

AUGUST 2011

# The BELL TOWER

VALLEY COMMUNITY CHURCH

Three years or so ago I went out for a run. It was a perfect evening for running; clear skies, cool temperature, just before sunset. As I ran along I was really enjoying the evening...until I heard something behind me and looked over my shoulder to see a younger man gaining on me rapidly, his pace more than a little bit quicker than mine. Oh, and he was pushing a baby in one of those jog along strollers as well. Suddenly I felt old, slow, and out of shape.

The truth is there was time when I could've smoked that guy. I ran a marathon once. OK, so that was over 25 years ago, but still I did it. I could do it again if I worked at it; maybe. But I am at a different place now and I have to adjust to where I am, to my current age and level of fitness. So I have a choice. I can go lay on the couch and dream of my past glories or I can lace up the shoes, hit the trail and do what I can where I am now.

It strikes me that this is an apt metaphor for how I engage in growing spiritually. The temptation is to look at some idea of spiritual maturity that is daunting and beyond my grasp. That can be discouraging. I know I ought to spend a lot of time in prayer and in the Bible, but it just isn't happening right now. I know I need to serve in ways that stretch and challenge my faith but it seems illusive. And so I have a choice. I can be intimidated and discouraged by what I can't do or I can take the next steps to growth. Maybe I can't pray for an hour every morning, but I probably could get in a good 5 minutes as a start. You see, in the end, the most important thing is that I enter into the journey. It is less important how strong I am than it is that I am getting stronger.

For almost a year we have been talking a lot around here about our Spiritual Growth Pathway. Our prayer is that more and more of the people in our church will begin wherever they are and put themselves on this path. Take some steps. Come to worship services on Sunday expecting God to do something. Bring an open heart and seek to connect with Him. Join a small group, taking advantage of the opportunity to engage in a deeper walk with Christ as you walk along this path with others. Serve in some area of ministry that suits where you are. Invest in others by reaching out to the people in your neighborhood or by being a friend and a mentor to someone.

I encourage you to commit to some time each day to pray and read the Scriptures as a starting point and then follow some of the steps listed above. We all need to invest in this and in each other. By doing this, we can keep growing stronger.

I think that after I finish this I'll swing by the gym on the way home.

*Danny*

Danny Hall  
SENIOR PASTOR

*Staying  
on the  
Path*



## Welcome Don & Brenda



Worship & Music Director, Don Elser and his lovely wife Brenda joined our church family in June. Since that time, Don has been hard at work getting to know us and helping us to connect with God.

Don says “I came from an unchurched family & was thirsty to know more about

God and always thought it was a huge privilege to learn about God and worship. I found the worship times of churches that I visited to be dry and the people to seem unattached. It always seemed odd to me that people weren't more excited about God when the words of the songs seemed so passionate and full of truth and joy/comfort. I longed to be part of helping people connect with this and deepen their experience with God. Through many circumstances, God led me to become a worship arts pastor...with an interest in creatively helping people connect with God. I have been doing this since 1983 when I began working as an intern at Montavilla Baptist church.”

When we asked Don to share a highlight of his life, his answer was “Wow, that's impossible to narrow down!” Finding a relationship with God; marrying Brenda whom he calls his gift of peace, beauty and wisdom, raising three wonderful and totally different daughters, seeing so many unchurched people come to Christ in a ministry he and Brenda were a part of, designing theatre sets, landscaping their home in Folsom, learning that he likes to speak and teach after all, hosting an after-school music club that grew to 70 kids (with all but 8 being unchurched), having two of their friends move from being disconnected from God to pursuing a relationship with their Creator. All of these and more have been high moments in his very busy life.

Certainly raising three daughters has meant a lot to both Don and Brenda. Ashleigh who is 24 is their oldest. She graduated from Yale this spring with a Masters degree in Arts & Religion. She plans to pursue similar studies at the University of Virginia where she will begin working on her PhD with an emphasis in Hebrew studies. Ashleigh just completed archeological digs and language studies in Israel. Katie, their second child, will be 23 in October. She graduated with a communications degree from Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, California. She works for Amazon.com in the Human Resources area. Ren, their youngest, will turn 21 in September. She is an administrative assistant/receptionist/agent in a company which helps people with environmental and safety compliance issues. She lives in Folsom which makes her close enough for weekend visits.



Don's life is full and far from boring. He likes to refinish furniture and objects for home, stage, church, etc. He enjoys the hunt; junk shopping for the bare materials to be refurbished. He enjoys spending time in his neighborhood with neighbors; getting to know them and enjoy them. He likes to hike, hang out on beach cliffs, and travel near and far. Gardening has been a hobby (well, before he and Brenda moved into their zero lot line house!) He enjoys having coffee and spending time with friends; talking and understanding what's going on in their lives. Don likes to volunteer with local high schools to help with sets for drama productions. He enjoys working on graphics, home and garden design (and other visual things) for friends and family when needed. He says of himself, “I'm a systems nerd. I love to organize things to be more simple and helpful for people—I love to solve problems.”

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Don has a lot of passages from the Scriptures that speak to him. But what stands out to him the most and most often, is what rabbi Jesus said when asked about the greatest commandment: “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind,’ and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.” Luke 10:27.

Don says, “I try and submit my actions and attitudes to the Spirit to guide me into being more loving toward my ‘neighbor’ (whoever God brings across my path). I think that this is a lifelong learning lab for me!”

Don loves that because of Jesus, he can continue to grow in a reconnecting and restoring relationship with God. He likes how that rolls out into better relationships with people who matter to the Lord and whom Don discovers matter to him. Often he finds that he has a change of heart about a person when he begins to see them through God’s eyes!

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## Introducing Patrick Faulkner

*Patrick Faulkner recently joined the student ministry team as the Director of Worship Arts. Here is his story in his own words:*



For about 5 years now I’ve been leading worship or helping on worship teams in the area. I started over at Valley Christian Center in Dublin somewhere around 2005 after spending years sitting in the pews wanting to play. Then I played for different groups including Christ on Campus at Las Positas College and eventually over at the International House of Prayer in Dublin. I was involved at the house of prayer for the last four years before being sent to Valley Community Church in February. I’ve been interested in music since I was in high school but in college the interest turned into a passion as I started studying it more intensely. I picked music without thinking about becoming a worship leader. I think I was planning be a composer or something like that, but the Lord had other plans. A year after

completing my music studies at UC Berkeley, I was still volunteering with my old high school youth group at Valley Christian. It has made a lasting impact on my life. The Lord began to open doors for me here at Valley Community Church through my college contacts with Haley and Shawn Cummins. I started volunteering with Haley’s youth group as a worship leader and eventually she put my name in for this position and I fit the bill so here I am.

In my spare time I keep an eye out for sweet music gear. Martial arts interest me—sometimes. I especially like volunteer work and I volunteer, whenever possible. Hanging out with friends, when I can and meeting new people, when they can is in my top ten. So are jamming with people and making beautiful music.

I have a number of favorite verses. One of them is Jeremiah 29:11-14: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ says the LORD. ‘They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. I will be found by you,’ says the LORD. ‘I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land.’” God certainly has had plans for my life. One of the highlights of my life so far was being able to overcome obstacles with Jesus which everyone else in my family thought were impossible.

So here I am—a Berkeley graduate with a BA degree in music leading worship and teaching music lessons to as many students as I can. It is really my dream job and I thank this community for valuing students’ growth enough to trust me with helping them to grow as worshippers and musicians and followers of Christ. “All things are possible with God.” Mark 10:27.

# Coming Soon to a Small Group Near You...

As summer begins to draw to a close we're looking forward to the start-up of our fall program for small groups. Some of the activities we have planned for the Small Groups Ministry are as follows:

**Fall Sermon Series on SERVING, begins August 28, and continues for 6 weeks.** Message-based small group lessons will be provided from August 28 through November 20. We will take a break for Advent and resume the message-based lessons after the New Year.

**GroupLink, Sunday, September 4, 12:15PM, Seminar Room.** This is a great opportunity for anyone to join a small group. At this time we will be forming (1) ongoing groups that will be doing the message-based lessons and (2) 8-week community-based groups. The short-term groups will have the option to become long-term groups at the conclusion of the eight weeks.

**Small group leader's meeting, September 25.**

This will be the first of two yearly equipping meetings we provide for our small group leaders. Please save the date!

**Special church-wide event, October 10 (6 weeks).**

Over the last few years we have had church-wide events connected to fall Sunday messages such as, Renew, MADvcc, and Just Walk Across the Room. These are times when we've asked everyone in the church to be a part of a small group for the duration of the event. It is a great time of all-church emphasis. More details to come!



## Navigating Our New Website—Ministries

Valley Community Church > Ministries

http://www.vcclive.org/ministries/

Valley Community Church > Mini...

I'm New Here | About Us | Services & Locations | Ministries | Media | Calendar | Online Giving | Contact Us | search

### Ministries

The Tri-Valley is a fast-paced community where it can be difficult to get connected and develop meaningful relationships. Within our various ministries there are a wide variety of opportunities to connect, engage, serve, and multiply. The underlying purpose of every program and event is *Transforming Lives in a Christ-centered Community.*

**I'M NEW HERE**  
SERVICES & LOCATION  
UPCOMING EVENTS  
MEDIA

**Adult Ministries**

- iNVERSION
- Men's
- Women's

**Groups**

- Small Groups
- Adult Bible Fellowships
- Sports
- Disability
- DivorceCare

**Children's Ministries**

- TNT Middle School
- VISION High School
- Adult Ministries**
- Groups**
- Missions
- Shining Light Preschool

## And Our Newest Staff Member Is...

Alicia Young joined the high school ministry team in mid-July as our new High School Ministry Associate. Here she tells us a little bit about herself:

I have been volunteering with the middle school program here at VCC for the last year, leading a group of 6th grade girls. I got involved with the high school program at the beginning of this summer. More specifically, I joined the ministry as a counselor at 'Xtreme Camp and I participated in the Passionate and Reasonable (ABLE) Conference with Sean McDowell. Outside of VCC, I've worked with high school students in a private school setting last year, and I've volunteered with Young Life as well.

I have always enjoyed working with youth, and the majority of my work experience has been with school-age kids. I've been a swim coach, tutor, nanny, and Teacher's Aide. In the last two years, however, God has impressed upon my heart a passion for young adults specifically. I struggled to feel at home in church during middle school and high school and I feel empowered to reach out to those students who may not normally feel welcome at church. I know that students make pivotal decisions regarding their spiritual lives while in high school, either accepting Christ or rejecting Him. I am excited for what opportunities God has prepared for the high school program here at VCC and I already consider myself blessed to be a small part of it!

In my spare time I love to read; I am a big fan of books, especially historical fiction. Music is a great escape for me, even if I'm sitting in traffic. As long as I have a good song playing, I am a happy camper. Sports have always been a big part of my life. I play soccer in an adult league

on the weekends, and I am a former swimmer and water polo player. Other than that, a trip to Target is always high on my agenda! I have two nieces and three nephews with a fourth on the way! I am so blessed that I get to spend a ton of time with them. They are a lot of fun! My favorite ice-cream is mint chocolate chip, and has been since I was 4-years-old. My favorite color is aqua. I am a cat person (not a big fan of dogs—sorry dog lovers), and I love Star Wars and Disney movies.

While a sophomore at Pepperdine University, I had the opportunity to study abroad in Germany for a year. I've also been able to do several mission trips overseas and throughout the states. I love being confronted by new and different cultures and I enjoy opportunities to talk about God's love in other languages. I realize and find it encouraging that we are all apart of God's family, no matter where we are geographically.

One of my favorite verses is Galatians 2:20. "I have been buried with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me." I first read that verse after being baptized, and it has since become my mantra. It is a good reminder for me to live my life in such a way that points to my Creator, not to me.



## MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL

**Sunday, August 28:** Kickoff for middle school IGNITE & high school VISION

**Tuesday, August 30:** 1st middle school BLAST of the year

**Wednesday, August 31:** 1st high school VISION of the year

**Early September:** Middle school Explosion, Van Hunt

**Late October:** Glow in the Dark Hockey

*Watch Keeping Connected in the Sunday bulletin for more information on all these events.*



## Heart Connection

Heart Connection, the VCC Women's Mentoring Ministry, began its pilot session last January after wonderful support and encouragement from VCC Women's Ministries.

Nearly 50 women responded to the call for mentors and those wishing to be mentored, and several ladies agreed to serve as prayer warriors, supporting the soon-to-be formed mentor/mentee pairs in prayer.

The Heart Connection team, Pam Bennett, Amy Carlson, Sandy Carter, Darcey DeRose and Lynn Kniveton, sought the Lord's guidance in matching mentor with mentee. Prayer warriors asked God's guidance in pairing the women. At the February Kickoff, mentors were introduced to their partners, and the women began a four-month journey of fellowship and accountability.

The Heart Connection team gives glory to God for all He has done to begin a mentoring ministry among VCC women. The team will hold its next Heart Connection Orientation in late September. Women who would like to be paired with a mentor or mentee are encouraged to attend.

## Business First... Then We Celebrate

As the church's fiscal year-end approaches, we are planning two church-wide gatherings that you'll want to take note of:

### Congregational Meeting

Sunday, August 28, 5:00PM

### Celebration & Appreciation

Sunday, September 18, 5:00PM

The meeting on August 28 will be for the purpose of reviewing and discussing the proposed budget as well as Elder and Deacon candidates. The budget and bios on candidates will be available on Sunday morning, August 21.

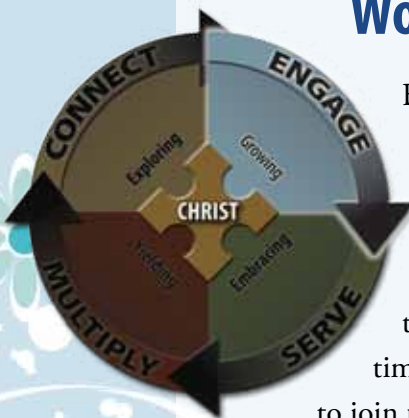
Absentee ballots will be available and can be turned in from August 28 until September 18. Questions or concerns can be addressed to Elders or staff at any time during that period.

On Sunday, September 18 we will gather at 5:00PM for a potluck dinner, collect remaining ballots, and then enjoy a time of Celebration in the sanctuary when we will focus on where God is leading us in the year ahead. We will also show our Appreciation to the Elders and Deacons who have served in the prior year. The evening will conclude with a special dessert back in the Hall.

Mark your calendars for these important dates and plan to be with us.



## Women's Bible Study at VCC



Bible Study at VCC is more than just Bible study. It is a time and place to connect with other women. No matter our age or life stage we are all trying to figure out this thing called life and how God wants us to live it. We have found that the journey is easier and more enjoyable when traveled together. This year we are offering three Bible studies throughout the year with each study being offered at four different times. Our hope is that one of these times will work for you and allow you to join us on this journey.

Bible Study begins the week of September 13 and runs through the end of May with some potlucks and special treats thrown in. While you can meet up with us at any point in the journey, we encourage you to join us at the beginning and continue through to the end. We want to invite you to come, bring a friend and to connect with Jesus this year!

### *Discovering Life with a Purpose* – A study of Ecclesiastes

Insight is being able to see not only into circumstances and people but into our own hearts. The book of Ecclesiastes was given to us to increase our insight and enable us to look inside ourselves and ask: Is life worth living? How does a wise woman face reality? How does a wise woman approach God? We are kicking off our Bible study year with a teacher-led look at Ecclesiastes where we will explore answers to these questions (and many more), have group discussions and time for prayer.

### *Becoming a Woman of Excellence* by Cynthia Heald

What does it mean to be women of excellence? God said of Ruth, a woman who lost her husband, lived in a strange land with an unhappy mother-in-law and had a horrible, demeaning job “I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence.” Ruth 3:12. Scripture is filled with other women who lived life with excellence to the honor and glory of God and He gives us the power to do that today. This 11-week study in group discussion format will enable us to be the women God intends for us to be.

### *When God's Spirit Moves* by Jim Cymbala

Jesus said “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” John 14:16-17. The Holy Spirit is someone that is involved in our lives every day and is working in areas we may not even realize. We will complete our year with a 6-week video series on the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit.

## Women's Bible Studies

Tuesday Mornings  
9:15-11:15AM, Seminar Room,  
Childcare provided

Tuesday Evenings  
7:00-8:30PM, leader's home  
(space limited)

Wednesday Afternoons  
3:00-4:30PM, Conference Room

Wednesday Evenings  
7:00-8:30PM, Seminar Room

Registration will begin in late August, watch for a bulletin announcement and link on the church website. We will also be on the patio after church services then. If you have questions or need more information, contact Sue Carlstrom at carlstrom5@att.net or 925-600-7810.



## Say Hello to Joseph Baker

Joseph Baker is our new iNVERSION Ministry & Media Associate. He works with audio and video on Sunday nights as well as video projects and the iNVERSION website. He lives his life by verse 5:1 from Galatians: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

Joseph has been working with church media for several years as a worship leader. He currently leads worship on Sunday mornings at Harvest Valley Church in Pleasanton. Joseph initially developed a relationship with VCC by guest leading worship within the student ministries. After meeting Heath Hardesty and becoming a part of iNVERSION, Joseph quickly realized he had a huge desire to be a part of this ministry.

Joseph and his wife, Lauri have been married for 3 years. In his spare time, Joseph devotes himself to learning more about worship and leadership, as well as networking with others and playing drums.

Joseph tells us about a highlight of his life a few years ago. “I took a band to Estonia and led worship for the largest youth conference in the country. It was an amazing time of worship and a huge opportunity to encourage the emerging church.”

Joseph is a busy man so he isn't around the church every day of the week. If you want to meet him, you will have to attend iNVERSION on Sunday nights. If you do, please be sure to introduce yourself and give him a warm welcome!

## August/September Calendar

**Sunday, August 7, 5:00PM**

BYOBBQ, Val Vista Park

**Sunday, August 21, 5:00PM**

BYOBBQ, Amador Park

**Friday, August 26, 6:30PM**

REFRESH 2011, Women's Ministry Fall Kickoff

**Saturday, August 27, 9:00AM**

VCC Cycling Group, Introduction to Road Cycling

**Sunday, August 28**

Church-wide Ministry Kickoff, Promotion Sunday

**Sunday, August 28, 6:00PM**

@Tribute, A Night of Worship

**Sunday, August 28, 5:00PM**

Congregational Business Meeting

**Sunday, September 4, 12:15PM**

GroupLink

**Sunday, September 18, 5:00PM**

Church-wide Celebration and Appreciation

**Sunday, September 25, 12:15PM**

Small Group Leader Equipping



**SUNDAY, AUGUST 28 IS PROMOTION SUNDAY.**

**ALL CHILDREN AGES 3 THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL WILL MOVE UP TO THEIR NEXT LEVEL.**