

MARCH 2012

The BELL TOWER

VALLEY COMMUNITY CHURCH

You'd think that after all these years I would have this following Jesus thing figured out. The reality is that this following Jesus thing is not something to be figured out. Like any relationship it has its ebbs and flows and requires constant attention to cultivate it to its fullest. This is particularly true in our walk with God because of the mind-boggling reality that we are talking about finite humans having a relationship with the sovereign, creator God of the universe. The very concept is startling, but it is exactly what we are offered in Christ.

God wants us to experience His love and respond to it with a life of devotion to Him and trust in His ways. He wants us to believe that He has our best interest at heart and to hear His voice and obey Him as He shapes us into the persons He created us to be. As wonderful as this promise is, we are continually challenged to enter more deeply into this relationship because in our sin and brokenness we too easily settle for lesser things. So what can we do?

As we move closer to Spring we find ourselves in the season of Lent. As a non-denominational church that does not follow a detailed liturgical calendar, we do not usually put a lot of emphasis on the Lenten season. Perhaps you come from a tradition that does. Regardless of your past experience or practice I would encourage you to consider using this season as a time of spiritual reflection and renewal.

While often we associate Lent with some form of self-denial ("I think I'll give up chocolate for lent!") the real essence of the season should be an attempt to limit some key area(s) of our lives in order to create space for God.

For instance, if you choose to give up something, it is not the act of giving it up that is as important as what you do with the "space" this sacrifice creates. It is a way of acknowledging that there are things in our everyday lives that crowd out time with and attention to our walk with Christ.

This year I am choosing to limit some of the constant "noise" in my life. When I took an evaluative test called Strength Finders, my number one strength was Input. That means I have a voracious appetite for and capacity to absorb information and ideas. This serves me well in so many ways, but one of its downsides is I am fairly addicted to what I call "noise." I get up and turn on the TV to hear the morning news and weather. The radio in my car is constantly on and so on. There's nothing wrong with that except I have managed to eliminate too many of the quiet moments of my life. So, I am intentionally choosing to alter that pattern and cultivate more quiet in my life. In this stillness I want to listen to and hear God more clearly. I want to live more in response to His leading and less in reaction to my circumstances. I want worship to be a way of life, not just a Sunday activity (see Don Elser's article on page 3).

Your needs and challenges will be different. My prayer for all of us as the Easter season draws near is that we will consider how God might be leading us to create more space for Him and see how His transforming grace will work in and through us.

Danny
Danny Hall
SENIOR PASTOR



Creating Space for God

Important Announcement about Electronic Giving



In order to improve the overall online giving experience and to allow debit cards to be used for giving, we are converting to a new online provider. Existing online account holders should stop your existing CashLINQ contributions (at your earliest convenience) and then sign up with our new provider SecureGive.

Online giving is a safe and easy way to support the ministries of VCC. This system enables you to support the church by making a one-time contribution or establishing a recurring contribution.

3 Simple Steps

- ❶ Create an online giving account at SecureGive (valleycommunity.securegive.com) or by downloading the mobile app.
- ❷ Provide **debit** VISA/Mastercard or bank information (for echeck).
- ❸ Indicate the amount, frequency (one-time or recurring) and designation for your gift.

Benefits, for you & the church

- **First Fruits** - In Proverbs 3:9 we are taught to honor the Lord with the “First Fruits” of our labor. By setting up a recurring contribution that is scheduled to come out of your account on the day you specify you can ensure that your First Fruits are given back to God.
- **Simplicity**—You will not need to remember if you gave this month or send in your offering checks when you are out of town.
- **Security**—Online giving is more secure than giving with a check in that an electronic gift can’t be lost or stolen.
- **No Distractions**—Instead of needing to worry about writing your contribution check during the service, you can be fully engaged with the worship service, knowing that you have already given your offering.
- **Helping VCC**—Online contributions require less processing from our administrative staff since the information is logged and deposited automatically.

In addition, to make giving easier and more convenient than ever, smartphone users may download the SecureGive Mobile App for iPhone, iPad, or Android phone. Search your app store for SecureGive.



Mentoring—Unexpected Blessings *by Marlene Diggins*

Mentoring can mean a lot of different things; taking walks, sharing coffee or a meal, or studying the Bible to name a few. Mostly it just means doing life together; being a good listener, being there when you are needed.

Back in September after spending time with expectant mother, Julie Chambers, I casually mentioned to her to add me to her list of backup help, if needed, when her baby came. She was due in about three and a half weeks. I think we were both surprised when she had to call me only two days later—to drive her to the hospital NOW!

As we buckled Julie’s 2½-year-old daughter, Natalie, into her car seat and headed from Livermore to San Ramon Regional at 3:30 on a Friday afternoon, Julie’s contractions were only three minutes apart! My prayers, as we navigated the freeway traffic and then back roads to San Ramon, went from, “Lord, I have 4 kids and I could deliver this baby if I had to,” to “Lord, please don’t make me deliver this baby!”

Luckily we arrived at the hospital to find Julie’s husband Luke waiting with a nurse and a wheelchair. Thirty minutes later, an incredibly beautiful Kate Elizabeth entered this world, safe and sound assisted by a very qualified doctor. I have been so blessed by both of my mentoring relationships in many ways, but getting to be a part of Kate’s birth story is a memory that I will cherish the rest of my life.

Responding to God & His Greatness *by Don Elser*

worship

What is this anyway? **For some people it's a synonym for congregational singing.** For others it's a type of feeling...a sense of quiet awe, perhaps.

Some people see worship as full of art and interest or excitement/entertainment and others as contemplative and quiet—or with lots of use of Scripture throughout. or coming forward for communion. or sitting still and receiving.

Some people love responsive readings; others? not so much.

But wait. I've just fallen into a **huge trap of thinking of worship as something that happens between the four walls or on the campus of VCC.** Hopefully, it does. But worship, real worship in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:24), has to be so much bigger than that. According to God, to obey is better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22). It has to do with responding to God and His greatness with our whole life – and loving and serving others.

We imitate, in serving others, this God who loves us in the middle of our mess. And THAT'S ALSO WORSHIP.

In fact, in some new songs you hear **the concept of "lifesong" more.** It's the idea that our whole life, not just our activities in a "worship service," is our real spiritual service of worship for God (or lack thereof). **Sunday becomes overflow. What can't be contained** because our worship cup is so full! This is the excitement of the REGATHERED PEOPLE OF GOD.

In fact, **a room filled with people who have experienced powerful serving and God-dependence all week would be electric, wouldn't it?**

The REAL WORSHIP LEADERSHIP then might be more in the group and less in the cue givers on the platform/stage area. Because everyone's different, this leadership would be different. Some people might be **quietly reflective** but obviously focused on God, while others might be igniting the **greeting** time or, **singing at the top of their lungs.** Some might **stand** while others sit **or even kneel.**

Maybe just coming with openness to a course correction or redirection **is worship?** One lady I observed came week after week and cried through the entire worship time. This was someone going through a very difficult season of her life...and yet clearly, depending on God in an intimate and broken way. It was very powerful and as people saw her it reminded them

This stuff is real!

Sometime life is HORRIBLE, but there is a Father who cares.

So, as you come to Sunday morning...bring your whole week. Express your joy and disappointments and questions and open your heart to what next week might be like. If we encourage everyone to stand....and you need or want to sit? Do it!! If we are singing and you're the only one who wants to kneel or stand and raise your hands...do that! When you follow the Spirit's nudging...it might not only benefit you, **but might help others sense God's movement...His reality.**

So...at a risk of being redundant: THANK GOD FOR OUR WORSHIP LEADERS scattered all over the sanctuary on Sunday morning

...and all over the Bay Area during the week

being church.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—

view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as this is your true and proper worship. ROMANS 12:1



Introducing Our Sunday School Teachers

Lisa Lee Akacsos



My name is Lisa Lee Akacsos and I share the teaching job for first service, second grade. The great thing about Sunday School is how very happy and excited the kids are. During the week I substitute teach. I can't always say the kids in public school are excited to be there. However, I have found that children are a precious gift God has given us, and being with them brings light to my life and my week.

One thing that God has impressed on me is that kids are VERY aware of what is going on around them. Their prayer requests are very astute and sincere. They have lots of questions. That keeps me on my toes. I need to know the entire story and think about what

kind of "why?" questions those "smart cookies" will throw out at me. I like to bring the Bible stories into current day applications but I have to remind them that there weren't cell phones or the internet or mail delivery or microwaves in Bible times.

For instance, in the story of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar he built this giant statue. How many stories tall would it be today? What building around Pleasanton is that tall? Let's take the stairs (no elevator in those days) to the top. Stand up, start marching. Let's see...20 steps per flight and 20 flights...we have to do some math. Keep marching and counting, we need to go up 400 steps. Look around as you're marching. Tell me what you see inside this statue. Nothing? It's hollow? Why are people bowing down to a big, tall, hollow statue? Keep going. You can do it! Why did people bow down to statues back then? What things do we worship? How do we worship? Who do we worship? When do we worship? Why do we worship? Who is our king? I didn't say president, I said King! And so on; this gets the wiggles out and their brains thinking!

I use a lot of sign language to teach scripture and song. It makes it easier to remember. They get only 75 minutes a week with us, so what we teach has to be memorable; something they can take and use until we feed them some more of God's word.

Becki and Dave Peterson

Becki and Dave Peterson currently teach the 1st through 3rd grades during the 2nd service.



"We have been teaching for over 25 years and have forgotten why we started. However, the opportunity to learn from young people and help shape young minds for Christ is at the top of our list of important things to do. Dave loves to embellish the Bible stories to bring them alive for the children and Becki loves the crafts. We get to know the families of our students and we are continually amazed at the insight and depth of belief in God and the spiritual things that these youth express. Preparing the lessons challenges us to make God's word relevant to our everyday lives and the lives of our students. Between big church and little church, we come home physically exhausted but spiritually refreshed."

continued on the next page



Nate Bennett

My name is Nathan Bennett and I teach first grade during the 9:00AM service. I am really quite nervous about being quoted in our church publication. I am certainly no pastor, and don't have the biblical knowledge or experience to speak with authority. I am just a guy who said he could help out in first grade...

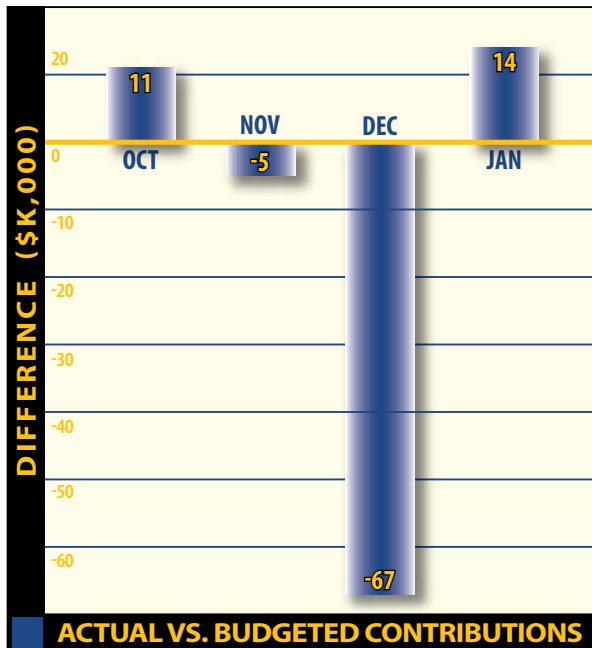
I started teaching because there was a need in the first grade class that had to be filled. Now I do it because it is fun and the kids are great! One of the things I have learned over the time I have been teaching is that dead time with first graders is never a good thing! As a result, I have also learned to always have a few activities up my sleeve in case the service runs long. When the day doesn't go as planned, I am prepared to roll with it.

During most of my week, I am a Financial Advisor at Summit Financial Group. It is amazing to me how God uses one hour a week of time to make an impact on both my life and on the little ones in my weekly care. Teaching Bible stories to first graders really makes you think about God's message in simpler terms. As adults, we often focus on the minutiae or the subtle lessons so much, that sometimes we miss and/or forget the simple lesson the Bible is teaching us. I've been impacted by looking at the Bible stories the way a first grader does—without the intellectual stuff we often put in the way. During my time teaching, God has taught me much about how big a six-year-old's heart for Christ can be; they are truly little lights to the world!

Financial Update

In recent years we have made it a regular practice to make a financial forecast of our annual contributions after the first four months of the fiscal year. And so it is that time again.

In the graph we show the contributions for each of the four months compared to the budget. As has been true the past several years, the deficit in December is significantly larger than other months. In the past we have attributed this pattern to the recession since year-end bonuses and commissions are lower than during better economic times. So it seems very reasonable to do the same this year, as our prediction a year ago turned out to be surprisingly close to the actual.



Taking this approach, the reasonable predictor for contribution in the remaining months of our fiscal year is to base it upon October, November, and January. The average for those three months is almost \$7,000 per month above budget. If the remaining months continue to average this much above budget, it will entirely offset the deficit in December.

We want to caution that such “predictions” are quite uncertain. An alternative approach is to calculate the percentage of contributions in the first four months compared to the entire fiscal year. If we use the same percentage as the average for the past three years, we then predict a deficit for the year of \$54K.

So our best forecast for contributions for this fiscal year is that it will be somewhere in the range of a deficit of \$54K to slightly above budget. If contributions do exceed budget, it will be the first time since 2006.

The level of giving to the general fund by the congregation is all the more remarkable in light of the very generous contributions to the Setting Us Free capital campaign. Remember that the “first fruits” offering on November 13 was just over \$600K. Giving has been strong since that Sunday, so that the total given by the end of January was \$755K. We praise God for the generous people of Valley Community Church.



Early Interest Leads to Naval Career *by Tim Ellis*

On October 7, 2011, Nathan Ellis graduated from basic training for the U.S. Navy at Great Lakes Recruit Training Command. Nathan comes from a family where serving in the military is tradition.

Nathan always loved jets, warbirds and ships—all things military. He went with VCC on the trip aboard the SS Jeremiah O'Brien during Fleet Week, watching the Blue Angels and sailing in the Parade of Ships. He started focusing on the Navy partly because of his family's background. His grandfather Russ was in ROTC during college and was an officer on a destroyer. Nathan's grandmother's cousin was a career naval officer, Vice Admiral William Lawrence. Bill was an F-4 fighter pilot, Superintendent of the Naval Academy, commander of the Third Fleet, and Chief of Naval Personnel. When Nathan was 11, he got to meet Bill when they attended the commissioning of a new Navy destroyer. After Bill's death, the Navy named another destroyer after him, the USS William P. Lawrence (DDG-110). Nathan, his dad

and his grandmother were able to attend the commissioning two years ago in Mississippi.

Nathan graduated in 2009 from Amador Valley High School. He then studied for two years at CSU Monterey Bay. However, after completing his first year of college, Nathan knew that he wanted to join the Armed Services. He enlisted in the Navy at the end of his first year of college, completed his second year and then shipped off to boot camp on August 9, 2011!

He is now training at the Naval Nuclear Power Training Command in Charleston, SC as an Electronics Technician. Once complete, he will serve onboard submarines operating the nuclear reactor motor. Nathan welcomes your prayers for him.

God Calls Busy Women *by Sandy Carter*

When Jesus called His disciples, where did He find them? Scripture tells us Matthew was bent over his tax collector's table. John and Andrew dropped commercial fishing nets to follow Jesus. Peter, too, left a large catch to answer the call.

The men Jesus chose to join His inner circle were busy people. Likewise, God has called busy women to serve as Heart Connection mentors and mentees. Several ladies lead VCC Bible studies, teach evangelism workshops, and serve on the Women's Ministries team while managing busy households. Yet these ladies allow God to use them to make a difference in the lives of other women.

Meeting over coffee, walking the Sports Park, enjoying lunch at a local restaurant or serving at a VCC event, mentors and mentees pray together and help one another pursue goals God has laid on their hearts. Mentors offer a listening ear and godly perspectives;

mentees bring teachable hearts and the desire to imitate the faith of their mentors. Over 40 mentor/mentee pairs have experienced the joy of seeing God at work in their lives through the Heart Connection ministry.



This spring Heart Connection will host its 2012 Orientation inviting VCC women to participate in the exciting ministry of one-on-one intentional relationship. Too busy? God calls busy women. He invites all of us to share our lives with other women and to encourage one another in our walks with the Lord. And He provides the time in our schedule for these relationships.

Learn more about the Heart Connection mentoring ministry by attending the 2012 Orientation, Saturday, March 17 at 9:00AM, in the Fireside Room.

For more information, contact Sandy Carter, 925-828-0971, or send an email to VCC Women's Ministries, womensministry@vcclive.org.

Welcome New Members!



Shawn & Lisa English



Mike & Joanie Fischer



Dean & Mary Hampton



Daljit & Pam Hundal



Jason & Tara Lindstrom



John & Sheri Newman



Bob & Jacquie Odell



Jeff Wead

Early Spring Upcoming Events

Saturday, March 17, 9:00AM: Heart Connection Orientation

Sunday, March 18: Christ in the Passover – Jews for Jesus

Saturday, March 24, 2:00PM: Gifts of the Garden, Women's Spring Tea

Saturday, March 31, 9:00AM: Heart Connection Kickoff

Sunday, April 1: Palm Sunday

Sunday, April 1, 7:30PM: CrossPoint – a dramatic time of reflection

Sunday, April 8, 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00AM: Easter Sunday services

Sunday, April 8, 8:30 to 11:30AM: Easter Breakfast

Wednesday & Thursday, April 24 & 25: The Sharing Closet