

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:
Marc Medefind
Cell: 209-777-9302
mrmedefind@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

I have become distracted by the challenge that the “lady” with the Boy Scout might not want to cross the street.

When my mother would refuse to cooperate, I admonished her, “Move your feet! What did the therapist tell you? I’m not going to help. You have to do it yourself.”

Each Sunday morning, I stop at Save Mart. The employees look for me, and point out where to get a small loaf to use for communion. Plus, I seek Hawaiian-style bread rolls. I have a routine for cutting the rolls into the correct size for communion distribution. (Some churches allow congregants to grab the bread loaf and tear off a piece.) The appropriateness of having everyone grab and fondle the same piece seems potentially “germy”.

The loaf during the “Words of Institution” is not touched by others. No one touches the bread other than myself.

Kind, (Boy Scout – like) considerate, well-meaning altar guild members will slice the loaf half-way. I try to instruct them to NOT slice the bread. I want to grab the loaf from the sides and rip the darn thing with my “manly” hands, and tear the bread – not slice it. I want congregants to “feel” the loaf being pulled apart. I want the suffering body of Christ “felt”.

My worship professor explained that congregants should “see” the blood fall from the cup, should “hear” it drip. Communion is a physical experience, not a detached cognitive endeavor.

Such it is for the bread – the body of Christ. The body will soon after that “Last Supper” be tortured, stabbed, and abused. The “body of Christ” in the form of the loaf should reflect this last moment of human interaction. It should be grabbed, twisted, wrenched, and “hurt” within our senses.

Such is life. Such it is for the “fully human” who suffered on our behalf.

What would your therapist (God’s Holy Spirit) tell you about a faithful life?

Pastor John



PRAYER REQUESTS

Prayers for healing:

Tom Stephens; 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, **Mt. Cross Ministries** 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.

Church Council Highlights

Marc Medefind, Council President

The Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church Council met on March 16. Here are some highlights of that meeting.

—Treasurer Mona Kowalczyk reported that SOV currently has assets totaling \$191,696. We enjoyed the good news that Income for February exceeded our budget by nearly \$3000 and our year-to-date income exceeds Y-T-D budget by nearly \$4000.

— We will have a combined Maundy Thursday/Good Friday worship service on Friday, April 3, at 10 AM. This is one of the highlights of our liturgical year.

—With Easter, “Resurrection Sunday,” quickly coming up, those who want to purchase lilies to decorate the church have a deadline of Sunday, March 22. Lilies are \$20 each. Members may choose to honor loved ones through lily purchases. Sign ups are available in the narthex, Council member Karen Arnold is handling purchase of lilies.

—The church will celebrate Palm Sunday with our annual potluck in Lineberger Hall after services.

—SOV Council member Mona Kowalczyk, and church members Chris Boyenga and Donald Gumm attended the Sierra Synod gathering earlier this month. SOV was among those churches verified as falling under sanctuary protections. Anyone seeking sanctuary is considered safe within 100 yards of the church building. It was also announced that Mountain Lutheran in Groveland is closing. There are 11 congregations and seven pastors serving our Synod.

(Church Council Highlights continue on Page 3.)

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| David Cherf | 04/03 |
| Rita McDonald | 04/19 |
| Karen Arnold | 04/20 |
| Lilliana Gallaway | 04/25 |
| Dakotah Timpson | 04/28 |

MAY BIRTHDAYS

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| John Carpenter | 05/02 |
| Joy Woods | 05/03 |
| Ella Boyenga | 05/04 |
| Byron Gallaway | 05/04 |
| Judy Richards | 05/06 |
| Frank Bettis | 05/07 |
| Warren Westerberg | 05/07 |
| Kaci Gallaway | 05/19 |
| Liliane Bettis | 05/29 |
| Gleneda Muralt | 05/30 |



MONTHLY BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON

Birthday Luncheon will meet on Thursday, April 16, at 11:30 AM. Please watch for more information as to where we will be meeting.

BIBLE TEXT READINGS

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| Resurrection of Our Lord Sunday | April 5 |
| Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6 | |
| Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 | |
| Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43 | |
| Matthew 28:1-10 or John 20:1-18 | White or Gold |
| Second Sunday of Easter | April 12 |
| Acts 2:14a, 22-32 | |
| Psalm 16 | |
| 1 Peter 1:3-9 | |
| John 20:19-31 | White |
| Third Sunday of Easter | April 19 |
| Acts 2:14a, 36-41 | |
| Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 | |
| 1 Peter 1:17-23 | |
| Luke 24:13-35 | White |
| Fourth Sunday of Lent | April 26 |
| Acts 2:42-47 | |
| Psalm 23 | |
| 1 Peter 2:19-25 | |
| John 10:1-10 | White |

(Church Council Highlights continued from Page 2.)

—Church member (and consummate handyman Alan Arnold) fixed problem areas at the church, including a restroom door that wouldn't allow anyone using a walker to enter. Alan also constructed arty new crosses for new members. Thanks Alan!

--Council discussed possible changes to how we deal with monthly benevolences. This will be further revisited in the fall.

—Council members voted to return the scooter we had housed back to Jan Collins who had originally donated it to the church.

—Our Spring Cleaning days are scheduled March 27 and 28 from 8:30 a.m. to noon both days.

—With Carolyn Stephens's absence, there is no one available to prepare the Easter cross this year unless someone feels called to do so.

—Pastor John is considering a Wednesday morning group which would closely examine lectionary readings for upcoming Sundays.

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.

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.

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.

Thanks go to Carolyn Daberkow for the continuing updates.

2026 Scholarships

Thanks to the generosity of our congregation, we are able to fund two scholarships for Merced College students as well as members of Shepherd of the Valley. The criteria and application information will be available in the narthex, and all confirmed members are encouraged to apply by June 3.

**BENEVOLENCE OF THE MONTH
April Benevolence
Mt. Cross Ministries**

831-336-5179
7795 Hwy 9 • Ben Lomond CA 95005
P.O. Box 387, Felton, CA 95018
mtcross@mtcross.org www.mtcross.org

Providing Profound Experiences in God's Creation

Mt. Cross Ministries is a Lutheran summer camp and retreat facility. Established in 1948, Mt. Cross is the only Lutheran Outdoor Ministry in Northern California and Northern Nevada and is affiliated with the Sierra Pacific Synod of the ELCA and the California-Nevada-Hawaii District of the LCMS. It is a member of Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, an association of ELCA camps across the country. Mt. Cross Ministries operates consistent with the theology and culture of the ELCA.

Mt. Cross Ministries has been serving children, youth, and families at camp for over 75 years! The camp is in the Santa Cruz Mountains town Ben Lomond, and is situated near many family attractions, parks, and beaches. The name, "Mt. Cross", was the suggestion of Rev. Ylvisaker, who at that time was the pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church, in Lafayette, California. He explained that "Mt" was for the terrain of the property and the "Cross" was derived from "Santa Cruz" meaning Holy Cross.

In outdoor ministry, faith comes alive through experience. Surrounded by God's creation, campers and guests discover belonging, courage, and wonder in ways that shape their spiritual journey. Whether gathered around a campfire, hiking beneath the redwoods, or sharing meals in community, we believe that encountering God in nature nurtures a deeper relationship with Christ and encourages discipleship that continues long after camp ends.

Donations may be given to Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church with Mt. Cross on the Memo line to be forwarded.

CONGREGATION COUNCIL MEMBERS

Term ends May 2026

Karen Arnold
 David John Cherf II
 Marc Medefind
 Barbara Ward

Term ends May 2027

Mary Jo Knudsen
 Mona Kowalczyk
 Christine Love
 Christopher Tomford

Mona Kowalczyk – Treasurer & Bookkeeper
 Christine Boyenga – Financial Secretary

2025-2026 Council Officers

President: Marc Medefind Vice-President: Barb Ward
 Secretary: David John Cherf II

Next Meeting Date: Third Monday of the month
April 20, 2026 10 AM

APRIL 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 April 5 | Sunday April 12 | Sunday April 19 | Sunday April 26 |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Greeters/ Attendance | <i>Susan Gumm</i> | <i>Chris Boyenga</i> | <i>Mona Kowalczyk</i> | <i>Chris Boyenga</i> |
| Ushers | <i>Donald Gumm</i> | <i>Alan Arnold</i> | <i>Donald Gumm</i> | <i>David Bettis</i> |
| Reader/Assisting Ministers | <i>Marc Medefind</i> | <i>Mary Jo Knudsen</i> | <i>Terry Foote</i> | <i>Chris Love</i> |

Forty Days
Reflection by Nan Dailey

Having walked the Lenten path for Forty Days, here we are saying our Easter Alleluias. Forty Days is an especially important length of time in Jewish culture symbolizing a period of testing, judgement, and transformation.

In the old testament, we have Noah who spends forty days bobbing around in an ark, Moses who spends forty days on Mt. Sinai only coming down when the ten commandments are ready for prime time release, and my personal favorite, Elijah who rushes around, afraid of Jezebel, so depressed by his failure that he literally lies down to die, and then hides in a cave from the Lord.

And in the New Testament? Obviously, there are the forty days of Lent, but there is also the critical forty days Jesus spends in the wilderness. Lent, as we know, is modeled on those days in the wilderness.

Just after his baptism, when he is pretty obviously acknowledged as the son of God, (it's pretty hard to ignore a white dove descending), Jesus is whisked into the desert by the spirit, for a forty-day period of fasting and prayer. Testing, judgement, and transformation – the three elements in a forty-day biblical story – can clearly be found.

Take the bread and stones segment.

Bread is a universal symbol of comfort. Why would Jesus and consequently us be asked to give it up? Because there is much different and far, far better food if we seek the bread of life. We've all heard it: our bread, earthbound bread nourishes our bodies and does a fairly respectable job of it. But the bread of heaven nourishes our spirits, our very souls. The point here is not that human made bread is bad but that it ties us down to the earth. And if I understand what life's task is: "to be God's hands and heart in the world", our job is to move ourselves and our communities, however big or small, ever closer to that state where what feeds us/nourishes us and brings out the best in us as followers of Jesus Christ is the springs of living water and the bread of life.

Using this scripture as a starting point, I think we can use bread as a stand in for all our earthly riches. Treasures, the items we think we need and value so much. Let me be clear here. I'm certainly not advocating we fast on an extremely strict diet, nor that we do not enjoy our earthly food. Nor am I advocating giving up the pleasure we might get from rubbing our hands over a beautiful smooth ceramic vase. Or the gasp of sheer delight we make when a baseball player makes an astonishing catch right by the wall.

What I AM advocating is that we look for those little crevasses in daily life. And use them with purpose to pray/meditate, to be reflective. Take a few minutes to talk to God about what you're spiritually hungry for. And it probably wouldn't hurt to say a few Hallelujahs while you're at it.

SHEPHERD OF THE VALLEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
APRIL CALENDAR OF EVENTS

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|---------------------------------|---------|-----------|--------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| | | | | MAUNDY THURSDAY | M. Thurs/Good Friday Service 10 AM Knitting Club 2 PM | Church Clean-up 9 AM |
| 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| EASTER SUNDAY Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom | | | | | Knitting Club 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News | |
| 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
| Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom | | | | Birthday Luncheon 11:30 AM | Knitting Club 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News | |
| 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |
| Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom | Council Meeting 10 AM | | | | Knitting Club 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News | |
| 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | | |
| Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |



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1455 E Yosemite Ave
Merced CA 95340

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED