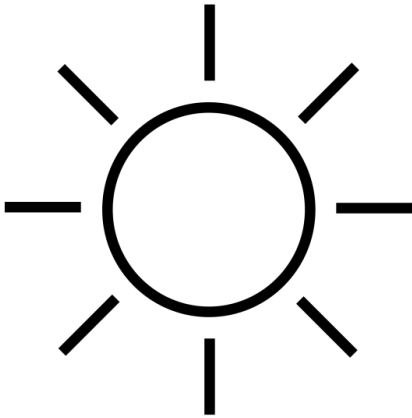


St. Stephen's Lutheran Church



Sun

February 2025

“Everything in Between Meeting God in the Midst of Extremes”

God meets us in the night—
before the sun rises,
before the wound heals,
before there are answers,
before there is closure.

God meets us in the light—
where joy is effervescent,
where laughter is contagious,
where flowers bloom from cracks in the sidewalk,
where people gather around tables.

God meets us in between—
at the edge of the water,
at the beginning of the wilderness,
at the start of something new,
on the edge of faith.

And if God meets us in all those places,
then surely God meets us everywhere—
at the water's edge, at the start of something new,
after the baptism, and before the call.
We are not alone. God is all around.
Let us worship the God of everything.

St. Stephen's Lutheran Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
2500 Soquel Avenue, Santa Cruz, California 95062
Phone—831-476-4700 — Fax—831-476-3918
www..ststephenslutheran.org
email—office@ststephenslutheran.org
Rev. James P. Lapp, Pastor

Ministers: The Entire Congregation
Church Council: Pres. — Beth Stiles V.P.— Steven Hendrickson
Secretary - Alyssa Burkhardt
Treasurer— Mark Linder
Shelly Barker, Sofia Bartee and Iva Tracey
Director of Music: Gary Roberts
Sunday School: Leslie Lapp
Pre-School Director: Kathy Berens
Custodian: John Hopping
Church Administrator: Leslie Lapp
Office Open: Mon.—Fri. 12:00—5:00 pm
Pastor Jim's Contact Hours — Mon.—Thurs. 9am—5pm at 831-325-9095

MISSION STATEMENT

St. Stephen's is a welcoming, healing community who worship God in Christ, nurture people growing in faith, serve others with acceptance and love, and invite people to share the joy of the Spirit.

VISION STATEMENT

To become an energetic, inclusive, multigenerational, multicultural, missional community that offers, hope, joy, worship, service, play, and life as disciples of Jesus Christ

From Pastor Jim



"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because he has anointed me
To bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
-The Gospel of Luke Chapter 4 verses 18-19

This was our Gospel reading for our Annual Meeting Sunday worship. These are the first words Jesus says about his life's purpose—his Mission Statement. We are now Christ's Body—the Church in the world today. So this is also our Mission Statement both in our lives and in our life as a church.

A significant decision was made at our Annual Meeting to sustain a full-time pastor until August of 2030 when I retire. Then we will likely move to a part-time pastor. It is significant because we will be drawing from our invested Reserve Fund principal in order to fulfill this decision. And it will be my privilege to help lead us into a new way of how we will be a church given the decline in participation and finances we have been experiencing for many years now.

This is both a little daunting and also the beginning of something new—a kind of adventure—like Jesus setting out on his public ministry. There are opportunities to be more creative and imaginative, kind of like the years where we developed low-income housing & our Child Development Center. One thing is clear: Jesus' Mission Statement will be guiding us. This is especially true as our country has taken a turn away from those words above. Our voice and witness as a church will be more necessary than ever before in my lifetime, and I look forward to walking this new journey ahead with you.



Hello Everyone -

After speaking to several musicians local, and members in our church, I've concluded that, the time is right to reach out to the community. It is time to share our church with more people who love live music, and are ready to receive it with us. We need to invite our neighbors and extended community inside our church, so more people can enjoy vocals & instrumentalists together. St. Stephen's can be the "other" platform for them,

where they feel welcome, and share their music. Maybe WE just might be able to help THEM out! I will be forming a small steering committee for this purpose. We must make our church for others to enjoy. The fun has already begun. Vision, Mission, Evangelism, and Outreach, and God will be our guide. We will present findings at a latter date.

Yours In Christ & Mission ~ Gary

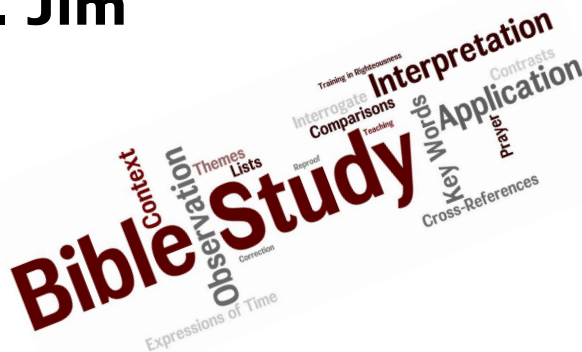
On ZOOM with Pr. Jim

Check email on Tues. for link

WEDNESDAYS

11a -12noon (no 4th Wed.)

& 7:30 – 8:30 pm



Reconciling In Christ Welcome Statement

(Approved at January 2020 Congregational Meeting)

“We welcome all who are seeking God’s love and grace.

We welcome all because God welcomes all, regardless of race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or relationship status.

We welcome all without regard to addictions, physical or mental health, imprisonment, socio-economic circumstances, or anything that too often divides us.

Our unity is in Christ.”

Annual Meeting Highlights

1. We began with a short liturgy offered by our Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, that is being shared with 9000 other ELCA congregations in our country at their Annual Meetings.
2. Pastor Jim announced that the Long Range Planning Task Force will host 4 small group House Meetings on Sundays March 23 & 30 right after church, and Thursdays March 26 & April 2 at 7pm. We will discuss possibilities for what our ministry may look like in 5 years time as we continue to experience decline in participation.
3. After some healthy discussion, we approved a budget for 2025 that included raises for our staff, including bringing Pastoral Salary compensation to the minimum Synod Guidelines for a 1st year, first time pastor with no prior experience or other graduate degrees. This will serve as our budget standard through August 2030, when Pastor Jim plans to retire and go part-time. This will involve a significant draw down on our \$1.3 million invested reserve fund principal, in order to ensure stable pastoral leadership for the next 5 years, as we prepare to move to a part-time pastor.
4. Barbara Rice and Don Smawley formed a new Kitchen Committee to oversee the possible renovation of our kitchen this year. They proposed to spend \$48,000 from our Reserve Fund for this project—half of which would be paid back to ourselves through Memorial Funds, fundraisers and a Capital Fund Drive. This was approved. Judi & Robert Alvarado joined the Committee.
5. Robert Bartee and Margaret Schraft were elected to Church Council to fill the vacancies left by Shelly Barker and Alyssa Burkhardt who both have served two 3yr terms. Many thanks for their leadership these past 6 years!
6. Beth Stiles and Steven Hendrickson will serve as Synod Assembly delegates.



Child Development Center

This month we celebrate Valentines Day by making Valentines for our neighbors as we continue showing the children what neighborly community outreach is and how they are appreciated in doing this act of kindness. **Families are welcome to join as the kids will be delivering them Sunday, Feb. 9 at the 10:00**

church service. We will celebrate as a class by exchanging Valentines on February 13. We are closed Feb 14-17 in observance of President's Day.

As I write this newsletter it is before our Congregation Meeting and School Board meeting end of January. So many things have changed over the years and still others remain the same. Some folks are wanting to move forward with long awaited projects and others continue to bring us together for current activities. As you can imagine my head is always full of thoughts about others. The church and our people, teachers, children and their families, my own faith, my family (As I await another grandchild), and moving slowly through the subtle changes age brings. I spent a good amount of time away from church and preschool to clear my mind of what has passed by, how it changed us, and to clear my mind for what is ahead. My thoughts became too many to carry. However, the time away brought peace and practicality back. God stories along the way showed hope for the future as the lord has always done for our preschool ministry. Just stop, listen and wait and another action (God story) in life comes along to restore and sustain faith through the journey.

We received a donation from the Murday Foundation along with a few other donations that balanced our budget for now as we took the gamble to remain small so we could adjust to working with much younger children. Once again, a wonderful person arrived at my office

door (Who had not heard of us before) looking for a Teaching Assistant position, which I had not advertised yet. We need 4 teachers here to be efficient. It is more of an expense, but coverage is needed. Right after that I received a few student inquiries and will enroll a few more to cover the teacher salaries and other expenses. We have renewed our working relationship with GoKids that funds families who cannot afford preschool in Santa Cruz County.

The preschool has increased payments to the church for facility use and different utilities and services. It will be important that we spend wisely as costs increase and we balance our teacher child ratios.

I may have an Eagle Scout project in the works. I look forward to meeting this scout and discussing the possibilities.

We are still gladly receiving Inflation Donation supplies and appreciate them. Kard for Kids is still available if you would like to donate a card from Safeway, Amazon, or Costco. It all adds up to be very helpful.

I pray that by the time you are reading this we have worked through some of our plans as a church moving forward in a way that we can be excited about the next few years. We are smaller yes, but we are a mighty and loving group of whom I am so fond of!

My goal has always been that SSCDC preschool brings joy to our church, families, and teachers.

Amen ~ Kathy Berens



January 24, 2025

Dear Church,

On Monday, our nation witnessed the peaceful transfer of power central to our democracy, followed by sweeping actions by the incoming Trump administration. Facing such changes, we receive guidance through Martin Luther's words in the Large Catechism.

In the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer, where we pray "Give us this day our daily bread," Luther writes about the importance of praying for our leaders, asking God to grant them wisdom and strength. He also speaks to the responsibility of leaders to provide stability, sufficiency and equity, saying, "[I]t would be very proper to place in the coat-of-arms of every pious prince a loaf of bread instead of a lion, or a wreath of rue, or to stamp it upon the coin, to remind both them and their subjects that by their office we have protection and peace, and that without them we could not eat and retain our daily bread."¹

This past week has been one of rapid and cascading change, from the inauguration of a new president and vice president to the flurry of activity in government orders and regulations. The policies and decisions reflected in this week's executive orders and regulatory changes have the potential to profoundly impact our lives, the well-being of our neighbors and the future of the planet. Therefore, I am concerned about the ways that many of the executive actions have created uncertainty and fear in our communities among neighbors struggling to survive, neighbors struggling to provide for their children, and neighbors struggling to be seen.

As a church, we are called to speak up when the government distorts or denies the image of God in each person by endangering access to protection, peace and daily bread. Where harm or inequity occur, we are called by God to respond with love and advocacy.

Luther also writes that in asking for daily bread, we are to pray for our leaders. We should pray that they act wisely and justly, protect all people and not cause harm.

Prayer is not passive; it's an act of hope. Prayer reminds us to ground ourselves in God's promise. We pray for strength, to love unconditionally and to serve one another. As we lift

up our petitions, we must also act—advocating for policies that affirm the dignity of every person and standing against actions that demean or exclude.

This church is committed to upholding the humanity of everyone, regardless of who we are or where we come from. We are a church called to love our neighbors and accompany all people in their joys and struggles. We must remain steadfast in this calling. As the ELCA, we will continue to proclaim the radical inclusivity of Christ's love. And we will deepen our local and global partnerships with those working to build a just and compassionate society, especially through our ecumenical and interreligious networks.

I commend to you the social message “Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy,” which states on page 7: “To evaluate how well agencies of government are doing their proper work of providing for the safety and well-being of those within their borders and/or jurisdiction, Lutherans ask one simple but all-encompassing question: Is the neighbor being served?”

I encourage our congregations to use the resources of the ELCA Witness in Society Team with advocacy networks on the state and federal level. And get involved with AMMPARO, the ELCA’s strategy toward just and humane policies affecting migrants.

As we move forward, let us hold fast to our faith and to one another. Let us be bold in our witness to the gospel, steadfast in our prayers for those in authority and tireless in our efforts to seek justice for all.

May God grant us courage, wisdom and peace in these days.

In Christ,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Valuing Spiritual Depth
by Steven Hendrickson

"Behind all words and gestures, behind all thoughts and feelings, there is an inner centre of prayer where we can meet one another in the presence of God. It is this inner centre which is the real source of all life and activity and of all love. If we could learn to live from this centre we should be living from the heart of life and our whole being would be moved by love. Here alone can all the conflicts of this life be resolved and we can experience a love which is beyond time and change." - Fr. Bede Griffiths

For one who is dedicated to following God in Christ, spiritual depth is essential. There is an active yearning and longing for union with Christ in the cave of our hearts. There are many portals in which experience and depth may occur. Prayer, meditation, worship, encountering scripture, nature, and interactions with others are a few ways in which God appears to us. The Spirit often surprises us in how we sense God's presence and communication. This is not a rational process, even though our thought faculties are an important element in a depth experience. Our intuition, physical senses (hearing, sight, touch, smell) are involved along with a "knowing" perception of our moment in the "eternal now". When spiritual depth is felt, we "know" on a very deep level.

Personally, some of the ways depth happens for me are experiences in worship, a meditation practice, opening to pray frequently, and reflecting and discussing biblical and other sacred texts with others. In these discussions, other participants are actively sharing their perspectives and experiences, with facilitators changing every time we meet. We learn and grow with each other in community. Last, but not least, God's creation in nature is vitally important. We meet God outside and in people we meet with every day.

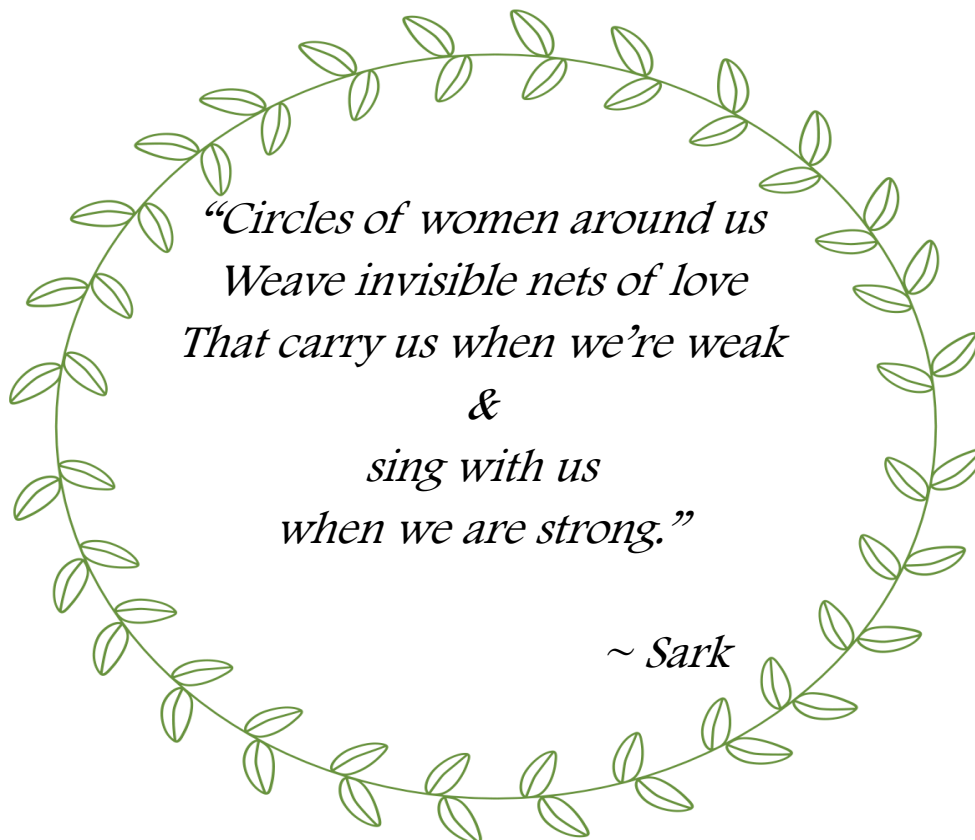
We give thanks and praise to God for Pastor Jim asking the congregation for "God Stories" every week in worship. Please reflect each day on how deep, meaningful experiences with God meet you personally. How is spiritual depth present in your life? Please share your responses with me. Thank you . . .

In Communion of Spirit!

Mary Martha / Ruth Rebecca Circle

Next meeting: February 13 at 10:30

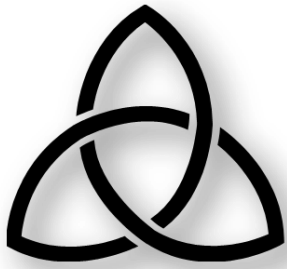
Tina gateschristina84@gmail.com
or Cheryl Curry cherylcjf@cs.com



Women's CAFÉ group

Thursdays, February 6 & 20 at 6:00 pm

Dinner, Devotions & Fellowship 476-4700



Trinity Tuesday

(Pub Theology / Discussion)

February 4 at 6:30pm

(First Tuesday of the month)

Place: Discretion Brewing 41st Ave.

1 HOUR

1 QUESTION

1 DRINK (3-in-1)

Join us for meaningful theological discussions in a relaxed atmosphere.

Bring your deepest questions about:

- God, faith, and the Biblical narrative
- The big questions that keep you up at night

Previous Discussions Have Explored:

- The historical decline of church membership and its implications
- Whether love truly is all we need - a theological perspective

What to Bring:

- An open mind
- A theological question that matters to you
- A willingness to engage in respectful dialogue

Where faith meets fellowship, and deep questions meet cold drinks.

Join the conversation. Challenge your assumptions.

Deepen your understanding.

All viewpoints welcome. Come as you are.

Questions: Call Kathy Allen at 831-430-6359 or email allen.kj@comcast.net

Scout Sunday

Come enjoy our homemade donuts!

February 2



Hearty congratulations to Scout Master Scott Caldwell
for 42 years of service! Some spectacular stats:

He has served 900% longer than the average tenure.

Led 1,680 troop meetings

504 Camp trips

294 days of summer camp

34,608 hours of volunteer service

Scout Sunday is celebrated on the Sunday before February 8 every year . Since 1910, school pupils have been imbibing good deeds, survival skills, and moral underpinnings via the Boy Scouts of America. The Boy Scouts of America are descended from the British Boy Scouts, which were created in 1908 in reaction to the success of Robert Baden-Powell's for Boys. Indonesia's national scouting organization, Gerakan Pramuka Indonesia, has over 17 million members, making it the world's largest scouting organization.

History of Scout Sunday

Lord Baden-Powell founded Scouts after the South African War. In 1907, Baden-Powell gathered 22 boys, some from public schools and others from working-class families, and placed them in a camp under his command. The outcome of that camp is now known to the entire globe.

During the third World Scout Jamboree in 1929, he was given a new automobile, which happened to be a Rolls-Royce. This automobile was quickly dubbed Jam-Roll. He also acquired an Eccles Caravan, dubbed Eccles Cake, so Scouts attending the occasion were treated to a Jam-Roll towing an Eccles Cake. This combination suited the Baden-Powells well in their subsequent journeys throughout Europe. Baden-Powell also had a significant influence on youth education. The global Scouting movement expanded under his diligent leadership. By 1922, there were over a million Scouts in 32 nations; by 1939, the number of scouts had risen to more than 3.3 million.



February Benevolence Offering

"Serving our Unhoused Neighbors"

Reflecting on all that we've done together in the last fiscal year leaves me with a deep sense of gratitude and awe at how much can be accomplished when we all help a little (and some of you a lot!). We entered this fiscal year with a mix of excitement and apprehension. Excitement because we were entering a new chapter of AFC's story – one that included a full-time executive director, dedicated office space, county funding and increased case management. We were apprehensive because we saw barriers to continuing that progress. The previous fiscal year saw our best housing numbers to date, but paths to housing were getting harder to come by for many of our participants. County funding was a tremendous blessing, but only guaranteed for a year. As we faced all of this, we leaned in with faith, trusting that the same dedication to mercy and justice that has guided AFC for over a decade would sustain us.

I'm proud to say it did. Despite a drastic drop in subsidized housing options, **our staff helped 40% of those leaving our programs move to permanent housing**, an incredibly difficult task in one of the country's least affordable areas. Those successes, combined with operating the most cost-effective programs in the county, led to not just continued county funding, but **additional funding to expand services to Watsonville**. All of this is only possible because of the collective lift of each of you. Dozens of sites host our programs free of charge. Hundreds of volunteers provide delicious home cooked meals. So many of you offer the dignity of a meaningful conversation with our participants, who are frequently stigmatized. **Your commitment to our unhoused neighbors gives me hope, and shows the power of interfaith action.**

I hope you share my sense of pride and gratitude, and use it to spur us on to another year of good work together.

Sam Altis, Executive Director

Annual Numbers

Faith Community Shelter

5000+ Bed Nights Provided - 44 Individuals Sheltered
44% Secured Permanent Housing - 5500+ Meals Served by Volunteers

Safe Spaces

15000+ Bed Nights Provided—74 Indiv. Safely Parked—28% Secured Permanent Housing

Birthdays & Anniversaries

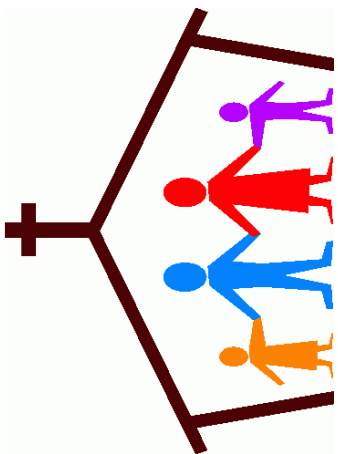
2-4 Kyle Travers	2-19 Connie Creel	
2-7 Marla Meek	2-19 Charles Eldridge	2—6 Pastor Jim
2-8 James Russell	2-21 Caitlin Hopping	& Leslie
2-10 Paul Powers	2-24 Miller Mouw	
2-18 Kathy Hopping	2-29 Beth Stiles	
2-18 Jay Johnston		

Prayer Concerns



SHORT TERM: Ruth Stiles, Susan Birkelo Family, James, Riley Volpi, Mary Saccullo, Chad Fields, Ana Cardenas, Rose, Levi, Lisa J., John B., Trace Hull, Linda, Scoutmaster Scott, Connie & Family of Paul Cunningham, Glosier family, Unemployed, George Webber, Isaac & Marissa, Chris Powers, Gloria, Beth & Family of Barbara Stiles, Marta's parents, Gary & Louse Matz, Friends in Tel Aviv, Nick, James, Mary D., Tom, Galahad, Debbie, Sam, Nate Barker, Robbin, Francisco, Michael, Keith, Noelle, Ensley, Sierra, Middle East Peace, Tom Dawson, Taiyo, Marissa, Isaac, Alvarado family, Dustin, Father Jack Davis, Sandi Csik, Elida, Jeannie, Anetta, Jane, Barbara Allen, Gary & Marjie Toops, Rachel B., Anne & Chloe Johnston, Nancy, Mateo & Lina, Don, Atlas, Sal, Katarina, Stephanie Jager.

LONG TERM: Those suffering with Mental Illness, James Sheehan, Biergiel—Colclough family, Carla Brown, Eric Utto-Galarneau, Joel Hurtgamm, Dawit and family (Ethiopia), April McCalmont, Marty Nehring, Miller Mouw, Kyle Lapp, Will, Aaron Johnson, Shelby Volpi, Ashley, Frank, Joe, Dom, Lisa & Beau, Linda Johnson, Bailey Ingalls, Jan Shadle, Vi Olly, Bobbie Erickson, Mike, Susan Anderson, Jan Wagner, Richard C., Brouse Family, Janet Baker, Sandy Godvine, Janelle Yung, Karin, Will, Chris, Pearl Runquist, Volpi & Robe Family, Cabel, Noah, Esdras, Immigrant families, The Homeless, People of Ukraine, People of Palestine/Israel, Our Nation's leaders, Mt. Cross, St. Stephen's Child Development Ctr, S.S. Senior Housing, Pastor Jim & Our Church Family, men & women of Armed Forces, and the Youth of today.



ST. STEPHEN'S WORSHIP SERVICE

Ready for your participation each Sunday at 10am.

In-person, Live Streamed on our website, or as a recording.

Go to ***www.stephenslutheran.org***

(Print the bulletin and Celebrate so you can read, sing and pray with Pastor Jim. Have some bread and wine/grape juice ready for Holy Communion)

**NEWSLETTER WAS SENT ON
January 30, 2025**

**POST OFFICE:
DATED MATERIAL
PLEASE DO NOT DELAY**

St Stephen's Lutheran Church
2500 Soquel Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95062

Non-Profit Org.
Postage Paid
Permit #7079
Santa Cruz, CA 95060-9998