

THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE



Shepherd of the Valley Evangelical Lutheran Church

1455 East Yosemite Avenue, Merced CA 95340 209-383-0632

Our Mission Statement: To be loving Christians, centered in God's Word and serving one's neighbor.

Our Vision Statement: Accepting people where they are and loving them as God does.

STAFF

Pastor John Russell-Curry
jrussellcurry@comcast.net

Administrative Assistant:
Carolyn Daberkow
shepherdofthevalleyelca@gmail.com
209-383-0632

Office Hours

8:00 – 11:00 AM Monday-Friday

web page: www.thesovlutheran.net
Also on Facebook

Council President:
Barb Ward
Cell: 209-617-7592
barbew4352@aol.com

Sunday worship is live on Zoom at 10:00 AM and in-person in sanctuary. (See updates on calendar & SOV Weekly News emails.)

Please have your articles for the newsletter sent each month by the 15th to:
shepherdofthevalleyelca@gmail.com
Thank you.

THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE newsletter is available as a paper copy for pickup, mailed, or sent as an email attachment, or viewed on the website.

ELCA Statements and information are available on the web sites: Sierra Pacific Synod, spselca.org, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, elca.org.

MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR

"What the bears do in the woods..."

When attending John Sutter Elementary School in Modesto, I had joined a group called "Indian Guides" (much like Cub Scouts, of which I was a member as well).

One of our regular gatherings was at our house. My dad prepared a special presentation by one of his co-workers. The presenter brought materials to share with us: a large bear rug (with head and all attached), a bow and some arrows, a short video featuring hunters shooting the "tree-d" bear with arrows, and some pictures of bears in the Long Barn area stealing food from garbage cans near the cabins.

Seventy years later, I regularly drive through Long Barn on the way to the family cabin. I have never forgotten the images of bears creating havoc with the garbage. One time, on a hike near the area, I heard (but didn't see) a bear.

Where have they gone? Has the increased human population "shoved" them away? Has hunting decreased the numbers? Have the rangers "relocated" the area's bears?

What good are the bears anyway?

Apparently, bears are a critical element in the ecosystem: eating garbage is a good thing, eating foods that contain seeds spread growth, chasing other large creatures protect small trees, their claws help aerate the soil...

Bears share the ecosystem with us all. Bears live here as do we. We're neighbors dependent upon each other.

Being a critical component of the ecosystem means that one is a critical component of the breath and life of the creating of humanity – and a critical component of divine intent.

When hiking in the bears' "backyard" and hear another bear "sneezing" in the woods, I'll remember to say, "God bless you!".

Pastor John



PRAYER REQUESTS

Prayers for healing:
Ken Sullivan; Dave Bettis; Family of Carol Linneman; Jan Collins; Brad Brandstad; Gleneda Muralt; Dorothy Woody; Rosie Sullivan; Eric Smith; Gleneda Muralt's niece, Shereida; Nan Dailey; Kimberly Castillo's daughter Jillian and mother-in-law Lupe; Pam Andersen; Pastor John Russell-Curry and his family; Warren Westerberg; Sylvia Poupard; Jeane & David Hetland; Annie Sofranek; David Cherf; and people who are ill around the world.

We lift prayers for our Benevolence of the Month, **New Beginnings for Merced County Animals** and for our Sierra Pacific Synod Bishop, **Jeff Johnson**.

The names on the Prayer List may be removed at the end of each month unless the office is notified that you would like them left on for another month. Please leave a message at the office, 209-383-0632. Thank you.

PRAYER CHAIN

If you have any prayer requests, please contact Pam Andersen at 209-631-4594 to start the Prayer Chain.

IN MEMORIAM

Long-time member Carol Linneman passed away on August 15, 2026.

A Memorial will be held Saturday, November 7, 1:00-4:00 at Vista Ranch, 7326 East CA-140, Merced.

Her daughter's address is:
Jessica Maggard
5595 Lakeshore Drive
Littleton, CO 80123

Church Council Highlights

Chris Love, Council Secretary
Council met on Monday, September 14

Pastor John will be absent October 11th for a family wedding; Marc Medefind will cover the pulpit; no communion that service.

There will be an Advent/Lent study series this coming church season.

Alan Arnold will be moving a pew for accessibility for more members.

Thankfest is being planned.

The Educational Blessing Sunday was a great success.

We're looking for Prayer Chain volunteers; talk to Pam Anderson; also a form has been made for those volunteering to guide conversations.

File cabinets are being cleaned up.

Church Bylaws and Constitution are being updated.

The Facility Usage forms have been updated with current prices for different space areas, personnel, and specific services including IT, and deposits; differentiation was included for members and nonmembers.

Blessing of Animals Service will be provided Saturday, October 3rd from 11 AM-12 PM.

A special memorial will be held for Carol Linneman on November 7th at the Vista Ranch from 1-4 PM.

Please continue to stay in contact with the church and any council members with updates, concerns, and of course joys. God continues to bless our church family.

OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

Nan Dailey	10/06
Marit Medefind Bond	10/10
Kaylei Rigers	10/13
Annie Sofranek	10/13
"Ana" Anastasia Crosley	10/16
Sarah Sofranek Williams	10/17
Ron Basso	10/18
Rylee Bernal	10/20
David J Cherf II	10/20
Bryan Hofmann	10/20
"Jenny" Virginia Love	10/21
James Bond	10/22
Stacy Christofferson	10/29

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Tim Shaw	11/02
Ana Boyenga	11/04
Gwen Cherf	11/06
Karen Goldsmith	11/06
John Pruett	11/07
Danica Christofferson	11/13
Kylie Christofferson	11/13
Dominic Basso	11/23

MONTHLY BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON

Birthday Luncheon will meet on Thursday, October 15, at 11:30 AM. Watch for information as to where we will meet this month. Join us for food and fellowship.

REMINDER

All SOV members who enter the church during the week are reminded to double and triple-check that doors are locked when leaving. Thanks so much.

BIBLE TEXT READINGS

Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost October 4

Isaiah 5:1-7
Psalm 80:7-15
Philippians 3:4b-14
Matthew 21:33-46 Green

Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost October 11

Isaiah 25:1-9
Psalm 23
Philippians 4:1-9
Matthew 22:1-14 Green

Twenty-First Sunday After Pentecost October 18

Isaiah 45:1-7
Psalm 96:1-9 (10-13)
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Matthew 22:15-22 Green

Reformation Sunday October 25

Jeremiah 31:31-34
Psalm 46
Romans 3:19-28
John 8:31-36 Red
You are encouraged to wear red this Sunday.

Shepherd of the Valley Website

The website is active and being monitored by Carolyn Daberkow, Administrative Assistant. Take a little time to review the website.

You will find the links to the Zoom gatherings by clicking on ABOUT US, click on WORSHIP SERVICE OUTLINES and click on the long link. You will need the Zoom app downloaded to your phone, tablet, or computer first.

SOV WORSHIP SERVICES ARE ON FACEBOOK

Our worship services can be seen any day, at any time, on Facebook. Just type in the search box "Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Merced" and you will see the church listed. Click on our church and our Facebook page appears, with all the services.

We encourage you to send the service to your family and friends by clicking on the "SHARE" icon below the picture and then use "Share to your friends" or "Send in Messenger" service.

Blessing of the Animals
Saturday, October 3, 2026
11:00 AM – noon

There will be a short, appropriate introductory service outdoors.

Each of our beloved animal friends may be presented for a personal blessing, love, and a treat!

Please join us to bless your loved one for all they do!



BENEVOLENCE OF THE MONTH
September and October Benevolence
New Beginnings for Merced County Animals

P.O. Box 1045

Winton, CA 95388

newbeginningsformercedanimals@gmail.com

newbeginningsforanimalsmerced.org

Sharon @ 209-769-2122

Sue @ 209-617-4131

WHO WE ARE

New Beginnings for Merced County Animals non-profit organization is dedicated to helping the animals at the Merced County Animal Shelter as well as other locations in Merced County.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to create a new standard in rescue operation with education and community involvement to end the suffering of animals who are lost, abandoned, or given up to the Merced County shelter.

New Beginnings for Animals – Merced is uniquely well-positioned to accomplish this goal by focusing on our three primary activities:

- Transporting large numbers of animals out of the Merced shelter
- Treating sick/injured abandoned animals and making them available for adoption
- AND working to fund a spay/neuter program in the Merced area to address the root of the overpopulation problem—sterilizing dogs and cats to stop the litters of unwanted animals that are overloading the shelters and rescues.

Please note New Beginnings for Animals Merced County does not have a facility...we are a group of volunteers working out of our homes. All animals are kept in foster homes where available.

Donations may be given to Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church with New Beginnings on the memo line to be forwarded.

CONGREGATION COUNCIL MEMBERS**Term ends May 2027**

Mary Jo Knudsen
 Mona Kowalczyk
 Christine Love
 Christopher Tomford

Term ends May 2028

Alan Arnold
 Lora Burnett
 Susan Gumm
 Barb Ward

Mona Kowalczyk – Treasurer & Bookkeeper
 Christine Boyenga – Financial Secretary

2026-2027 Council Officers

President: Barb Ward
 Secretary: Chris Love

Vice-President: Christopher Tomford

Next Meeting Date: Second Monday of the month
Monday, October 12 10:00 AM

OCTOBER SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP ASSISTANTS

To help serve the glory of God in worship - please contact Chris Boyenga, 209-769-8544 to participate as Greeter, Usher, or Reader/Assisting Minister for our 10 A.M. Sunday Worship Service.

	Sunday October 4	Sunday October 11	Sunday October 18	Sunday October 25
Greeters/ Attendance	<i>Chris Boyenga</i>	<i>Mona Kowalczyk</i>	<i>Chris Boyenga</i>	<i>Mary Jo Knudsen</i>
Ushers	<i>Hunter Price</i>	<i>David Strubbe</i>	<i>Hunter Price</i>	<i>Alan Arnold</i>
Reader/Assisting Ministers	<i>Mona Kowalczyk</i>	<i>Bronwen Maxson Strubbe</i>	<i>Chris Love</i>	<i>Marc Medefind</i>

“Are We All Good?”
Reflection by Nan Dailey

“Very Good.” Those are the exact words God uses when she/he has completed, at least for the time being, the work of creation (Genesis 1:31). Gloriously, “very good” includes the creation of us, humans (Genesis 1:27). But then the whole Garden of Eden fiasco happens (Genesis 3). Humans (represented by Eve and Adam) are turned out of their “home.” Literally expelled from the garden. Not allowed to just walk out but “driven out” (Genesis 3:24). And, lest, by any chance they miss God’s point, there are angels and a circling, flaming sword blocking the way back in (Genesis 3:24). And, as if that weren’t enough God tells them, by implication, that they will be responsible for their descendants’ suffering. (as implied in Genesis 3:16-19 and stated in Romans 5:12-24).

Now here’s my dilemma. Does that mean we’re not **good** anymore? That instead we’re **bad**. After all, don’t we carry in our very genomes a lost relationship with God otherwise known as sin? Reading the writings of some of the early church fathers (Cyprian, Gregory, Augustine) and extracts from Medieval sermons, could certainly lead one to think so. We’re told we are bad, bad, bad, and only fervent prayers and petitions of repentance- and perhaps a few donations to the church - can bring forgiveness. And a possible, but certainly not guaranteed, escape from an afterlife in hell.

But I’ve come to a different way of thinking. First to the matter of God kicking his/her bad children out of paradise. Even during the chilling, frightening confrontation between God and Adam and Eve as described in Genesis 3:10-19, we see God’s deep love and compassion for them (us?). Knowing they are embarrassed by their nakedness, she/he makes clothes for them (Genesis 3:21)!! Now who makes clothes for someone they literally are booting out of the best living situation ever?

This same profound love and compassion towards his/her children when they/we stray from their/our relationship with God, is vividly described over and over in the Bible. The wandering Israelites, for example, make a golden calf to worship (Exodus 3:1-6) and the people of Nineveh seemingly commit almost every sin possible (Nahum 3). But, although God may impose consequences for such sin, at the end of the day God assures us of her/his unending fidelity (Deuteronomy 7:9 and Lamentations 3:22-23). And, more importantly perhaps, that he/she loves them/us deeply and wholly.

The ultimate “proof” of this love? Jesus Christ. Our savior, who so deeply loved (and loves us still) that he poured all his love and compassion out on the cross. Are we sinners a la Adam and Eve? Absolutely. But that in no way impedes our God’s constant overflowing, life altering love of us. He/she made clothes for Adam and Eve. And, if we allow him/her to, she/he will clothe **us** in holy light.

PS: Author Rachel Held Evans wrote about these issues in her book, Inspired.

OCTOBER 2026

**SHEPHERD OF THE VALLEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
OCTOBER CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
					Knitting Group 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News	Church Clean-up 8 AM Blessing of the Animals 11 AM - noon
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom					Knitting Group 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom	Council Meeting 10 AM			Birthday Luncheon 11:30 AM	Knitting Group 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom					Knitting Group 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News	
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom Shepherd of the Valley 67 TH Anniversary					Knitting Group 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News	



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Merced CA 95340

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED