

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

THE POWER OF FLIGHT

I have officiated at two services where white doves were used successfully with the mission of *peace, love, beginnings, and remembrance*. The use of such items were clearly a source of awe for all present.

I have been involved in the “releasing” of a couple of other flying items:

- a. We use a pool scoop to gently lift up small moths that lie on top of the pool. Surprisingly, the small moths dry out and “come to life”. They wander a couple of inches and then fly away... home? (Awe?)
- b. In 1970, I found myself in an aircraft hanger in Rantoul, Illinois. I was huddled in front of a door with a window, admiring B-52 aircraft. (Awe for engineered success, while mortality use doves and aircraft for war.)

At that moment, I received an unexplained powerful revelation: these aircraft when released have no purpose other than to kill or to perform violent destruction.

When released from the confines of a basket, homing pigeons fly into the sky and circle the area three times in order to get the bearings of magnetic input. Receiving the guidance of Triune creating, they fly between 50-600 miles home. (Awe)

Dove “handlers” prepare birds for “release”. We cannot “buy” doves for life’s display. We can only “rent” them. The goal (and ours) is to return “home” (divine intent and divine provision).

Such it is for the creating divine intent.

God does not give us life in order to hoard, to hide, nor to “own”. Being the caretaker of creation - our “landlord”, God allows us to “rent” life.

We marvel with awe the gift of returning “home”.

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

We remember Carol Linneman as a faithful long-time member of SOV. Carol fell outside her home during the first week in August and was diagnosed with a broken hip and a broken femur of the other leg. Within a week, Jessica, Carol's daughter, came and arranged an air transport to a hospital in Colorado. We were notified Carol passed away on August 15, 2026, at the age of 91. Our prayers are with her family and friends.

Church Council Highlights

Chris Love, Council Secretary
Council met on Saturday, August 15.

Finance committee will meet quarterly: Chris T, Mona, member.

Modern Air will maintain air conditioners monthly.

Rusting metal fences will be painted with special product.

Falling fence will be repaired with neighbor splitting expense.

Dumpster has locking bar to prevent random dumping; key provided by church office for congregation needs.

Prayer Chain and Sunshine Committee will reach out to members; contact church if you'd like to help.

Council trained on opening and closing duties of our church.

A recipe Needs Box will be in Social Hall; members can pick up cards to fill church needs; all help is welcomed and appreciated.

Up-to-date MOU completed with Healthy House garden.

Job descriptions binder and Facility Use Forms will be updated.

Office Binder will be made available with council minutes and correspondences in church office.

Quarterly Church Clean up days will be organized in Calendar of Events.

Church Council Highlights continue on Page 4.

SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Jesse Saldivar	09/03
Amy Sofranek	09/05
Kimberly Castillo	09/11
Jan Carpenter	09/14
Emily Saldivar	09/27

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

MONTHLY BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON

Birthday Luncheon will meet on Thursday, September 17, at 11:30 AM at H&W Drive-In 121 W. 16th Street. 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

Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost September 6

Ezekiel 33:7-11
Psalm 119:33-40
Romans 13:8-14
Matthew 18:15-20 Green

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost September 13

Genesis 50:15-21
Psalm 103:(1-7) 8-13
Romans 14:1-12
Matthew 18:21-35 Green

Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost September 20

Jonah 3:10-4:11
Psalm 145:1-8
Philippians 1:21-30
Matthew 20:1-16 Green

Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost September 27

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32
Psalm 25:1-9
Philippians 2:1-13
Matthew 21:23-32 Green

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.

Church Council Highlights continued from Page 2.

We will have four quarterly Benevolences: 1st Scholarship; 2nd Garden and Healthy House; 3rd Capital Improvements for the church; 4th New Beginnings.

Blessings of the Animals will be Saturday, October 3rd at 11 am; contact Chris Love with ideas to help.

A great year is planned with our Congregational Meeting and new budget in January 2027.

Feel free to contact any council members with needs or news; we're a church family.



2026 Theme: SHELTER ME, See, Hear, Respect, Protect

You are invited by the local unit of Church Women United in the Merced Area Unit to:

**Human Rights Day
THURSDAY, September 3, 2026**

9:30 to 11:00 AM

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
1080 E Yosemite Ave. Merced CA 95340

Bring a friend and enjoy fellowship, food, and music. Annette Macias will share information about the Homeless Shower Programs in Merced County which are hosted by Love INC. Shower donations welcomed: Gently used Men's Jeans; Men's T-shirts; Shoes & Belts; Gently used Backpacks for Men; Men's & Women's Underwear; Women's Sports Bras (Dollar General); Gently used Blankets; First Aid Items; Deodorant; Metal Water Containers; Lysol Spray; White Garbage Bags and 33-Gallon Bags.

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, September 14 10:00 AM

SEPTEMBER 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 September 6	Sunday September 13	Sunday September 20	Sunday September 27
Greeters/ Attendance	<i>Mary Jo Knudsen</i>	<i>Stacy & Kylie Christofferson</i>	<i>Chris Boyenga</i>	<i>Mona Kowalczyk</i>
Ushers	<i>Hunter Price</i>	<i>Alan Arnold</i>	<i>Hunter Price</i>	<i>Alan Arnold</i>
Reader/Assisting Ministers	<i>Barb Ward</i>	<i>Susan Gumm</i>	<i>Mary Jo Knudsen</i>	<i>Terry Foote</i>

“First Fruits”
Reflection by Nan Dailey

Wouldn't you agree that September is a "harvest month? And as such, giving thanks to the divine for a fruitful harvest has been the norm in numerous cultures including our own. This is particularly true for those who depended and still depend heavily on their agricultural undertakings for survival. And even today, when many of us are not linked closely with the production and harvesting of our food, we offer thanksgiving for the completion of a successful harvest.

For example, in the context of our spiritual life we might offer up prayers of thanks. Perhaps cornucopias full of a wonderful assortment of gourds are placed on the steps leading to the altar. And the children may proudly bring forward the pumpkins they will later carve into Jack O'Lanterns to add to the cornucopias.

But perhaps less well known is giving thanks to the divine for the "first fruits" of the harvest. But we know this custom, too, has an ancient background. Not only are there references to such activities in the bible (see Deuteronomy 26:1 and 2) but also from ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome and in Celtic traditions.

So, what is the big deal about "first fruits"? For the early Israelites and most probably those other ancient cultures as well, first fruits symbolize dedication, trust, and blessing. By giving the first portion, the peoples honored God and gave thanks for the blessings bestowed upon them. (for more information see openbibleinfo.com)

All of this has made me wonder what the first fruits of my labor might I have to lay before the Lord as we enter this harvest month? What bounty has the divine given me through my seasons of sowing and reaping?

Now, I don't have any corn or zucchini or oranges to bring forward, but I do have the "fruit" that has grown from having had cancer.

For example, I know to a greater depth than I ever did before, that I am loved deeply by many people. And I now know in a very visceral way, that hanging on to old junk – some from 30 or even 40 years ago – only serves to take away energy from healing. And swiveting over the way someone else approached a problem sends my cortisol into overdrive which is not therapeutic when it comes to cancer. Truly I have a basket full of his/her gifts that I can set before her/his altar with praise and thanks.

And now, I'll pass the question on to you. What are the first fruits of **your** harvest? It really doesn't matter one bit where/when/what you reaped or sowed. What matters is laying before our God in thanksgiving your metaphorical ear of corn, bag of oranges or bushel basket of zucchini.

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

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
						Church Clean-up 9 AM
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom	Labor Day Office Closed				Knitting Club 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News	
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom	Council Meeting 10 AM			Birthday Luncheon 11:30 AM H&W Drive-In	Knitting Club 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News	
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom					Knitting Club 2 PM SOV Weekly Email News	
27	28	29	30			
Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom						



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED