

The Living Word

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Fire Season: Stewardship of our Resources

Over twenty years ago when Beth and I were house hunting, we met a rancher who was selling his home in El Sobrante. It was a nice home with a barn in the back and a couple of horses in it. I asked him why was he selling? He replied with bitterness that he had lost his leases for his cattle to graze in the hills and grass lands. And he said that other ranchers like him were also losing their leases. He then prophetically declared that Californians would suffer from unprecedented wild fires in the coming years. His cattle were creating fire breaks by keeping the grasslands grazed.

Grazing is an essential part of fire suppression. The key is good grazing that takes into account the life cycle of the plants being grazed. This means moving the animals before they overgraze to new pastures which need grazing. Ranchers map out, generally starting in the low lands and moving up to the foothills, and then higher elevations. The timing allows recovery of the grass lands while limiting excess flammable grass and brush.

Controlled burns are also important. There are things not even goats will bother to chew. The key to controlled burns is that they be low intensity. Low intensity fires preserves the roots so regrowth is easy and by preserving the roots, mud slides are minimized.

Perhaps Common Ground takes on another initiative, using my own neighborhood's Wildcat Canyon Fire Prevention & Response program listed below, or create or join your neighborhood watch and incorporate some of the program.

In Beth and my neighborhood in Richmond, there are on-going Wildcat Canyon Fire Prevention and Response information sessions hosted by our local County Supervisor, John Gioia. He has mobilized East Bay MUD, PGE, local Fire chiefs, East Bay Regional Parks and the City of Richmond. 1) We have cows, calves, and goats grazing our grass lands. 2) They have received grants from the Coastal Conservancy to remove dead trees, and debris. 3) They have installed 12 cameras to monitor the valley for wild fires for anyone to monitor. Volunteers monitor the cameras during the most risky fire threat periods, the tech equivalent of staffing a forest fire watch tower. 4) There's something called a Zonehaven Evacuation Management Platform/Tool that Contra Costa agencies are acquiring, that's intended to aid agencies in training, planning and implementing evacuations. Note: Best plan is always to know and talk to your neighbors, personally prepare/plan, go if you feel unsafe...and don't wait to be told to evacuate! 5) Power lines and transformers have been a source of fire ignition, Call 800-743-5000 #1 to report a hazardous situation.

What can we do around our homes? Defensible space is 1) Leaving space between planted vegetation. 2) Create "Fuel Breaks" such as driveways, walkways and lawns. 3) Dispose of tree trimming and debris, most importantly ones less than 4" in diameter. 4) Keep grass to less than 4" tall. Mow before 10:00 am and never on hot and windy days. 5) Remove litter such as leaves, needles, twigs and bark. 6) Remove tree branches less than 6' from the ground. 7) Keep gutters

clean. 8) Move flammable materials away from your home, such as wood piles and propane tanks. 9) Use fire resistant plants in your landscaping. Consider planting Bay Area natives. (Bonus – they are adapted to our climate so you save water, too.) 10) Trim branches that overhang the roof. 11) Only grow low growing plants near power poles. 12) Keep flammable debris from being next to the base of your home.

If a fire comes, 1) Prepare to evacuate – have a go-bag ready. 2) Remove curtains from your windows. (They can ignite from the heat of the fire through the glass.) 3) Water around your house, under the eaves, roof if you have shake shingles, at the base of your house especially if you have wooden decks. 4) Wear a mask.

During the times when the outside air is polluted with smoke one can close the windows and doors, and invest in an air filtration system. See Hi-Velocity Systems, HEPS system at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2ChWPT7HLo>. It purifies the indoor air through filtration, kills germs, and removes chemical outgassing.

Switching gears to forest fires, it is important to know who owns the forests. In California 58% of the forests are under Federal control in National Forests and Parks; Bureau of Land Management, 3% is owned by the State of California, while 39% are privately owned. California and the Feds cooperatively fight fires and manage the forests.

Around 110 years ago there was a study in the Stanislaus National forest. Their study found 19 trees per acre of greater than 6". A hundred years later the same location had 260 trees per acre. What has happened is that our forests are more vulnerable due to being more homogenous, fewer nutrients and moisture per tree, less resistant to drought and insect infestations, and high intensity fires. Once fire reaches the tree crown, it is easy for the fires to go tree to tree and is virtually unstoppable due to high density. It was thought a hundred years ago that fire suppression was important to allow the forests to become thicker and allow for more lumber production. We are currently stuck between mismanaged forests, minimal lumber infrastructure to log, and drought. The bottom line is we need to get serious about forest thinning and controlled burns. Additional studies can be found at:

https://www.fs.fed.us/psw/topics/forest_mgmt/variabledensity/.

While I love trees, there can be too many. See the photo of a CalFire thinned forest Conservancy plot, and a privately owned unmanaged forest. These plots are on the same street side by side.



Properly maintained Tahoe Conservancy lot



Privately owned, uncleared lot

Living Stones

*When this is over, may we never again take for granted
A handshake with a stranger / Full shelves at the store
Conversations with neighbors / A crowded theater
Friday night out / The taste of communion
A routine checkup / The school rush each morning
Coffee with a friend / The stadium roaring
Each deep breath / A boring Tuesday / Life itself.
When this ends/ may we find
that we have become / more like the people
we wanted to be / we were called to be
we hoped to be / and may we stay
that way — better / for each other
because of the worst.*

—“When This Is Over” by Laura Kelly Fanucci

Lately, I have heard a lot of people reflect on the blessings of the past year and a half. And certainly, while there have been blessings and learnings that we will inevitably need to find ways to carry forward, these types of hyper-optimistic and cheerful reflections seem largely out-of-touch to me. This year has pushed me to my limits. It has felt sticky. It has been painful. It has created and revealed much vulnerability and gaps in our social infrastructure. More than relishing the blessings, I have wanted to wash the residue of this year down the drain.



And as we start to reemerge into communities once again, I have found a new mantra: shampoo-rinse-repeat. I have been focusing on rinsing off the stickiness, the painfulness, the anger, the fear, the loneliness, the trauma, the grief, the loss, the longing. Shampoo-rinse-repeat. There has been so much that has hurt us. Shampoo-rinse-repeat. And once all of it is mostly rinsed off (and it may take a while), I may be ready to consider the learnings—and maybe even the blessings. But the spiritual life, teaches us to do things one step at a time. And the first step for me is to shampoo-rinse-repeat. This is how I will find the ground beneath me and find authentic ways to grow forward into more loving and hopeful community. I look forward to doing this work in partnership with you.

See you in (zoom) church,
Christy

ZOOM WORSHIP

Even as we experiment with in-person and hybrid worship opportunities, we will continue to worship together online using Zoom. Worship begins at 10:30. Please join us for this time together by clicking the link below and joining us through video. Or alternatively, you can 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 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.

THE SEASON OF PENTECOST

The liturgical season of Pentecost lasts about 6 months (from Pentecost Sunday—on May 23 this year—until the season of Advent begins—on November 28 this year). For this Pentecost season, we will spend significant time talking about the idea of Covenant—with God, in our world, in our church, and in our personal lives. Please join us for worship and conversation as we move through these next months together. It promises to be rich and meaningful.

IN-PERSON WORSHIP RESUMES IN JULY

Our first in-person service since the shelter-at-home restrictions began will be July 4th. Another bit of freedom to celebrate! We will be meeting at 10:30 outdoors in the Peace Garden, and worship will also be livestreamed on Zoom. Some tents will be set up, but shady seating may be limited so please check the weather beforehand and come dressed for outdoor temperatures and sun. We're following worship with a bring-your-own picnic lunch, to give us all a chance to get caught up with one another.

On July 11th and 18th, we are returning to Zoom-only worship while Christy is on vacation. Please join us for worship; you'll see familiar faces in the virtual pulpit those Sundays.

On July 25th, we will resume worship together in the Sanctuary. Work has been done throughout the church in our absence; it will be wonderful to enjoy the updates. Planning for the service on the 25th is still in progress; we would like this service to be welcoming and meaningful, so please let Beth and/or Christy know what will help make the return to communal worship resonate for you. Our services will also continue to be on Zoom; the church recently purchased new video equipment to (hopefully) make that a seamless transition. Please read our Regional Minister's article below and follow the link to the full article for one person's insight on how to embrace the future *right now*.

THE NEW WAYS OF THE CHURCH

Earlier this week Carey Nieuwhof, author and podcaster published an article, **“The New Church Characteristics of Churches That Will Be in Decline Five Years from Now”** <https://careynieuwhof.com/the-new-characteristics-of-churches-that-will-be-in-decline-five-years-from-now/>. The article raises some important points about how congregations go forward as we move into a post-pandemic time.



While I do not believe that decline is inevitable, change is and how we manage change will be one of the factors that determines how we will navigate the next few years and can determine whether we grow or decline. As Nieuwhof says, “While the future is impossible to predict accurately and anyone who tells you they know where it’s all going is either lying or deluded, there are often clues as to what’s ahead.”

So, read the article and considering all you and your congregation has learned during shelter in home months, assess your congregation’s ministry in terms of these seven characteristics, knowing that not everything will be true for every congregation:

1. Betting everything on a physical return to church.
2. Still measuring success by the number of people who attend physical locations. “If people engage with church differently via digital, home-based, or community-based gatherings, the leader who defines success by worship attendance alone in a church building or campus will grow more and more frustrated.
3. Online ministry is seen as an afterthought or lesser form.
4. All feedback comes from their echo chamber. This is the perfect time to listen to people who have not been at leadership tables. Talk to folks whose voices have not been or have seldom been heard.
5. Quickly returning to pre-pandemic worship formats – what Nieuwhof calls 3 songs and a message.
6. Thinking of the church building as the sole place of ministry. “One trend developing before our eyes is the home as the new center of life. In the last six months, work, food preparation, entertainment, school, and shopping are now more home-based than ever. And for 6 months, that’s been true church.” Some of that will shift, but can we do ministry without relying so much on our buildings.
7. Be careful not to exclude young adults from the inner leadership circle. Nieuwhof talks about reaching out to Generation Z, but his point includes generations that have not been previously included in the congregational leadership.

As we return to our congregations, let’s consider some new ways of doing the ministries we are called to do.

Rev. LaTaunya Bynum

MISSION ACTION GIFT

Have you ever been to a church camp? Or for that matter any camp? Every summer since 1960 (with a few missing years) the Christian Churches of Northern California and Nevada (CCNCN) offer a week of camp for ages from 9 to 109 at our regional owned camp Community of the Great Commission (CGC). Our June donation will help those kids and adults attend by offering scholarships. Some of us have received these scholarships in the past. I think you know how much the camp means to me, so I don't think I need to explain. The scholarship fund is named after a man who got me into the CA camp experience. His name is Rev. Ben Bohren. A minister for most of his life, he also worked with National Benevolent Association, was director of church relations for Chapman University in Orange, CA and much more. Many times he was either a Counselor or Director. He has influenced my life in more ways than one. Check out this website; www.uccr.org/community, and you will understand why we do this.

Thank You!

Carl Cordes (cc)

In appreciation for the quick and effective work of firefighters recently in the Mezzera-Cordes-Goode neighborhood, our July Mission Action gift is going to the California Fire Foundation. Their mission is providing emotional and financial assistance to families of fallen firefighters, firefighters, and the communities they protect. They designed, built and maintain the California Firefighters Memorial at the State Capitol, they supply emergency support to departments and families of firefighters killed in the line of duty, and provide educational assistance to the children of fallen firefighters. Their Supplying Aid to Victims of Emergency (SAVE) program brings immediate, short-term relief to victims of fire or other natural disaster throughout California. Additionally, the Foundation supplies public safety resources, and conducts outreach and education about fire safety issues through its Firefighters On Your Side program. Check out their website at <https://www.cafirefoundation.org/> for more information.

DON'T FORGET:

To help earn money for the church beyond your generous donations:

- ✓ Use www.goodsearch.com (instead of Google or Bing) for your internet searches.
- ✓ Start at www.goodshop.com when shopping online.
- ✓ Sign up at www.escrip.com for when you patronize local stores and restaurants.
- ✓ Take your recycling to Valcore (www.valcorerecycling.org) and ask that the money go to the church.
- ✓ Use www.smile.amazon.com. The first time you use it, you will be asked to select a charity to support. Pick our church, and don't forget to bookmark the page!



You will be hearing about Independence Day at our outdoor Fourth of July worship service at church that day. The service will be in-person and also streamed live for you at home. In the meantime, below are some trivia items about the Liberty Bell, a symbol of Independence Day. The bell was cast in 1752 to be hung in the Philadelphia town hall (which later became known as Independence Hall). That location is where the Second Continental Congress debated and adopted the Declaration of Independence and where the Constitutional Convention debated and adopt the original Constitution of the United States. Legend has it that the bell was rung on July 4th to signal that the Declaration of Independence had been adopted by the delegates. But it would be more historically accurate to say that the bell was rung a few days later after the delegates had actually signed the document and it was read aloud to the crowd assembled in Philadelphia. Now, how about some more items of interest?

Did you know that there is a religious citation which was cast onto the bell when it was forged? It is a citation from the Book of Leviticus (25:10) which reads "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof." So the bible had a role in casting the bell.

Also, did you know that there was a misspelled word cast into the bell when it was made? What might it be? Pennsylvania is spelled "Pensylvania" on the bell. The name of the original colony of Pennsylvania was derived from its founder William Penn, a religious figure from England. The second part of the name is from the word "sylvan," which means wooded or an area containing trees, as in a sylvan setting. Somehow William Penn lost one of his "n's!" And that's your history and linguistics lesson for the day. Happy 4th and see you at church that day (or on Sunday, July 25th when we return to worship in our sanctuary).



Mark Your Calendar

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| Sunday, July 4 | In-person worship in the Peace Garden and picnic lunch |
| Wednesday, July 21 | Administrative Council, 5:00 p.m. |
| Sunday, July 25 | In-person worship resumes in Sanctuary |

Note – Elder's Meetings and Ministry Council will resume in August

