

# St. Stephen's WITNESS

All Are Welcome!

April 2024

## Do Your Part!

Living in Santa Clarita, and spending as much time as I do in the Antelope Valley, you can probably imagine that the overpass and tunnels of the 5 and the 14 freeways where they intersect are a VERY familiar part of my life. In fact, that has been true not just recently, but pretty much constantly since about 1994. It was just about this exact time of year so far back I don't recall the date that I had one of the truly "AHA" experiences of my ministry years and learned a lesson I want to offer to you.

I had the responsibility to come up with a written Easter message in addition to a sermon for Easter Sunday. Time was running out and I was looking for something fresh and meaningful to say in both so that people might find a new perspective on the celebration. Like you at SSOV, they had been through dozens and dozens of Easters, and the Bible readings of the women at the tomb finding the stone rolled away was so familiar they could recite the story from memory. Because in those days the schools gave an Easter vacation, I knew many of the people were going to be gone for travel or family visiting, and Easter was becoming more and more an *obstacle* that I simply had to overcome and get through, but I was working hard mentally to make sure I did not come down to such a low place for such an important and life-giving celebration. I was on my way to Lancaster, I believe, and you may recall that the transition to the 14 from the south bound 5 involves taking the exit and slowing so you can follow a swooping overpass that results in your heading east, up hill, and joining the other eastbound traffic. There often are other cars so you have to pay attention to what you're doing,

Large structures like that have to have a drainage system to get the water off of the road when it rains, and there are grates for drains all along the left side wall of the overpass. I was the only car at that moment making the transition, and I noticed, growing out of one of the drains a tall stalk of a plant that had a couple leaves and a yellow flower on it. I was amazed, as this was not a good place for a flowering plant! It registered on me that such a miracle *could* be a message, meant just for me. I did what I had to do that day in the AV and was looking forward to driving home, but eventually remembered that I would *not* be on that overpass. I *really* wanted to see that flower again, maybe take a picture! I took a complicated set of turns and a round-about way just to see it again. The flower was in full bloom, bright yellow blowing in the breeze like an advertisement for Spring and God and life! There were too many cars to allow the picture, but over the next few days I looked forward to driving that overpass and seeing my flower! Twenty some years later I still remember and often, even when it's not close to Easter and spring, I check that drain as I drive by. There's never been another flower. I know that's a lot of words to tell a story, but I really believe that flower was a miracle and a message for me, and I've spoken and written about it several times, then, and since.



## The Staff

The Reverend James Fuller  
The Reverend Father James Seipel

Office Manger:  
Doretta Rapp

Office Assistant:  
Yvonne St. Andrew

Music Coordinator:  
Alexandra Caselli

Communications Coordinator:  
Thomas Rapp

Our purpose it to glorify God by **welcoming** people in His love, **encouraging** commitment to Jesus and **equipping** in the Spirit, to grow and to serve in the world.

## Join us on Sundays

Virtual Worship: Sundays  
YouTube.com 1 pm (St Stephens of the Valley Lutheran Church)

In-Person Worship:  
9:30 am

## Let's stay in touch!

 [ststephenspalmdale.org](http://ststephenspalmdale.org)

 /ststephenspalmdale

## Photo Directory



*oh snap!*

Staff has been working diligently to get photos of the congregation for a new photo directory. We need your updated photos! Therefore, we have been striving to take pictures after worship and your cooperation has been great! We just need a few more people to make our directory complete. Can't make a Sunday service? You can make an appointment any day or time the office is open! Monday - Thursday, 9am to 2pm! Just call before you come and we will snap your picture and you can be on your way!

## Financials

### \$3,035 Overage

#### Ministry Giving

Feb. Giving: \$17,363

Feb. Expenses: \$14,328

### \$11,097 Overage

#### Ministry Year to Date

Giving: \$41,595

Expenses: \$30,498

### -\$53 Deficit

#### Mortgage Income Received

Feb. Giving: \$1,397

Feb. Expenses: \$1,450

## March Council Highlights

- There will be a joint worship service on May 19th at St. Paul's (9am). There will be no worship service at SSOV that day.
- Synod Assembly will be May 31st and June 1st at the Lutheran Center in Glendale.
- Council approved the purchase of a new AED for the sanctuary using Memorial Gift donations.
- Approved three scholarship award recipients.

## Thank You!

... to everyone who donated a food basket to go to the Migrant Worker Program! We donated 12 baskets of food!

... to all those who came out for work day! We appreciate your time you have given to SSOV!

... to everyone who donated a lily for Easter. They really made the Worship Center look beautiful.

... to Alexandra Caselli, our fabulous musician and choir members, thank you for your dedication to SSOV. Thank you for providing special music for our various Holy Week and Easter services.

## Because of You...



*"Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise"- Ephesians 5:15*

**W**e have time to invest and authors Tom Rath and Jim Harter in their book *Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements* put it this way, "To create a life that's worthwhile, not just for ourselves but for those around us, we need to find something we love to do that benefits society."

God has abundantly blessed this congregation with gifted people. There is much to do around the church and with everyone's help our congregation functions better and our mission and ministry is more fully carried out. Please sign up to be a Sunday morning reader or usher, join the alter guild, serve on a team, or call the office and let them know what you'd be interested in doing so they can help connect you to the right person.

Volunteers infuse life into the congregation. It's not always easy to find the time or energy to volunteer. However, when you share in the work with joy and enthusiasm you may be challenged but, you'll also be richly blessed.

## Stewardship Thought for the Month

*"For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."  
Ephesians 2:10*

# April 2024

- Siri Suggestions
- US Holidays
- Facility Use
- Worship and On Campus Events

March 2024							April 2024							May 2024																							
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S																	
							1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>31 Virtual Worship YouTUBE.com Easter 9:30AM In Person Worship! 12:00PM Restauracion</p>	<p>1 Office Closed April Fools' Day 10:30AM Staff Meeting 4:30PM Cub Scouts</p>	<p>2 9:00AM Blue Livin' Supports 4:00PM Band Practice 5:00PM Choir Practice 7:00PM Restauracion</p>	<p>3 9:00AM Blue Livin' Supports</p>	<p>4 6:30PM Restauracion</p>	<p>5 7:00PM Restauracion 8:00PM NA</p>	<p>6 7:00PM Restauracion 8:00PM NA</p>
<p>7 Virtual Worship YouTUBE.com 9:30AM In Person Worship! 12:00PM Restauracion</p>	<p>8 10:30AM Staff Meeting 4:30PM Cub Scouts</p>	<p>9 Eid al-Fitr 9:00AM Blue Livin' Supports 4:00PM Band Practice 5:00PM Choir Practice 7:00PM Restauracion</p>	<p>10 9:00AM Blue Livin' Supports</p>	<p>11 6:30PM Restauracion</p>	<p>12 8:00PM NA</p>	<p>13 1:00PM Restauracion 8:00PM NA</p>
<p>14 Virtual Worship YouTUBE.com 9:30AM In Person Worship! 12:00PM Restauracion</p>	<p>15 Tax Day 10:30AM Staff Meeting 4:30PM Cub Scouts 6:30PM Council Meeting</p>	<p>16 9:00AM Blue Livin' Supports 4:00PM Band Practice 5:00PM Choir Practice 7:00PM Restauracion</p>	<p>17 9:00AM Blue Livin' Supports</p>	<p>18 6:30PM Restauracion</p>	<p>19 1:00PM Restauracion 8:00PM NA</p>	<p>20 8:00PM NA</p>
<p>21 Virtual Worship YouTUBE.com 9:30AM In Person Worship! 12:00PM Restauracion</p>	<p>22 Earth Day Passover 10:30AM Staff Meeting 4:30PM Cub Scouts</p>	<p>23 9:00AM Blue Livin' Supports 4:00PM Band Practice 5:00PM Choir Practice 7:00PM Restauracion</p>	<p>24 9:00AM Blue Livin' Supports</p>	<p>25 6:30PM Restauracion</p>	<p>26 8:00PM NA</p>	<p>27 8:00PM NA</p>
<p>28 Virtual Worship YouTUBE.com 9:30AM In Person Worship! 12:00PM Restauracion</p>	<p>29 10:30AM Staff Meeting 4:30PM Cub Scouts</p>	<p>30 9:00AM Blue Livin' Supports 4:00PM Band Practice 5:00PM Choir Practice 7:00PM Restauracion</p>	<p>1 9:00AM Blue Livin' Supports 6:30PM Restauracion</p>	<p>2 6:30PM Restauracion</p>	<p>3 7:00PM Restauracion 8:00PM NA</p>	<p>4 7:00PM Restauracion 8:00PM NA</p>



## Get Involved

**Usher:** Ushers give a warm welcome to visitors, welcome the congregation, pass out bulletins, collect offering, direct communion, and take attendance. Contact the office.

**Scripture Reader:** Readers share two Bible lessons with the congregation. Contact the office

**Communion Setup/Clean up:** Do you like working behind the scenes? Contact Doretta Rapp at [stofficeasst@sbcglobal.net](mailto:stofficeasst@sbcglobal.net) if this sounds like the right job for you!

**Praise Band:** Love to share your gift of music with others? Do you play an instrument? Contact Alexandra Caselli at [aacjazz@gmail.com](mailto:aacjazz@gmail.com).

**Soundboard:** Make sure our choir and band sound great every Sunday! Contact the office if you are interested.

### Tuesdays

#### Choir and Band Practice

If you like to sing, join us!! We are always looking for singers. We meet at 4 pm for band practice and 5 pm for choir rehearsal in the Worship Center. Call Alexandra (818-631-2237) for more details.

### Monthly

At the end of the month food sacks are assembled for our "Feeding Others" program. For more information, contact Barbara Counts 661-816-4352.

## President's Corner

The mid-week Lenten services here at SSOV were attended by 12-15 people each week. It was an interesting perspective on the meaning of the cross. I found that the questions raised and the observations and reflections shared brought new meaning to me for what the cross meant for the world. I hope this Easter season has renewed your spirit, as well. Here is some information on this year's Synod Assembly:

- *"The Unity of the Church" will be celebrated at the Southwest California Synod Assembly on May 31 and June 1 at the Lutheran Center in Glendale.*

- *Kick off the event with an all-day ministry fair on Friday, May 31, from 9 am to 5 pm. Enjoy lunch while immersing yourself in workshops, musical performances, small group discussions, and Q&A sessions with Bishop Brenda Bos. Participants can choose between morning and afternoon sessions, concluding the day with a special reception honoring our former bishop, Rev. Dr. R. Guy Erwin, in our courtyard at 5pm.*

- *Saturday, June 1, will begin with a worship service at the Lutheran Center, followed by business sessions.*

We can send two representatives to the assembly. Council would like to hear from you if you would like to be considered as a delegate representing St. Stephen's; please contact the church office.

*Chuck Lebo*



## The Ministry Planning Team wants you to know...

Since the first meeting in December this team has been discussing possible ways to move our congregation forward – forward towards better engagement with our neighbors; forward towards increased outreach; forward towards bringing the message of God's love and grace to more hearts and minds. They have been working in conjunction with the other teams at St. Stephen's as well, since this a united effort.

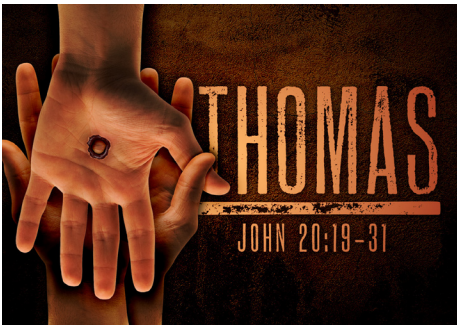
How can you help? Visitors and even old and new members alike need to feel connection, so don't be shy, take a moment after worship to greet someone you don't know.

A Care Team has been formed. They will bring communion to home bound members and friends. How can you help? If you know someone who would appreciate a visit and would like communion, let the office know. Current or prior attendance at St. Stephen's is not required to benefit from this ministry. This team would be glad to bring communion to anyone in need.

Family Fun Day is being planned for May 4th. Kids activities, local vendors and food trucks will be on hand. In addition, to brighten our presence in the community, a mural of colorful hearts along the block wall on 17th St. E. is in the works. Our neighbors and those in attendance are going to be invited to participate by adding a heart to the mural or by painting in a heart outline. How can you help? Invite friends and family to this event. Once the flyers are printed, take some with you and pass them out in your neighborhood or distribute them to your social groups.

An all new live-streaming system will soon be installed in the loft. It will enhance the audio and visual broadcasting of our worship services with better sound and picture clarity. How can you help? Encourage someone you know, especially those who may not have a church home, to watch and listen. You never know whose heart the message may touch.

*Fellowship, Generosity, Hospitality, Involvement, Spiritual Life*



## Worship in April

After we hear of the miracle of Easter, now we hear of the surprising ways the resurrected Jesus appears to the worried and anxious people of faith, bringing peace and hope once again.

- 4/7 Second Sunday after Easter  
Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133  
John 20:19-31
- 4/14 Third Sunday after Easter  
Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4  
Luke 24:36b-48
- 4/21 Fourth Sunday after Easter  
Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23  
John 10:11-18
- 4/28 Fifth Sunday after Easter  
Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31  
John 15:1-8



## Easy Ways to Donate to St. Stephen's!



Are you looking for an easy, convenient way to contribute to our church? St. Stephen's offers two eGiving options that allow you to give anytime, anywhere – even on the road! It takes just seconds to use your smartphone to give by text or through Vanco's mobile app.

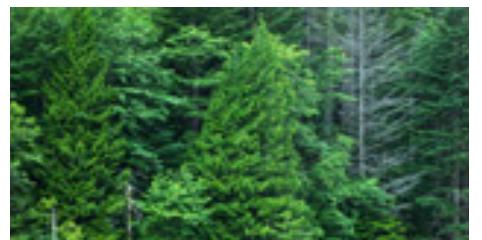
For text giving, simply send a text message to 888-979-6933 with the amount you would like to contribute (for example, \$25). Just follow the prompts.

To give through the mobile app, download the free VancoMobile app from the Apple Store or Google Play and search for our church by name. (St Stephens Church)

Or you can scan this QR Code with your phone's camera and go directly to our Simply Giving site!



We appreciate your generosity, whether you're donating from the pew or going to the mountains!



## Abundance Sunday April 14th

To Benefit Grace Resources  
*Children and Adult Sock and Underwear*

Wish List includes: refrigerators, cribs, car seats, baby books, washer & dryers, kitchen furniture, dressers, and night stands. New children's toys are always welcome! Plus travel-size toiletries. To benefit Grace Resource Center, please place items in the shopping cart in the entrance to the Worship Center, or contact Barbara Counts 661-816-4352.

## Women's Book Study

Once upon a time we had big dreams. But life became a maze of responsibilities, obligations, and expectations. Maybe we see that there's more to life and more to faith, but we're distracted by the next crisis or urgent diversion, and that stirring of purpose always seems out of reach. We still have dreams, but we're no longer in touch with them...

This video Bible study will help you understand that God has a plan for your life. Interested? Come to HM and Danny McKinsey's home (3445 W. Ave. N-3 Palmdale) Wednesdays at 4:30p starting on April 10th. For more information, contact HM, 661-305-9856

**Sunday, April 14th is the  
deadline for the  
May Newsletter.**

## Father Jim continued

Parallel to the revival we call Spring, Easter is the message of *Life*, the *God of Life*, the *Gift of Life*, and the *love* that makes life worth living. The Jewish Passover coming around “the 13th of Nisan” puts it right at the approach of spring, and that puts our observations of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus right into that same time frame. It *is* a serendipity that makes spring an even more important and meaningful time, but I don't really believe it is an accident. Living in SoCal it is almost always hard to distinguish the change of seasons the way it happens in other places in the world, especially the changes from winter to spring and from summer to fall. When the time comes that you don't have children living with you that is not only true for the seasons, it is also true week to week. In retirement often life seems to be just a string of Saturdays, you have to keep a calendar or check regularly to be certain what day it is, even the Sundays can be just the same. I have known people whose excuse for missing church was that they lost track of it being Sunday! To keep ourselves spiritually alive, we cannot let that happen

*All* of us want there to be factors and experiences that remind us we are alive, we are loved, and we are important, we have things to **do!** It is important for us to know that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. We are individually so small, how can it be that *we matter?* Building on the thoughts of Bishop Bos when she spoke at our big anniversary in February, we need to learn to notice and identify the miracles around us, the gifts of God that reveal His presence, His caring, and our importance. God's presence in the world is too often described as a kind of *control* or even dominance, when it seems clear to me that it is such a generous, loving, and beautiful presence, subtle and not at all forcing things down our throat. Because of that it is important that *we do our part*, and notice, pay attention, and be thankful for all the magnificence of life and beauty around us. Things could *always* have been otherwise, so the “gifts” of grace and beauty we run into should be noticed and named and appreciated! Feeling God's presence begins with noticing God's gifts and the signs of His presence all around us. If you start naming them out loud and saying Thank You you'll be surprised at how many and how often God reminds each of us of His kindness and presence!

*Father Jim*

*St. Stephen's*  
OF THE VALLEY  
LUTHERAN CHURCH

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stadmin@sbcglobal.net

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9am-1pm

Mon- Thu

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## Steward your soul for a fuller life

Jesus teaches, “*What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?*” –Mark 8:36, 37 (NIV)

Instead of the superficial “How’s it going?” a wise colleague asks friends, “How is your soul?”

The question requires effort. To answer it I must plunge deep inside -- below the constantly churning waters of everyday joys, hopes, ambitions, desires, anxieties and disappointments. These are so strong, especially our desires and ambitions, that if we are not careful they can absorb all our time and energy.

Jesus repeatedly warns us not to let our desires and our worries engulf us, keeping us from paying attention to the soul. Our soul is where we connect with God, the source of our greatest strength and truest identity. Without attention, our soul can dry up like a plant without water. As with all the treasures God has given us, we must be stewards of our souls.

The mystics of old and modern prophets (such as Richard Rohr, Marjorie Thompson or Howard Thurman) teach us to employ prayer, holy silence, and other spiritual disciplines to tend our souls and keep worldly worries and desires from overwhelming us.

This month, begin a daily practice of caring for your soul. You might begin with five minutes of spoken prayer followed by five minutes of silence. Or reflect deeply on a Scripture passage. Or try prayerful yoga. (Your pastor might be able to give you some resources or ideas.)

With a little practice and attention, you can become stronger, more centered and more spiritually resilient.

How is your soul?

*-Rob Blezard*

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