

The Shepherd's staff

THE NEWSLETTER OF HOLY SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH — ADVENT / DECEMBER 2025
433 MORAGA WAY, ORINDA, CALIFORNIA 94563 — WWW.HOLYSHEPHERD.ORG — (925)254-3422

SPREADING CHRISTMAS CHEER TO NEEDFUL FAMILIES!



Our Sunday School kids have once again taken on a meaningful Christmas gifting project, coordinated by Sunday School Leader Elizabeth Humphrey

Once again this year, our Sunday School kids (and their families) are working with "Families First" (a local nonprofit focused on keeping families together - and kids in school - amid economic hardship) to support a local family in the East County area. Our students and their families have already used a SignUp Genius to fulfill the needy family's Wish List! And they will be sharing in a "Wrapping, Cocoa and Cookie Party" during the Sunday School time slot on December 7th.

While our Sunday School kids and their families alone have been able to provide Christmas gifts to this needy family, we can all further support their efforts by extending holiday blessings into the new year! (Checks to the church office memoed "Needful Family" or visit www.holyshepherd.org and click to our online Givelify giving platform.) Any contributions will be used to purchase Amazon and Safeway cards, so as to purchase groceries and other necessities. Contact Elizabeth via email (elizabethannehumphrey@gmail.com) for more information, and thank you for your generosity and support for those less fortunate this holiday season!

In Acts 20:35, the Apostle Paul quotes Jesus as saying "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Those words are - for us - a reminder that giving to others brings a sense of blessing and joy far beyond being on the receiving end of those same gifts. And we hope that this year's Christmas Sunday School project brings that sense of blessing and joy to our kids this year!

WEEKLY EVENTS SCHEDULE

*We encourage you to
join in!*

Sundays at 9:30 am — In-person worship with Holy Communion happens in our Sanctuary.

Sundays at 9:30 am — Our in-person worship services are "Live-Streamed" via Facebook @HSLCOrinda.

Sundays at 10am — Sunday School for Kids happens twice-monthly following KidTalk. (Upcoming class dates are December 7 and 21!)

Sundays at 10:30 am — Coffee Fellowship takes place in the CFM following our worship service.

Sundays at noon — Our 'Worship Video' is available at www.holyshepherd.org.

Mission Partner Update:

International Health Partners: US/TZ

IHP has done it again! They're just a month away from opening their 4th medical facility in Tanzania – this one in Chihoni in the Dodoma Highlands!

It was just a year ago that medical missionary Paula Lofstrom took to our pulpit to share the story of IHP's latest 'project' – news of the ground-breaking and foundation building at a new medical center. Her report to us that day was that the Spirit was at work to make a meaningful difference in the lives of needful people. First up was the building an OPD (Outpatient Department) on their new campus in Chihoni.

Those of us who have partnered with Paula over the years know full well that Paula and the Holy Spirit seem an unstoppable combination, but we didn't know it would get completed SO soon! The grand opening of their new OPD is slated for mid January of 2026! Wow!

We're thankful to note that the major funding for this project came as a gift from the estate of long-time Holy Shepherd member Lois Okerstrom. Lois' spirit of love and service lives on!



Aerial view of the OPD.

If you'd like to offer a Christmas gift of IHP (or any of our other ministry partners), simply forward a check to the church office, noting the name of the ministry you wish to support in the memo line. Additional info is available from Pastor John, Treasurer Chris Merlin or Bookkeeper Bridget Marko.

International Health Partners (IHP) is a non-profit medical ministry that serves the people of Tanzania by providing excellent healthcare to those who need it most.

IHP seeks to improve health care for the people of Tanzania by integrating medical knowledge, techniques, and best practices within the East African culture. They employ and train local health care professionals and rely on the generosity of others to build resource efficient facilities without sacrificing the care for their patients. IHP continues as one of Holy Shepherd's major ministry partners in our recently-approved 2025/26 budget.



COUNCIL LEADERSHIP FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Per our congregational constitution, our officers are elected by the Church Council at the first meeting after election of new church council members. We are thankful that the following persons have agreed to serve in these respective roles:

President

Joan Kiekhaefer

Vice President

Nina Hannawalt Berchtold

Treasurer

Chris Merlin

Secretary

Dave Lausch



- Henry Ch. — 12/4
- Karen H. — 12/5
- Gretchen S. — 12/12
- Paul H. — 12/13
- Solveig Tsch. — 12/14
- Terry H. — 12/15
- William O. — 12/15
- Dorelle K. — 12/19
- Abigail G. — 12/22
- Lisa M. — 12/22
- Bill H. — 12/24
- Marla Schr. — 12/24
- Jesus of Nazareth — 12/25
- Michael St. — 12/25
- Russ Bl. — 12/29 (100!)
- Mary H. — 12/30



"Prayer isn't about us getting God to see things from our perspective. It's about God getting us to see things from God's perspective, and about moving us from a place of self-focus to one of outward focus and community."

For Wellness

- Yvonne G.
- Louise H.
- Donna Z.
- MaryHelene W.
- Judy B.
- Judy H.
- Joan B.
- Russ R.
- Harold & Elise M.
- Arlene R.

For Those Serving

- Meghan and Brian P.

For Peace

- Kristi L.
- Marian McG.
- DeLane R.
- Diana N.
- Mark Z.
- Kathleen J.

Christmas Cookie Exchange

Cristi Chow is back at it! Our undisputed "Queen of Community-Building" is hosting a **"Christmas Cookie Exchange"** at 1pm on **December 20** in our Center for Ministry. Bring 3-6 dozen of your favorite homemade holiday treats and exchange them for the sweet treats which others bring. Additionally, you're invited to bring a small house-warming holiday gift (less than \$25) for the annual gift exchange. For more information or to RSVP, contact Cristi Chow at hslccristi@gmail.com.



It's Our Advent Music Fest

Advent brings with it a spirit of hope and joy and excitement, and our annual Advent / Christmas Music Fest strives to make those feelings come alive! Join our gifted musicians and music teams, as we celebrate the great Good News of the Christmas season on **Sunday morning, December 14 at 9:30a**. This is also a wonderful opportunity to invite family members, neighbors and friends to join in the celebration of Christmas in a meaningful and melodious way.

A New Kind of Caroling!

A couple of years ago now, amid some particularly challenging weather, we discovered a fun way to carol folks both near and far via the wonders of modern technology! Join us at the home of Steve and Nina Berchtold (3339 Moraga Blvd. in Lafayette) on the evening of **Sunday, December 21 beginning at 6:30p**, for caroling and cookies and Christmas joy! Note that this is a family-friendly event for all ages. Join us!



A Word from Pastor John



There are LOTS of beautiful songs and carols that fill the airways and our hearts during this Advent / Christmas season. I suspect that you have your favorites (and your 'not-so-favorites' too!) even as do I. But the one which lingers on my heart this year is the ancient and memorable tune "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel".

You might well just roll your eyes and say "Of course it is" – seeing as I was a medieval history major back at Cal back in the day – and "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" is a song that dates back to those medieval monasteries of which I studied in the 9th and 10th centuries. But I'd like to think that the reason is contained in the title of the song itself – the word "Emmanuel".

You see, the word "Emmanuel" means "God with us". "Emmanuel" was the title given to the promised Messiah by the prophet Isaiah. "Emmanuel" was a title used by the gospel-writer Matthew as the right descriptor of who and what the Christ-child of Christmas is. You see, when we declare that Jesus is "God with us", we're affirming that God is with us – in our lives and in our world – each and every day. When we declare Jesus to be "God with us", we affirm that he is with us when things are going 'just right' and when things seem to be 'all wrong'.

When we declare Jesus to be "God with us", we're acknowledging that we need a God who is more than just an idea or a philosophical construct – for philosophical constructs are cold-comfort when we're grieving or feeling overwhelmed. We NEED the One who is with us when the storms of life rage, when all others forsake us, and when it feels like we don't have a prayer in the world.

I'm thankful in these chaotic and divisive days that God IS with us ... that Jesus IS "God in the flesh" ... "the tangible God". I'm thankful that Jesus is our Emmanuel. And I hope that you too may know the comfort that comes in knowing that God IS WITH US!

Hope + Love + Peace + Joy!

12 Noon

We gather at 12 noon for a festive celebration of Jesus' birth, complete with candlelighting, communion and the music of our SpiritBorne worship team. If you've got dinner plans or just don't like driving after dark, we're hoping this works well for you!

Christmas Eve Worship 2025

Mark your calendar and join us as you are able!

5pm

We gather at 5pm for a reflective celebration of Jesus' birth, complete with candlelighting, communion and the music of our Canticle Choir. If you've got a yearning for a more traditional Lutheran Christmas Eve service, we're hoping this works well for you!

HOLY SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH
433 Moraga Way
Orinda, CA 94563

