



# The BELL TOWER

VALLEY COMMUNITY CHURCH

*Your  
Kingdom  
Come,  
Your Will  
Be Done*

As we continue to consider together the nature and scope of the gospel, my thoughts keep coming back to those words in the Lord's Prayer, "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." How many times have I repeated those words without any real reflection on their importance, on the implications they have for my life and for the life of our church. Do I really want God's rule in every area of my life? Do we as a church make our highest priority the worship and service of God? Do I order my thoughts and actions according to God's agenda rather than my own?

None of us can say we do this perfectly or perhaps even consistently. Thankfully God is a graceful and merciful God who knows us in all of our weaknesses and brokenness. That is the beauty of what God has done for us in Christ. We can become fully alive to all that God intended for us because of his covenant love for us.

But I fear that we have taken the gift of that grace and turned it into what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls "cheap grace." This cheap grace presumes on God's goodness with little sense that this grace reflects a deep call to holiness, not just to excusing our sins as if they do not matter. They matter so much it took the death of the Son of God to break the power of and pay the penalty for these sins. Our transformation into Christlikeness is not an option that we choose to add on to forgiveness, but it is rather the essence of what God intends for us as his followers. It calls us to a radical presence in this world where we enjoy the experience of God personally while living in such a way as to point others to him and to the ways of his Kingdom. We get to be a part of and have a role in God's work of transforming this broken world. This is Good News.

Fortunately, God's Kingdom is a community not merely a collection of individuals. We have each other to walk with as we seek to understand better what all this means for us day by day. In the next few weeks, as we continue to consider how the gospel impacts the way we live in various ways, we will work together to wrestle with some difficult issues. What does it really mean to be in the world but not of it? What does it mean to truly love my neighbor? How do we tell the Good News? What does it mean to stand for holiness and justice?

That we are doing this during the season of our national elections affords us an even more interesting opportunity to let the gospel challenge our notions of normal. I hope you will join the conversation, opening your heart, mind, and will to however God might choose to call you deeper into experiencing life in his Kingdom.

*Danny* Danny Hall  
SENIOR PASTOR

# Dedicating Your Child to God



**Baby Dedications**  
Sunday, November 25,  
both services

**Preparation Class**  
Sunday, November 18,  
10:45AM in Room B212

*Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. And he took them in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. MARK 10:14, 16*

If you are a new parent or new to Christianity, you may be wondering why you should dedicate your child and how it differs from baptism. The primary difference between a baby dedication and baptism is that a dedication is focused on the parents while the baptism is focused on the child.

A baby dedication is an opportunity for the parents to make a commitment about how their child will be raised. Parents promise before God and the church family that to the best of their ability they will raise this child in the

love and admonition of the Lord so that later, the child can choose Christ as their Savior. Later, as a public display of their choosing Christ, the child can then be baptized—usually at middle school or high school age.

In as much as these children's notion of the love of Christ will be formed by their growing up in our church, the congregation also stands and dedicates themselves to these children and this family and to being an example of Christlikeness.

Our next baby dedication will be on Sunday, November 25, during both services. First time parents need to attend a class which will be the Sunday before, November 18, during second service. Please watch the bulletin to sign up and for class information.



*A song, a song, dancing in the night.  
It will bring them goodness and light.*

## Do You Hear What I Hear? *by Sharon McCracken*

Bring your family and friends to join the VCC Christmas caroling. We will have guitars and pianos to help us make a joyful noise to the Lord on Friday, December 14.

The seniors of Pleasanton will be our audience. Many of these honored citizens are without loved ones during the Christmas season and look forward to any visitors. We will go out in groups to Parkview, Eden Villa, Pleasanton Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, and Ridgeview Commons to sing. Books with carols will be provided to all participants.

You can let us know if you will join us by signing up on the tear-off Communications Slip during service beginning Sunday, November 18. Check the box next to "caroling" on the back of the slip and be sure and include your contact information.

Cookies! We also pass out packets of cookies to the residents. Check the box next to "cookies" on the back of the Communications Slip as well if you would like to supply a dozen or more. We will contact you with more details once we hear from you.

We will meet at 5:45PM in the Hall and go to the various homes from there. All groups will return to VCC for refreshments, singing, and sharing.



## Heart Connection *by Sandy Carter*

On Saturday, September 29, the Heart Connection Team hosted their third Sharing Celebration. Mentors, mentees and prayer warriors gathered to celebrate what God had done through their new relationships. Joanie Fisher shared how the ministry of praying for several mentor/mentee pairs blessed and encouraged her. Other prayer warriors, Nancy Riccomini, Diane Graydon and Kathy Engel also shared how they prayed for their mentors and mentees to faithfully meet together and to follow God's leading in their discussions.



Vickie Sien enthusiastically shared how the Lord had led the Heart Connection Team to pair her with Laura Rodrigues. After Vickie moved into her new home, she was drawn to Laura, her neighbor. She recognized Laura's godly maturity and her success in raising two wonderful sons, and wished she could spend more time with Laura.

Honoring their commitment through Heart Connection, Laura and Vickie met regularly. Laura wisely answered Vickie's questions regarding godly parenting, and the two women prayed with and for one another. Vickie shared her appreciation to the Lord for her new relationship with Laura.

Many women expressed appreciation for how God had made 'just the right' match for them. When Cindy Vance's mentor needed surgery and was unable to meet, Darcey DeRose became Cindy's mentor. They shared how they discovered connections between them that only the Lord would have known.

Linnea Ebersole read a letter from Mary Cameron praising God for her relationship with Lisa Lee Akacos, sharing how she recognized God's hand in their friendship. Linnea's mentee, Deanne Gilbreth, shared how Linnea's encouragement and prayer for her helped her through a difficult time at work.

After Pam Bennett agreed to meet with Laura Farrar, she was surprised to learn Laura lives in Martinez, an hour's drive from Pleasanton. Pam shared how the day before she met Laura, Pam committed to taking her grandson to a class in Concord. This class gave Pam a full hour each week to meet Laura at a Starbucks near Laura's Martinez home.

The Heart Connection Team gave glory to God for all He had done to provide mentoring relationships among VCC ladies. Heart Connection will hold its next Orientation in early 2013. Women who would like to be paired with a mentor or mentee are encouraged to attend.

Heart Connection also desires to offer training, encouragement and accountability for women who have already entered mentoring relationships. The Team is asking the Lord to weave mentoring into the culture of VCC and to develop an atmosphere where women are able freely to approach other ladies for the purpose of mentoring or being mentored.

For more information about Heart Connection, please pick up a brochure at the Welcome Center or visit the [Women's Ministry pages at vcclive.org](http://www.vcclive.org).

# Year-end Status Report on VCC Finances *by Sid Niemeyer*

Our church just completed its fiscal year on September 30. The fact that I recognize that the federal government has the same fiscal year reflects the fact that my first career was at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, but it also works well for our church. It fits better with our annual rhythm in which fall represents the re-launch of many of our ministries. So as we begin a new fiscal year, the Elders and I thought it would be good to write this brief summary of our current financial status.

We continually thank God for the faithful giving of our congregation. In this past year our total contributions were \$2,125,000, which was only \$14,000 below budget. On the side of expenses, we were \$7,000 below budget. So our general fund income and expenses were well aligned with one another.

However, we do think it's important to alert you to a sudden change of pattern in contributions. In the months of August and September we experienced significantly less giving compared to our budget forecast. Prior to those last two months, we had seven straight months in which giving was above (or at) our budget. But in August we had a deficit of \$19,000, followed by September which was low by \$22,000.

We have not been able to identify any reasons for the sudden change in pattern of contributions. From time to time, we see these kinds of fluctuations, and then the prior pattern reemerges. But we also need to be alert, as it might reflect a longer-term change. We thought this was a significant enough of a change that we ought to

share it with the congregation. Please make it a matter of prayer as we enter this new fiscal year with a slightly higher budget.

Meanwhile, giving to our Setting Us Free capital campaign continues to be strong. Last November a total of \$2.3M was pledged for a 3-year period. By the end of September a total of \$1.1M had been received, with \$95,000 in September alone. To date \$1M of our debt has been paid off, and because of our commitment to tithe on these contributions, we have \$112,000 of additional funding for special missions projects. The continuing response of so many is a great source of encouragement and a testament to God at work among us.

Finally, at a recent meeting the Deacons talked about how the balance in our benevolent fund has steadily gone down over the past several years. The level of contributions to this fund has remained about the same over years, but the number of requests and the level of help that we have provided has grown during this time of extended economic difficulty. As a result, while the balance in our benevolent fund was once above \$60,000, it now stands at \$16,000. We will continue to be wise and generous in the way in which we help those who find themselves in a tough spot, and we hope that an eventual lack of funds in benevolence does not constrain us in the future.

Our staff and leaders strive to wisely use the funds that you have entrusted to us. Pray for God's continued guidance in all of our financial matters. May we give Him praise for all that He accomplishes in and through us.

## Around Back

Friday & Saturday,  
December 7 & 8  
6:30-8:00pm  
[weather permitting]

### Come and See *Around Back Living Nativity!*

Children's Ministry is trying something new this year. As an outreach, we will be having a LIVE Nativity complete with animals.

Yes, you and your family and friends can WALK through the VCC parking lot and see the children in our ministry portraying the shepherds watching over their flocks, the heavenly hosts, baby Jesus with Mary and Joseph, and the Magi who come from afar.

We are excited to share this experience with you and hope you can join us. Invite your friends and neighbors to come too!



## Christmas Concert & Dessert *by Traci Randall*

Christmas is my favorite time of the year. I love all of the decorations, the lights, the gifts, the smell of goodies and the music—especially the music. No other season offers such beautiful music as Christmas. It's also the perfect time of year to engage with my unbelieving neighbors and family members.

I like having my neighbors and family in my home, or giving them a gift, and inviting them to church. They may never go to church or they may think they don't need church but on Christmas, they're willing to come. That's why for the last few years Women's Ministry has offered a special opportunity for outreach as we celebrate the Christmas season together.

Our annual Christmas concert will be Sunday, December 2, at 7:00PM in the Sanctuary. A beautiful dessert will follow the concert. Our guest this year will be Billye Sluyter Johnstone of Crimson Bridge. She will be sharing through her music and personal story how her trials and triumphs have brought her to understand that the best present any of us can ever receive is the presence of Christ in our lives. She will share honestly, with humor and vulnerability, while sharing songs of the season mixed with other music that illustrate her message. She is a worship leader in her own church in Southern California and a representative for World Vision. She understands the impact a story can have on the lives of those we connect with.

Please join us and bring someone with you; someone who loves Christmas and presents and music but may never otherwise darken the door of a church. We will hear about the greatest present ever given and how He can change a life! The cost is \$10 per person and tickets will go on sale November 11, [online](#) and at the Gathering Place after services. Childcare will be provided by reservation only.

## November/December Calendar

### Men's Retreat

November 2-3

### Sharing Closet

Wednesday & Thursday, November 7 & 8

### Celebration of Hope Thai Dinner

Friday, November 9

### Celebration of Baptism

Sunday, November 11 (class on 11/4)

### Family Thanksgiving Service

Wednesday, November 21

### Baby Dedications

Sunday, November 25

### Decorating the church

Saturday, December 1

### Women's Christmas Concert

Sunday, December 2

### First Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 2

### 'Around Back' Living Nativity

Friday & Saturday, December 7 & 8

### Caroling Around Town

Friday, December 14

### Christmas Eve Services

Monday, December 24, 3:00, 4:30 & 6:00PM

## Lift the Load and Hear the Angels Sing!

O ye, beneath life's crushing load,  
Whose forms are bending low,  
Who toil along the climbing way  
With painful steps and slow,  
Look now! for glad and golden hours  
Come swiftly on the wing;  
O rest beside the weary road  
And hear the angels sing!

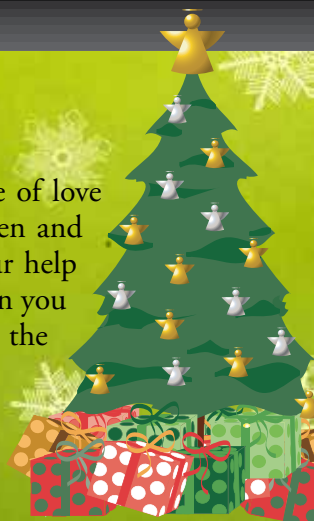


We need modern day “angels” who will bring a message of love and hope to the lonely, hurting, and needy; to those men and women who are toiling beneath life’s crushing load. Your help can lift spirits and provide rest beside the weary road when you give someone an Angel Tree gift this Christmas and give the angels a reason to sing.

This year we will have two trees. Our Angel Trees will go up in the lobby of the church and in the Hall on the first Sunday of Advent, December 2. Show God how thankful you are for all he has given you by sharing with others through this ministry. Take as many gift tags as you want and donate a gift in his name. All gifts will be due in the church office by Sunday, December 16.

We will need volunteers to help wrap presents on the morning of Sunday, December 16. Watch *Keeping Connected* and the bulletin for more information and to sign up.

Forms will be available in the office if you would like to receive help from Angel Tree or if you know of someone who could use help.



## Give SUM Love for Christmas!

The challenge is on Valley Community Church. Last year your generosity filled 403 stockings for the School of Urban Missions (SUM) outreach event. Can you increase that and fill 450 stockings this year? Gifts are also needed.

SUM had over 2,000 people attend last year. Every child that attends the event receives a filled stocking and a wrapped Christmas gift. Parents are touched by the generosity of those who give. Often, these are the only gifts a child will get for Christmas. It is an opportunity to show people that God loves them and it often opens the door to dialog about Jesus and giving their lives to Christ. When one family member follows Christ, the whole family will typically follow.

SUM also needs special prizes for their raffle. They are looking for brand new items such as bikes, backpacks filled with school supplies, gift cards, super sneakers, CD players, large remote control trucks or cars, footballs, basketballs, soccer balls, make-up kits, and live Christmas trees.

### Stocking suggestions

**School supplies:** (pens, pencils, crayons, sharpeners, markers, tablets, solar calculators, coloring books, etc.)

**Toys\*:** small cars, balls, harmonicas, yo-yos, jump ropes, small stuffed animals, Slinky, etc.

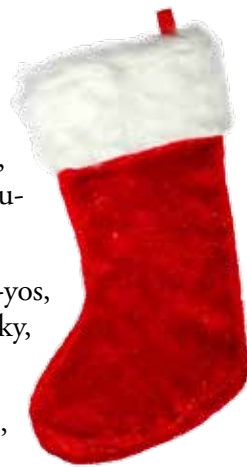
**Hygiene items:** toothbrush, toothpaste, bar soap, comb washcloth, etc.

**Other:** individually wrapped candy, lollipops, gum, socks, hair clips, flashlights (with batteries).

### Gifts suggestions for boys and girls

Board games, action figures\* stuffed animals, balls (basketball, football, soccer, etc), baseball gloves, dolls, books, cd's, make-up, scarves, gloves, gift cards, etc.

\*Items to avoid: toy guns and knives; fighting themed toys like Power Rangers, Pro-Wrestling, Batman, etc. and magic/sorcery items like Harry Potter, Yu-Gi-Oh, Pokemon, Dungeons & Dragons etc.





*Kit & Kirsten (Ash) Becker*



*Jared & Lisa (Richardson) Johnson*

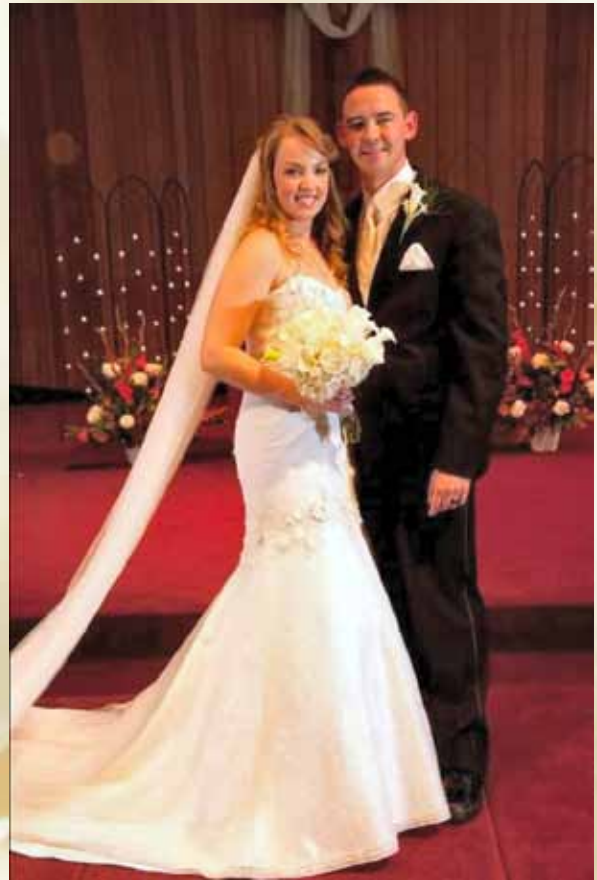
*Congratulations!*



*Giuseppe & Jodi Gatto*



*Patrick & Lorien (Ash) Maxwell*



*David & Vicky (Bell) Monical*



*Christopher & Naphtali Roberts*