 22nd of August we had a beautiful gathering that launched our efforts to develop new Vision, Mission, and Identity statements for our congregation. Our goal is to determine how God is calling us into the future - what we're working toward, how we'll get there, and how we communicate who we are today.

We had a great morning together, celebrating our place in the community, examining our current context for ministry and beginning to envision how we'd like the world to be. While the first workshop focused on 'collecting' values and drafting collaborative vision statements, the next session will work on our mission and identity.

One 'product' of our work is the art gallery at the back of our sanctuary. Participants were invited to create collages with images that represent what they value most about being a part of First Christian Church (DOC) of Vallejo. I hope you'll take a moment to visit the gallery and see how people chose to respond. Thanks to Carol B. for providing the art supplies!

I hope you will join us for the next session on Saturday, September 5th from 10 am to 2 pm. (Lunch will be provided.) We do our best work when it represents everyone's voice and ideas can marinate in the sharing of different perspectives.

After these two sessions, a team will take all the wisdom we've generated and work toward crafting the statements that best reflect the wisdom of these creative efforts. Drafts will be shared for reflection and feedback before more fine tuning takes place and we (hopefully) adopt our new statements later this fall. Please reach out with any questions, and please continue praying for our congregation to be led by Spirit and Wisdom through this process.

Peace,  
Pastor Sara

**Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.  
John 6:35 (NLT)**



Bread of Life: Gather. Savor. Share. The world feels heavy—divided and uncertain. Hearts ache, minds seek peace, and souls hunger for hope. In these moments, many search for a way forward. Amid injustice and tragedies, we remember we must first gather around the

table for strength so we can respond with love and grace.

This fall, let us gather together to break bread, savor the divine generosity of God, and rise to share with the world out of the abundance we have received from the bread of life.

**The table is open. Come, be renewed, and take this bread.**

Our next series, Bread of Life, highlights how Jesus fed people—not just their bodies but also their souls—with good news, stories of redemption, and parables that showed the way of God’s kingdom. From wedding feasts to eating with tax collectors to feeding thousands, people left Jesus’ presence with full hearts and bellies. A gift Jesus gives freely so we may give to others.

September 6: Bread of Life  
John 6:25–40 (I Am the Bread of Life)

September 13: Bread for Growth  
Luke 13:18–21 (Parable of the Yeast)

September 20: Bread for Sharing  
Luke 14:7-14 (Parable of the Great Banquet)

September 27: Bread for Community  
Luke 19:1–10 (Dinner with Zacchaeus)

October 4: Bread for Feasting  
John 21:1-17 (Breakfast on the Beach)



## NOTES FROM THE PASTOR

### Pastor at the Pub

Come join me for some down-time at **Mare Island Brewing Company - Ferry Taproom (289 Mare Island Way in Vallejo) on Wednesday, September 30th from 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm.** This is a chance to get together and hang out during the week. It's informal and open to any who'd like to join. There's a menu with appetizers and meals if you're hungry for a snack or dinner while we visit. All ages welcome.

### Bible Study

We continue to meet on the last Sunday of the month to engage in scripture study together. For September we'll meet after worship from **Noon to 1:30 on Sunday the 27th.** Bring a brown bag lunch and your Bible. We'll meet in Fellowship Hall and take a look at the passage where Jesus addresses the Question of Paying Taxes: **Matthew 22:15-22.**

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### HAPPY LABOR DAY- Dave Mezzera

What did Jesus have to say about Labor Day (upcoming on September 7th this year)?

In Matthew 9:37-38 Jesus said: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Do we see ourselves as the Lord's laborers? Are we part of those who labor (share our time, talents and treasure) with FCC-V? Or are we sometimes those who are seen as the few who need to be prodded just a bit to help with the harvest?

And in Matthew 11:26, Jesus raises our spirit when He said: "Come to me all you who labor . . . come to me all you who are weary . . . and I will refresh you." This may give us the uplifting inspiration that whatever we do on behalf of our church or of others within the church will be refreshed and rewarded.

In any event, we may each ask ourselves - can we become the Lord's laborers? Happy Labor Day!

RUACH READS - Sara Steenhouse

**Ruach:** (Hebrew) *n. Wind, breath, spirit. An invisible, animating force known by its movement. Pronounced ROO-ahkh.*

FCC Vallejo has launched a new Spirituality Book Club called **Ruach Reads**. This offering will give us a chance to read, reflect, and discuss books that focus on our faith lives. I hope the reading and discussions will speak to our souls and give us some meaningful opportunities for growth. We'll meet bi-monthly in the fourth week. I hope to be able to offer attendance by Zoom for those unable to join in-person. If you'd like to host a meeting in your home, let me know!

Our first meeting in August was delightful! Thanks to Carl & Jeanne Cordes for hosting.

We're still arranging the time and place for October's meeting, but you can get a book now to be prepared.

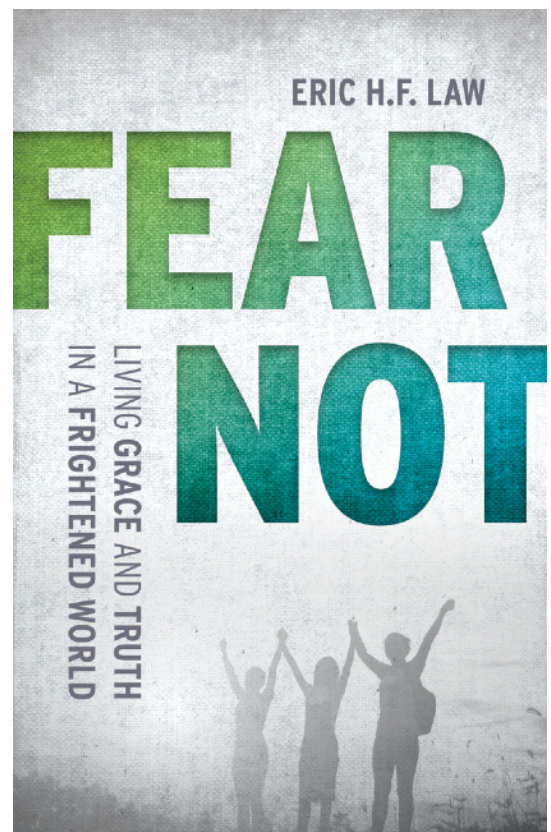
For our second meeting we'll read the book **Fear Not: Living Grace and Truth in a Frightened World**

Discover how to break free of fear and live courageously in anxious times.

We're more afraid than ever right now. Scripture tells us to "fear not," but how do we actually do that? How do we move from fear-based living to more faithful, graceful living in frightened times?

*Fear Not* takes a look at what's behind our culture of fear and offers a vision for living in courageous communities committed to truth-telling, grace, hope, and love.

Author Eric H. F. Law, an Episcopal priest, is the founder and executive director of the Kaleidoscope Institute, the mission of which is to create diverse and sustainable communities. For more than 20 years, he has provided transformative and comprehensive training and resources for churches and ministries in all the major church denominations in the United States and Canada.



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RUACH READS - continued.

You can purchase the book from [Chalice Press here](#) (30% off right now!) Or if you prefer, [here from bookshop.org](#).

I hope you'll join us for some snacks, connection, and discussion of this book. Even if you don't finish it all, pick a couple of chapters that look interesting and we'd love to hear what you think.

Ruach Reads Calendar

October    *Fear Not* by Eric Law

February   *All About Love* by bell hooks

April        *Sustaining Hope in an Unjust World: How to Keep Going When You Want to Give Up* by Timothy Charles Murphy

June         *In Defense of Kindness: Why It Matters, How It Changes Our Lives, and How It Can Save the World* by Bruce Reyes-Chow

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STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN - Carl Cordes

Last month I introduced the theme for this year's Stewardship Campaign, "There Our Hearts Will Be". The portion of a sermon below is written by Rev. Gascot Arias. She is passionate about multicultural and multilingual ministry, social justice, and Hebrew Bible scholarship. A proud second-generation Disciple who grew up in Puerto Rico, she attended Disciples congregations and schools that shaped her love for education, ecumenism, and community engagement. She serves with joy and passion as pastor of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Downers Grove, Illinois. Please enjoy these words and take a minute or two to contemplate them.

Turning Toward the Light: Generosity, Intimacy, and Trust from Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

**Scripture (NRSV)**

1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your alms may be done in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 5 "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

(continues...)

## STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN - continued

16 “And whenever you fast, do not look somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**Commentary**

*“In Puerto Rico, there’s a tree known as the yagrumo, sometimes called the “trumpet tree.” Its leaves are remarkable. One side deep green; the other, a shining silver-white that catches the light. People say you can predict rain when you see the silver side showing because the leaves flip over just before the rainfall. It’s as if the tree itself senses the change in the air. It has un barrunto (‘a hunch’) that something life-giving is on the way. It has the “inside scoop,” meteorologically speaking.*

*The yagrumo carries another, more sinister meaning in Puerto Rican culture. If you say that someone is “like the leaves of the yagrumo,” you are calling them two-faced. One is their public-performing face, the other reveals the inside, that is, what they’re really like. That contrast, between the deep green and the shimmering silver, has become a symbol of hypocrisy, of pretending to be something we are not.*

*Yet, despite this less-than-flattering usage, I remember, as a child, seeing the cross behind the altar draped in yagrumo leaves during Holy Week. During this week close to the spring equinox, the silver sides of the yagrumo leaves would turn upward and outward. The cruciform arrangement shimmered under the sunlight piercing through the windows of the sanctuary. As a little kid, I would speculate on how these “two-faced” leaves (often alluded to when calling someone a hypocrite) symbolized, ironically, the good news of the Resurrection. Only later did I realize that symbols are multilayered, complex, and malleable. The same leaves that alluded to hypocrisy could also represent the transformation and new life that comes from opening ourselves to the light.*

*When we see the yagrumo-draped cross, what we are accentuating is that the leaves turn not to deceive, but to receive. They turn toward the heavens to receive in expectation of rain, of life, of abundance.*

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## STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN - continued

*This double-sided leaf, then, offers a fitting image for generosity. Generosity, like the yagrumo, has two faces: one that looks inward, toward the hidden place of the heart where our trust in God resides, and another that faces outward, yielding the fruit of love, justice, and compassion. These are not opposing faces. They are complementary: two sides of the same calling.*

*If, as Cornel West says, “Justice is what love looks like in public,” then generosity is what deep trust in God looks like in public.*

### ***Religion: Practicing Faith Generously, Being Generous Faithfully***

*In Matthew 6, Jesus cautions, “Be careful that you don’t practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention.” We often hesitate around that word “religion.” It can sound rigid, performative, even lifeless. But Jesus’ concern isn’t with the consistency of the practice, but rather with the intent bound up with our action. One possible origin of the word “religion” (like the one offered by Augustine) links the word to religare, “to bind fast.” It suggests the idea of a bond (-ligare) or obligation between humans and the divine, with the prefix re- intensifying this act of binding. What I propose here is that Jesus challenges us to ask ourselves, “What is bound up with our acts of generosity? What intentions and agendas motivate acts of faith and generosity?”*

*Jesus speaks of “practicing” our religion, and not “having” a religion, as in something to possess and showcase on a shelf. Faith is something we train in, something that becomes second nature through repetition and discipline.*

*Generosity is, in this sense, a religious practice: a way of shaping the heart to mirror the generosity of God. The Center for Faith and Giving describes stewardship as “grateful and responsible use of God’s gifts in the light of God’s purpose as revealed in Jesus Christ.” This is not merely about money or resources; it’s about living consciously, purposefully, and faithfully: it is about letting our decisions reflect trust in the God who provides. It is about joyously taking on this divine obligation to be agents of God’s will for the cosmos.*

*Jesus assumes generosity will be part of our regular rhythm of our religare: “Whenever you give... when you pray... when you fast...” Not if you give, or pray, or fast, when! These are not optional, but essential expressions of faithful living in God’s light.*

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STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN - continued

*Yet Jesus' command to give "in secret" challenges us. We teach our leaders to model generosity and faithfulness publicly. And our kids should see us putting into the offering plate. Public giving is a profound witness, especially in a world hopped up on greed and cruelty. How then do we reconcile that with Jesus' warning to not draw attention to ourselves? To keep it a secret?*

*Perhaps the issue is not visibility but motive and intent. Meaning, it's about the light toward which our hearts are turned. There is a difference between being seen and seeking to be seen. Recognition offered by others is not the same as recognition sought for oneself. When we give to the poor, pray, or fast, the measure of our generosity isn't how others might react, much less how others might praise our charity. It's how closely our hearts align with God's own generosity. The question is not whether the act is public or private, but whether our hearts remain open to the One who sees in secret, whether our silvery, intimate heart turns toward the divine light."*

Starting in October, we would like the Worship Leaders to use the following themes as part of their "Gratitude and Generosity" Moment which we will be calling "There Our Hearts Will Be" instead. If you are interested, please sign up.

The themes are:

October 4: **Re-center our lives** on God's quiet, faithful presence.

October 11: **Let our giving reflect** our deepest values and commitments.

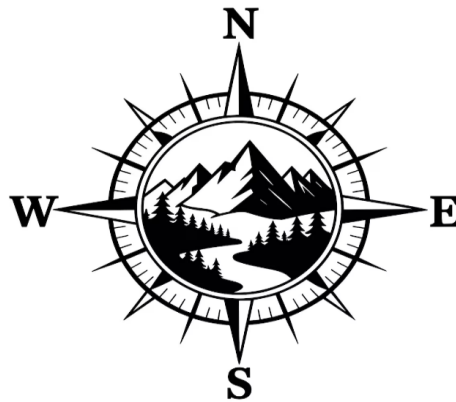
October 18: **Align our actions** with our confessions of Christ.

October 25: **Allow God to transform, heal, and renew** our hearts.

November 1: **Practice a generosity** that is not performative, but rooted, joyful, and Spirit-led.

# **CCNCN Christian Men's Fellowship Retreat "Positive Masculinity for Changing Times"**

**October 16 – 18, 2026  
Community of the Great Commission**



The times they are a-changing! Come join us for conversations (in a safe space) about what masculinity really means. We will meet at CGC campground in the beauty of God's creation, 30303 Chicken Hawk Rd., Foresthill, California. Men of all ages are invited. Friday dinner through Sunday brunch is included. All rooms are shared.

Check in starts at 4 p.m. on Friday.

Keynoter: Rev. Ted Firch

Rustic Cabin accommodations: \$80

Motel style accommodations: \$165

Tent or camper accommodations: \$75

Come to the mountain top for this weekend of fellowship,  
delicious food and spiritual challenge.

**Register at [ccncn.org](http://ccncn.org)**

Scholarship assistance is available. For information contact Ted at [revsfirch@gmail.com](mailto:revsfirch@gmail.com)

**Apply by October 1, please.**

## HYBRID WORSHIP CONTINUES

We continue to develop and improve our hybrid worship abilities. Every Sunday morning, we have some members of our worshipping community onsite in our sanctuary and some members of our worshipping community online on Zoom. We continue to work to make both formats engaging and accessible. Please share comments and suggestions that might make both formats better for everyone.

Our worship services begin at 10:30. To join us for worship on Zoom, click the link below and joining us through video. Or dial in by calling the number below according to your time zone. The instructions to connect are fairly easy, but if you need help, please reach out.

In preparation for Zoom worship, please have communion elements of some form with you so that we can all partake together. This can be bread and juice—or any other elements that evoke the Last Supper for you. You may also want to light a candle near you as we worship together.

### **Worship on Sundays, 10:30 a.m. PLEASE NOTE THE NEW MEETING INFO!**

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83204891403?pwd=YkJBNTQwWURabEtpRFVoaDU5aU5hQT09>

Meeting ID: 884 4460 0052

Passcode: 503337

Dial by your location

- +1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)
- +1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)
- +1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)
- +1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

# Mark Your Calendar

September 5 - Visioning Workshop, 10:00 am - 2:00 pm, lunch provided.

September 7 - Labor Day, office closed.

September 10 - Admin Council Meeting, 5 pm on Zoom.

September 11-13 - Regional Women's Retreat, Christ the King Retreat Center, Citrus Heights.

September 13 - Elders Meeting, 5 pm on Zoom.

September 17 - Ministry Council Meeting, 5 pm on Zoom.

September 27 - Bible Study, after worship (bring a lunch).

September 30 - Pastor at the Pub, 4:30-6:30 pm at Mare Island Brewing, Ferry Tap Room.

October 3 - Narcan Training and IHART Conversation, 1:00-3:00 pm.

**The deadline for the next Living Word is September 30**

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