

# Pope Francis Dies at 88 After Final Appeal for Gaza Cease-Fire

*“Will the millions who will mourn his death these coming days respect this wish of his? Will they care for Gazans and Palestinians the way he did?”*

The Vatican announced Monday that Pope Francis has died at the age of 88, hours after he appeared at an Easter mass and appealed for an end to Israel’s war on the Gaza Strip.

The pope’s Easter address, read aloud by Archbishop Diego Ravelli, decried the “terrible conflict” in Gaza that “continues to cause death and destruction and to create a dramatic and deplorable humanitarian situation.”

“I appeal to the warring parties: call a cease-fire, release the hostages, and come to the aid of a starving people that aspires to a future of peace!” said the message from the pope, an outspoken opponent of military conflict and war profiteers, climate destruction, and runaway economic inequality.

“In the face of the cruelty of conflicts that involve defenceless civilians and attack schools, hospitals, and humanitarian workers, we cannot allow ourselves to forget that it is not targets that are struck, but persons, each possessed of a soul and human dignity,” the pope’s address continued.

News of Pope Francis’ death came after a bout with

double pneumonia left him hospitalized for more than a month. The Vatican did not specify a cause of death in its announcement.

*The Nation’s* John Nichols wrote Sunday that Pope Francis’ calls for peace have made him “arguably the most consistent high-profile defender of the humanity of the Palestinian people during a period when the Israeli assault on Gaza has been pursued with relentless violence.”

Nichols continued:

“With a boldness and specificity that has often sparked controversy, this pope has challenged economic injustice, racism, environmental neglect, militarism, and the abuses of new technologies that increase inequality. He has faced his share of criticism, not just from conservatives who disapprove of his views but also from reformers who sincerely wish that he would do more to modernize the church. Yet, in a time of too much indifference and impunity, this pope has remained uniquely engaged with the embattled regions that political and media elites neglect or abandon.

That’s been especially true when it comes to Gaza, where Pope Francis has long argued for cease-fires, arms blockades, aid convoys, and a diplomatic urgency that recognizes that Palestinians and Israelis are “fraternal peoples [who] have the right to live in peace.”



[Korea.net](http://Korea.net)/Korean Culture and Information Service (Jeon Han)

In a tribute to Pope Francis, Palestinian theologian Munther Isaac wrote Monday that “he conveyed true compassion to Palestinians, most notably to those in Gaza during this genocide.”

“The pope left our world today, and the occupation and the wall remained. Even worse, he left our world while a genocide continues to unfold,” Isaac wrote, pointing to the pontiff’s call for a thorough international investigation of Israel’s assault on Gaza.

“Today I wonder: Will the millions who will mourn his death these coming days respect this wish of his?” Isaac asked. “Will they care for Gazans and Palestinians the way he did?”

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## MODESTO PEACE/LIFE CENTER ANNUAL MEETING

In Person and on Zoom\* • All Welcome

**Saturday, May 10, 2025, 829 13<sup>th</sup> St., Modesto**

**9:00 AM Coffee, Conversation**

**9:30 AM Business Meeting, Financial Report, Committee Reports, Board Member Nominations**

**Discussion: Action plans, ideas, and strategies**

**12:00 PM Adjournment (\*Link to be sent)**

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## Kruse Lucas Celebrates Graffiti

Kruse Lucas Art Gallery welcomes **Donna Wayman-Maurer** for her upcoming exhibit in June, July & August, for their Annual Graffiti Exhibit as part of the 26th Annual Graffiti Festival.

Donna is an artist who has been painting automobiles, vintage hood ornaments, animals, flowers, and scenery, though her exhibit will focus on cars. Her medium is typically oil, which she uses in thin glazes, putting down layers of color to achieve brilliant color and depth.

The gallery is located at 525 Tully Road, Modesto, and is open Monday through Friday, 9-5, except holidays.



### Be informed!

Read the Valley Citizen at <http://thevalleycitizen.com>

# The 40th Annual Peace Camp is Here!

June 20-22, 2025

Registration is now open! [peacelifecenter.org/peace-camp](http://peacelifecenter.org/peace-camp)

The Modesto Peace/Life Center's 40th Annual Peace Camp in the Sierras will take place on June 20-22, 2025. Come celebrate 40 years of Peace Camp, a rich tradition of people gathering together in peace and kindness to live out and imagine a more peaceful world. You'll enjoy workshops, good food, singing, crafts, a talent show, recreation, and stimulating conversation with people of all ages in a beautiful mountain setting.

### About Peace Camp

Peace Camp takes place at Camp Peaceful Pines, in Dardanelle off Hwy. 108 in the Stanislaus National Forest. Peace Camp officially opens at 3 p.m. on Friday and closes at 12 p.m. on Sunday. Families and individuals of all ages are welcome. Minors under 18 must be accompanied by an adult.

Camp rates start at \$70 for children and \$100 for adults and covers the program, food and lodging for the weekend. Partial scholarships and day rates are also available. Donations for scholarships are appreciated.

### 2025 Workshop Speaker

We're honored to welcome Melanie Berru as our featured speaker for Saturday's workshop at Peace Camp. Ms. Melanie Berru is a proud Chicana from California's Central Valley, a mother, transformative educator, freelance consultant, contributing writer to the grassroots newsletter, *Stanislaus Connections*, and a trailblazer for equity and justice. As a sociology professor at Modesto

Junior College, Ms. Berru also serves as the Rising Scholars Faculty Liaison and teaches college courses to incarcerated brothers and sisters within the jail system. Her abolition work embodies the belief that education is not merely a pathway to opportunity but a transformative force capable of dismantling systemic barriers and fostering empowered communities.

Ms. Berru's commitment to "making the invisible visible" is a guiding principle in her work. Whether through her engaging community, her transformative teaching, or her advocacy, she uplifts voices often unheard and empowers others to challenge inequity with courage and love. Recognized for her impactful service to students and the community, she has earned numerous awards that highlight her passion and advocacy.

For more information, please visit: [peacelifecenter.org/peace-camp](http://peacelifecenter.org/peace-camp)

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<b>10</b> MAY	<b>Leadership 101</b> Take part in leadership talks and activities.
<b>17</b> MAY	<b>Data and Actions 101</b> Explore data collection, analysis, and impactful actions to drive change.

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# The Value of Conservation Programs: An Open Letter from the Endangered Species Recovery Program

By Jaime Rudd, Ph.D.

Director, Endangered Species Recovery Program

California State University, Stanislaus <https://esrp.org/>

March 25, 2025

America's natural heritage defines us as a nation. From the iconic bald eagle to the ancient Grand Canyon, these treasures represent our identity and traditional values of being responsible stewards of this great land. Because of this, people come from all over the world to take in these beautiful landscapes and are moved by their deep ecological history. California alone hosts several distinct ecoregions that contain the tallest and oldest tree in our evergreen forests or show-off magnificent super blooms in our semi-arid grasslands. And each of these regions contain their own unique ecological communities that are home to plants and animals, often found nowhere else on Earth. By preserving these distinctive landscapes and the species that inhabit them, we honor both our past and our obligation to future generations.

But our public lands aren't just simple luxuries – they're essential to our strength and self-sufficiency as a nation. Conservation programs help protect public lands and address needs that cannot be adequately served through profit-seeking alone. They also play a critical role in maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem resilience. For example, healthy ecosystems ensure clean water and productive soil, benefit numerous industries (e.g., agriculture, fishing and hunting, and other outdoor and recreational activities) and reduce our dependence on outside resources. Wetlands and forests act as natural buffers against flooding, while intact landscapes sequester carbon, mitigate climate change impacts, prevent soil erosion, and support watershed health. Moreover, monitoring programs for wildlife diseases create early warning systems for environmental problems that could eventually affect human and domestic animal health. This can all directly translate into economic benefits – reducing infrastructure damage, maintaining clean water and air, and healthy crops and livestock. Ultimately, when species are protected and their habitats are preserved, entire ecosystems remain stable which, in turn, provides essential services

fundamental to human well-being. Simply put, when we protect species and their habitats, we protect ourselves.

And the American public has consistently agreed, showing strong, bipartisan support for environmental agencies like the National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency. There is also support for environmental protections and legislation such as the Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Protection Act, Clean Water and Clean Air Acts, and the Antiquities Act. While these laws could benefit from thoughtful improvements, it is widely accepted that they have led to improvements in air and water quality, protection of endangered species, and better environmental decision-making. Even today, many green technologies,

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such as electric vehicles, solar and wind energy projects, and sustainable urban development initiatives, have built upon the foundational work of conservation programs, demonstrating how environmental protection can drive innovation and economic progress.

Yet there is a common misconception that private sector jobs exist independently of government aid and are “self-made.” But when you look more closely, most of these economically important private companies and corporations in America have benefited substantially from government grants, loans, contracts, subsidies, and partnerships throughout their development. These range from small, local businesses with a handful of employees to well-known corporations in the oil and gas industry (e.g., ExxonMobil, PG&E), manufacturers of electric vehicles (e.g., Tesla, General Motors, Ford, Stellantis), technology companies (e.g., Intel, Apple), aerospace companies (e.g., Boeing, SpaceX), and others (e.g. Amazon). This reality doesn't diminish the value of private enterprise, but it does highlight how public and private sectors work together in the



American economy rather than functioning as completely separate domains.

Conservation programs like the Endangered Species Recovery Program (ESRP) also exemplify this collaborative relationship with our agencies. For over 33 years, ESRP has demonstrated how government support can empower local expertise through merit-based funding. Programs like ours compete rigorously for every dollar through competitive grant processes where only the most effective, well-designed projects receive support, ensuring accountability and results for federal funders and taxpayers. When a Bakersfield resident finds a sick kit fox or when riparian brush rabbits are near the brink of extinction, our team responds by bringing various groups together, working with agencies, non-profits, private landowners and other members of the public to address critical conservation needs that result in meaningful action. Unlike large corporations or privately held companies that receive millions, if not billions, in government funding and subsidies, programs like ESRP represent exceptional value for taxpayers. The entire budget for most wildlife conservation projects nationwide is a tiny fraction of what goes to major defense contractors or technology companies, yet the services provided have immeasurable long-term value. When a species like the San Joaquin kit fox or the riparian brush rabbit is saved from extinction, we are preserving genetic resources and ecological functions that, once lost, cannot be recovered at any price.

Fundamentally, the question shouldn't be whether conservation programs deserve public support, it's whether we as a society value the irreplaceable natural heritage that makes America unique. These aren't red vs. blue values; they're American values which is why conservation programs like ESRP are vital investments in America's future and not government burdens.

Ed. Note: Inexplicably, this vital program has had its funds frozen. See the article in last month's issue of [Stanislaus Connections](#). And visit ESRP's Facebook page.

<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1032770658886935&set=a.545953160902023>



**MODESTO PEACE/LIFE CENTER**

Working for **peace, justice**  
and a **sustainable future**

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Mailing address: P.O. Box 134,

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## MRB

MICHAEL R. BAUDLER

CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT

mb@modestocpas.com

TELEPHONE  
(209) 575-2653 ext 303

FACSIMILE  
(209) 575-0629

**Michael R. Baudler, CPA**

1120 14TH STREET, SUITE 2  
MODESTO, CALIFORNIA 95354

# Reimagining the Peace Essay Contest: A Community Invitation

## Hello Connections readers and community members!

The Peace Essay Contest has been a beloved tradition in Modesto for over 30 years, organized by volunteers from the Modesto Peace/Life Center. Over the decades, it has engaged thousands of students in thoughtful reflection and writing on issues of peace, justice, sustainability, and nonviolence—topics they may not typically explore in their everyday schoolwork.

## Today, we're excited to share that the contest is entering a new chapter.

Our committee has been hard at work reimagining the contest to better reflect the world students are growing up in today. While the foundation remains the same – encouraging youth to think critically about how to build a more peaceful world – we're expanding the ways students can express their ideas. Rather than focusing solely on essays, we are opening the door to a broader category of creative expression, allowing students to submit work that reflects their unique voice and talents, whether that's painting, music, poetry, or photography.

We're currently exploring potential themes, including the impact of artificial intelligence on our lives, communities, and future. Our goal is to create space for students to examine complex, real-world topics from a variety of perspectives, experiences, or imaginations.

To celebrate their efforts, the contest will conclude with an awards ceremony and reception in the Spring of 2026, where students and their families will be invited to honor their work and celebrate their contributions. First through third-place winners in each division will receive awards

and scholarship prizes as recognition for their creativity, insight, and dedication.

This project remains proudly nonpartisan, grounded in our belief that a peaceful world is built by listening to and learning from diverse voices. We especially want to reach students who may not have had previous opportunities to think about these topics – creating new ways for them to engage in meaningful, transformative dialogue.

As we continue developing this new vision, some elements are still evolving. We're sharing this update now to invite you into the process. Whether you're an educator, artist, community leader, or simply someone who cares about the next generation—we want to hear from you.

## We're actively looking for:

- Community members and educators to help shape and guide the project.
- Artists, educators, and community leaders who want to uplift youth voices.
- Judges and screeners passionate about writing, art, music, or youth education.
- Volunteers to help with logistics, outreach, and event planning.
- Tech-savvy supporters to assist with programming, social media, and submissions.
- Partners from youth-based nonprofits, schools, and local organizations.



There are also opportunities for sponsorship from individuals, businesses, and organizations interested in investing in a high-impact, youth-centered community project. Your support can help us offer meaningful recognition, expand access, and build something truly special together. This contest has already touched the lives of thousands of students – we hope to build on that legacy and continue growing with a new approach, new tools, and new voices.

Together, we can empower the next generation to envision and build a more equitable world. If you're ready to engage with passionate young visionaries and play a hands-on role in reimagining this powerful project, we invite you to join us.

As these plans continue to evolve, some details may change. This update is part of our commitment to keeping you informed and involved. We want this to be a community-driven effort, and your feedback and ideas are essential to that process.

## Inspired to get involved? Ready to act?

If you're interested in volunteering—whether it's by helping to plan, judging, connecting us with partners, or simply providing feedback—please reach out to us at [modestopeacecontest@gmail.com](mailto:modestopeacecontest@gmail.com) or call/text 209-303-2036. Our committee meets biweekly on Mondays at 5:30 pm, both in person and on Zoom. We would love for you to join us.

Let's reimagine what peace can look like—through creativity, community, and connection.

## Lots to Pond-er at River Bluff Park

By Elaine Gorman

On a beautiful Sunday morning in mid-March, I have arranged to meet a few friends for a stroll and casual birding at Ceres River Bluff Regional Park. I hadn't been to the park in a couple of years, as it was closed for maintenance and upgrades.

We meet on the upper level, where soccer fields, restrooms, a playground, picnic area, and a snack kiosk are located. Canada Geese gather on the soccer fields, perhaps contemplating their upcoming departure north. We admire the redbud trees that are just starting to bloom. As we begin to walk down the ramp to the lower terrace, we pause to look out over the 100-year floodplain and large pond. We spot a Swainson's Hawk (one of our summer nesting migrants) in a nearby Valley Oak.

Just a couple of years ago, there was a walnut orchard in the lower terrace. There are now walking paths, benches, interpretive signs, and parking areas in this approximately 40-acre parcel. Valley oaks, cottonwoods, sycamores, and other native trees have replaced the orchard. As the oaks are still mostly bare, oak galls, mistletoe, and bird nests are especially noticeable. We spot goldfinches, a Northern

Flicker, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Northern Mockingbirds, Scrub Jays, and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Willow fluff drifts down and carpets the ground.

We walk over to the pond and watch the geese. Mallards and American Coots float around. Common Moorhens strut their stuff near the edge. A happy surprise is the Great-tailed Grackle. Several other groups of people are walking dogs, strolling, and enjoying the mellow ambience.

Wandering over to the Tuolumne River, we scan the banks, looking for birds and wildlife. We find some raccoon tracks in the mud. There is a cement boat launch — I reckon that it is used for canoes and kayaks. We pause for a water break at the small pavilion. Sounds of life in Modesto, just across the river, drift over and fill in the gaps in our conversation.

We continue the loop, then walk up the ramp, back to the upper level. This route is about 1.5 miles. I suggest that you take along a 7-year-old. You will be rewarded with jokes, discussions of loose and missing teeth, and boundless enthusiasm.

<https://www.ceres.gov/250/River-Bluff-Regional-Park>



Getting there — 6 miles from downtown Modesto, 15-minute drive. Go south on Mitchell Road. Turn left (east) on Hatch Road. Go about one mile, turn left onto Eastgate Blvd. Keep left, park on the upper level near the soccer fields and picnic area.

# Modesto's Connection to "The Penguin Lessons"

By **CHRIS DAVIDSON**

In 1987, the Peace Life Center had its first Peace Essay Contest. (PEC), Indira Clark, Bunny Huddleston, Elaine Gorman, and I, along with a couple of others, organized it. I helped organize the speaker/presenter. In May of that year, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, the Argentinian Nobel Peace Prize winner, came and spoke to the audience at the participant reception at Modesto Junior College. He received the Nobel Prize for his work in returning Argentina to a democracy. At the reception, he spoke about his experience during Argentina's civil-military dictatorship in the 1970s. Part of his message has stayed with me since then. He admonished us to exercise our voting power and exhorted us to hold our political representatives accountable for defending democracy.

It is important to know these things; to know that we, here in Modesto, CA, are connected to the people of Argentina and to many others in places like El Salvador, Germany,

Hungary, Soviet Union/Russia, and Palestine, and that we have agency during these current, disruptive political times.

This is a brief talk I gave to those who attended the movie, "The Penguin Lessons" at the State Theater in April 2025. My first talk to the audience was on a lark. While watching the movie, I was struck by the fact that we, in Modesto, had a connection through the Peace Essay Contest to the people in Argentina. It occurred to me that most younger people in our town don't know about the myriad connections we have to the history that has brought us to this moment; actions from its residents, some of whom are us!

All in saying, YOU are living history! We can share the actions we have taken working in the social justice and environmental movement, AND with our experiences, break down the walls between us and our neighbors while enriching our community - our town. Whether you are still active or thinking about it, shuffle through your

memories and recall something you have done. It could be something like breaking bottles for the first recycling center, volunteering at the food bank, pitching in and working on a project for your church, mosque, synagogue, or other. You may not give much importance to your actions, but others do. Your actions and knowledge of it become part of the fabric that binds us to each other and our community. Share the who, what, when, why, and how of your stories. With your stories, we can help repair the distances that divide us.

Write it down and send it to me, Chris Davidson at: [living20th.history@yahoo.com](mailto:living20th.history@yahoo.com). I would like to use your stories and put them together thematically, post them to the Center's Instagram, retell them on the Center's radio station, and/or publish them in *Stanislaus Connections*. If you have accompanying recordings or photos, do not hesitate to send them along.

Remember, no act of caring is too small.

# Remembering the Courageous and Visionary Activist, David Hartsough

Before passing away last month at age 84, David Hartsough spent his life protesting war and injustice, while also living the gospel of nonviolence.

By **Robert Levering**

An activist's activist. David Hartsough stirred up a lot of "good trouble" before his death from cancer last month at age 84.

Arrested more than 150 times, David's first civil disobedience action took place in 1960 at a sit-in at a segregated lunch counter in Virginia. His last such protest occurred in November 2024 at Travis Air Force Base in California while attempting to block weapons shipments to Israel to conduct its genocide in Gaza.

Between these bookends, David got busted for aquatic blockades of aircraft carriers going to Vietnam, obstructing construction of a nuclear power plant on an earthquake fault on the Pacific coast, blocking streets in San Francisco to protest the war in Iraq, conducting nonviolent training in Kosovo and engaging in die-ins at nuclear weapons facilities in California.

He details these actions — and many, many others — in his 2014 memoir, "[Waging Peace: Global Adventures of a Lifelong Activist](#)," which has inspired thousands of activists throughout the world.

"I chose my parents well," is how David often explained his lifelong commitment to peace and social justice. When David was 10, his mother Ruth went to Washington to demonstrate against legislation that would reintroduce the

military draft. She fasted for a week while lobbying Congress.

His father Ray, a Congregational minister, worked on the staff of the American Friends Service Committee for many years, starting with a stint helping refugees in Gaza in 1949. In his role at AFSC, Ray organized speaking tours for social change activists such as Bayard Rustin, A.J. Muste and Ralph Abernathy. Many of them came to dinner with the Hartsough family. They lived outside Philadelphia in a cooperative community that had been founded by World War II era conscientious objectors.

When David was a teenager, his father took David and his brother Paul to Montgomery during the bus boycott where they met Martin Luther King Jr. He often saw King during his college years at Howard University, where David was one of the few white students at the historically African American institution.

To say that King inspired David would be an understatement. It would be more accurate to say that David was a lifelong disciple. One of his prized possessions was a set of audiotapes of King's speeches and sermons which David listened to several times a year. In "Waging Peace," David includes an appendix outlining the principles of Kingian Nonviolence, values that he exemplified over seven decades of activism.



To say that King inspired David would be an understatement. It would be more accurate to say that David was a lifelong disciple.

David recalled that once, in a meditation, he heard and felt Martin Luther King come from behind, put his hands on his shoulders, and say, "David, I know that working for peace and justice can be a lonely struggle. I want you to know that I will be with you."

Two other figures played central roles in David's life. When David was a teenager, his father Ray gave him a copy of Gandhi's "[All Men Are Brothers](#)." David read many of Gandhi's writings and used examples from them in various nonviolent campaigns he organized over the years.

The teachings of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount, also profoundly shaped his outlook. In fact, he was reading the passage about "Love your enemies..." in his pocket New Testament when confronted by a neo-Nazi during a sit-in at a segregated lunch counter. The man had a knife and threatened to kill David if he didn't leave the store. David responded, "Friend, do what you think is right, and I will still try to love you." The man dropped his hand, turned around and left the store.

David later wrote that it was the most powerful experience of his young life: "It confirmed my belief in the power of love, the power of goodness, the power of God working through us to

**continued page 6**

## Remembering the Courageous and Visionary Activist David Hartsough from p5

overcome hate and violence. I had a profound sense that nonviolence really works. At that moment nonviolence became much more than a philosophical idea or a tactic that worked in Gandhi's India. It became the way I wanted to relate to other human beings, a way of life, a way of working for change."

Indeed, David preached the gospel of nonviolence all over the world, as much by his actions as by his words. He was always driven by his sense of injustice. He had great empathy for those who suffered from oppression, especially the victims of American militarism and imperialism, whether in Vietnam or El Salvador, in Gaza or the Philippines, in Sri Lanka or South Sudan. He got involved in struggles in all these countries among many others.

David often cited September 1, 1987, as the worst day of his life. For several months, he had helped organize people to block trains and trucks at the Concord Naval Weapons Station, where arms were to be put on ships bound for Central America to support the U.S.-backed Contras in Nicaragua.

Normally, the police removed and arrested demonstrators blocking the trucks or trains. But that morning, a weapons-loaded train did not stop. Instead, it literally ran over David's friend Brian Willson, severing both legs, slicing a hole in his skull among other injuries. David, who had been knocked down by the train, rushed to Brian's side and held his head while others called for medical help.

Fortunately, Brian survived. Rather than stopping the campaign, the group held a rally four days later with 10,000 protesters. And for the next few years, they maintained a 24/7 presence at the tracks, and about 2,000 were arrested. Among those arrested were David's parents.

David's contributions to the peace movement went beyond direct action. He believed that it was not enough to protest wars, but thought that there should be a nonviolent army to protect civilians and deter violence in conflict zones. So, in 2002, he co-founded Nonviolent Peaceforce. The organization has grown to more than 400 full-time peacekeepers on the ground in 10 countries including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Iraq and South Sudan. It is funded by the United Nations, the governments of the Netherlands, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, as well as the European Union and a variety of nonprofits.

In 2014, Hartsough co-founded World Beyond War dedicated to the abolition of war. Since then, the group's



**David blocking a weapons truck at Concord Naval Weapons Station in June 1987.**

I had a profound sense that nonviolence really works. At that moment nonviolence became much more than a philosophical idea or a tactic that worked in Gandhi's India. It became the way I wanted to relate to other human beings, a way of life, a way of working for change."

Declaration of Peace pledge has been signed by tens of thousands of individuals. The organization now has 46 chapters in 35 countries and 111 affiliates around the world, which try to educate the public about the weapons industry and engage in nonviolent direct actions for peace.

Despite spending more than seven decades on the frontlines of struggles for justice, David enjoyed a full life outside of the trenches. He married Jan Hartsough in 1967. She has been quite active in social justice work herself and has been arrested with David numerous times. Their two

children, Peter and Heidi, each have two children. Along with David's brother Paul and his children, the extended Hartsough family spends a lot of time together, especially in nature, particularly at their cabin near Echo Lake in the Sierra mountains.\

When at home in San Francisco, David took walks almost daily in the Arboretum in Golden Gate Park, where he marveled at the beauty of the flowers. He would even spontaneously clap when he came across especially lovely ones. Even after getting a terminal diagnosis four years ago, David insisted on hiking in the Sierras and the Grand Tetons. Some of these mountain hikes were as long as 10 miles. He also enjoyed sailing with friends in the San Francisco Bay.

No remembrance of David is complete without mentioning his love of music. After his diagnosis, he and a group of friends met weekly to sing folk songs at Baker Beach with a glorious view under the Golden Gate Bridge. (David played the guitar.) He credited those sessions for helping him outlive the predictions of his doctors.

On the evening before his passing, David enjoyed participating virtually in a singalong of Broadway musicals led by his longtime friend George Lakey.

Though not with us anymore, David will be long remembered for his persistence and commitment to justice and his belief that one day "We shall overcome."


Robert Levering was a full-time anti-Vietnam War organizer from 1967 to 1973. He was an adviser to the 2020 film, "The Boys Who Said NO!" about the draft resistance movement, and the Executive Producer of "The Movement and the 'Madman," a documentary about the impact on Nixon of the Moratorium and Mobilization demonstrations in the fall of 1969.

From Waging Nonviolence.






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Stanislaus County has been impacted by a recent increase in suspected drug-related overdose and accidental poisoning deaths



**What you can do:**

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- Check in with friends and family with a history of substance use
- Seek treatment for substance use disorder
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# Democracy or Plutocracy?

By LAWRENCE S. WITTNER

Despite much lofty rhetoric portraying the United States as a democracy (in which the people rule), this nation, in fact, has often resembled a plutocracy (in which the wealthy rule).

The confusion owes a great deal to the fact that the United States, at its founding, was somewhat more democratic than its contemporaries. In the eighteenth century, European nations, governed by kings, princes, and other wealthy hereditary elites, usually provided a contrast to the more unruly, less hidebound new nation, where some Americans even had the vote.

Even so, the overwhelming majority of Americans didn't have the vote, which was largely confined to property-owning or tax-paying white males—[about 6 percent](#) of the U.S. population in 1789. Women (comprising about 50 percent of the population) were, with very few exceptions, denied voting rights. And slaves ([about 18 percent](#) of the population) lacked both voting rights and citizenship.

Wealthy Americans maintained firm control of the U.S. and state governments. The Founding Fathers were [rich white men](#)—in many cases, owners of massive plantations dependent upon slave labor. And the first President of the United States, George Washington, was [one of the wealthiest Americans](#) of his time. Women and slaves had no governing role at all.

Another reason for the association of the United States with democracy is that, over the course of its history, the country has gradually grown *more* democratic—although only by overcoming determined opposition from its traditional economic elites.

During most of the nineteenth century, the struggle for democracy was difficult, indeed. Although white male suffrage expanded, campaigns for women's rights and, especially, for the abolition of slavery met fierce resistance. The wealthy planter class of the South resorted to a bloody Civil War rather than accept limits on slavery—an overplaying of its hand that, ironically, led to slavery's abolition and voting rights for the former slaves. And thanks to the postwar enfranchisement of millions of African Americans, Reconstruction governments injected elements of political, economic, and social equality into Southern politics. Horrified, the old planter elite launched a counter-revolution—a terror campaign spearheaded by the Ku Klux Klan that deprived African Americans of voting rights and public office, while riveting white supremacy into every aspect of Southern life.

In the North, the rising industrial magnates of the late nineteenth century, deploying the enormous wealth of their giant corporations, fastened their grip on governance during what became known as the Gilded Age. Enjoying lives of unprecedented opulence and power, corporate titans easily bought the allegiance of politicians or acquired public office themselves. Indeed, the U.S. Senate became known as a



“millionaire’s club.” Meanwhile, masses of impoverished immigrants, drawn to jobs in the new factories, crowded into big city slums. Although “Panics” (economic depressions) periodically swept through the nation, producing massive unemployment and hunger, neither the federal nor state governments enacted relief measures. Instead, most politicians—ignoring widespread poverty, the suppression of Black voting rights, and a growing women’s suffrage campaign—concentrated on serving the new corporate titans by passing pro-corporate legislation.

With the governments of North and South subservient to the economic elites of the late nineteenth century, radical movements emerged outside the two-party system. Angry farmers organized the Populist Party to take back the nation from the plutocrats, and for a time, enjoyed substantial electoral success. Bitter strikes and workers’ struggles convulsed the nation. Perhaps the best known of them, the nationwide Pullman Strike of 1894, was broken only when the federal government stepped in to destroy the American Railway Union and arrest its leaders.

The pent-up popular outrage at plutocracy finally broke through in the early twentieth century. Capturing portions of both the Democratic and Republican parties, the Progressive movement succeeded in limiting some of the more flagrant abuses of rule by the wealthy. Its reforms included the direct election of Senators, a constitutional amendment authorizing a progressive income tax, workers’ rights measures, and a constitutional amendment guaranteeing women’s right to vote.

Although World War I and the return of conservative Republican rule in the 1920s undermined the struggle for democracy, it revived dramatically after the onset of the Great Depression and the beginning of the New Deal. Drawing upon an overwhelming majority in Congress, the Democrats passed legislation sharply raising taxes on the wealthy, establishing the right of workers to union representation, inaugurating massive relief projects,

and establishing Social Security, minimum wage laws, maximum hours laws, and other measures designed to serve “[forgotten](#)” Americans. Despite bitter opposition from the Southern elite, even the civil rights issue made an appearance, in the form of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s executive order establishing a Fair Employment Practice Committee.

These popular egalitarian initiatives were supplemented in the 1960s by major voting rights and other civil rights legislation, immigration reform legislation, Medicare and Medicaid, and measures to reduce poverty, advance educational opportunity, and create public broadcasting.

Today, of course, we are witnessing a new counter-revolution, led by billionaires like Donald Trump and Elon Musk, to [reduce public access to the vote](#), intimidate their opponents, and, more broadly, return the U.S. government to its earlier role as a guardian of political, economic, and social privilege. Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, in their current barnstorming tour, refer to this program as “Oligarchy” (rule by the few). And they are correct. But, more specifically, it is plutocracy (rule by the wealthy), designed to serve the interests of the wealthy.

Although the United States has never been a thoroughgoing democracy, there are many indications that, over the centuries, it has made significant progress toward that goal. And the question today is: Will we scrap that progress and return to the Gilded Age—or worse?

This is an historic moment—one that provides an opportunity for Americans to defend what [Abraham Lincoln lauded](#) as “a government of the people, by the people, [and] for the people.” It would be a shame if Americans abandoned that democratic vision.

Lawrence S. Wittner (<https://www.lawrencewittner.com/>) is Professor of History Emeritus at SUNY/Albany and the author of [Confronting the Bomb](#) (Stanford University Press).

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## Valley Poets Cynthia Barstad & Jenissa Gonzalez: Sharing A Connection Through Family, Faith, & Poetry

Cynthia Barstad has been in the world of poetry for many years, sharing her words with her family, friends, and strangers. Her passion for writing has skipped a generation to her granddaughter, Jenissa. They have been able to express themselves through poetry and use it as a foundation to deepen their relationship with each other and God. The eldest of three children, a wife for 13 years, Cynthia is the mother of two children and a grandmother of five. She writes: “Although I was an Early Childhood Educator for 30-plus years, I have a love for movement and words. I think in movement and put movement to words when I study and sit with God in the early morning. Deep in my soul, I hunger for connection with God. In His presence, I find peace in turmoil. It’s in His presence that I am schooled and learn more about the unique way He has crafted me. He has given me a love for dance and writing, where I go deep into myself and find treasures. It’s in Him I’m learning about love and healing for my soul. Of all the roles I have in life, my favorite is being His daughter.

Jenissa Gonzalez was born and raised in Modesto in a very blended family, the eldest of 5 in my home. I have always had an old soul and sought out connection and meaning from a young age. Writing has always been something I’ve enjoyed, but I found poetry as an outlet after doing humanitarian aid with Ukrainian refugees, along with serving as a missionary in other countries with *Jesus Mission*. My perception of the world and what matters has grown into something much larger than me. My heart and soul have found connection and meaning through God, and I continue to deepen my understanding of the world and what it means to truly love others.

*A Gathering of Voices* is very pleased that Cynthia and Jenissa share some of their work in this issue of *Stanislaus Connections*.

### Playground on my frontal lobe

As I enter my last year to develop my brain, I find myself most drawn to childlike wonder. It is as if my stunted childhood wants one last chance to see sunlight.

She wants to dance and sing and jump with joy. She likes sparkles and pink.

She wants to skip down the street and wear friendship bracelets. Her favorite stuffed animal is always on her bed.

She gets excited about things she likes and doesn’t feel shame when she talks too much. She loves making new friends and doesn’t minimize herself to be liked.

She is grateful to have a full belly and is proud to look strong. She sits quietly in awe as the breeze blows through the trees.

She notices the power of the ocean waves and can’t help but chase them. She smiles at flowers and pretty dresses, and babies.

This young girl, who has only lived in photo albums for many years, is yearning to be noticed. I am the only one who can show her to the world.

I will make her feel seen, known, loved, and beautiful.

She will have confidence in her talents, humor, and wisdom.

Her kind heart will be nurtured in my hands.

She is free to run and play and live in the space of my mind. She can pave her own paths and tie things off with little bows.

I want to be defined by who she is and who she hoped I would be.

*Jenissa G.*

### Unattached

People constantly tell me that I’m brave. Strong. Courageous. Little do they know how often I go for what is easy. Safe. Familiar.

Chasing what I can’t have because there is no risk of commitment when something is unavailable. Leaving the reality of my home for a place where I am unknown and therefore free of accountability. Watching my life from the outside, ridding myself of the burden of self-awareness.

Unafraid of war and disaster because I have an overwhelming sense that the Lord wants to keep me around for some reason.

Suddenly bravery, strength, and courage become apathy, dissociation, and avoidance. I am an audience member in my own life.

Running from my reflection to avoid the truth.

*Jenissa G.*

### Where does my soul reside?

I know where my heart sits on my left side, but my heart and my soul have a familiar divide.

My soul has its own wide domain; whether it feels joy or sorrow or pain, it seems to encompass the whole plain.

It consumes my entire being without apology; it is heavy but also light and free.

When I think of my soul, I can feel a warmth like a fire, It is a light that yearns to glow brighter It begins at the center and expands as if it can grow bigger than the life that I’m leading

My soul is heavy with experiences, people, and places I’ve been. It seems to beg to let the light in.

I’m not sure where all this light would go if there were not a Keeper of my soul. This Shepherd can see the light inside that others can only view through my eyes.

Although I still don’t know where my soul resides

I’m certain that one day it will know a world that is greater than mine.

*Jenissa G.*

### Space

Always needing more but never having enough

Suddenly everyone is light years away and I am floating all alone This void around me is heavy with every thought that has ever occupied my mind

I attempt to make myself bigger so infinity doesn’t seem so vast

Now the shame of being too much creeps into the corners of my mind I shrink until I am like a grain of sand on a never-ending coastline

Crushed under your feet like an ant carrying fifty times my body weight So small that even I can’t find myself

I see glimmers of light far off in my galaxy, but they are merely past hopes that have already died The desire to be known contradicts my fear of the very same thing

Running from any glimpse of my reflection while yearning to be seen So, for now and forever, I will live in space

Watching the world from above but feeling miles below

*Jenissa G.*

## Hometown glory

When did the urge to flee become the desire to stay?  
There is no freedom to go unrecognized.

Familiar strangers and former acquaintances loom on  
every corner.

The city that I claimed had nothing to offer me seems to  
keep me fairly occupied.

I have become the one counting down the days until my  
friends are home for the holidays.

My suitcase that had a permanent place in the corner  
of my bedroom, now collects dust in the garage. These  
things that I once viewed as a sign of failure have become  
the few things that make me feel secure. I've found joy in  
being a recognized regular.

Excitement grows when I get to see dear friends on  
random weekdays; no struggles to make our paths cross.

My life that once existed parallel to the place that shaped  
me, has become a messy map of intersecting lines.

My attempts to uproot have only planted me deeper in the  
dry ground here.

I have become a local tour guide, having stories for  
random neighborhoods, shops, and landmarks. Suddenly,  
I am okay being where I am from.

—Jenissa G.

## A Storm

There's a storm a brewin' Mama said.

Git down them cella' steps fast as you can and latch that  
cella' door behind ya. But Mama it's so dark, so damp  
down there.

I don't like the smell of damp dirt nor the taste of its  
wetness on my tongue when my words are mixed with  
that dirt.

Git, she shouted.

Now, before the storm assaults us all. Remember to latch  
that door behind ya.

Quiet as a mouse scamper down them steps. Real quiet-  
like.

Listen for the storm to pass before poppin' your head out  
like a gopher in the yard. Yes, Mama.

BUT, I don't like storms and I don't like cellas. It's so  
dark in there.

Go! she screamed. Go now! Yes, Mama.

I'm going.

Please be safe in that horrid storm!

*C. Barstad*

## Her Last Rodeo

She put her best foot forward  
although she'd rather not.

Always the one to  
comply, get the job  
done,

review the history of the  
herd then hold her breath  
hoping nothing

changes. But it  
always did-

Just like the last rodeo  
she rode proudly and flew with the  
wind. The crowd cheered.

It's energy propelled  
her in spite of rising  
dust.

Her clinging sweat cooled her taut  
body, igniting her history of  
perfection.

A pedigree of stoic  
messages: toe the line  
above

reproach  
untouchable

The crowd cheered again  
as she rode round and round the arena.

Lifted higher and higher  
on the chants rising from foreign  
tongues she sat taller in her saddle  
slowing her horse to a trot.

Change would not come  
today. The family expected  
so much. She couldn't pay  
that price yet.

*C. Barstad*

## Sunday Morning

We sit in our  
seats. We look good.

We smell nice, too.

We sing our songs

while thoughts of Sunday dinner dance in our

minds. The offering plate is just barely full,  
but our wallets are full to  
overflowing. We smile at one  
another.

Our greetings remain within the walls of our meeting  
place as we exit. Monday - Saturday we waltz and tango  
in our worlds with me, myself, and I. Sunday morning  
rolls around again.

We sit in our same  
seats. We look good.

We smell nice.

We sing our songs.

We extend the same greetings with a  
smile. We speak and speak.

But I don't know  
you, and you don't  
know me.

We exit into another Monday-Saturday ritual.

Perhaps this week we will dance in enchantment with a  
Swan Lake ballet or a taste of a Chubby Checker twist.

Same partner, though: me, myself, and I dancing through  
the days waiting for a different Sunday. Wondering and  
wondering what dance Sunday will display.

*C. Barstad*

## Cat Got Your Tongue?

I stood on your doorstep

Tongue in hand

Speechless you looked

at me Your eyes spoke volumes

Shaking your head you put out your

hand Into which I placed your

tongue

It's time you spoke for yourself.

*C. Barstad*



# Great Programs on KCBP 95.5 fm, the Voice of the Valley

Streaming on [www.kcbpradio.org](http://www.kcbpradio.org)

## CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

**Confetti Park** - Music, stories New Orleans style, Saturdays at 8:00 am; & Sunday's 12:30 pm.

**The Children's Hour** - Sundays 3:00 pm. And Mondays at 4:00 p.m.

## SCIENCE

**Radio Ecoshock** – the latest scientific information on Climate Change – Saturdays, 9:00 am.

**Explorations** – Science explained with Dr. Michio Kaku - 9:00 am Sundays.

**Big Picture Science** - 1:00 pm Sundays.

**Planetary Radio** – 2:30 pm Sundays.

## PROGRAMS

**The Ralph Nader Hour: Citizen advocate Ralph Nader and guests discuss topics important for consumers and our nation on Saturdays at 4 p.m.**

**Ukraine 2.4.2** - a collaboration between Anne Levine, WOMR, the Pacifica Network, and Kraina FM, a 26-city radio network in Ukraine that arranges weekly cutting-edge and exclusive interviews with key people in Ukraine – Thursdays, 10:00 am.

**Beethoven to Bernstein** - Classical music ranging from Beethoven to Bernstein. Big hits from well-known composers - Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Strauss, Ravel, Copland - and many more, mostly in the form of orchestral, chamber, and piano music - Saturdays, 10:00 pm.

**The Not Old – Better Show** - fascinating, high-energy program of big-name guests, inspiring role models, interesting topics, with entertaining host and former Modestan, Paul Vogelzang – Fridays, 2:00 pm, Saturdays, 12:30 pm.

**Down on the Farm** - topics important for our San Joaquin agriculture with Madera organic farmer Tom Willey - Saturdays, 6 am

**Sounds Irish** Music from County Wicklow - Saturdays, 7:00 pm.

**Various musical programs during the noon hour: Oldies, Old Piano, and International.**

**Dead Air** - Hear the Grateful Dead with Cory Daniels. Fridays, 6 pm; Saturdays, 3 pm.

**Attitude with Arne Arnesen** – 3:00 pm. Political and social issues.

**Sojourner Truth** - 4:00 pm – Tuesdays. Interviews and panels focus on issues that affect people of color.

**Democracy Now!** - 7:00 am, Monday thru Friday. Reporting by veteran journalists Amy Goodman & Juan Gonzalez.



**Flashpoint Magazine** - 10:00 pm, Monday thru Friday. Politics, social issues, from KQED's Dennis Bernstein.

**Julian Taylor's Jukebox** – 4:00 pm, Thursdays and Fridays. Eclectic, contemporary music.

**Nuestra Música** – 4:00 pm, Tuesdays. Eclectic, Latin-flavored music with a beat!

## LOCALLY PRODUCED PROGRAMS

**The Well-Being of the Community, Your Family, and You** 11:00 am to 1:00 pm Thursdays. Live, Bilingual in Spanish & English

**Rockin' with MJC** – One-hour music shows by Modesto Junior College students. 1:00 a.m. Saturdays; 2:00 p.m. Saturdays; 7:00 p.m. Tuesdays.

**Triumphant Tuesdays** – Noon, Tuesdays.

Inspirational thoughts & music with Catrice.

**Sports Talk Modesto** - Join Jay Freeda and Jimmie Menezes. Snappy banter to catch up on everything happening in the sports world. – Thursdays, 5 pm.

**Vibn with the West Modesto Collaborative** - Jasmine Corena and Likhi Rivas. Engage, Educate, and Advocate on behalf of the West Modesto Community. Showcases Voices of the West Modesto Community – Wednesdays, 7 pm.

**AREA 5150 UFO RADIO** – Spooky music & sounds out of this world, Friday night, 11:00 pm.

**Cyber Stallion: Bucks Stallion's Radio Transmission Emporium** – Cyber Acoustic Music - Saturdays, 12:00 am, Wednesdays, 5:00 p.m.

**I-On-Modesto** - John Griffin interviews local people who reveal their inspiring stories. Mondays & Fridays, 10 am and Wednesdays at 9 pm.

**Arts of the San Joaquin Valley** with Linda Scheller and Laura Stokes - Mondays, 8:00 pm; Tuesdays, 9:00 am & Wednesdays, 8:00 pm. Listen here: <https://anchor.fm/kcbp> and on Spotify

**Women of the Valley** with Linda Scheller and Laura Stokes - 8:00 pm Tuesdays & Thursdays & Wednesdays, 9:00 am. Listen here: <https://anchor.fm/kcbpwotv> and on Spotify.

**Modesto Sound** - California Audio Roots Project (CARP) – Tuesdays 5:30 pm, Wednesdays 11:30 am, & Sundays 11:00 am & 4:30 pm.

**Sunday Cruisin'** with your host, DeeJay Rig! Oldies hits from 1959 to 1999 – Sundays, 5:00 p.m.

**Faithful Fridays** – inspirational music and thoughts with Catrice – Fridays, 7:00 p.m.

**Why Not Nice?** - Showcases unique music from unique cultures and thinkers worldwide, focusing on world/academic/jazz and roots music – Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.

**Mars Radio – Hip-Hop Show** - Music, interviews from

**Stanislaus County Behavioral Health & Recovery Services and KCBP 95.5 FM "The Voice of The Valley"**

**Presents A Live Bi-lingual Program: "THE WELL-BEING OF THE COMMUNITY, YOUR FAMILY AND YOU"**

**THURSDAYS 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM**



local & regional artists - Fridays, 8:00 pm. A new, second show plays on Saturday nights at 8:00 pm, with a third at 8:00 pm Sundays.

**Modesto Area Music Awards (MAMA)** with Middagh Goodwin – Mondays 5:00 pm; Fridays 9:00 pm & Saturdays 6:00 pm.

**Freak Radio** with Christian E. Boyett, 6 pm Thursdays. Replays Saturdays, 9 pm & Tuesdays 11 pm.

**This is SKA** with Middagh Goodwin - Tuesdays, 9 pm; Fridays, 11 pm; Sundays, 5 am to 7 am.

**I'll Take You There** - A musical journey with Modesto's El Comandante - Saturday, 5:00 pm; Sundays, 9:00 pm.

**Penny Bloods** – Fun, Victorian melodrama radio plays, often performed by local actors, written by Arnold Anthony Schmidt, CSU, Stanislaus. As scheduled.

PSAs in English and Spanish produced by the West Modesto Community Collaborative.

LISTEN TO OUR MUSIC PLAYLISTS AT SPINITRON <https://spinitron.com/KCBP/calendar>

Find a complete programming schedule on our website, [www.kcbpradio.org](http://www.kcbpradio.org)

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# It's 1933 In America

By Lynn Sampson

The highly revered historian Wilhelm Dilthey wrote in his ground-breaking book *Pattern and Meaning in History*: “Throughout history, a living, active, creative and responsible soul is present at all times and places.” He insisted that there was always “systematic meaning” to the world resulting in “individual processes” which can be “sorted out” and from which “outer events originate.” The patterns we now share with 1930s era Nazi Germany, the “historical movements, social organizations, and systems of culture” are the same creating the “human, social, historical reality” of 1933 right now in America.

Massive, unfortunate, society-wide trends appear. These are not isolated or infrequent. I remember growing up in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century surrounded by the profoundly ridiculous notion of relative truth, which insanely insisted that reality was, and I’m not exaggerating, only what an individual decided it was. This nonsense swiftly died out, but for a brief time, was popular.

My anger is not just inspired by nonsensical philosophies. Trends in cultural norms can be just as offensive. Luckily, many of these misguided fads are limited to fringe elements. But if highly educated, very intelligent, and reasonable people widely adopt an ugly and disgusting notion, what then?

A generation ago, my own parents lived through the most onerous and lethal nonsense of all time. They were forced to watch an entire respected nation go through an apocalyptic catastrophe that ended up engulfing most of the world and costing over 20 million lives. A cradle of civilization, renowned for its art, music, literature, and beneficence, did not slowly descend, did not slip into, did not gradually fall down, but swiftly, in less than one decade, crash headlong into nationwide total madness and spectacular imbecility.



Having nearly unanimously taken on the lies and blatant evil of its political leadership and offering no meaningful resistance, gaily and freely got in step with a trenchant obscenity and followed it to ultimate destruction without any significant objection.



For the Nazis the enemy were the Jews. For the latest reincarnation of wholesale demonizing, it is “immigrants.”

The parallels between the German apocalypse and America in 2025 are shocking. The historian Kenneth Clarke estimated that a majority of the German people supported the Nazi’s rise to power. The National Socialist platform was, however, based on lies. The central theme of their campaign was fear. The nation’s highest judiciary was in lockstep with the Nazi party. Orthodox Lutherans and conservative Catholics enthusiastically supported it. A portion of the free press was persuaded. Its leader was a convicted criminal. Respected national figures supported him.

Researchers who have painstakingly studied the causes of the attack on the Capitol found, after interviewing hundreds, the most commonly stated motivation for doing what they had done was the absurd fear, but no less virulent, of being outnumbered and outvoted by people who did not share their politics or ethnicity.

Of course, such cataclysmic events do not happen in an instant. All such momentous occasions have regrettable milestones that lead up to the final conflagration, harbingers of an impending doom. Historians agree that the penultimate event that sealed Germany’s march into manic psychosis and guaranteed its domination by a madman was the election of Paul von Hindenburg to the office of President and his choice to form a coalition by taking the opposition runner-

up into his government. Soon the geriatric Hindenburg was reduced to a figurehead and his political rival quickly ascended to absolute power. Germany’s January 6<sup>th</sup> was the burning of the legislative body’s seat of government which succeeded in cowering the nation and its leaders into docile submission to the Nazis who conveniently blamed the disaster on Communists, much as radical right-wing Republicans blame the Capitol insurrection on FBI plotters inciting peaceful protestors to riot.

In the final analysis, it is likely that the German disaster and the American descent into Trumpism and the snare of a petulant child named Donald, constantly raging in a school-yard temper tantrum, were both caused by the same thing. In the end it isn’t vast global forces that sink democracies, start wars, or ruin nations. Ultimately, it is ordinary human psychology. People, everyday people who are tortured, bedeviled, and seething with garden variety feelings of personal lack of self-esteem.

The Weimar Republic was swallowed up by National Socialism when the government was dismantled and turned over to a vicious autocracy. The nighttime arsonist burning of the official legislative body’s chambers capped the final dissolution of democracy in Germany. It did not return for a decade and a half, and only after much of the nation had been destroyed in the process.

As I write this our nation is on such a brink and, not unlike Nazi Germany of nearly a century ago, is careening towards disaster.

*Lynn Sampson is a freelance writer and arts critic. He is a graduate of Colorado Mesa University and the University of London. He is a musician, filmmaker, poet, artist, and trained French chef, married, father of five children, and a Modesto, California, resident for over 35 years.*

## FASCISTS

grey drizzle spits  
on grey patio walls

a world drugged lifeless  
from greed and cruelty  
lowers its head  
in obeisance  
bored by the spectacle  
of the weak  
and the displaced  
the unheard and starving  
whipped for a cheap laugh  
or a drive by smirk  
from the boss man

the privileged  
cower in supplication  
to clowns who romp  
among marbled ruins  
clumsily acid-wash history  
never to be forgotten

grey drizzle spits  
on grey patio walls  
ceases  
in this season of drought  
and despair

but the clowns go on  
cavorting

into this long night  
of knives and  
shattered glass

of gulags  
clanging with the caged  
and the chained -  
justice tricked into a grave

bleakness prevails  
only if the silent  
remain silent

– Tom Portwood

# calendar

Help keep our readers informed. We urge people participating in an event to write about it and send their story to Connections.

## MAY

**MAPS - Modesto Area Partners in Science:** Free MJC science programs on Fridays in MJC West Campus, Sierra Hall 132 at 7:30 pm., unless noted otherwise. TBA FALL.

**Modesto Science Colloquium,** Wednesdays, 3:15 - 4:15 p.m., MJC West Campus, SCC 115. Free to the Public. Talks recorded for the Science Colloquium's YouTube Site. TBA FALL.

**The Prospect Theatre:** 24/25 season has continuing offerings. Visit <https://prospecttheaterproject.org/2024-2025-season/>

**9 FRI: California Zephyr** at the State Theatre. <https://thestate.org/events/uncle-lonny-presents-california-zephyr-052025/>.

**10 SAT: MPLC Annual Meeting,** 9 am to 12 pm. All welcome.

**10 SAT: Melanie Berru** speaks about the **Rising Scholars Network** and the Transformative Power of Education at the McHenry Museum, 1402 I St., Modesto, 2 pm. Admission free. Info: 209-961-5231.

**13 TUES: VIGIL: DEFEND OUR DEMOCRACY** at McHenry Ave. and J. St. (Five Points), 4:00-5:00 pm. Info: Call the Center at 209-529-5750 or email [jcostello@igc.org](mailto:jcostello@igc.org).

**17 SAT: "Invitation to Presence"** – Half-Day Contemplative Prayer Retreat, 9 a.m. to noon, Modesto Church of the Brethren, 2301 Woodland Ave. For more information and to sign up, contact Mike Monson at 209-380-5832 or [michaelmonson9@gmail.com](mailto:michaelmonson9@gmail.com)

**18 SUN: The State Theatre** and Modesto Film Society present *Pretty Woman*, 2 pm. Join the State Theatre. Have fun, get perks, and support Modesto's historic non-profit theatre. Visit <https://thestate.org/films/pretty-woman-052025/>

**27 TUES: VIGIL: DEFEND OUR DEMOCRACY** at McHenry Ave. and J. St. (Five Points), 4:00-5:00 pm. Info: Call the Center at 209-529-5750 or email [jcostello@igc.org](mailto:jcostello@igc.org).

### LOOKING AHEAD

**June 20-22, 2025: The 40th Annual Peace Camp** is Here! Registration is now open at [peacelifecenter.org/peace-camp](http://peacelifecenter.org/peace-camp). See article, p. 4.

### REGULAR MEETINGS

#### SUNDAYS

**Unity of Modesto** meets in person every Sunday at 10:00 a.m. at 2467 Veneman, Modesto. Information: 209-578-5433.

**Modesto Vineyard Christian Fellowship,** 10:00 am at the MODSPOT, 1220 J St. Call or text 209-232-1932, email [modestovineyard@gmail.com](mailto:modestovineyard@gmail.com); All Welcome.

**IMCV Weekly Insight Meditation and Dharma Talk,** 8:45 am - 10:15 am, 2172 Kiernan Ave., Modesto (rear bldg. at the end of the UUFSC east parking lot). Offered freely; donations welcome. All are welcome. For more information, please email [charlie@imcv.org](mailto:charlie@imcv.org). Our mailing address is IMCV, P.O. Box 579564, Modesto, CA 95357.

**Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stanislaus County** meets in person and on Zoom every Sunday at 10:30

am at 2172 Kiernan Ave., Modesto. Info: 209-788-3720; [www.stanuu.org](http://www.stanuu.org)

**Food Addicts Anonymous in Recovery.** Sundays 6:30 pm, 2467 Veneman Ave. Modesto. Info: Emily M., 209 480-8247.

#### MONDAYS

**The Compassionate Friends,** Modesto/Riverbank Area Chapter is meeting by Zoom on the second Mondays at 7:00pm. Bereaved parents, grandparents, and adult siblings are invited to participate in this support group for families whose children have died at any age, from any cause. Call 209-622-6786 or email for details: [tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com](mailto:tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com); <https://www.modestoriverbanktcf.org/>

**Suicide Loss Support Group:** Friends for Survival meets every third Monday at 7 pm. Details: Norm Andrews 209-345-0601, [nandrews6863@charter.net](mailto:nandrews6863@charter.net).

**Walk with Me,** a women's primary infertility support group and Bible study. 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm the first and third Mondays of each month. Big Valley Grace Community Church. Interested? Email [WalkWithMeGroup@gmail.com](mailto:WalkWithMeGroup@gmail.com) or call 209.577.1604.

#### TUESDAYS

**Climate Action Justice Network-Stanislaus** meets the first Tuesday of the month, 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm. Link- <https://tinyurl.com/CIAN-FirstTuesday>

**Attention Veterans:** Join us for **Free Coffee & Donuts Meet & Greet** at the Stanislaus Veterans Center, 3500 Coffee Rd., Modesto, Suite 15, 7 am – 11 am

**NAACP Meeting.** King-Kennedy Center, 601 S. Martin Luther King Dr., Modesto, 3rd Tuesday @ 6:30 pm. 209-645-1909; For ZOOM link, visit <https://www.naacpmoDESTOSTANISLAUS.org/> email: [naacp.branch1048@gmail.com](mailto:naacp.branch1048@gmail.com)

**Exploring Whiteness & Showing Up for Racial Justice Meetings,** Fourth Tuesday, monthly 7:00 p.m., Central Grace Hmong Alliance Church, 918 Sierra Dr., Modesto. Info: <https://www.facebook.com/events/24765549018387/>

**Pagan Family Social,** third Tuesdays, Golden Corral, 3737 McHenry Ave, Modesto, 6:00 pm. Info: 569-0816. All newcomers, pagan-curious and pagan-friendly welcome.

**Adult Children Of Alcoholics,** Every Tuesday, 7 pm at 1320 L St., (Christ Unity Baptist Church). Info: Jeff, 527-2469.

#### WEDNESDAYS

**Retired Public Employees Association.** All seniors welcome! Meetings every third Wednesday. Denny's Restaurant, 1525 McHenry Ave. 11:30 am to 1:00 pm. Call (209) 324-2060. Pay \$8.00 and order from the menu.

**The Almond Blossom Sangha** meets on Wednesdays, 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm, Zoom, and sometimes hybrid, for meditation and Dharma discussions. Call Anne at 209-404-4835 for more information.

**The GAP.** A place of support for Christian parents of LGBTQ+ or questioning kids every Wednesday 6:30 pm at St. Paul's Episcopal Church 1528 Oakdale Rd. Instagram: Thegapmodesto

**Ongoing meditation class** based on Qi Gong Principals. Practice a 3 Step Guided Meditation Process I have been doing for over a decade. Fun and Easy. JOIN ME! Donations accepted but optional. Call 209.495.6608 or email Orlando Arreygue, CMT RYT, [orlando@arreygue.com](mailto:orlando@arreygue.com)

**Merced LGBT Community Center** offers a variety of monthly meetings and written materials. Volunteers, on-site **Wed-Fri**, offer support. Ph: 209-626-5551. Email: [mercedboard@gaycentralvalley.org](mailto:mercedboard@gaycentralvalley.org)

## MODESTO PEACE LIFE CENTER ACTIVITIES

Modesto Peace/Life Center **VIGILS: held EVERY OTHER TUESDAY** of the month at McHenry Ave. and J. St. (Five Points), 4:00-5:00 pm. Call the Center for info: 209-529-5750.

**MEDIA:** Listen to **KCBP95.5 FM** Community Radio, the "Voice of the Valley" also streaming at <http://www.KCBPradio.org>

**PEACE LIFE CENTER BOARD MEETING,** FIRST Thursdays, 829 13th St., Modesto, 6:00 pm, 529-5750. Meetings on Zoom. Email Jim Costello for login information, [jcostello@igc.org](mailto:jcostello@igc.org)

**PEACE/LIFE CENTER MODESTO,** 829 13th St. Call 529-5750. We'll get back to you with current info on activities.

org – 1744 G St. Suite H, Merced, CA. [www.mercedlgbtcenter.org](http://www.mercedlgbtcenter.org)

**Merced Full Spectrum** meets the second Wednesday of every month, 6 p.m. 1744 G St., Suite H, Merced <http://www.lgbtmerced.org/> Merced Full Spectrum is a division of Gay Central Valley, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. <http://www.gaycentralvalley.org/>

**TRANSGENDER SUPPORT GROUP,** 2nd & 4th Wed., 7:30 to 9 pm. Info: (209) 338-0855. Email [info@stanpride.org](mailto:info@stanpride.org), or [tgsupport@stanpride.org](mailto:tgsupport@stanpride.org)

#### THURSDAYS

**Attention Veterans:** Join us for **Free Coffee & Donuts Meet & Greet** at the Stanislaus Veterans Center, 3500 Coffee Rd., Modesto, Suite 15, 7 am – 11 am

**IMCV Grupo de Meditación en Español,** cada semana 7:30 pm - 9:00 pm, 2172 Kiernan Ave., Modesto (edificio trasero al final del estacionamiento este de UUFSC). Ofrecido libremente, las donaciones son bienvenidas. Info: Contacto Vanessa, 209-408-6172.

**LGBTQ+ Collaborative Meetings** are on the 2nd Thursday of the month, unless noted. Evening meeting, 1pm to 2 pm, Central Valley Pride Center, 400 12th St., Suite 2, Modesto, CA. Information: John Aguirre at [cell/text-\(559\)280-3864](mailto:cell/text-(559)280-3864) / e-mail: [jpmoDESTO@gmail.com](mailto:jpmoDESTO@gmail.com)

**Green Team educational meetings** the 3rd Thursday of each month, 10 to 11 am, Kirk Lindsey Center, 1020 10th St. Plaza, Suite 102, Modesto. [www.StanislausGreenTeam.com](http://www.StanislausGreenTeam.com)

**3rd Thursday Art Walk,** downtown Modesto, third Thursdays, 5 to 8 pm. stroll to art displays and galleries. Info: <https://visitmodesto.com/arts-entertainment/#art-walk>

**VALLEY HEARTLAND ZEN GROUP:** every Thurs 6:30 to 8:30 pm, Modesto Church of the Brethren, 2310 Woodland Ave. Meditation. Newcomers welcome. Info: 535-6750 or <http://emptynestzendo.org>

**Pagan Community Meeting,** 1st Thursday, Cafe Amore, 3025 McHenry Ave, Suite S., Modesto, 8 pm. Info: 569-0816. All newcomers, pagan-curious and pagan-friendly welcome.

#### FRIDAYS

Friday 7:30-9:30 pm (Sept thru May) **International Folk Dancing** with Village Dancers, Carnegie Art Center, 250 N. Broadway, Turlock \$7. No experience or partner needed. 209-480-0387 for info.

**Overcoming Depression:** small group for men & women. Every Friday, 7:15 pm. Cornerstone Community Church, 17900 Comconex Rd, Manteca, CA 95366, (209) 825-1220.

**Ukulele On Funstrummer Fridays:** Every Friday morning from 9 am to 10:30 am Play Along Easy Songs from the Funstrummers Songbooks of over 500 songs. Funstrummers Performing Band Practice from 10 to noon and afternoon gig. Unitarian Church, 2172 Kiernan Ave., Modesto, 209-505-3216 for details. Donations accepted. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mej3gD0ZD40&list=LLB8Y19zZg660qHCXGoC6ojQ&index=1>

**SIERRA CLUB:** Yokuts group. Regular meetings, third Friday, Office of Valley Improvement Projects, 1224 K St. Modesto., 6:45 pm. Info: 209-632-5473. Visit <http://www.sierraclub.org/mother-lode/yokuts> for info on hikes and events.

#### SATURDAY

**Free Community Drum Circle** every third Saturday, 11 am to 12:30 pm, Gallo Center for the Arts, 10th & 1 St., Modesto. No experience or drums necessary to participate. All levels welcome. <https://drum-love.com/>

**Refuge Recovery: A Buddhist Approach to Recovery from Addiction.** @Friends Coming of Age., 1203 Tully Rd., Ste. B., Modesto. Saturdays 8-9 am. FREE (donations accepted). Info: [RefugeRecoveryModesto@gmail.com](mailto:RefugeRecoveryModesto@gmail.com)

**Divine Feminine Gathering.** Join us for a time of ritual, song and conversation as women come together to celebrate one another and the Divine among us and within us. 3rd Saturday of the month, 3:30-5:00 p.m. Stockton, CA. Contact Rev. Erin King, 209-815-0763, [orkingenne@gmail.com](mailto:orkingenne@gmail.com)

### CalPride Stanislaus EVENTS

**1202 H St., Suite C, Modesto, 209-408-8848.**  
Open Monday-Friday, 10 am-6 pm.

#### ONSITE GROUPS & PROGRAMS (Hosted at CalPride Stanislaus)

**QUEER POINT:** CalPride's harm reduction program supports individuals who use drugs and the broader community and provides on-site syringe services, safer injection kits, fentanyl test strips, and Narcan for overdose prevention. Available Monday through Friday, 10 AM to 6 PM.

**FOLX Group for LGBTQ+ Individuals** between the ages of 25-49, 2nd and 4th Tuesdays, 1-2 pm.

**Women's Group,** run by women for ALL women every Wednesday, Noon-1 pm.

**Dreams and Solutions Drugs and Alcohol Support Group, 1st and 3rd Wednesdays,** 1-2 pm.

**Writing Group Peer Support Group** for anyone looking to explore themselves through creativity every Friday, 4:30 pm-6 pm.

**BEADiFULL Peer Support Group** focusing on organic, peer-lead conversation and connection while making friendship bracelets and beaded jewelry, 1st and 3rd Fridays, 11:30 am-1 pm

**Wellness Wednesdays,** every Wednesday from 1-5 pm, for any individual receiving services in-center to be in community, create art, play games, etc.

**Legal Name Change Clinic,** every Tuesday and Thursday, 10 am-4 pm, and Monday, Wednesday, and Friday by appointment only.

**Affirmation Station FREE Clothing Closet,** open during business hours, Monday-Friday, 10 am-6 pm.

**FREE HIV/HCV Testing and Counseling** available Monday-Friday, 11 am-5 pm.

#### OFFSITE GROUPS (Hosted Elsewhere)

**The Men's Senior Group** meets every Thursday at 1 p.m. at the Queen Bean Coffee House, 1126 14th St, Modesto.

**We Thrive POZ Art Group** meets every Wednesday from 6 to 8 p.m. at The Dragonfly-Art for Life Studio, 1210 J St, Modesto.