



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
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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
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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

"Why We Don't Applaud In Worship"

The seminary I attended was associated with the Presbyterian Church (USA).

An aspect of the seminary is its name, San Francisco Theological Seminary. It isn't located in San Francisco (albeit, it was originally), but in one of the "richest" neighborhoods in the country.

Another aspect is the association with the Graduate Theological Union, seven seminaries that shared classes, faculty, bookstore, and library privileges (with U.C. Berkeley). We are the only ones not physically located in North Berkeley. A van from San Anselmo in Marin County would collect riders, pass San Quentin, and cross the San Rafael bridge.

Each semester, students could opt for classes throughout the "Union".

Pattee is a dancer. She is a registered dance/movement therapist. At the Pacific School of Religion, she attended liturgical dance classes and enjoyed a wide array of performances... She became a member of a liturgical dance group that provided worship support in Marin.

One of the challenging things learned was that liturgical dance within the worship environment is a corporate prayer. It is not a performance. Despite the fact that a prayer might be received by an enthusiastic **"AMEN!"** out of appreciation, a liturgical dance group might cringe or feel "defeated" by applause. Prayer presented through movement is intended for those who learn more kinesthetically than the rest of us. It's another way of speaking. God's Word is available to all – even those who resonate with movement.

Such it is for other presentations within worship.

Prayer is presented and offered respectfully.

Pastor John



PRAYER REQUESTS

Prayers for healing:

Dave Bettis; Joel Knox; 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, **Scholarship Fund** 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

By Marc Medefind, President

The Shepherd of the Valley, Lutheran Church Council met on January 19. Here are some highlights:

—Pastor John discussed plans to accept the Burnetts as members at the Jan. 25 service. The Burnetts are entering our membership by transfer.

—Preparations were made for the Congregational Meeting on January 25.

—Looking forward, Pastor John said he had acquired study materials for our annual Lenten Study. The Ash Wednesday service will take place at 10 a.m. on February 18.

—Mary Jo Knudsen organized a very successful “coat drive.” Coats will be delivered to Love, Inc.

—Susan and Don Gumm donated a hand sanitizer which will be placed at the sanctuary doors in the narthex.

—A landscaping committee has been established to consider our church’s exterior needs.

—Barb Ward put together a “clean-up list” that will help us more efficiently accomplish needed tasks around the church. Our next clean-up day is Saturday, February 7 at 9 a.m.

—Pastor John put out a request for someone in the congregation to consider serving as a wedding coordinator.

—Our church’s committee structures were also discussed with the idea that we need to “edit” or possibly combine certain organizational responsibilities to ease our workload.

FEBRUARY 2026

BIBLE TEXT READINGS

| FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS | |
|--------------------|-------|
| Hunter Boyenga | 02/07 |
| Curtis Boyenga | 02/13 |
| Tim Dailey | 02/18 |
| Marc Medefind | 02/18 |
| Pam Andersen | 02/19 |
| Carrie O'Bara | 02/20 |
| Mary Rahn | 02/21 |
| Terry Foote | 02/22 |
| Pat Shaw | 02/24 |
| Mona Kowalczyk | 02/24 |
| Syd Saldivar | 02/25 |

| MARCH BIRTHDAYS | |
|-------------------|-------|
| Alan Arnold | 03/06 |
| Dorothy Woody | 03/07 |
| Carolyn Stephens | 03/10 |
| Dan Woods | 03/10 |
| Christine Boyenga | 03/11 |
| Phil Rahn | 03/14 |
| Dylan Cherf | 03/20 |
| Ken Sullivan | 03/26 |
| Carolyn Daberkow | 03/26 |
| David Pressly | 03/27 |
| Patti LiWang | 03/28 |
| Brent Sales | 03/29 |

MONTHLY BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON

Birthday Luncheon will resume on Thursday, February 19, at 11:30 AM. Please watch for more information as to where we will be meeting.



| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Fourth Sunday after Epiphany | February 1 |
| Micah 6:1-8 | |
| Psalm 15 | |
| 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | |
| Matthew 5:1-12 | Green |
| Fifth Sunday after Epiphany | February 8 |
| Isaiah 58:1-9a (9b-12) | |
| Psalm 112:1-9 (10) | |
| 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16) | |
| Matthew 5:13-20 | Green |
| Transfiguration of Our Lord | February 15 |
| Exodus 24:12-18 | |
| Psalm 2 or Psalm 99 | |
| 2 Peter 1:16-21 | |
| Matthew 17:1-9 | White |
| First Sunday in Lent | February 22 |
| Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 | |
| Psalm 32 | |
| Romans 5:12-19 | |
| Matthew 4:1-11 | Purple |

Annual Congregational Meeting

Shepherd of the Valley's annual Congregational Meeting took place after services on January 25.

The congregation read and heard report highlights from Pastor John Russell-Curry and all the church's committee chairs, including an overview from Council President Marc Medefind; a Treasurer's report from Mona Kowalczyk; an audit report from Chris Tomford; a membership and pledges report from financial secretary Chris Boyenga; and committee and support groups, including Worship and Music (Karen Arnold, Jan Collins and Marit Medefind); Property Report (David Cherf); Garden Report (Marc Medefind); Altar Guild (Barb Ward) and Scholarship Report (Karen Arnold and Mona Kowalczyk.) The congregation also voted to adopt the annual Congregational Budget.

In addition, a nominating committee — including members Chris Love, Tim Shaw and Jan Collins — was elected to nominate new council members. Council members going off the board in May include Marc Medefind, Barb Ward, David John Cherf II and Karen Arnold. Delegates Chris Boyenga and Mona Kowalczyk were also elected to attend the ELCA Synod conference and assemblies. The conference assembly is scheduled March 14 in Modesto. Dates for the synod conference are TBA.

BENEVOLENCE OF THE MONTH

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.

Giving Envelopes

If you have not picked up your 2026 Giving envelopes, please do so as soon as possible. If you did not receive a box and would like one, please contact Chris Boyenga.

ASH WEDNESDAY

We will be having an Ash Wednesday worship service on February 18 at 10 AM. Please plan on attending this special service as we begin the Lenten season.

Shepherd of the Valley Website

www.thesovlutheran.net

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.

January & February Benevolence Scholarship Fund

Our benevolence for January and February is our Scholarship fund. Until COVID, our funding was primarily through estate sales; however, for the past few years there have been few opportunities for ways to support this endeavor. In 2025, we awarded two \$300 scholarships to Merced College students: Paschina Weedling and Leslie Cortes, both Nursing students. These students are always so appreciative of our help, and we are grateful to our church family for their support of this worthwhile project.

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



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.

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
Secretary: David John Churf II Vice-President: Barb Ward

*Next Meeting Date: Third Monday of the month
February 16, 2026 10 AM*

FEBRUARY 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 February 1 | Sunday February 8 | Sunday February 15 | Sunday February 22 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Greeters/ Attendance | <i>Barb Ward</i> | <i>Chris Boyenga</i> | <i>Chris Love</i> | <i>Mary Jo Knudsen</i> |
| Ushers | <i>Dave Bettis</i> | <i>Alan Arnold</i> | <i>Donald Gumm</i> | <i>Alan Arnold</i> |
| Reader/Assisting Ministers | <i>Bronwen Maxson</i> | <i>Marc Medefind</i> | <i>Susan Gumm</i> | <i>Chris Love</i> |

Spiritual Fatness
Reflection by Nan Dailey

February's an odd month, don't you think? It's shorter than any other month in the year, it's the month we set a day aside to celebrate loving in general and our special loves in particular, and it includes Ash Wednesday, the day when we receive the mark of the cross on our foreheads as a reminder of the forth coming 40 day Lenten season: a time for fasting and sacrifice in preparation for celebrating the resurrection of our Lord.

And as if that weren't enough to set February apart there's Fat or Shrove Tuesday. It marks the end of the festival season, which in the US we are most familiar with as Mardi Gras. Since Lent is a period of abstinence and fasting, traditionally, all that lovely, "rich" fattening food, eggs, butter, dairy, and sugar could not be eaten during the Lenten season. Solution? In order to keep the food from spoiling, it all **had** to be eaten before Ash Wednesday. What a shame, huh? Didn't get all your Christmas cookies eaten? Well, here's another chance.

I think we could say Lent is a period of "skinnying" ourselves down. We know it's about food in the context of fasting and abstinence, but could that "skinnying" also be spiritual? What might a person who is fat spiritually (which probably is all of us) be like? What would be their characteristics? Which of those characteristics do I see in myself? How can I use a Lenten practice to lose some of that excess avoirdupois I carry not only (sadly) around my belly but also around my heart and my hands?

To get to an answer, here are a couple of questions we might ask ourselves. Am I proud, even arrogant, about my belief system, because I just know it really is better than all the rest? Am I convinced that I am doing enough to serve others? Do I use my interpretation of worship practices to disparage any that are different? Do I dip my toe in the writings of the people God touched, but rarely do the hard work of engaging with their work(s)?

I'm sure there are other spiritually fattening habits we could think of, but isn't the critical question not so much what my fattening selfish indulgences are, but what spiritual practice(s) could help me **lose** some of them?

Now I really wanted to suggest a good, meaty idea for a Lenten spiritual practice, one that we could all sink our teeth into (food metaphors deliberate), but what keeps coming to my mind over and over is "prayer." "Simply" prayer. I've learned in the last ten years, when something keeps coming to mind like this, I should pay attention, so I'm going with prayer as a way to at least reexamine if not to rid myself of some of my dodgy spiritual beliefs. Sort of like a spiritual weight watchers' program.

Prayer. Quiet, worshipful prayer. Or exuberant clapping and singing prayer. Not necessarily structured, although that would be fine, but open-hearted, open-ended prayer. How about having a chat with the Lord? Or maybe resting in the arms of the Divine? Accepting absolution and forgiveness? Listening and looking for signs of the spirit all around? Praying to God, like David (Psalm 40), to be lifted out of the mud and mire we've gotten ourselves into?

If I can be in prayer with the Divine in these and other ways through Lent, lose a couple of pounds worth of arrogance, disdain and criticism, come Easter morning I bet my Alleluias will be louder than ever before.

FEBRUARY 2026

SHEPHERD OF THE VALLEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
FEBRUARY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom | | | | | SOV Weekly News sent via email | Church Clean-up 9 AM |
| 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom | | | | | SOV Weekly News sent via email | |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom | Presidents Day Office Closed Council Meeting 10 AM | | Ash Wednesday Service 10 AM | Birthday Luncheon 11:30 AM | SOV Weekly News sent via email | |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| Worship 10 AM Sanctuary & Zoom | | | | | SOV Weekly News sent via email | |



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Merced CA 95340

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED