

SEPTEMBER 2011

The BELL TOWER

VALLEY COMMUNITY CHURCH

Big Challenge...Big Opportunity

As we enter into this next season of our church's ministry it is exciting to consider what God has in store for us. Each year brings new opportunities and new challenges. This year one of our biggest challenges is our biggest opportunity.

We are about to launch an initiative to pay off the debt incurred with the building of the parking structure. Elsewhere in this *Bell Tower* you will find more details about this, but I want to take a moment to address the "why" of this initiative.

As we consider the mission into which God is calling us, we have two important challenges that this campaign will address. First, there is the practical reality that the debt limits what we can do. The servicing of the debt is a significant part of our budget each year and we would love to be free to invest those funds in ministries that help us fulfill our mission. Beyond that, our loan has conditions that require us to keep a cash reserve of about \$500,000. The impact—we have funds ready to be invested in ministry that we have to hold onto at this time.

Second, there is the issue of our discipleship. A year ago we introduced our Spiritual Growth Pathway as a guide to the life transformation that we believe should be a part of every follower of Jesus' journey. We are committed to truly becoming a place where God is "transforming lives in a Christ-centered community." One of the greatest indexes of how this transformation is happening is displayed in how we handle our possessions.

Most people don't realize that the Bible talks about money and possessions more than it talks about either love or prayer. Almost half of all of Jesus' parables are about this as well. Why? I think it is because nothing reveals the state of our hearts like our attitude toward and use of our possessions. Our giving to God demonstrates our trust in Him and expresses gratitude for his gracious provision.

Finally, since a major goal of this initiative is to position us to become more outward-focused, allowing us to serve and invest in our community and the world, we are building into the plan a commitment that reflects this goal. We are going to invest a tithe, 10%, of all money given in this campaign, to missions' projects. By doing this we are saying right up front this whole process is designed for the glory of God and the good of others. Our prayer is that while attacking the practical issue of our debt we all, both individually and corporately, pursue an ever-deepening walk with Christ.

So, please be in prayer about all of this and come with an open heart and a willing spirit as we trust God together for his provision, direction, and blessing.

Danny Danny Hall
SENIOR PASTOR

**If your
vision isn't
intimidating
to you,
it's likely
insulting
to God.**

Steven Furtick
Elevation Church
North Carolina

Worship Arts—Get Involved! *by Don Elser*

It's good to be able to be part of what God is doing in the community of faith here at Valley Community Church! At this time, I feel like the biggest part of my worship arts pastoral ministry is to get to know the culture, people and history here—as well as the unique environment that God has placed us in, and the gifts and talents which are part of our community. I have really appreciated the support and flexibility of the worship band in learning to work with another leader! I'm grateful, also, for such a responsive and “alive” congregation to serve with.

Many people think of worship leadership as coming from “the stage” or platform. In my way of thinking, the most powerful worship leadership comes from those gathered to worship. Often one or two highly engaged worshippers can actually be part of leading and encourage those up front and help us keep a focus on God and the “conversation” that we're having with Him and each other in worship. Thanks to you who are an unofficial part of our worship leadership at VCC. I am so grateful for you!

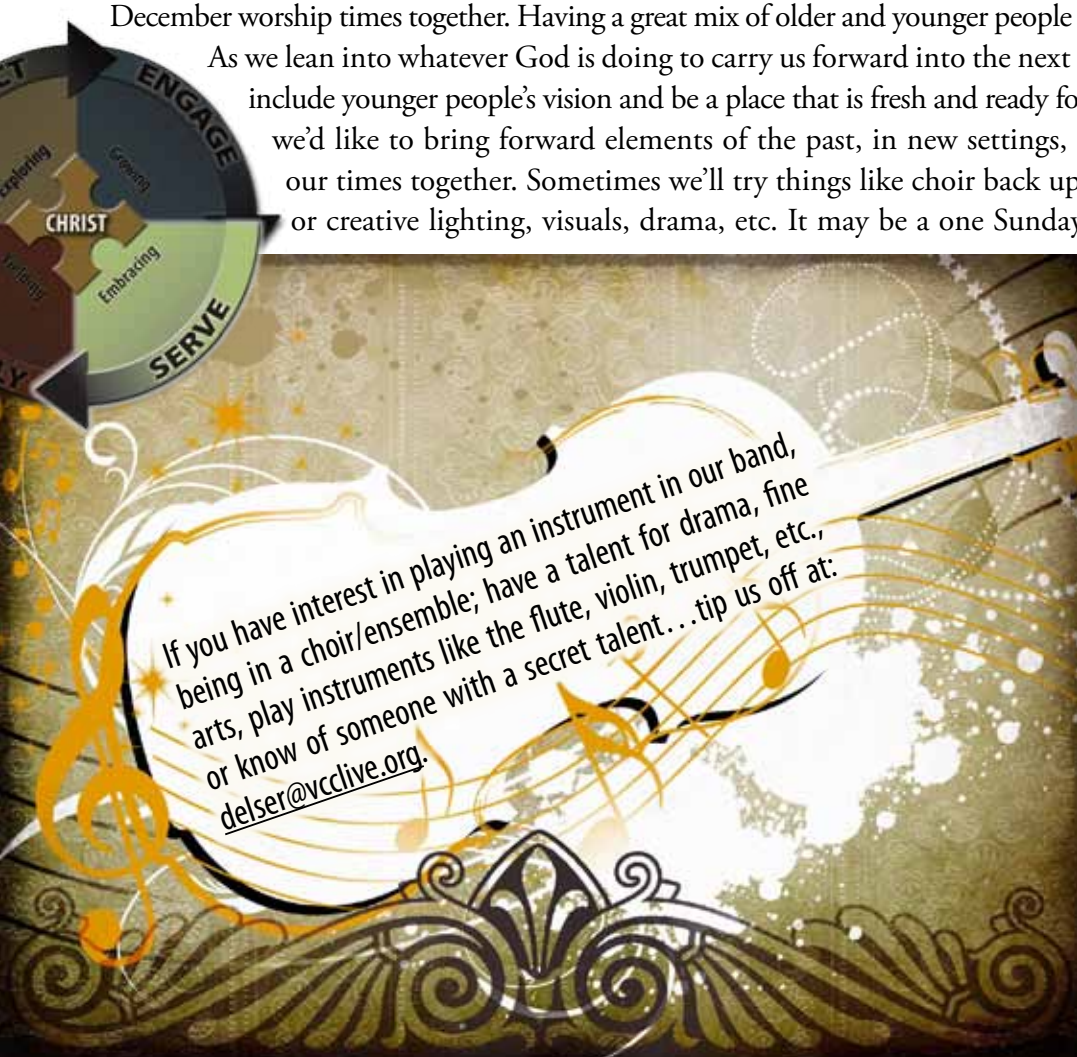
I would love to see our worship band expand...with more people helping share the load...and broadening us a bit. We could use an additional person for every instrument up front. If you have experience playing one of the instruments in our band, and would like to be part of this, I'd love to meet you! In addition, it helps to learn about other people with gifts and talents in drama, fine arts, instruments like flutes, violins, trumpets, etc. who can be used for some special offertory/communion interlude or message support projects. If you have an interest in being part of seasonal or special tune choir/ensemble work, please contact me.

There are two tunes that I'd like to utilize this fall, as well as 2-3 songs which could be a great enhancement to our December worship times together. Having a great mix of older and younger people in this would be solid and encouraging.

As we lean into whatever God is doing to carry us forward into the next decades of VCC ministry, we'd love to include younger people's vision and be a place that is fresh and ready for whatever God has for us. In addition, we'd like to bring forward elements of the past, in new settings, to add richness, depth and variety to our times together. Sometimes we'll try things like choir back up for a featured tune, children's group, or creative lighting, visuals, drama, etc. It may be a one Sunday shot or something that moves us to

understand what helps people worship in a new and fresh or deeper way. Please be patient as we work and learn together.

Your specific encouragements along the way are helpful to us as we learn what has helped you most. I will always and especially value knowing how those you bring with you—who are either considering or beginning a relationship with God—are helped to connect or made to feel welcome and safe at VCC. How incredible to know that we have the privilege of worshipping God AND doing it with a sense of His huge heart for restoring people in relationship to Him.



If you have interest in playing an instrument in our band, being in a choir/ensemble; have a talent for drama, fine arts, play instruments like the flute, violin, trumpet, etc., or know of someone with a secret talent...tip us off at: delser@vcclive.org.



setting us free, by Sid Niemeyer

For several years the elders have considered launching a capital campaign to free our church of debt, and this past spring they decided that “this is the year.” In May we started to put together a leadership team for this campaign, and that team has been busy making plans and already starting to enlist volunteers.

The first public announcement of this campaign, which we are calling **setting us free**, was on August 28 as we began our Fall church program. Later in September we will be distributing a *Prayer Guide* to encourage everyone to pray in a concerted church-wide way. The campaign is not simply about raising money, rather it is a time to focus on the critical role that giving and money plays in discipleship. How we use our money is really a heart issue, according to Jesus.

setting us free will formally kick-off (I do like the football metaphor) on October 9. A series of four messages on Sunday mornings will help us to see more clearly that giving is a very important means of grace that leads to spiritual growth. We will have a special small group curriculum that in three lessons will give you an opportunity to reflect and apply the Sunday morning messages.

We want to give you the opportunity to hear in detail the purpose for the campaign, i.e. the vision, the timing, the benefits, and the process. To that end, we would like everyone in the congregation to attend a *Group Fellowship* where a group of 30-100 people will have the opportunity to hear from Danny Hall and Elder, Stu Bailey (chair of the campaign). In this setting you will be able to ask all the questions that you like!

setting us free will conclude with two special Sundays in November. On *Commitment Sunday*, November 6, we will collect the pledges of the congregation. The following Sunday we will announce and celebrate the total amount that was committed, as well as take a *First Fruits Offering*.



Ministry 2 Men—Unchaining a Man’s Heart

by Tony Catudal

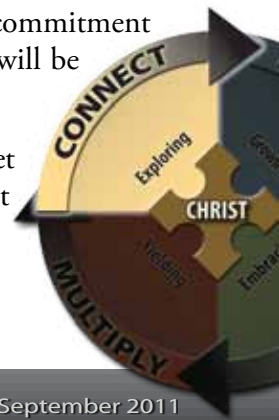
We have been evaluating how best to meet the needs of men here at VCC and believe that Ministry 2 Men is where we need to go. Ministry 2 Men is our heart’s desire to provide connecting and spiritual growth opportunities for men that are specific to their needs, time constraints, and struggles. As we look at how this ministry should be shaped we are asking questions like: how do men gather? What do men really need? What are the issues

that need to be addressed under the surface? These questions and more are being considered as we develop our plans for the year. Ultimately, Ministry 2 Men is something we hope you hear about not because of the size or nature of the events, but because of the life transformation taking place in the hearts of the men of VCC.

Our main events for this next year will be the men’s Wednesday morning and Thursday evening Bible studies, quarterly fellowships, and the men’s retreat in November. As in previous years, this year’s retreat will be held at Redwood Christian Park. However, we are decreasing the nights stay to just one night to reduce both the cost and time commitment in an effort to make this high-impact event accessible to more men. The theme of this year’s retreat will be *Freedom to Be!* where we will look at some of the things that keep us from being truly free in Christ.

Men, it is our hope that this will be an exciting year for Ministry 2 Men and a great time for you to get involved! For more information or to hear about serving opportunities, please contact Doug Roberts at 925-449-1928 or Tony Catudal at tcatudal@vcclive.org.

Upcoming Events: Wednesday AM study, ongoing—weekly; Thursday PM study, begins September 15; quarter fellowships, to be scheduled; *Freedom to Be!*, Men’s retreat, November 4-5.



Sunday School for Adults? . . . Yes, Building Life Together! by Ted Saito

A wonderful place to get to know other people.

A good way to start to build relationships.

Fun socials with great food.

Terrific in-depth teaching.

I appreciate your praying for me.

The best adult Sunday school class I've ever attended.

These are a few of the comments from the 50 or so weekly Building Life Together (BLT) attendees who meet at 10:30 every Sunday morning in the upstairs Valley Community Church Seminar Room.

Using many Adult Bible Fellowship concepts brought to us by interim pastor Dave Jenkins, BLT began in September 2008 to be a bridge between the large sanctuary worship gathering and small groups. A typical class starts with coffee and snacks provided by BLT right after the first service where we “Yak & Snack,” make friends and build relationships.

Seating is at small round tables to enhance interaction and classes are designed to give opportunities to discuss questions based on the day's lesson. We enjoy a hymn, led by Bud Engel or George Mitschelin, accompanied by Hannah Park on the piano, and are challenged to consider how to understand and apply God's word in our personal lives. The team of teachers provides written handouts and use audio visuals to enhance our learning. Our Bible-based curriculum has included studies of Acts, 2 Corinthians, Nehemiah, 1-2 Kings and recently Jeremiah. Recent studies have been supplemented by insightful and thought provoking materials from Lifeway publications. Prayer requests written at each table are compiled into one list which is then distributed for an extended prayer time each week and emailed in the weekly BLT Prayergram which also includes important class announcements to keep everyone informed.

BLT depends on a large leadership team and many others for ideas, energy, and person power. We still have opportunities for new people to be used by the Lord to serve. Bill & Jean Steuben are an excellent example. Bill is the driving force behind our downtown Pleasanton Christmas Caroling as well as a neighborhood outreach to Maggie, an octogenarian widow who lives across from VCC. Bill invited the neighborhood to join with BLT to spruce up Maggie's yard. What a wonderful (and lasting) witness it was for the neighbors to see us pruning, clipping and trimming Maggie's place.

BLT has sponsored several church-wide activities. What fun we had with Bill Nandor's idea for a Purim Party! Steve & Caryl Glavan wrote and produced the Purim Melodrama for the BLT Players' debut presenting the story of Esther which was followed by a delicious Persian luncheon including the creative decorating touch of Lilia & Jon Knight. BLT also sponsored the Walk Through the Bible presentation overviewing the whole Old Testament including hand motions to help us remember the key events. Another church-wide event was the Christian Seder (Passover) sit-down supper taught by Dr. Robinson (Jews for Jesus) highlighting Christ in the ancient Passover tradition. Typically there is a monthly “Informal Luncheon” where we share favorite dishes, often informally interview a BLTer, and annually have a hymn sing.

BLT sponsors and participates in a wide range of service projects. In addition to outreaches to the Christmas School of Urban Mission activity, BLT, led by Pam Bennett, participated in Samaritan Purse's Operation Christmas Child sending shoe boxes of Christmas joy to foreign children throughout the world. Eleanor Fong and Jan Mickelson have organized Caring Connections to harness BLT's loving spirit to help care for, show our love, and concern and be part of the solution to a peer in need.

continued



BLT members in Maggie's yard



BBQ lunch break



One of six loads of clippings!



BLT has a big heart for missions. In addition to sponsoring various interactions with visiting missionaries and participating in Mission Sundays, BLTers serve. Rob and Geri Sullivan were very active in BLT before they went on full-time mission work with the Rafiki orphanage in Jos, Nigeria. John and Margo Johnson make multiple extended trips to help, fix and install major electrical upgrades at the school and orphanage in Ndola, Zambia. Paul and Karren Pentony regularly work the winter months at Bible Study Fellowship headquarters in San Antonio.

In September we begin our 13-week series on Romans and invite anyone interested in building bridges with others at VCC and being challenged by Biblical truth. Please drop in whenever you can.

Heart Connection—Multiplying

In our modern culture, we often equate ‘worship’ with ‘music.’ Singing praises to God is certainly one way to honor and adore Him, but recently Heart Connection participants praised the Lord for what He had accomplished through their four-month mentoring commitments.

On June 4 nearly 25 women gathered to celebrate what God had done through their newly-formed relationships. Diane Graydon shared how the ministry of praying for several mentor/mentee pairs blessed and encouraged her. Amy Carlson and Gretchen Zaballos shared how God used the simple activity of shopping to deepen their relationship and allow them to see Him at work. MaryAnn Reynolds pointed out that the mentor can also be ‘mentored,’ praising God for how her ‘mentee,’ Joanie Fisher helped MaryAnn take a step of faith.

Suzy Goon and Margarita Burger enthusiastically shared how Linnea Ebersole, their mentor had encouraged them. Margarita thanked God for giving her a mentor who could sympathize with her and point her to practical, everyday applications. Several other women shared how their mentors had helped them grow in prayerful trust and thanked the Lord for providing mentors who could identify personally with their struggles and questions.

Many women expressed appreciation for how God had made ‘just the right’ match for them. Mentors agreed that the relationships were certainly ‘two-way,’ the mentor growing through her friendship with her mentee. There is not enough room in this article to recount all the blessings shared that morning.

The Women’s Ministry Team is asking the Lord to weave mentoring into the culture of Valley Community Church and to develop an atmosphere where women are able to freely approach other ladies for the purpose of mentoring or being mentored. On September 24, we will begin another four-week mentoring program. If you are feeling lonely, are hurting, or would like to have someone come alongside you to help you grow in your faith, this program may be what you are looking for.

Heart Connection also has a desire to offer training, encouragement and accountability to women who have already entered mentoring relationships. For more information about Heart Connection, please pick up a brochure at the Welcome Center or visit the Women’s Ministry pages on the VCC website, www.vcclive.org.





Praying for Our Children and Their Schools

moms in touch
INTERNATIONAL

Fern Nichols is a parent just like you. When her sons entered junior high, she had the same apprehensions you do for their welfare. But overriding those fears was a deep trust that God could protect and keep her children. She knew that if moms gathered together to cry out to God for the needs and concerns of their children and schools, that he would not only hear those prayers, he would answer them. So Fern called like-minded moms who gathered each week to pray. What started so simply, has grown into a worldwide community of praying moms in every state and in more than 130 countries around the world.

This was the beginning of Moms In Touch International—moms in touch with God, their children, their schools and one another through prayer. As moms began sharing what God had been doing in their lives, and in the lives of their children through prayer, other groups began to spring up all over British Columbia, where Fern’s family was living at the time.

The summer of 1985 brought a change as they moved from Abbotsford, British Columbia, to Poway, California. Fern soon discovered that God had given her still greater opportunities for carrying on the work that began in Canada. Once again she prayed that God would raise up mothers who were willing to “stand in the gap” for their children. That fall, Fern began the first MITI group for Poway High School, and soon many other groups began to form for schools in that district. This grassroots effort spread quickly as mothers prayed for groups to start around the state and across the nation.

The fall of 1987 brought the first published Moms In Touch Booklet, and in January of 1988 the first Moms In Touch retreat was held with 35 women. They prayed for national exposure and God answered their prayers that spring when Fern got a call from a producer at Focus on the Family. That May she and twelve other moms were on the air talking to Dr. James Dobson! That first radio program brought over 20,000 responses.

Today, Moms In Touch International has groups in every state in the USA and in more than 130 countries worldwide. The Moms In Touch International Booklet has been translated into more than 48 languages.

Last year, on the third Sunday in September, Moms In Touch International hosted the first “Bless Our Schools Sunday.” Bless Our Schools Sunday is a time for churches to pray a blessing over the educators and students in their congregation. Valley Community Church will join this tradition on Sunday, September 18, by praying specifically for those who are staff, and students in our schools. Imagine the impact this time of prayer can have on the teachers, principals, school board members or students that are standing up for biblical values, as well as every school in our community. This is a great opportunity to show our students and school staff that they are important to us!

If you are a mom who is interested in praying for your child and their school, stop by the table at the Gathering Place on September 18 for more information.

We are bond-servants of the Lord, completely dependent upon Him for guidance and help. We do not trust in chariots or horses, but in the name of the LORD our God.

PSALM 20:7



Recharge—Starting Your Day off Right! by Ted Saito

“Disciple men to Christ through developing close bonds between men and *winning* (MATTHEW 28:20 & 4:19), *building* (2 TIMOTHY 2:2, EPHESIANS 4:11-12), and sending (ACTS 1:8, MATTHEW 4:19) men to *serve* (MARK 10:45) the Kingdom of God.”

Early Risers offers an excellent opportunity for spiritual growth & fellowship as we carry on a tradition of a men’s early morning Bible study. Led by Ted Saito since 2008, we meet every Wednesday morning (6:30-7:30AM) in the Valley Community Church Conference Room. Diane Saito & other wives provide one of Pleasanton’s best cooked breakfasts which is enjoyed by the dozen guys who dive into the scriptures and follow the lesson plan which is emailed in advance.

The lessons challenge all of us men to apply Biblical truths to our everyday lives and to pursue “winning, building and serving,” by providing the opportunity for lively discussion and personal sharing. We write our prayer requests so that everyone get’s a copy for our closing prayer time and to reference during the week. Early Risers also offers the possibility to be taught, develop personal study, leadership, and teaching skills. Ron Mickelson, Paul Klass and Drew Sanders have blessed us with their insights, energy and leadership.

Every lesson is scripturally-based. We’ve systematically studied Mark, Joshua, James, and Ephesians. Sometimes we also draw on books like *Authentic Christianity* (R. Steadman) and *Quiet Strength* (Tony Dungy). Our 2011 goal, to become conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29), has been aided by discussions of topics like these: using peer pressure to glorify God, develop & demonstrate godly strength, dealing with success and failure, security in today’s uncertain world, prayers that please the Father, and being a friend in times of severe stress.

Our occasional service projects are designed to build bonds with the guys while serving the Lord. Aaron Lee and Mike Kowalski brought their sons to Our Shepherd’s Gate project to work with dad, learn how to use some new tools and serve Jesus as we cleaned out a storage area, built new shelves and enjoyed lunch afterwards.

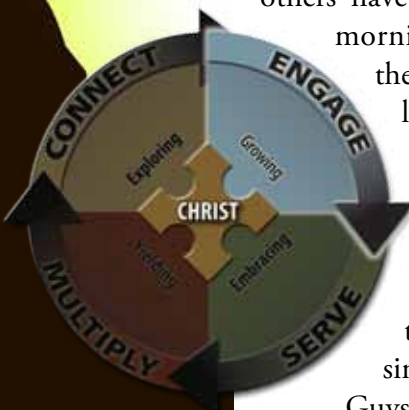
Facing career changes, some men have joined us for encouragement and support in between job opportunities while others have a schedule that allows for weekly Wednesday morning recharging. Don Prescott captured many of the guys’ feelings about Early Risers, saying “I always look forward to Early Risers, to the fellowship with my friends, and to a great breakfast! It’s part of my life and my week would not be complete without it.”

This fall we will study the book *Respectable Sins*. Author Jerry Bridges “returns to his trademark theme of holiness and addresses a dozen clusters of specific sins” which may have become “acceptable” and that we use to excuse ourselves.

Guys are invited (walk-ins are welcomed!) to join us as we accept the challenge and God’s help to overcome respectable sins and become more conformed to Christ’s image. Contact Ted Saito, 829-4380, if you would like more information.



Mike Kowalski & sons



Celebrate With Us

Sunday, September 18 will be an evening of Celebration and Appreciation. We will gather at 5:00PM for a potluck dinner together (bring a main dish, salad, or dessert to share...your choice!), collect members' ballots, and then enjoy a time of Celebration in the sanctuary. Our focus will be on where God is leading us in the year ahead. As Danny

Hall mentioned in his article, we have some big challenges and big opportunities in front of us. You won't want to miss this opportunity to catch the vision.

A special part of the evening will be the Celebration of Baptism. Many of our youth made first-time commitments to Jesus this summer and will publicly acknowledge their desire to follow Him by being baptized that night. Adults are also invited to participate in the baptism. A preparation class will take place on Sunday, September 11 after second service.

During the evening we also plan to acknowledge and show our Appreciation to the Elders and Deacons who have served in the prior year. Our focus this month is on the third step of the Spiritual Growth Pathway, *Serve: a Place to Give*.

Nothing exemplifies giving servants more than our Elders and Deacons.

Elders who are rotating off after five years of serving are Dave Bennett and Bill Butler. Deacons who have completed a three-year term are Jason Alley, Patti Ambrose, Keith Brown, Craig Copeland, Dan Towson, and Jody Wallem.

Childcare will be provided during the meeting.



**Celebration & Appreciation
Sunday, September 18**

**Dinner at 5:00PM
(drop your food in
the Hall at 4:45PM)**

**Baptism (prep class on
Sunday, September 11)**

**Childcare provided
during the meeting**

September Calendar

Tuesdays & Wednesdays, 3:00PM

Homework in the Hall for middle & high school

Sunday, September 4, 12:15PM

GroupLink

Saturday, September 10, 9:30AM

Heart Connection orientation

Tuesday, September 13, 9:15AM

Women's AM Bible study begins

Tuesday, September 13, 3:30PM

Children's Choir begins

Wednesday, September 14, 3:00 & 7:00PM

Women's PM Bible studies begin

Saturday, September 17, 6:30PM

Middle school Van Hunt

Sunday, September 18, 5:00PM

Church-wide Celebration and Appreciation

Tuesday, September 20, 3:30PM

Children's Homework Club begins

Saturday, September 24, 8:30AM

Heart Connection Kickoff

Sunday, September 25, 12:15PM

Small Group Leader Equipping