

# The BELL TOWER

VALLEY COMMUNITY CHURCH

## NEW YEAR COURSE CORRECTIONS

Happy New Year! It is hard to believe that we are already into 2011. I hope you all had a blessed Christmas season.

The beginning of a new year is often a time of review and renewal, a time to take stock of things and make some course corrections. We are doing the same at VCC. As a result of this we have made the decision to bring the Café service to an end. Despite a lot of wonderful things happening in and because of our Café service, a thorough evaluation has led us to making this hard choice. The last Café service will be on January 16th. There are several reasons why we are doing this.

When we launched the Café we had a few main goals. First, was to provide an alternate entry point into VCC for those who might find a more traditional church setting less inviting. Second, we were hoping that families would be encouraged to worship together. Third, we were hoping that our students would feel and be more connected to the church as a whole, not just to Student Ministries. By and large these goals have not been significantly met. On top of this there have been at least two negative impacts that we need to address.

Trying to ably meet the needs of both the Sanctuary and Café services has stretched our resources pretty thin. The sudden reversal we had at the Worship and Music Director position left us less able, than we had hoped, to develop musicians and artists to lead our services well.

Our volunteers have been amazing, but we see a need to consolidate these resources to do a better job. We believe that focusing our resources on doing one service well will allow us to create a better atmosphere for corporate worship at this time.

Also, although a core of our students have been faithfully engaging in the Café (a special thanks to those who are in this group), we have seen some negative impact on our High School ministry. The Sunday morning High School gathering had been an integral part of the overall strategy to connect and engage students to Christ and to the church. We believe that restoring that dedicated time will best facilitate the effectiveness of this ministry.

The Café has been a ministry initiative that has taught us a lot. We know that creating a truly welcoming environment for guests and seekers is of utmost importance. We all have to take seriously the responsibility to help those God brings our way to connect to God and his church. In light of this, I would like to challenge all of us to look around each week and take the time to meet someone we don't yet know, to help them have a positive experience as they join us.

The good news is that we are attracting new people in various ways. For instance, iNVERSION has become a truly great entry point for many. Each Sunday evening has seen new people checking out what is going on there. The traction that is being gained is something quite encouraging.

We have also learned that connecting our students to the life of the church is crucial. We don't want to forget that, so we are going to pray and explore other ways to make those vital connections. Be willing to be a part of this as it unfolds.

God has been doing some great things in and through the people of VCC. Let's continue to trust him as together we live out our vision of transforming lives in a Christ-centered community.

*Danny*

Danny Hall  
SENIOR PASTOR



## Running on Empty, Part One *by Tony Catudal*

**SERVICE AND WORK AND ACTIVITY**—are all good and should be engaged in by every Christian. But at the bottom of all these things, giving meaning to them, will be the inward habit of beholding God. (*The Pursuit of God*, Tozer)

Have you ever run your car out of gas? Our family car has an invisible reservoir of gas that gives us many additional miles of driving after the gas gauge reads “empty.” Yet, on more than one occasion, this unseen “tank” has become empty a few miles sooner than the closest gas station and we’ve been left stranded (Please don’t hold this stupidity against me!). The bottom line is that I should have paid (with time and resources) to care for my car before the car’s needs became critical and placed us in harm’s way.

Do we approach our spiritual lives the same way? After all, a car can’t run without gas, or our bodies without proper nutrients. How well does our soul thrive and grow if we are not caring for it? While soul neglect is often unintentional, it happens unless we become intentional about our own spiritual growth. For many of us, a major obstacle to becoming more intentional is lack of time and not being able to prioritize soul care.



Bay Area life and culture make it extremely difficult to prioritize such needs. But these needs are deep and if the other responsibilities in our lives crowd out spiritual growth opportunities, then those responsibilities become the obstacles—the very reasons we need to pursue a new set of priorities. Often, we let career considerations, financial needs, and corporate culture drive our lives instead of the other way around. The impact and cost goes beyond the simple hours we work at a job. It impacts every other area of our lives in ways that will never show up on an actual corporate bottom line. Part of the definition of the word, “career,” is, “a charge at full speed; to run or move rapidly along.” Living like this can destroy our spiritual and personal bottom line—our lives.

Soul neglect is the same. We don’t think we have time to “fill up”, but the cost to us, our families, our churches, and our souls, is much higher than the cost of making time to be intentional about spiritual growth. We often don’t realize this until it is too late, and we are left on the road, stranded, and in harm’s way.

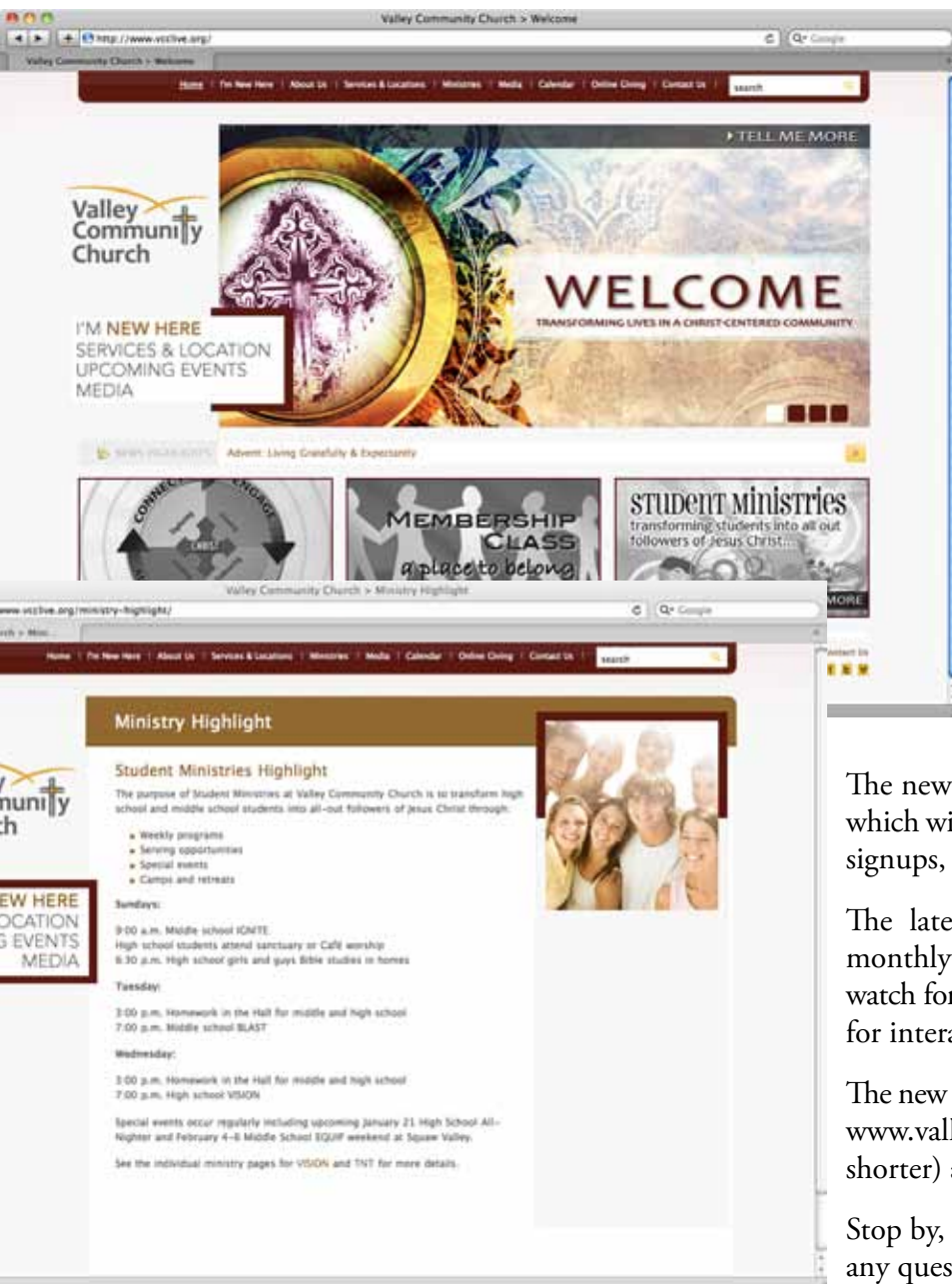
The question I would like to ask is, do the priorities in our lives allow us to “fill up”; to care for our souls and give expression to their needs? An important part of caring for our souls is to take time in our lives to be a part of a small group and to serve. On the VCC Spiritual Growth Pathway (the way our people connect, engage, serve, and multiply) we are given specific steps to express what is inside; for our souls to sing! But this is about more than just activities. It is about becoming more Christ-like and prioritizing the eternal.

Growing and serving in community are key elements of spiritual life and flow out of a thriving relationship with Christ and, at some point, should be a part of the life of every Christ-follower. Such things matter because they mattered to Christ and were a part of how He lived. They are a part of who we are in Christ and as we grow to become more like Him, these things inside of us need to find expression. They become the cry of our souls. The simple part is the hard part; turning toward Christ and reprioritizing our lives accordingly. But, as we seek HIM, anything is possible.



**THE CHALLENGE:** In the next month, pray about your priorities and how they may be helping or hurting your spiritual growth.

Next month we’ll talk more about the specifics of the small group and serving ministries at VCC, and how you can become involved.



## New Website!

Visitors to the Valley Community Church website will now find a site with many new features as well as an updated look. Launched in December, the new site is easier to navigate and, as content is loaded over the next few weeks, should provide all the information desired by those looking for a church home as well as those of us who are already connected here at VCC.

Details on upcoming events will be easily found facilitating greater involvement in the life of the church. Currently you will want to take note of the upcoming women's Heart Connection on January 22, an orientation for their new mentoring opportunity, and the rescheduled Membership Class on February 25 and 26.

The new website will be connected to our new database which will enable: online registration for events, volunteer signups, small group communications.

The latest message recordings, weekly bulletins, and monthly newsletters can be found under Media. Also watch for blogs from various contributors which will allow for interaction around subjects of interest.

The new website can be reached at the current web address, [www.valleycommunitychurch.org](http://www.valleycommunitychurch.org), as well as a new (and shorter) address, [www.vcclive.org](http://www.vcclive.org).

Stop by, take a look around, and let us know if you have any questions.

## Upcoming Events

### High School All-Nighter

Friday, January 21, 6:00PM - Saturday, January 22, 5:00AM. Start at VCC, finish at Granada Bowl.

### Heart Connection

Saturday, January 22, 9:30-11:30AM. Connecting women heart to heart through intentional, life-on-life mentoring relationships.

### Men's Night Out

Thursday, February 3, 6:00-9:00PM. Dinner and discussion in the Seminar Room. "Resolutions failed? Now what?"

### Middle School EQUIP at Squaw Valley

Friday, February 4-Sunday, February 6. A fun and challenging weekend, equipping students with tools to reach others for Jesus.

### Membership Class

Friday, February 25- Saturday, February 26. A place to belong. Find out more about VCC; opportunity to become a church member.

### Men's Retreat

Friday, March 25-Sunday, March 27. Annual Men's Spring Getaway to Redwood Christian Park

# Lighthouse

CHRISTIAN SUPPLY

## Illuminating the Valley *by Susan Harford and Barbara Kennedy*

It isn't often that your passion, your God given-gifts, and your mission in life all collide to create a way of life that honors God every moment of every day. For Ken and Sandy Hill however, their passion for God and for good Christian books, their gifts of business acumen and hospitality, and their desire to give something to the Christian community, resulted in a business that did just that. Lighthouse Christian Supply has helped to sustain their family and also provided Tri-Valley Christians access to the most current and relevant information that Christian literature has to offer for twenty-one years.

Walk into their store and you will be greeted by personnel who have been trained to help "above and beyond"—not what you usually find in today's retail world. On a recent visit I was looking for a specific book on marriage. Not only did the salesperson help me find it, but the young man also recommended a couple of other books that he had read and that he felt offered what I was looking for. I was impressed by the fact that he had actually read them especially since he shared that he is not married.

*Barbara Kennedy says: Ever since my kids were very young, we have spent many happy hours at Lighthouse Christian Bookstore. When they were little, my kids loved to watch Veggie Tale movies in the little area set up for them. I knew they were safe and happy and hearing God's word from some very silly vegetables. What more could a mom want?*

*Over the years, they have outgrown watching the movies but not spending time at Lighthouse. We still visit on a regular basis and are always met with a warm greeting as we come in. More times than not, I am actually greeted by name. I always know I can go there to buy books for Baby Dedication, the Nursery classrooms, or for curriculum but its non-work stuff that is so special.*

*I have bought countless books for my kids and husband-both fiction and nonfiction, for myself-again fiction and nonfiction, and gifts for everyone! I can go in with a list of items to look for and there is always someone ready to not only help me find it but make recommendations for related items. Their knowledge of their products is so refreshing and they have never steered me wrong.*

*If you just need a book, yes, there are lots of places to get one. If you need to spend some quiet time finding that "just right" gift, a book to help you with your daily struggles, that one translation of the Bible that will get you to dig deeper into God's word, then please, visit our friends at Lighthouse Christian Bookstore. They are there to minister to your needs.*

Once a bustling, thriving business, Lighthouse Christian Supply is struggling. Internet access and electronic book readers are changing the way people access material and read books. "We have always tried to be a ministry as well as a business," says Sandy Hill. "With all the Christian book stores closing we'll not be able to buy Christian gifts, books, music, etc. anywhere (locally). I really do believe that other places will stop carrying it as well. The other hard part is that our closing will affect the elderly who do not have computers—they are the ones that thank us the most for being there."

What can you do to help? First of all pray for Sandy and her staff. She believes God wants them to stay open but for that to happen they need customers. As a consumer, shop where you will find a personal touch—consider Lighthouse Christian Supply when you have a need they can supply.



## Retrospect

It is kind of like watching one of those odd time-lapse movies from science class: seed breaks open to roots, roots crawl and ascend to stems, branches unfurl, and then fruit... It happens so naturally but so quickly. It is strange, yet it is beautiful and inspiring to watch. When you watch it, well, you just know there is something greater than the nutrients of the soil and the wetness of the water responsible for breaking open that hard seed to a nimble plant and a canopy of colorful fruit. There is something else happening here—a deeper magic, so to speak.

This is how I see iNVERSION unfolding in my mind as I take a quick retrospective of 2010.

The vision that was set forth for iNVERSION is finally beginning to be fleshed out. It is hard to believe that we only started meeting on Sunday nights at the end of February, 2010. Now I admit, I am highly excited about what is happening through and at iNVERSION. Yet I must slow down here to answer an important question. What is iNVERSION? I know that for many this is still a looming question. So let me answer it in two ways:

1. Come and see for yourself—we would love to have you join us! Come experience what a Sunday night is like. All are welcome, and we do our best to make the un-churched, the de-churched and the churchd all feel welcome, yet challenged by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. iNVERSION is a ministry with an emphasis on college, 20's & 30's—though it is not comprised only of those demographics. It is a ministry for them, but is not comprised only of them. iN exists to engage the postmodern culture and mindset (those who have been steeped in a secularized, relativistic, and now digital world) and to raise up the next generation of leaders to serve the church and the culture at large.

You know that it is happening! Any given Sunday at iN we have a group that consists of staff/leaders (from various churches), lay leaders, musicians, and Sunday morning congregants from churches all over the Tri-Valley. We also have those who are just now coming back to the church after living in that bleak land between that is commonly called “de-churched”—that is, those who profess Christ as savior but have no community to engage in and be accountable to. Also, we are graced to have those who are coming to church for the very first time; they are not quite sure about this Christianity thing but they are intensely interested in the narrative of the Gospel that is being presented and they are magnetized by the motions of a loving community that is bending over backwards to bring them in.

With such a wonderful mix happening, we acknowledge that there is something else involved here. It is not just the atmosphere of moving music and artistry, or the room ambience, or the welcoming vibe and riotous conversation. Nor is it our value to insistently use the latest technology to present the greatest love story ever told.

Yes, we believe there is something else happening here—that God's great grace is breathing iNVERSION to life so that it may be a refuge to the walking wounded and a missional outpost to help the next generation run the race to spread the Good News in the Tri-Valley and beyond.

We thank you all for your support. Please keep iNVERSION in your prayers. We look forward to an exciting 2011. Hope to see you soon.





## *Your stories...*

Have you just walked across a room? What fruits have you already seen from that walk? Send us an [email](#) and tell us your story. We would love to hear from you.

## How Am I Doing? *from the Elders*

As the end of the year approaches, people often take time to take stock of the year. Some people write Christmas letters that list the accomplishments of each family member. Others gather family pictures and put them in albums or make picture collages that tell the story of another year completed. Still others look back at their strengths and weaknesses and plan for the future, e.g. making New Year's resolutions.

As we come to the end of the year, the Elders thought we'd share a resolution that we recently made together. As part of implementing our VCC Spiritual Growth Pathway, we determined that in the year to come, we would each take the challenge of answering three questions. And we would hold one another accountable for our responses to these three questions—*How am I growing spiritually? Who am I investing in? What rooms am I walking across?*

*How am I growing?* Actually this question can be read in two ways, and both are good. One sense of the question is to evaluate what we are doing so that we might grow spiritually. Growth happens because of the work of the Holy Spirit, but spiritual growth also requires intentional effort on our part. Paul draws the analogy to physical exercise: "Spend your time and energy in training yourself for spiritual fitness. Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is much more important." (1 Timothy 4:7-8, NLT). The Spiritual Growth Pathway lays out at a high level the types of things that we can be doing that are important for growth. In addition, each one of us should be identifying the spiritual practices, or disciplines as they are often called, that are particularly helpful for us to become more like Christ.

The second sense of the question *How am I growing?* is to evaluate whether spiritual growth is evident in our lives. We should look at ourselves, but it's especially important to ask some people close to us whether they have seen spiritual growth in us. The single most important aspect to look at is whether we are becoming more loving, and the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) help to flesh out what growth in love looks like. Answering this question involves looking at how we respond, emotionally and in actions, to various stressors in our lives.

*Who am I investing in?* Everywhere we turn there are people telling us how to invest; in life insurance, stocks, bonds, cars that are bigger and run smoother, high definition, flat screen television that promises a better picture, the newest cell phone loaded with apps, a faster computer with information at your fingertips, etc. The greatest investment you can make however is an investment in people. This is the great investment—it is "great" because it is the only one that is eternal.

Jesus gave us our marching orders in Matthew 28 when he told us to make disciples and teach them to obey all that He had commanded. A disciple is a learner, a follower. We have been sent to make more followers of Jesus Christ, and then to help these new followers to grow in their faith. Elsewhere Jesus talks about the type of treasure that we should seek (Matthew 7:19-34), clearly an allusion to the concept of investing. Jesus' conclusion—invest in the Kingdom of God. Fundamentally that means investing in the lives of people. Invest in the lives of other believers. Invest in the lives of those who do not yet believe.

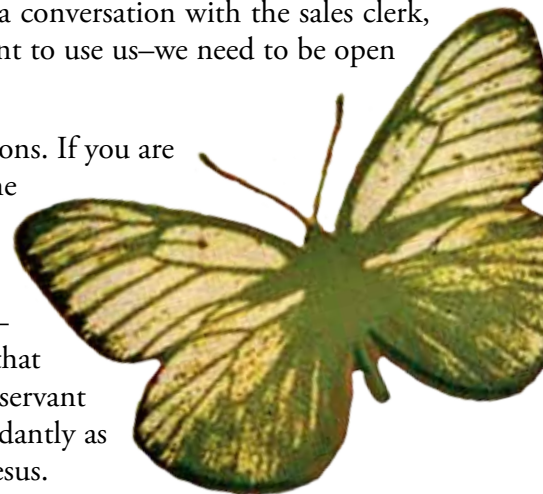
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*What rooms am I walking across?* Jesus never had to go far to find someone to introduce himself to. There was not only the woman at the well but the blind man, the lepers, tax collectors, and many more. All were ordinary people with whom Jesus struck up a conversation. Each conversation led to a changed life.

We don't have to walk very far either. Perhaps our walk takes us across the living room to an unchurched family member. Perhaps it is across the street to a neighbor's home. We can strike up a conversation with the sales clerk, the mail person, or the waitress at our table. We never know when God will want to use us—we need to be open to every opportunity.

Maybe you'd like to take the challenge of asking yourself these same three questions. If you are part of a small group, you could help one another with these questions, just as the Elders will be doing with one another. Or maybe get together with a friend or two who would like to do this with you.

We believe that by keeping these questions before us, we will be connecting more—experiencing God's presence in our lives; engaging better with others in ways that help them and us grow; serving those around us more, gladly taking the role of servant even as Jesus did when he washed his disciples feet; and multiplying more abundantly as we invest in others. That's the pathway of growth. That's the path of following Jesus.



## **EQUIP!** BUILDING TEENAGE DISCIPLES

Does your middle school child have unchurched friends? Is he or she ready to take the next step in their faith walk—going deeper into the word; learning how to share their faith with their peers? Then our “Equip” weekend is for them.

Equip is a fun and challenging weekend of training for students who love God and want to share their love of God with their friends. Equip will help them to love God in a way that overflows from and through them so that each young teen can become an agent of God through ministry with their family and friends.

Pastor Jay Ashcraft will be the guest speaker and will be using Evangelism Explosion (EE) for youth to “help develop a worldview that is framed by the recognition that without faith in Jesus we are all lost in our sins.” Your middle school children will be given tools that show them how to reach their friends in a conversational way to share their faith in Christ and even bring those friends from unbelief to belief. EE uses a variety of components where the experienced lead the inexperienced until they become experienced and the principle of spiritual multiplication occurs.

This fun-filled weekend will take place February 4-6, 2011 in Squaw Valley, California. All current middle school students (6th to 8th grade) are invited to participate. While the focus of this weekend is on equipping students, they will also have a chance to ski or ice skate. The cost for the weekend is \$170. Sign-ups will be taken through January 13, 2011. Space is limited so sign up now. Watch the bulletin for additional details. For questions, please contact Sheri Ellison at [sellison@valleycommunitychurch.org](mailto:sellison@valleycommunitychurch.org) or 925-846-6622x38.

**Lift Tickets:** Under 12 is \$12, Youth (13-18) is \$62, plus cost of equipment rental if needed.  
**Ice Skating (includes cable car ticket):** Under 12 is \$15, Youth (13-18) is \$24, plus cost of skate rental.

*Making your way in the world  
today takes everything you've got  
Taking a break from all your worries  
sure would help a lot*

*Wouldn't you like to get away?*

*Sometimes you want to go—where  
everybody knows your name*

*And they're always glad you came*

*You wanna be where you can see—  
our troubles are all the same*

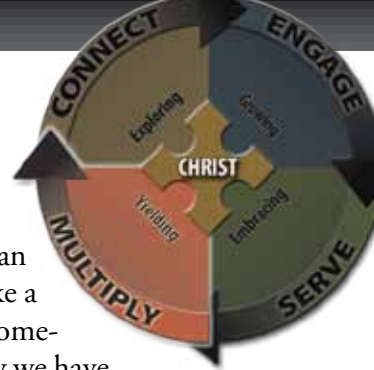
*You wanna go where everybody  
knows your name*

THEME FROM *CHEERS* BY GARY PORTNOY



**Orientation—Find out more!**  
**Saturday, January 22**  
**9:30AM**

## A Place to...Invest | Women's Mentoring Ministry by Sandy Carter



The writer of this little chorus really tapped into human nature, didn't he? How often have you longed to take a break from your worries? Don't we all enjoy going somewhere where someone knows our name and is happy we have arrived? And yes, we often need someone to remind us our troubles are not unique; someone who can truly understand our concerns. Wouldn't you like to have the listening ear of a friend who enjoys spending time with you and can give you a godly perspective?

You can have such a friend in your life! In January we are launching "Heart Connection," a women's mentoring ministry. You will be invited to attend an Orientation coffee, Saturday, January 22, 9:30AM at VCC, to learn about the ministry. If you are interested in being mentored, mentoring another woman or perhaps both, you will then attend a Kickoff coffee where you will be partnered with another lady for a four-month commitment to an intentional friendship.

Mentor/mentee couples will have the freedom to set their own agendas and pursue their own goals with foundations for their relationships built on prayer and a Biblical perspective. If you are starting a new relationship with Christ or perhaps you would like to explore what it means to be a Christ-follower, you might consider meeting with a woman who can help you investigate the claims of Christ or grow in your faith.

Perhaps you simply need an 'older' woman to give you perspective on your life stage, explain how she raised her children or encourage you as you meet for a cup of coffee or take a walk together. Each relationship duo will be as unique as the individuals who have committed to meeting together. At the end of the four-month commitment, everyone involved in the program will gather for a time of sharing and celebration of all God has done in and through the relationships.

If you would like to learn more about Heart Connection or you would like to receive a personal invitation to the Orientation, please contact Sandy Carter, 828-0971, the church office or the VCC Women's Ministry [Facebook](#) page.

## Worship & Music Director Search Update

After a bit of a holiday season break the search committee will be working hard on the search in the new year. So far we have screened a number of candidates and had interviews with several. We have one candidate that we have moved quite a ways through the process and two or three more we will be going deeper with soon. We hope to make significant progress this month.

Please continue to pray for this process and that God would bring us just the right person in His timing.

