



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2010

The BELL TOWER

VALLEY COMMUNITY CHURCH



Advent: LIVING gratefully & expectantly

It's hard to believe that we are heading into the holiday season, but here we are. Like churches around the world, beginning with the last Sunday of November, we will be observing the four Sundays of Advent to prepare our hearts for Christmas. But what is Advent?

Look up the word "advent" on Wikipedia and you will find the following, **Advent:** from the Latin word *adventus* meaning "coming." The Latin *adventus* is the translation of the Greek word *parousia*, commonly used in reference to the Second Coming. Christians believe that the season of Advent serves as a reminder both of the original waiting that was done by the Hebrews for the birth of their Messiah as well as the waiting of Christians for the Second Coming of Christ.

As followers of Jesus we live with a grateful eye looking back to the 1st coming of Christ and an expectant one looking ahead to His 2nd coming. The four Sundays of Advent are thematically arranged to aid us in this. Here are those themes:



1ST SUNDAY
prophecy & hope



2ND SUNDAY
bethlehem & peace



3RD SUNDAY
angels & joy



4TH SUNDAY
shepherds & love

Each Sunday we will have an Advent lesson around these themes as part of our worship and to enhance your preparation we are putting together an Advent family worship guide. These guides outline ways for you to gather with your family or friends to celebrate together.

Finally, our Advent sermon series is entitled **Merry ____Mas**, encouraging us to look for Christ who is missing in much of our Christmas celebrations. By looking at various portraits of Jesus we want to be reminded of our great Savior whose birth we celebrate and whose 2nd coming we await. Couple this focus with some great seasonal music and you have a recipe for great celebrations.

We have been studying together this fall how merely "walking across a room" can be the simple first step to sharing and showing Christ's love. This Advent season will be a great time for you to reach out to those around you and invite them to join you in looking for the true meaning of Christmas. In our homes or in our church there will be lots of opportunities to share the message of Christ.

I can't wait to see what happens.



Danny Hall
SENIOR PASTOR

A Place to Give: Serving Others in Hard Times!

Society today is cultivating a mentality that every individual should only worry about themselves and that in the end, your life will be happy and prosperous. The Christian mentality, on the other hand, teaches that God is sovereign over the universe and when we put our trust in Him and are obedient to His commands, He will work all things out for our good.

In Matthew 19:21, Jesus says to the rich man: *“If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”* This admonition was not only for this one man, but for all of us. God has entrusted us with the care of those who are in need.

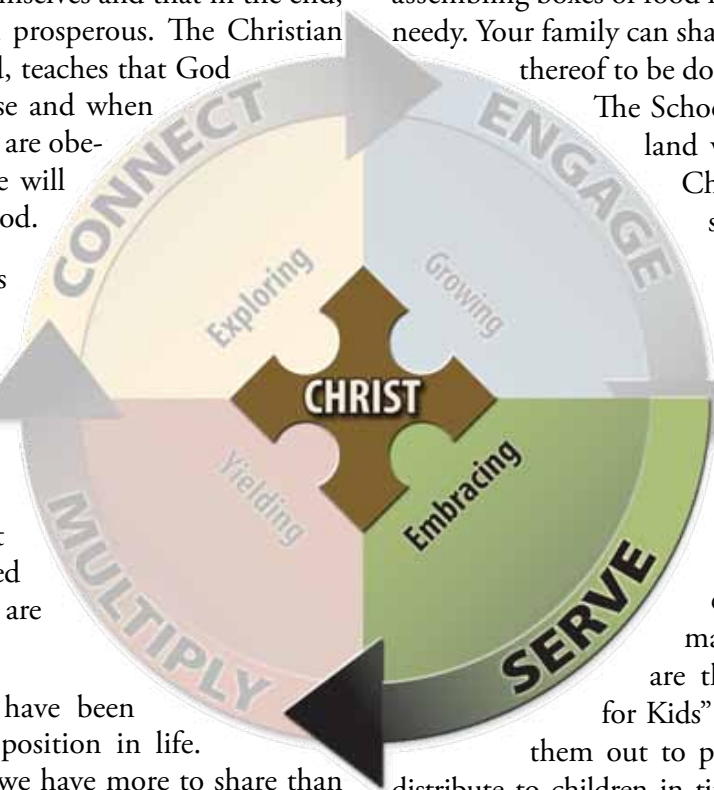
Most of us in Pleasanton have been placed in a very fortunate position in life. Even in the worst of times, we have more to share than over 80% of the rest of the world. At least 80% of humanity lives on less than \$10 a day. Almost half the world—over three billion people—live on less than \$2.50 a day. Can you imagine feeding a family of four on \$10 a day, let alone sheltering and clothing them?

So what can you do to make a difference? The best way is to be on the look-out for people who need help. We can “transform lives” one at a time. There are many opportunities to do this through Valley Community Church. One way is to fill a shoe box for Operation Christmas Child (see the October 2010 *Bell Tower* for more information). If you did one shoe box in the past, perhaps you will consider stretching yourself and filling two this year.

Thanksgiving is coming and we have a tradition of assembling boxes of food for a Thanksgiving feast for the needy. Your family can share a complete feast or portions thereof to be donated to Open Heart Kitchen.

The School of Urban Missions in Oakland will be throwing their annual Christmas party. There will be stockings to stuff and they are always in need of larger gift donations for their raffles, as well as volunteers to help out at the function. On December 11, the Women’s Ministry will hold their annual blanket making night. This is a night of fun and festivity as men, women, and children gather to make simple tied blankets that are then donated to the “Blanket for Kids” organization who in turn give them out to police and fire departments to distribute to children in time of great emotional trauma. Other opportunities to give are our annual Angel Tree and our fundraiser for the Home of New Beginnings. You can find more information on all of these events in the pages of this issue of the *Bell Tower*. We have something for everyone, at any age, to do.

In tough times, giving to the less fortunate is more important than ever. God calls us to stretch ourselves to care for those in need. It doesn’t matter how little you have; we have all been blessed with time. If you can give monetarily, try stretching yourself a little further this year. If not, stretch yourself and give your time—volunteer to help one of these causes in the way you can best serve. ❖



Dates to Note—November & December

- Friday & Saturday, November 12-13:** Membership Class
- Saturday, November 13:** Thanksgiving boxes preparation
- Saturday, November 13:** Celebration of Hope Benefit Dinner
- Saturday, November 20:** Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes due
- Thursday, November 25:** Thanksgiving Service, 10:00AM
- Saturday, November 27:** Church decorating
- Sunday, November 28:** Baby Dedications
- Sunday, November 28:** First Sunday of Advent

- Sunday, December 5:** Women’s Christmas Concert & Dessert
- Saturday, December 11:** Blanket Making
- Sunday, December 12:** Christmas Musical Worship Services
- Friday, December 19:** Stockings for School of Urban Missions due
- Sunday, December 12:** Angel Tree gifts due
- Friday, December 24:** Christmas Eve Services, 3:00, 4:30, 6:00PM
- Sunday, December 26:** 10:45am service only

Provide Hope for the Helpless

They look like typical teenage girls; interested in fashion, makeup and posing like their favorite models. They are in fact, young girls who have been used in the most humiliating and degrading ways imaginable. They have suffered at the hands of those who were supposed to love them. Sold into sexual slavery by fathers and mothers desperate for a way to put food on the table, or abducted off the streets of their villages and forced to live like caged animals, these girls have lived with no hope of salvation from the lives they have been forced to live.

In steps a woman with a heart for the plight of her sisters. She discovers that a mere forty dollars can buy these young girls out of despair for one evening. It occurs to her that perhaps she can use one night and throw a party—a party that not only provides rescue for one night, but one that offers eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. But there are so many girls. How can she ever reach them all?

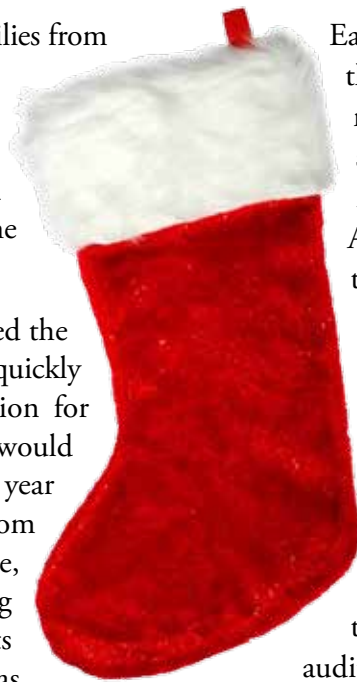
Church family, you can serve and transform the lives of these young women, one at a time. Your generous contributions will go towards the “purchase” of freedom for young girls just like the ones pictured here. Join us on Saturday, November 13, at 6:30PM for our Second Annual Celebration of Hope Benefit Dinner. Tickets are \$5 per person and are available at the Gathering Place on Sundays. An opportunity to donate to the ministry will also be provided. The bulletin has more information regarding this event. ❖



SUM Toys for Tots; SUM Christmas Socks *by Bill & Jean Steuben*

Last December (2009) children and families from the Oakland community gathered for the annual event put on by the School of Urban Missions. It's a fun day filled with music and drama, puppets and thousands of toys, plus a message of the greatest story ever told.

As VCC volunteers, when we approached the registration table, it began to rain. They quickly assigned us to set-up jobs in preparation for 2500 children and their parents. This would be one of the most exciting days of the year for these children. We did everything from setting up chairs, registering everyone, preparing a hot dog lunch and helping the U.S. Marines pass out Toys for Tots Christmas gifts and filled Christmas stockings to each child. They also raffled off many bicycles and Christmas trees.



Each volunteer had their own special experience throughout the day. Jean remembers the young mother who came up to her and in Spanish, saying her son was crying because they never got in the registration line and would not get a gift. A SUM student quickly responded and went in to get gifts for her family. Meanwhile, the mother shared how important the event was to her son. Her pride in her son was very obvious as she talked about his good work in school. For the last two years, he was first in his class. The families were so gracious and appreciative.

Whether partnering with the college students from SUM or helping parents as they guided their youngsters through the lines towards the auditorium for the Christmas show, each of us came away feeling blessed by the opportunity to share God's love with them. It was a pleasure to serve them. ❖

New Boys on the Block!

Note: many of these part-time roles take the place of previous staff/interns.



Eric Szyrko Born in Hayward, California, Eric grew up and spent the first 18 years of his life in San Leandro. Eric grew up in the church, attending Harbor Light in Fremont and also Redwood Chapel in Castro Valley. Eric's passion for music started as a young child, learning some piano and guitar at the age of 8. Eric spent his high school years learning to DJ, which then led to producing two records that were sold in local and regional vinyl shops. It wasn't until the age of 19 that Eric picked up the guitar again and felt a calling to pursue music ministry. A college classmate invited Eric to Inroads Christian Church in Fremont. Eric began to attend Inroads regularly, where he found a place to serve on the worship team as a backup guitar player. Inroads became a place where Eric started to truly engage in a relationship with Jesus Christ for the first time in his life. Eric has now been involved in music ministry since 2001, and recently led 20-somethings' ministries as well. Eric's desire is that we

be a people who truly seek God through truth found only in the Bible, and that the songs that we sing in worship of our God speak the same truth. Eric has been married to his wife Katie for 5 years. They have a 2-year-old daughter named Reese, and a new baby boy, Jackson.

Eric is the Ministry and Music Associate for iNVERSION. He helps direct and coordinate Sunday nights, lead worship and develop worship bands. He will also help with comGroups, and meet various other needs as they arise. You can follow Eric's blog at ericszyrko.blogspot.com.



Josh Bubniak Josh is a stay-at-home papa for his daughter Kaiyah as well as a full-time student pursuing a degree in Network Administration with a specialty in securities. Josh is a lover of all things electronic and musical. You can often find him fixing something one of his friends or bandmates has broken or working on his latest effect pedal build. Josh has been married to his wife, Michelle for over 5 years. Their daughter Kaiyah was born in March of 2010.

Josh is the Media & Ministry Associate for iNVERSION. He helps with audio and visual production: recording, mixing and engineering. He also helps with setup and teardown on Sunday mornings and updates and keeps the website current with the weekly recorded media.

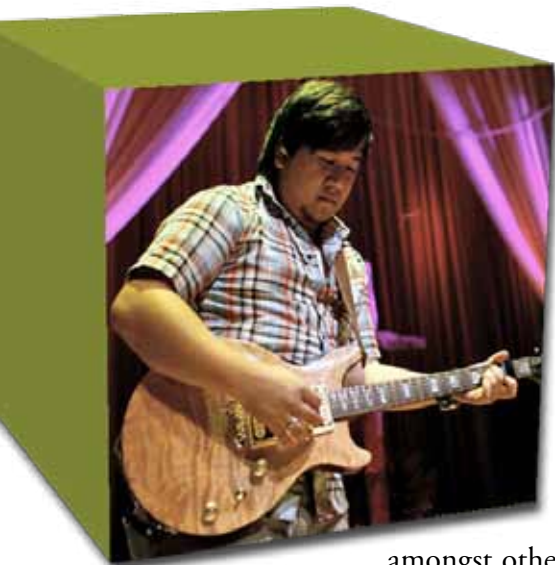
Josh Pickering Josh is a senior in high school at Valley Christian in Dublin. He plays football with the Valley football team as a right guard on the offensive line and also plays on the defensive end. Josh also participates in high competition volleyball. An interest of his is audio engineering (which makes him a natural fit for this job). Josh and his family have been attending VCC for the last twelve years (he started coming in first grade). Josh hopes to pursue a college degree that will lead him towards a career in the film industry. He would eventually like to be a producer.

Josh will be assisting James Whittle with the Sunday morning technical and media support as well as assisting with weddings, concerts and other outside events.



Dale Franklin Hi everyone, I'm Dale and I'm excited to be the new high school ministries intern. I currently attend Las Positas Community College in Livermore, where I am studying for a Mechanical Engineering degree. Hopefully this will be my last year there before I transfer to somewhere such as Cal Poly, however there is a lot of course work I need to complete. When I'm not at school or working, I am volunteering for the middle school program, or I am involved with various other Bible studies. Although much of my life is centered on church activities, outside of that I enjoy the outdoors, specifically hiking, camping, and dirt biking. I also enjoy investing in existing friendships, as well as making new ones.

As the High School Ministry Intern, Dale helps with the many things that interns do, such as being a small group leader, setting up small group meeting rooms, cleaning out the slushy machine, as well as many other necessary tasks.

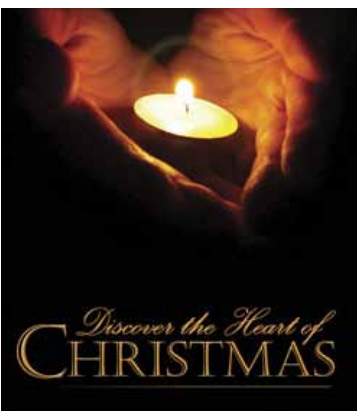


David Thaw David is our new Student Ministries Worship Intern. David hails from across the Pacific ocean, being born in Rangoon, Burma and raised in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. David came to America when he was 13-years-old. Not until he was 17 did he decide to go into ministry by volunteering to play bass in his youth group's worship band. That was only the beginning; David soon found he had an affinity for guitar and leading worship. He attended Bethany University in Santa Cruz where he majored in Music Ministries and worked at a local church as their worship intern. Since then, David has worked at a plethora of churches ranging in size and denomination, the last of which was Neighborhood Church in Castro Valley. David likes taking trips to Guitar Center, greatly dislikes celery, and loves playing the board game Settlers of Catan! His hobbies include beating everybody on staff at ping-pong (except Jay!), maintaining guitars, and building relationships with anybody and everybody,

amongst other things. If you see David around make sure you say hi to him, he would love to meet everybody in the church family! David also plays lead guitar in the band Symphony In The Sky (www.symphonyinthesky.com).

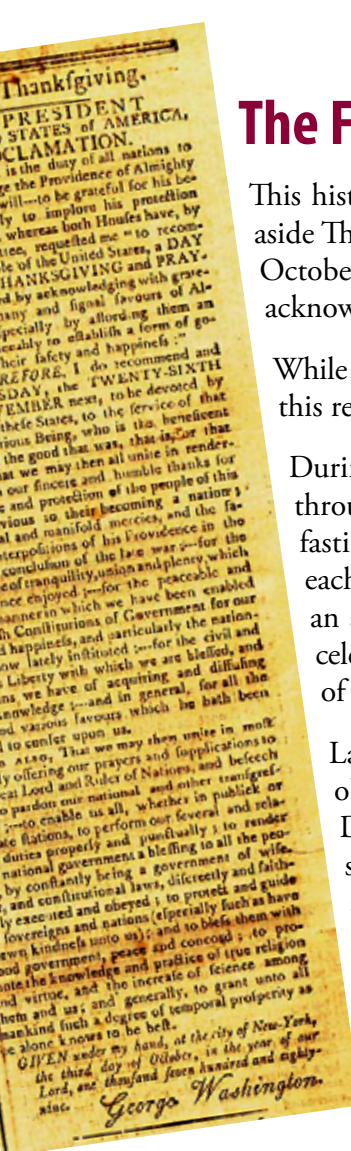
For our Student Ministries, David leads and develops worship bands. He has been teaching students the tech side as well as the music element. He is looking for students who have a heart to worship and point others to Jesus.

Steve Young We also want to introduce Steve Young (no picture available) who is with us on an interim basis leading worship for the Café. Interested musicians can contact him at steveturtle70@gmail.com. Worship practices are on Thursday nights at 8:00PM in the Hall. ❖



Advent—Celebrating at Home

As a church family at Valley Community Church we will celebrate the four Sundays of Advent, beginning November 28. We encourage each family unit (whatever it looks like) to make this a focal point of their own anticipation of Christmas. Make or buy your own Advent wreath and use it during times of family worship. Invite someone who doesn't have a family or may not understand the true meaning of Christmas to join you. This year we are providing a special tool to help you with celebrating Advent. On November 28 you can pick up a booklet with Advent readings, discussion questions and other suggestions for how to prepare your hearts for Advent.



*Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!
For the LORD is good. PSALM 100:4, 5A*

The First Thanksgiving Proclamation

This historic proclamation was issued by George Washington during his first year as President. It sets aside Thursday, November 26 as “A Day of Publick Thanksgiving and Prayer.” Signed by Washington on October 3, 1789 and entitled “General Thanksgiving,” the decree appointed the day “to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God.”

While there were Thanksgiving observances in America both before and after Washington’s proclamation, this represents the first to be so designated by the new national government.

During the 1700s, it was common practice for individual colonies to observe days of thanksgiving throughout each year. A Thanksgiving Day two hundred years ago was a day set aside for prayer and fasting, not a day marked by plentiful food and drink as is today’s custom. Later in the 18th century each of the states periodically would designate a day of thanksgiving in honor of a military victory, an adoption of a state constitution or an exceptionally bountiful crop. Such a Thanksgiving Day celebration was held in December of 1777 by the colonies nationwide, commemorating the surrender of British General Burgoyne at Saratoga.

Later, on October 3, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation calling for the observance of the fourth Tuesday of November as a national holiday. In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt moved the holiday to the third Thursday of November (to extend the Christmas shopping season and boost the economy). After a storm of protest, Roosevelt changed the holiday again in 1941 to the fourth Thursday in November, where it stands today.¹

As you can see, the roots of our Thanksgiving Day go back to our very first president. It didn’t take long for the holiday to become precious in the hearts of Americans. The idea of a day to “acknowledge God with grateful hearts” one Thursday in November, quickly became a part of our heritage; so much so, that when moved back a week, there was a great amount of protesting. ❖

¹ Excerpt from: www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/firsts/thanksgiving

You Can Feed Those in Need

The year 2010 is not unlike that time in 1939. Our economy could once again use a boost. Many of our families, friends and neighbors have been hit hard financially. It is a time when we all need to look out for those in less fortunate circumstances. One way you can brighten a day, is to donate non-perishable food and/or a \$15 grocery store gift card to help us prepare Thanksgiving feasts for those in need. Perhaps your family would like to contribute a whole feast for someone in need.

Donations should be dropped off in the church lobby by Friday, November 12. Saturday, November 13, we will gather in the church lobby to fill bags. This year we would like to invite you to submit the name(s) of those you know who are in need. You will have the option of making the delivery yourself. You can fill out a form, available in the church office, to designate a family to receive a dinner. All remaining dinners will be donated to the Open Heart Kitchen.

You can help by donating the following for each bag:

- \$15 grocery store gift card (for turkey)
- Canned corn
- Canned peas
- Canned cranberry sauce
- Canned sweet potatoes
- Stuffing mix
- Potatoes (instant, mashed)
- Gravy (canned or mix)
- Marshmallows
- Pie shell
- Pumpkin pie filling (already spiced)
- Paper cups (multiples of 8)
- Paper plates (multiples of 8)
- Thanksgiving tablecloth
- Thanksgiving napkins (multiples of 8)
- 2 candles with candlesticks ❖

“The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.”

LUKE 15:16



Women's Christmas Dessert Concert Features Sylvia Lange

In his book, *Walk Across the Room*, Bill Hybels emphasizes the value in sharing our faith stories with our friends. It's also helpful to expose our friends to the dynamic stories of other believers.

On Sunday, December 5 from 7:00-9:00PM, at Valley Community Church, VCC Women's Ministries will host a Christmas Dessert Concert and provide an opportunity for you to invite your friends to hear the inspiring story and music of speaker and independent artist, Sylvia Lange. Sylvia candidly shares her personal story interspersed with her unforgettable music. Although her songs are executed with excellence and beauty, it is her personal story that captures the attention as audiences are drawn to know more about Jesus.

With a heart especially bent for those who don't yet know Christ and for those who have forgotten who He is, Sylvia is also committed to doing whatever she can to help feed starving and diseased children all over the third world. Working with her beloved World Vision, she is known for her grace, brevity, appropriate discretion, and class as she shares from the stage how the listener can help save the life of a child through child sponsorship.

Following the concert in the Sanctuary, we invite you and your guests to relax in the foyer and front patio sharing stories over an elegant array of decadent desserts. Tickets will be available soon for \$10 per ticket. Watch *Keeping Connected* and the bulletin for more information in coming the weeks! ❖

Blankets Bring Comfort *by Susan Harford*

While surfing the internet recently, I came across a site that talked about security blankets for kids who are "seriously ill, traumatized, or otherwise in need." One grandma wrote the following: "The night my dad died, I (age 10) remember three things: huddling with my 4 siblings on the bed, the flashing red lights, and rubbing the 'silky' blanket—the quilt that was normally on my mother's bed."

Her story reminded me of the blankets we make each year at church that also go to help kids get through the tough times.

It might be due to a family death such as this grandma's, fire that burns down a family home, a natural disaster such as an earthquake or just plain, old hard times for a family but no matter what it is, a child needs to know there is someone out in the world that knows their plight and is willing to help. There is no better way than providing a warm blanket that they can wrap around them like a warm hug.

Join us on Saturday, December 11 at 6:00PM in the Seminar Room for our fourth annual blanket making event. Bring at least one yard of fleece and a good pair of scissors or a rotary cutter and mat. There is NO SEWING involved. If you can tie a knot, you can make a blanket. If you are unable to join us and would like to help, you can drop off yard cuts of fleece in the church office. Volunteers will cut and tie them for you.

NOTE: Elementary, middle school and high school students will be making blankets as a service project. Parents, please drop off their 1 yard lengths (or more) of fleece in the office by Friday November 12 so volunteers can prepare them for tying.

Fleece is currently on sale at Joann Fabrics. ❖



And the Winner Is...

Congratulations! Nancy Riccomini is the winner in our quarterly drawing. She will receive a coffee or juice gift card for \$5.00.

Do you know that your name will be automatically entered to win when you provide us with an update to the church database (either your own or for someone else)? As we move to our new database in December it is important that we have your most current information. If your email or any other critical information has changed, please take a moment to let us know. ❖

Baby Dedication

... Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. . .

There are few things in life as precious as a new baby. A baby born to a Christian family is doubly blessed. He or she will grow up hearing about Jesus from the morning of His humble beginnings to His magnificent gesture of death on the cross—all so we might spend eternity along side of Him.



Baby Dedications
Sunday, November 28,
both services

Preparation Class
Sunday, November 21,
10:45AM in Room B212

In Deuteronomy 2 God makes it clear that the duty of teaching children belongs to their parents. Sunday School or Vacation Bible School can provide some instruction, but parents must seize

the teachable moments that arise throughout life. Dedicating a child acknowledges God's sovereignty not only over the child, but also mother and father. Parents present their child before God and His people asking for grace and wisdom in carrying out their responsibilities. God's people agree to come along side of parents to help them in this responsibility of raising their children so that the child might one day trust Jesus Christ as Savior for the forgiveness of sin. ❖

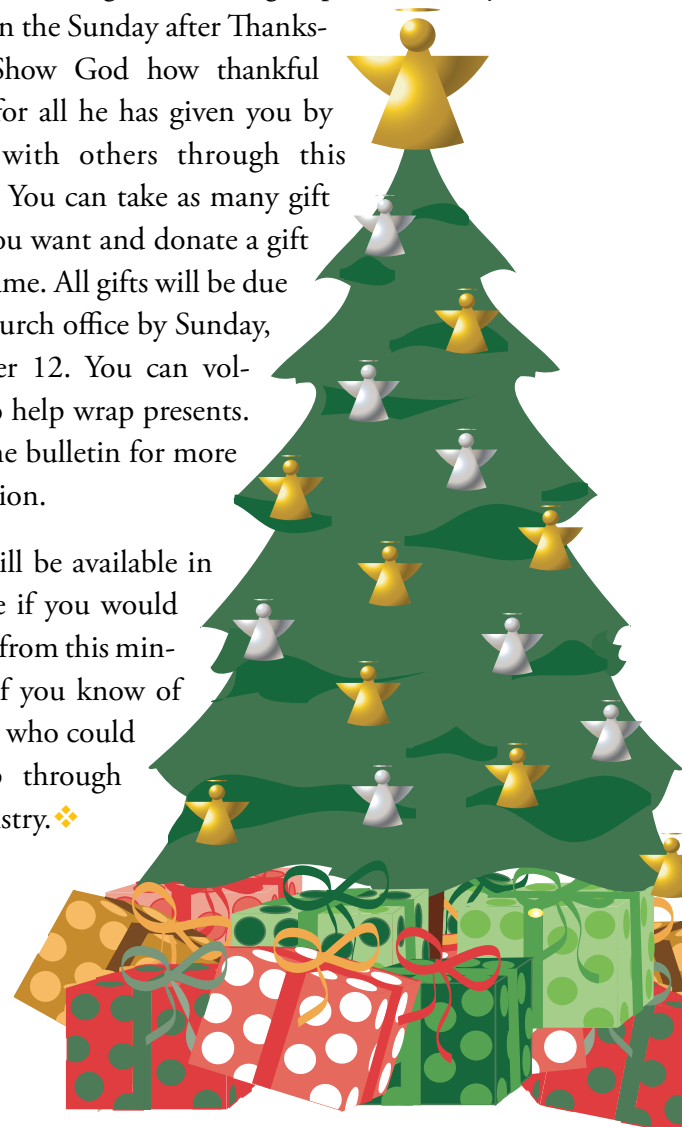
Something You Should Know About Angels

The word "angel" comes from the Greek word *aggelos*, which means "messenger." The matching Hebrew word *mal'ak* has the same meaning. In the Bible, God often sent his angels down from heaven as messengers. An angel appeared to Mary to tell her of the coming birth of Jesus and the role she would play. An angel also came down as a messenger to assure Joseph that it was alright to take Mary as his wife.

Today, we have modern day "angels" who bring a message of love and hope to the lonely, hurting, or needy. Those angels are men and women of Valley Community Church who reach out to others through our annual Angel Tree giving.

This year our Angel Tree will go up in the lobby of the church on the Sunday after Thanksgiving. Show God how thankful you are for all he has given you by sharing with others through this ministry. You can 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 12. You can volunteer to help wrap presents. Watch the bulletin for more information.

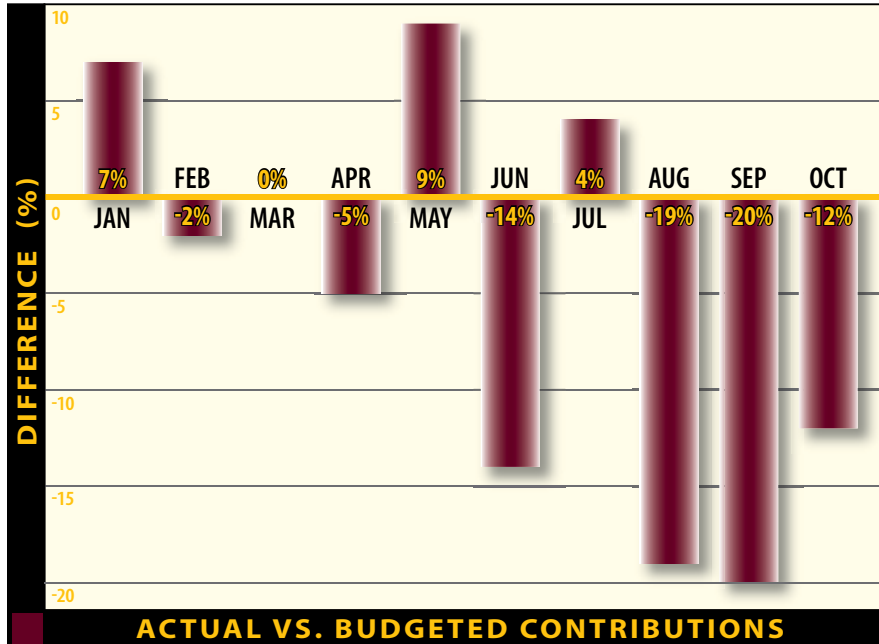
Forms will be available in the office if you would like help from this ministry or if you know of someone who could use help through this ministry. ❖



Financial Update

In the last three months we have experienced a reduction in contributions that is significant enough that the Elders decided that the congregation should be informed.

The chart below shows the change in pattern. For the first seven months of 2010 we had a relatively stable trend, and the average contribution level was on target with our budget. But in the last three months we have had consistently large shortfalls between our giving and budget.



The average deficit for these three months is 17%. In terms of dollars, that represents a total shortfall of \$93,000 in just three months.

We of course recognize that the ongoing economic difficulties undoubtedly play a role. You might recall that in the Fall of 2009 we had a period of lower than usual giving, and we attributed that to the continuing economic difficulties that so many of us are experiencing. But upon sharing our financial situation early this year, the congregation responded with more sacrificial giving. And we are very thankful to God for that response.

We ask that your first response be prayer. Give thanks for the ways in which God has

provided in the past, both for the congregation and for you. And pray about our current financial needs as a congregation. Pray, too, that God would show you whether he is calling you to respond to our current need.

Finally, pray for wisdom and discernment for VCC leaders. Pray that God would lead us as we discern when and what further actions we should take. We are trusting that God can use financial difficulties for His purposes, as long as we continue to seek after Him and His Kingdom (Matthew 6:31-33). ❖

