

The BELL TOWER

VALLEY COMMUNITY CHURCH

Kingdom People in a Broken World

Missions; Mission-minded; Missional; all words you may hear in church. We use them here at VCC. The problem with these words is that they all too often become mere buzz words, clichés that we are familiar with but not impacted by. Let's take a minute to unpack this important concept and see how it might lead us to some life transformation.

The concept of mission or being missional is rooted in what we call The Great Commission. While it appears in slightly different forms in all the Gospels and in Acts, its most clear iteration for me is found in Matthew 28:19-20. *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (NIV). These powerful words, the last of Jesus to his

followers, give us our mandate. We are to be about seeing that everyone has the chance to hear of God's love for them in Christ and to see that love lived out in radical obedience to Jesus. In other words, by what we say and how we live, we are to demonstrate the reality and presence of God's Kingdom. This is a life that flows out of a deep connection to God and an others-centered focus in our living.

There are countless ways this is done and, as a church, we get to explore and partner together in living it out. Our obedience is a prime catalyzer in our spiritual growth as we rely on him to empower us and form us into Kingdom people. I want to point you to two important areas that impact our living out this calling.



First, one of the most important missional endeavors we are investing in here at VCC is iNVERSION. In order for you to understand it better and see how this exciting ministry is already making an impact, we have included a longer than usual article here in this *Bell Tower*. Please take time to read and reflect on what God is doing in and through this ministry.

Second, once a year we set aside a weekend to give special notice to the unique ways God is using VCC to impact the world both locally and globally and to hear about new ways to engage our culture with the gospel. On May 4 and 5 we will be celebrating our mission together. We begin on Saturday evening with our International Dinner when you get to indulge in great food from around the world. Following that feast we will hear stories of how God is working in and through us and hear an inspiring message from our keynote speaker, Dr. Mark Young, President of Denver Seminary.



On Sunday morning we will all meet together at 9:00AM for one worship service followed by breakout sessions where you can get more detailed and intimate updates from a variety of people who are serving the Kingdom in many different ways and places.

This is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate, to learn, and to be challenged to engage more deeply in living as Kingdom people in our broken world. I am looking forward to it and I encourage you to be sure to be there, too.

Danny Danny Hall
SENIOR PASTOR

Chaotic & Beautiful *by Katie Baker*

Does your two-year-old think 3:00AM is the perfect time for a party? Do you spend your days picking up stray Cheerios and wiping runny noses? What about meal time—can it be called “dining” if you’re eating chicken nuggets and pre-packaged macaroni and cheese?

This stage of life that we call a “young family” is stressful, chaotic and beautiful. Along with the task of raising children to be healthy adults, we are commissioned with raising them to know the Lord. What an incredible blessing and responsibility! In the midst of the craziness, we often don’t take time to connect with others who are in the same stage and facing similar challenges in their families and marriages. We are not on this journey alone. We need the encouragement and support of others along the way.

VCC is launching a ministry specifically for Young Families (families with newborn to grade school-age children) designed to provide opportunities for those of us in the thick of temper tantrums and math facts to connect, learn together, grow together, and encourage each other.



Last year VCC sponsored several events for this purpose—a Young Families BBQ, a brown bag lunch (with bouncy houses and snow cones), two adult-only dinners, and a parenting class specifically for young families. We are encouraged at the response to these events and see an even greater need to help young families get plugged-in at VCC.

We are excited about the future of this ministry and have several events on the near horizon:

- Family hike at Pleasanton Ridge: Saturday, April 27, meet at the Ridge parking lot at 3:00pm. After the hike we’ll head to Meadowlark Dairy for ice cream. Come for the hike or just join us for ice cream!
- Parent as Coach Workshop: Thursdays, 7:15- 8:45pm, from 4/25 to 5/30.
- Family BBQ: Sunday, June 9, BBQ and fellowship time on VCC campus after second service.
- Family camping trip this summer: dates TBD (watch the bulletin).
- There are also young family small group opportunities to provide more intimate environments for learning and relationship-building. Contact the church office at 925-846-6622 for details on dates and locations.

For more information about how you can become involved, email youngfamilies@vcclive.org, visit our Facebook page (search “VCC Young Families”), or call the church office.

A red wagon with a banner that says "HELPING YOUNG FAMILIES GET CONNECTED!". The wagon is positioned at the bottom of the page, with a wooden background behind it. The banner is red with white text. The wagon has two large black wheels with red centers and a black handle on the right side.

HELPING YOUNG FAMILIES GET CONNECTED!



DNA Markers *by Tony Catudal*

One of our goals as a church, as stated by Danny Hall at the beginning of the year is to deepen our relationship with Christ and be more intentional about how we live out the gospel of the Kingdom. He challenged us to press on in three ways: 1) increase commitment to reading and reflecting on scripture, 2) cultivate spiritually enriching relational environments and 3) find a place to serve.

In the February *Bell Tower* I mentioned that over the course of the last year we were led to a decision to revitalize our Groups Ministry. As we refine and cultivate our relational environments, I want to focus on how we can meet Danny's challenge to pursue them in a spiritually enriching way.

First, we have to understand what the key characteristics of relational environments are at Valley Community Church. To that end, we have identified three defining characteristics: Living in Community, Growing in Christ, and Being Mission-minded. These outline the purpose and intention of a relational environment. They align well with what Danny recently challenged as well as the VCC Spiritual Growth Pathway. They also build upon the work we have already been doing in Groups over the last 5 years.

It is our desire to see these markers (characteristics) become the DNA of each of our existing groups as well as any newly created groups. If a group has this DNA then any type of group with two or more people (small group, micro group, mentoring relationship, Bible study, etc.) would be considered a relational environment. This definition gives our groups more vision and clarity while simultaneously making it easier for people to become involved through a broader range of groups. Here are the markers in greater detail:

Living in Community (Connect)

As we connect in community we are brought into an ever-deepening relationship with Christ and His body.

Growing in Christ (Engage)

Again, relational environments are critical to our mission of making disciples. We believe that a Christ-follower needs to connect in a relational environment—in community—in order to grow in the image of Christ. As we engage with Christ, we are nurtured and cared for in a group, where we are encouraged to grow in our relationship with Christ as we integrate God's Word and principles into our daily life.

Being Mission-minded (Serve, Multiply)

By this, we are not referring simply to serving as a group on a project or mission. Rather, the group encourages growth in each individual that leads to a life that is marked by service. It also includes being open to others by adding new people or branching new groups from time to time, serving, and looking outwardly, in a sense—loving God and loving others—markers of life transformation.

We are still finalizing the overall language of the Groups Ministry and more information will be forthcoming. As we press on together in 2013, the challenge has been set, the bar has been raised. It is our desire that each of you would connect in a relational environment. If you are having trouble getting started, please let us know how we can help you.

For more information or to connect with a group, please contact Tony Catudal at tcatudal@vcclive.org, or at 925-474-9410.

An Inside Look at **iNVERSION** by Heath Hardesty

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We don't live in the same world that we did ten years ago, let alone twenty or thirty years ago. Though, you don't need me to tell you that (five minutes of the nightly news or the zombie-like hordes of people you see ambling around everywhere with their gaze transfixed to a smart-phone hi-def display can tell you that). The rate at which wide-scale cultural change is happening is unprecedented. It is quite dizzying.

This rapid cultural change has both gold and gravel in it. Some of this change is exciting, such as entirely new people groups coming to know Jesus, and the development of new technologies that can deliver everything from low-cost water wells to digital versions of the Bible to the bleakest of places. But some of the change is flat-out wicked; technologies armed with surgical precision to destroy rather than heal, designer drugs that do costly damage, and the use of digital tools to download rubbish and viruses of perversion into our memory banks, to entertain us to death, and to distract us from who we were meant to be.

The cultural landscape has changed and is changing. And this means the way in which the church approaches communicating the Gospel to the surrounding culture context will change as well. But let me be quick to say that our content doesn't change. Jesus doesn't change. The cross doesn't shrink into some self-help badge of man-centered moralism.

The Gospel stays rock-solid and firmly rooted as ever. The Gospel, the Good News of the person and work of Jesus Christ is timeless and timely—never to be improved upon or added to. Yet, how the body of Christ finds ways to reach the world is always in flux. As long as culture is dynamic so too are the ways in which we are called to engage the vertigo-sick world we live in.

What this means is that in a post-Christian culture, a culture that is increasingly unchurched and dechurched (those who grew up in some form of church life but have since distanced themselves from what they now believe to be hypocritical and inauthentic), it is no longer a world that thinks to walk through the doors of the church for

an answer to their compounding problems. And if and when they do walk through the doors of a church, they are often greeted by a nicely manicured world from another planet that doesn't seem to have any access point for a broken person like them—they feel they are too dirty, not moral enough, or simply don't know the rhythms and cadences of our “rituals”—and so they opt out rather than feel welcomed in.

Some Clarity, please.

It is in recognition of the fact that the church is called to seek the good of the city in the here and now (ref. Jeremiah 29:5-7) by incarnating the Gospel into culturally appropriate forms, that iNVERSION exists. Now, let me admit, there is a great deal of confusion about iNVERSION—what it is, why it is, who it is—and my aim in this article is simply to take a step towards clarity regarding those questions. Further steps down this path towards clarity will follow in the next weeks.

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First, let me dispel a few common misperceptions. iNVERSION is not a college ministry (though we are seeing more college students than ever getting disciplined and stepping up to lead). It is not a singles ministry (though we have quite a few people who would make fantastic wives or husbands). It is not an evening service merely to accommodate those who just like to sleep in (even though some of our people are nearly nocturnal because of their difficult nightshifts). It is not church-lite as to not offend the tolerance-obsessed

sensibilities of popular opinion. It is not about being cool. It is about contextualizing the Gospel and preaching that Jesus is Lord. Contextualizing does not mean compromising. We make no bones about it: Jesus is Lord. This is Gospel light, not Gospel-lite.

iNVERSION is a missional church community under the eldership of Valley Community Church that exists to make Gospel-centered disciples for the glory of God.

That is the acorn. Let me open that up and introduce you to its unfurling leaves and fruit. So, what does this mean, “a missional church community under the eldership of Valley Community Church that exists to make Gospel-centered disciples for the glory of God”?

“**Missional**” means that we are deliberate about multiplying disciples and seeking out ways to proactively meet the unchurched and dechurched where they are. It means we seek to mentor and mobilize the next generation of leaders and prepare them to be missionaries, church planters, and the next wave of leadership here in the local body. The great commission of Matthew 28:19-20 is the strands of our DNA. “**Church community**” means that we are part of the global body of Christ as believers who profess Jesus is Lord, and that we are fully a part of VCC. The people who are part of iNVERSION are participating in weekly corporate worship, the preaching of the word, communion, giving of finances, baptism, fellowship, and high levels of accountability. It also means that we seek to teach the often-misunderstood truth that church is not merely a time and place on a certain day of the week, but it is the redeemed people of God, those called out of darkness and into his light (who just so happen to meet at certain times and places to express their love for their God as a gathered family). Church is not a place, but a people.

“**Under the eldership of VCC**” addresses the relationship of iNVERSION and Valley Community Church. This means that even though iNVERSION has a distinct culture aimed at engaging the unchurched and dechurched, we are truly a part of Valley Community Church and are in alignment with the vision and guidance of the elders. There is a unity and diversity here that is vibrant and healthy for all involved. “**Making Gospel-centered disciples for the Glory of God**” is how we express our highly intentional mission to see those outside of the church come to love Jesus, love like Jesus, all for the expressed end of God receiving his due worship. This mission is about him, not us. It also means that it is the power of the Gospel that is our center of gravity, not some new trend or faddish program.

Now, the next question quickly on the heels of these explanations of what is the who: Who is iNVERSION for? Who is too young, too old? iNVERSION is open to all, though we have a particular focus on reaching those in their 20’s and 30’s. In fact, intergenerationality is key to our mission so that mentorship can happen across generational lines. We desire and need people of all ages to

make this mission go forward—and we have been blessed to see more and more people over the age of forty join us. We even have a children’s ministry called BEGiNNiNG’s to help young families with children get plugged in and cared for. The 6-month-old and the sixty-year-old each have their important place in the life of iNVERSION.

What this Looks Like (Structure & Vision)

So, just what does this iNVERSION community look like? Structurally? Each week? The framework or structure of iNVERSION is simple and lean. There are three key pieces. 1) We gather on Sunday nights to proclaim the Gospel in a way that is accessible to the culture at large but is still deeply challenging and edifying to the Christian. This means presenting Jesus from both Old and New Testaments and deconstructing false views of religion and irreligion that work against the Gospel. 2) During the week we scatter throughout the Tri-Valley in com-Groups to live life together, to learn about the love of Jesus through studying the Scripture in smaller relational environments, and to serve our neighbors and the city we live in. 3) We say we are local going global, which means we use all the digital tools we can to reach a digitally native demographic here in the Tri-Valley, as well as to contribute homegrown content (sermons, articles, music, etc.) to build up the global church. Our website and app (iOS & Android) have received thousands of views and downloads from countries all over the globe.

Even though iNVERSION has a distinct culture aimed at engaging the unchurched and dechurched, we are truly a part of Valley Community Church.

What about the future vision of iNVERSION to connect with those who don’t walk through the doors of the church campus? What is this you may have heard about iNVERSION going offsite? Ever since the conception of this ministry (some nine plus years ago), the idea of a “missional outpost” has been part of its DNA. The vision for a missional outpost is to create and cultivate two separate yet complimentary entrance points into the life of the church with strategically different environments to engage the unchurched and dechurched of the Tri-Valley with the Gospel. What does this mean? It means a location off the property of 4455 Del Valle Parkway that would take the form of a boutique coffee and tea shop and a venue where ministry could happen seven days a week.

This is a place where people of all ages, ethnicities, and religions could come to work on their laptops over fine coffee and tea, come to laugh with friends, come to meet people in a welcoming environment outside of work and home. It would be a place that stayed open well past 8:00PM, giving people of this valley a place to meet up with friends that isn't a nightclub or bar or overcrowded Starbucks (with tables two inches apart!). The venue portion would be a place where we could collaborate with the city on art shows, concerts, forums, and then preach the Gospel through our regular Sunday service, thereby interweaving the life of the Gospel into the secular lives of those we are seeking to minister to. In other words, the need for this offsite location doesn't come merely from an overcrowded room on Sunday nights (though that is certainly something we are facing), it comes from a missional impulse to get involved in the life of the city we are here to serve.

Some Celebration

Now that I have articulated the why, what, how, and who of iNVERSION, I want to celebrate with you. God has been very gracious in growing iNVERSION. We believe that growth manifests in breadth and depth. In other words, growth happens when disciples are made and people come to love like Jesus loves. Call this numbers and fruit: numbers being more and more people being discipled, and fruit being the fruit of the Spirit coming to characterize our lives with the Spirit of Jesus (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self control).

In the past year alone we have seen amazing growth in numbers and fruit. The iNVERSION community has grown 120% in the last year. That is staggering. We now have a community size of 150+ people with an average weekly attendance hovering around 100 people. This growth is not transplant growth from VCC Sunday morning services; it is outside growth from those

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who otherwise would not be here. It is the unchurched, the dechurched, and, yes, some transfer of people from other churches in the Tri-Valley.

We have comGroups in Pleasanton, Livermore, and Dublin—with more forming as this article is getting ready for print. We have a guy's group that is bursting at the seams with young leaders craving in-depth study of God's word. (I literally have to kick these guys out of the host-home on Monday nights because they have grown to value each other so much). Guys. Yes. Guys! And, despite what people say about younger people not being "givers", the monthly offering at iNVERSION has well exceeded expectations and is averaging well over \$5,000 per month. Not astronomical numbers, but not bad for a community who is struggling to raise young children, is under the anvil of school loans, or is paying rent on their very first apartment in a very expensive zipcode.

We don't live in the same world we did ten years ago. More and more we find ourselves living in a post-Christian culture brazenly rebelling against all forms of moral order. But this means an unimaginable opportunity is before us: to be missionaries in our own backyard. **Think of iNVERSION that way: a missionary movement in our**

own backyard—people who are seeking to bring the Gospel to bear on this moment in history to this particular culture we live in. That is, after all, what it means to be a missional church community under the eldership of Valley Community Church that exists to make Gospel-centered disciples for the glory of God.

Thank you for all your prayers, love, and support. If you have questions, I would love to talk with you about them. Though, the best way to see what this is all about is to simply come join us one Sunday night and witness it yourself. Hope to see you then.

www.inversiononline.org
iNVERSION
Making Gospel-centered disciples for the glory of God.



A Confession from One Once Dechurched *by Luke Hansen, iNVERSION intern*

It's hard not to be jaded after decades of seeing the strongest ties, the most important moments, the safest places dissipate, break down and lose their places in our memories. My experiences with entropy and loss are not unlike those of many others: once nestled in the warmth and security of a happy home, of relationships heading toward marriage, of church bodies that offered acceptance and accountability...only to see them corrode and crumble one by one. I believe that those wandering the maze-like aftermaths of betrayals, excommunications, divorce, failure and loss, begin to forget what it feels like to belong.

We have lost our "home bases." And since we no longer hope to feel safe in a relationship or community, we approach these situations with a sort of abusive mistrust: where churches and potential friends and spouses must pass our selfish auditions. "Belonging" with a person or to a group hinges on the degree to which those people are pleasing us, can serve and benefit us. We forget that "belonging" means playing a role—serving and sacrificing ourselves for the community which we are part of. This is why so many of us feel alienated in church: no matter how much we are entertained or moved by the spectacle of a service, we will remain outsiders as long as we are merely part of the audience and not part of the action.

My interest in iNVERSION was a general hope that I could play a role in a community. After many years of being a judgmental church spectator (if I showed up at all), critiquing sappy worship music or shaking my head at

the seemingly superficial attitude of the church "greeter" handing me a bulletin, I realized that even if there was no way I would ever love the church service, there might be a way to love the church.

The awesome thing about iN is that when I moved out here (from Colorado) I found I was surrounded by people who were a lot farther along than I was in this vision of serving and belonging. iNVERSION truly seeks to be an "every member mission". We talk about it all the time—and it is becoming more and more of a reality.

As I've attempted to serve this community, I've been met by dozens of folks trying to serve me. Although our Sunday night service has many of the forms of an ordinary church service that I have often criticized, the movement and motivation here is in the mission and relational ministry.

Though I'm on staff as an intern with iNVERSION, I feel that almost everyone I talk to on Sunday nights is on staff with me! Almost everyone here is eager to get to know each other, to meet outside the church building and to bring in Christian and non-Christian friends. I've never seen a group so eager to invite others. I think the motivation here is not just bringing people in to hear an awesome message—we are wanting to give them something sorely lacking in our society: a place to belong; a place where people can love enthusiastically and sacrificially and be loved selflessly, out of the true, earth-shattering belief that God first loved us.

May Calendar

- Sharing Closet:** Wednesday & Thursday, May 1 & 2
- HS car wash fundraiser:** Saturday, May 4, 8:00AM
- International dinner:** Saturday, May 4, 5:00PM
- Missions Sunday:** Sunday, May 5, 9:00AM (ONE SERVICE)
- HS graduation banquet:** Friday, May 10, 6:00PM
- Growing Up Female, level 1:** Friday, May 10, 5:00PM
- Growing Up Female, level 2:** Saturday, May 11, 10:00AM
- Respite Care event:** Saturday, May 11, 12:00PM
- Mother's Day/baby dedications:** Sunday, May 12
- Shadow Cliffs baptism & picnic:** Sunday, May 19, 12:00PM





THE GLOBAL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

Be sure to save the date for this year's Global Leadership Summit, Thursday-Friday, August 8-9. Once again, it will be our privilege to host the Summit at VCC. Registration will begin in late May/early June. Be thinking about who you can invite that would benefit. Who wouldn't?

Thursday-Friday, August 8-9 | willowcreek.com/summit

LEAD WHERE YOU ARE



BILL HYBELS
Founder and Senior Pastor, Willow Creek Community Church



GEN. COLIN POWELL
Former U.S. Secretary of State



DR. BRENÉ BROWN
Research Professor, University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work



MARK BURNETT
Four-time Emmy Award Winner; Executive Television Producer



VIJAY GOVINDARAJAN
Top 50 Management Thinker



PATRICK LENCIONI
Founder and President, The Table Group; Best-selling Author



LIZ WISEMAN
Executive Strategy and Leadership Consultant



OSCAR MURIU
Senior Pastor, Nairobi Chapel, Kenya



DR. HENRY CLOUD
Clinical Psychologist; Leadership Consultant; Best-selling Author



CHRIS BROWN
Co-Senior Pastor and Teaching Pastor, North Coast Church



JOSEPH GRENNY
Co-Founder, VitalSmarts; Best-selling Author



BOB GOFF
Founder and CEO, Restore International; Attorney



ANDY STANLEY
Founder and Senior Pastor, North Point Ministries