While this is the 17th Annual Tidings of Joy at Village Presbyterian Church on Mission Road, it is the first under the musical direction of Will Breytspraak. We spoke with Will about what you can expect at this year’s “Tidings of Joy” concerts.

“We are introducing the first Tidings of Joy Children’s Chorus,” shared Will. “We want Tidings to be for kids and for families, in addition to a celebration of the season’s most beautiful music.”

“We want it to feel like the whole community is coming together. We want it to be like coming home. So we’re going to celebrate a lot of dimensions of our community and our music community. What I mean by that is that we’ll have a children’s chorus, so there’s a place for kids.”

“I will conduct a men’s chorus singing two pieces: excerpts from Mendelssohn’s Christus and Biebl’s Ave Maria. Dr. Elisa Bickers will conduct the women’s chorus in Rutter’s Candlelight Carol. Matthew C. Shepard will conduct the Village Chamber Choir in an absolute masterpiece by a Canadian composer Healey Willan — Hodie, Christus Natus Est. He’ll also conduct a beautiful piece about the shepherds called Quem Pastores. It’s a team effort, but it’s also a celebration of team. We want people to see that and feel that because we love working together.”

“The program opens with Vaughn Williams’ What Child Is This? And then from afar, you’ll hear Angels We Have Heard on High. We’re all teaming up together to conduct the children’s chorus – Jenny Hull and me, Kate Beebe and Rebecca Enslow. Then the young adult choir, Alegria, will play a special role. And of course there will be the traditional congregational song.”

“The Village pipe organ and its master, Dr. Elisa Bickers, will be prominently featured. The closing of the first half, we will have Dr. Bickers playing an arrangement of Widor’s Toccata, mixed with Joy to the World. It’s a hybrid composition she’s very excited to share. And that will really punctuate the first half before the intermission with an exclamation mark.”

“We have a John Rutter piece called Jesus Child. The text of it has a lot of questions, such as ‘Have you heard

Continued
the story about the shepherds? Have you heard the story about the wise men? Have you heard about the baby? etc., etc. This whole concert is structured about that piece and those questions.”

“I hope that the audience will feel the excitement of the community coming together in the way that the concert unfolds. There’s something in there for everyone. We encourage people to invite a neighbor or friend, somebody who could really use a dose of Christmas beauty in their lives.”

“I also really want to encourage people to bring children and let them experience the awe of this. Our kids are lonelier than ever, with all the social media out there. It is harder to grow up now than it’s ever been. The children in our community need to get here and feel the unconditional love and the wonder and sit with their families and tune out of all that other stuff and tune into the Christmas story—hear men singing and women singing, children and 96-year-olds singing and hear the pipe organ. It will make a permanent impression on them.”

One Village vocal ensemble you will not hear in the Tidings concerts is Village Voices, our youth choir.

“Village Voices will be featured in the morning of Tidings,” notes Will. “They’ll be singing movements from Vivaldi’s Gloria with a chamber orchestra in all morning worship services. That’s going to allow some of the adults to pace themselves for the afternoon of Tidings, and also allow Village Voices a very prime time spot in our season.”

Please join us for Tidings of Joy at 3 and 6 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 17, in the Village on Mission Sanctuary. Admission is free. A retiring offering will benefit Community LINC, our Village Signature Mission for 2017-2018.

About Community LINC

In 1986, a group of citizens from local churches created Community LINC to address ways to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness. Today, it is one of the largest single-site providers of interim housing for homeless families in Kansas City. The goal of the program is to stabilize families for sustained independence. LINC owns six buildings with 36 units and has an annual budget of $2.2 million. They serve 150 families a year.

Community LINC does more than rehouse families. Adults participate in employment services, budgeting, healthy lifestyles and life skills classes, mental wellness services and intensive and individualized case management. Services for children include bi-weekly classes on nutrition, resilience skills, academic advocacy and support and mental wellness services. This year Community LINC, as well as four other organizations focusing on homelessness, have become Coordinated Entry Screening Sites assisting families and individuals with securing stable housing.

The Transforming Generations/Trauma Informed Care project aims to expand LINC’s trauma informed care services in order to impact the next generation and reduce the likelihood of teens and children ever becoming homeless adults. This year, the Village Church Mission Committee selected Community LINC Trauma Information Care Program as its Signature Mission. Signature Mission funds help start new programs, expand infrastructure and/or serve new clientele. In general, Signature Mission provides funds to help a local organization grow. You can find out more about Community LINC at www.communitylinc.org.

Second Thursday Recital

Please join us at 12:15 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 14, when soprano Kate BrysTspraak presents a recital of Christmas and seasonal favorites in the Village on Mission Chapel.
The Village Habitat Crew Welcomes New Homeowner

On a bright Thursday morning on Oct. 26, Kansas City Habitat for Humanity blessed the new home of Kennedy Johnson, Jr. Members of the Village Habitat Tuesday-Thursday crew took part in the blessing festivities as well as the construction of this house in Kansas City, Kan.

Having just completed community college classes, Kennedy, who currently works at an area casino, will be attending the University of Kansas to complete coursework towards a degree in chemical engineering.

Habitat provides safe, decent and affordable housing for Kansas City residents who qualify financially for 0% fixed-rate mortgages. Mortgage payments that homeowners make are put into a revolving fund to help build future houses through the Habitat program. Homeowners must also take classes and put in sweat equity hours at the ReStore, in the office and on construction sites.

“Kennedy has been a very busy young man,” shared Deborah White, director of Mission. “Not only has he been working full time and going to school, but he has committed 280 hours of work to Habitat.”

At the house blessing, joined by his proud parents, Kennedy, Jr. shared his appreciation in the following poem:

Dream Team

As a child, you see houses.  
As a child, you have a dream.  
When you’re young you just think it happens, never thinking what it means.  
The intentions seem so rosy red, waiting for life to just form,  
naively grabbing at proceedings, forgetting about the thorns.  
I never thought it was possible, at least not for myself.  
So many rosy dreams, that were meant for everyone else.  
So many moves to destinations our family was our wealth.  
I thank the Lord for this opportunity to give me a chance to help.  
I thank the people here and ways I learned myself.  
I appreciate the good and bad that taught me something else.  
Many would understand my story but few would know my dream.  
I thank y’all for becoming my family. Welcome to the team.

Food Pantry

The Food Pantry cannot leave Thanksgiving behind us without thanking all the donors who provided the food for 500 families of the Pantry’s clients. One very generous donor provided the 500 turkeys and many other generous donors provided the food to complete 650 baskets (larger families received several baskets with their one large turkey). Smiles abounded at the Pantry on Distribution days!

The Pantry’s thankfulness doesn’t stop with the food for the baskets. A huge thank you goes out to all who participated with the sorting of the food and the distribution of the baskets to the clients. Many volunteers worked extra hours to make this mission the success that it was.

Now during the month of December, the Pantry is asking for canned fruit. Fresh fruit is becoming scarce, and like you, the clients love canned fruit. Please pick up a few cans on your weekly grocery shopping trip and bring them to church. The Clothes Closet is happily accepting blankets, warm coats, hats, mittens, scarves, etc. Christmas decorations are a big hit right now - but no Christmas trees, please.
Be the Church Service Day Engages More Than 300 Participants from Across Kansas City

Oct. 22 was not any normal Sunday for many Presbyterian churches in Kansas City. It marked the first time the congregations of Covenant, Grandview Park, Heritage, John Knox, Second and Village Presbyterian Churches joined forces to serve across the Kansas City area. Beginning at noon, volunteers scattered throughout the community to provide meal service, beautify neighborhoods, renovate nonprofits, write letters, pack hygiene kits, prepare for international trips and participate in a neighborhood fiesta.

Regarding the impact, the numbers speak for themselves:

- 200+ volunteers participated from Village and 300+ from across all the churches
- 450 hygiene kits assembled
- 400 packages of Adult Vitamins and 600 packages of Children’s Vitamins packed for the Dominican Republic Medical Partnership (DRMP)
- 100 Child Health Kits created (healthy practices booklet, powdered milk packet, peanut butter packet, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste)
- 200 bundles of crayons sorted for DR child health education activities
- 42 swaddling blankets made for Kenyan babies and 20 for Jewish Vocational Services
- 300 sack lunches for City Union Mission
- Hundreds of meals served
- Several yards cleaned up
- 26 organizations supported
- Thousands of lives touched

The Kansas City Presbyterian Mission Exchange group created a centralized online registration site whereby members from any congregation could sign up for each other’s activities. “If a time at one’s home church did not work out with a volunteer’s schedule or if the activity was not appealing,” said Deborah White, director of Mission at Village Church, “then you could sign up for an activity at another church. The centralized registration offered a wide variety of choices.”

Furthermore, the variety allowed all ages and abilities to participate. Some churches offered breakfast while others offered an evening meal.

As one participant shared, “Be the Church was opportunity to come together in fellowship as well as service.”

Thank you to the many volunteers who participated. A special thank you to Pam, Chris and Scott Logan who arranged the terrific DRMP activities; Lora Garrison in International Mission; Jenna Soltys, Rev. Zach Walker and Abigail Lutz in Youth Ministry; Rev. Hallie Hottle and Becky Bliss in Young Adult Ministry and at Village on Antioch; and Ellen Wootton in Children & Family Ministry; as well as our great custodians.
ADVENT MISSION

Deck the Village on Mission Trees with Hats and Mittens - Now through Dec. 24
Come decorate our Christmas trees with hats and mittens to give to families served by the Village Clothes Closet/Food Pantry. Trees will be located at the north and south entrances of Village on Mission. Contact Deborah White at 913-671-2369 or deborah.white@villagepres.org with any questions.

Joy Offering Dec. 24
The Joy Offering provides support to current and retired church workers in need (50%) and to students attending Presbyterian related racial ethnic schools and colleges (50%). The Christmas Project offering helps local social service agencies who help others with holiday and emergency assistance needs (100%). Green envelopes for this offering will be in the hymnal slots in the pew in front of you.

VOA Angel Tree for Prison Fellowship
Village on Antioch invites you to be an “angel” this Christmas! Our Angel Tree program is done in partnership with Prison Fellowship, giving us the opportunity to buy gifts for the children of incarcerated parents, in the name of their parent.
For 2.7 million children in the U.S., Christmas can be a hard reminder of the loneliness, abandonment and sense of shame that is associated with having a parent in prison. Through this program incarcerated parents sign up their children, ensuring they will have presents for Christmas. We have the opportunity to provide hope, by communicating with caregivers to find out what is needed, buy gifts, and deliver them directly to the children. Paper angels are now available in the VOA Narthex. Each angel has a child’s information and gift suggestions (based on our conversations with caregivers).
You’re invited to take as many as you’re able, purchase a clothing and toy item, wrap and attach the angel to the gift, and return to church by this Sunday, Dec. 10. Delivery drivers also needed for Sunday, Dec. 17. More information and delivery driver sign up at www.villageantioch.org/mission.

Adult Sunday School - The Kings Vs. Shepherds
10:45 a.m. Sundays, Dec. 10 & 17
The gospels of Matthew and Luke tell different stories about the birth of Jesus. The wise men only appear in Matthew and the shepherds only appear in Luke. Why is that? We will examine both the familiar and perhaps the unfamiliar components of these two stories, comparing and contrasting them with one another. Come discover what God is revealing to us as we prepare to welcome the incarnation of God in the birth of Jesus once again. Taught by Randy Jackson.

Winter Weather Advisory
If the weather forecast is to have 4 inches or more snowfall during Saturday night, the 8 a.m. worship service at Village on Mission will be cancelled.
We journeyed to 12 places of hope during “The Places Hope Takes You” sermon series.

We experienced hope by participating in Be the Church Service Day, touring the Village Food Pantry, walking the Labyrinth at the Meneilly Center for Mission, worshiping with friends at Lakeview Village and Claridge Court. We found hope singing hymns, sipping hot cider and eating s’mores around a campfire at Village on Antioch. We experienced hope by walking through beautiful woods, flowers and sculptures at the Overland Park Arboretum and Botanical Gardens. We gathered food for the hungry by gleaning with After the Harvest. We toured Community LINC, our Village Church Signature Mission for 2017-18. We gathered at the Liberty Memorial and prayed for the city that it be a place of hope and held a prayer vigil for the 153 people in Kansas City, Mo. and Kansas City, Kan. who have lost their lives to gun violence in 2017 alone. We sorted clothes and supplies for the homeless through Uplift Ministry and culminated our hope activities with a friendly game of kickball between Village on Mission and Village on Antioch at Roe Park.

We found hope through yards and yards of colored ribbons strung along the Sanctuary ceiling. The Places Hope Takes You: A Visual Interpretation was the brainchild of Rev. Jenny McDevitt and made by many hands, much time and stubborn creativity. Rev. McDevitt shared, “Hope is always a bright burst of color even when the world feels filled with dread and despair. The chain of ribbons that moved throughout the Sanctuary pointed to this. The colors were vibrant and demanded our attention; so, too, does God’s faithfulness. The ribbons also moved from the back of the chancel clear up to the cross in a bold, decisive direction. That is the nature of hope — it takes us to the cross. At the same time, hope takes us from that cross back out into the world to be messengers of that good news.”
ADVENT SERMON SERIES

A Stranger Came to Town

This is a season of tradition. We read the same stories. We sing the same hymns. We light the purple candles. We kneel at the manger and we have learned the angel's songs by heart. We walk this same journey because the love that fashioned the universe and its billions of galaxies have chosen, in grace, to take on skin and walk where we walk. The Word became flesh. He napped in a manger. He spoke with an accent, and had favorite foods and loved a good story. He was one of us. But he was also a stranger. His heart was bigger, his prayers were deeper, his spirit was freer. This strangeness was unsettling to some. It was magnetic to others. They discovered, and we continue to discover, that this stranger not only reveals truth about God, but he reveals the truth about us. A stranger came to town and sends us on a journey to find our way home.

Dec. 10 Finally Seeing What Has Been True All Along
Dec. 17 The Good News of the Metanoia Man
Dec. 24 Morning Worship, Lessons and Carols
Evening Worship, You Do Not Have to Be Afraid Anymore

Christmas Eve Worship

Please note there will be no Gathering Service on Dec. 17. The 5 p.m. Family Worship service on Christmas Eve is in The Gathering style. There will be no Gathering service on New Year’s Eve. We will have all morning worship services on New Year’s Eve at Village on Mission and Village on Antioch.

Good News, Dec. 6, 2017
PC&C is Grateful for 375 Volunteers

Pastoral Care & Counseling offers and sponsors 42 different ministries and programs. We couldn't do this without the dedicated support of 375 faithful volunteers. For those who deliver flowers, serve on the PC&C committee, help serve home communion, take blood pressure readings at the Food Pantry and at the church, usher or serve with compassion at a memorial service, serve as a Stephen Minister, or share God's love in countless other ways, we deeply thank you. On Friday, Nov. 10, many of these volunteers enjoyed an evening filled with delicious food, created a hot beverage at the coffee bar and enjoyed entertainment at the annual PC&C Volunteer Appreciation Event. Thank you all very much!

Poinsettia Sunday is Dec. 10

A long-standing tradition at Village is delivering a bright, beautiful poinsettia to those who cannot physically come to the church during the Advent season. Volunteers who are willing to spread some Christmas cheer by helping to deliver one or more of 250 poinsettias are invited to come to the Welcome Center between any of the services to pick up a poinsettia and instructions. Thank you for your gift of time and help!

Remembrance Service Honored Our Loved Ones

At 4 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 3, many gathered for our annual Remembrance Service in the Sanctuary. We gave thanks for all of our loved ones who are deeply missed. We gave voice to the grief that lingers and the love that will never let go. The service included prayers, beautiful music, time for reflection, candle lighting, and the proclamation of God's holy Christmas promise: Christ comes to us as a light in this world that the darkness will never, ever overcome.

Wednesday Night Dinner

Dine before or after your class. Salad bar opens at 5:15 p.m.; hot food buffet is open 5:30-6:30 p.m. These dinners offer an opportunity for everyone to enjoy a well-balanced, convenient meal. Full meal with salad bar & dessert is $7. Salad bar & dessert is $6. Children ages 4-10 are $3 and children age 3 and under are no charge. Contact Liz Middleton (913-671-2359) or liz.middleton@villagepres.org for reservations by noon Monday.

NEW: Standing reservations are only available on a pre-pay basis. Contact Liz Middleton at liz.middleton@villagepres.org if you are interested in paying for a month, several dates, or the rest of the meals through Dec. 13.

Menu:

Dec. 13 – Christmas Dinner! $7 per person. Fresh fruit (V & GF), cheese cubes w/ crackers & grapes (cheese is V & GF), mixed greens w/ shredded carrot & grape tomatoes (V & GF) with assorted dressing. Meat Station: carved roast beef (GF), chicken caprese (GF), potato/vegetable station, wild rice primavera (V & GF), green bean amandine (V & GF), glazed baby carrots (V & GF), dinner rolls, cheesecake.

Dinners resume Wednesday, Jan. 10.
Beginner Hula Hooping and Hoop Dancing Class

Bring a friend and try a fun new way to get a great cardio-vascular work-out with KC Hoop Girl, Sirenna Beyer, that will strengthen the core and burn calories. The hoops, music and fun are provided! Enter at the south side of the church and take the elevator to the third floor. Questions? Call 816-591-5186. 5:45-6:45 p.m. Thursday evenings in the Youth Loft.

Spring 2018 Village U Catalog … Coming Dec. 29

The Spring 2018 Village U curriculum is a wide umbrella encompassing all our adult learning opportunities in one, easy-to-find location. Village Church is a learning community with a long commitment to providing opportunities for adults – young and older—to grow in knowledge and faith together. We hope you will spend some time discovering all that is available. Child care is available for most classes for a one-time $40 fee per child for the term; reservations required in advance. Some classes will have a small fee for materials and resources; the fees will be noted in the class listing. You will be able to register online, by telephone, by fax or by email.

Registration for Village U 2018 spring term:

For Village Church members: Registration begins at 9 a.m. Wednesday, Jan. 10.
For community members: Registration begins at 9 a.m. Tuesday, Jan. 16.

Sunday Morning Adult Classes
9:30 a.m.

Faith Journey - The class is studying Marcus Borg’s book, The Heart of Christianity- Rediscovering a Life of Faith, in which he explores what he calls two paradigms for looking at our faith and how those can work together. Led by Kathy Ray. Room 230.

 Foundations of Faith - The class has begun a series titled "Painting the Stars," a study and conversation focused on the intersection of science, faith and religion. The class is taught by Diann Markley. The class enjoys thoughtful conversation. This study is DVD-based so each session will feature a clip as the basis for discussion.

Growing Together class is for adults in their 40’s and 50’s who are interested in growing together in context of their families. Growing Together welcomes anyone who is looking for opportunities to grow using Christ’s principles as we apply Jesus to our lives today. Join us as we study the Book of Acts. Facilitated by Lawrence Andre. Room 124.

 Village Forum - Advent Class 2017 - Mary, Mary, What You Gonna’ Call That Baby? is a carol we sing during the Advent/Christmas season. In other texts it is Joseph who names the baby Jesus. Centuries earlier the prophet Isaiah did the same. Likewise, all of us have names for God just as did the earliest writers of scripture. The class continues Dec. 10 and 17 as participants are engaged in study of sacred names with Rev. Jay McKell. Room 127.

THE VILLAGE CUP

Special Offer in the Village Cup Coffee Shop

Looking for a great gift, that’s thoughtful but easy on you? Look no further than The Village Cup. We have a new 16 oz. stainless steel tumbler, with a bold band of VPC’s signature purple just waiting for you. Purchase yours today and get a great deal with our $30 Tumbler & Gift Card set, saving you $2 off the tumbler. It’s a gift that just keeps giving.
Dr. Rodger Nishioka Now Seeking Ordination

At the November Session meeting, the Session voted to endorse Dr. Rodger Nishioka to become an Inquirer for Ministry with Heartland Presbytery. It’s the first step necessary for him to enter the process to become an ordained Minister of the Word and Sacrament.

It’s been 20 months since Dr. Nishioka accepted the call to be director of educational ministries of Village Presbyterian Church after serving for 15 years as professor at Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta. In May, the Session voted to change Rodger’s title to “senior associate” with responsibilities for supervising the other associate pastors and directors of children and family ministry, connectional ministry and mission.

Dr. Nishioka shared with the Session members, “Almost three years ago, I was sitting in the refectory, which was the cafeteria at Columbia Theological Seminary. And around the ring of the refectory are the portraits of the Professors Emeriti – 47 white men and two white women. I remember thinking, ‘Okay Lord. I guess eventually I can go up there.’ Then lo and behold, beyond my imagination, God said, ‘No! Let’s do something else.’ And that led to a calling here…One of the things I love most about the Presbyterian Church is our polity, our structure that says we are governed by equal numbers of women and men who are ruling elders and women and men who are teaching elders. I’ve always been proud to embody that – even as a professor in the seminary where I was a ruling elder preparing women and men to be teaching elders. But it wasn’t within my imagination that I would ever be called to be a teaching elder. So now that I’ve been here serving with you, more and more I’m realizing the call is to be a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA). In conversations with the Committee for Preparation for Ministry of the Presbytery, that means I must go through the process and they said, ‘It would be good if you were an Inquirer.’”

“One of the great ordination questions is ‘Will you be a friend among your colleagues?’ And I think I would live that out. My other favorite ordination question is ‘Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination and love?’ That’s also a different embodiment I think for a teaching elder than it is for a ruling elder. Not better, not worse, but just different.”

Rev. Tom Are noted, “Dr. Rodger Nishioka is already functioning as a pastor. There are some Book of Order things that he’s prohibited from doing. He can’t perform weddings, he can’t baptize, he can’t officiate at the table. He’s already living in our community as one of the pastors. In some ways, I think the ordination of Dr. Rodger Nishioka would be the church catching up.”

“The timeline for his ordination is dramatically different and the process is somewhat amended,” explained Rev. Are. “The Presbytery has indicated it would expedite the process and ordination exams will be in January. The expectation is that once he completes the ordination exams and those are returned with satisfactory marks, then the Presbytery would move to ordain, possibly by late spring or summer. It’s normally a two-year process, but most people have not been in ministry for 30 years before they enter the process.”

Carol Groebe agreed to be Rodger’s liaison to encourage him during the process, promising to bring Skittles while he prepares for his ordination exams in January.
New Village Little One

Join Children and Family Ministry in welcoming the following little one born recently: Calla Marina Alexander Svaty (Kimberly and Josh Svaty, parents). A rose was placed on the communion table the third Sunday in November to celebrate this new baby.

Diapers in December

Children and Family Ministry is once again collecting disposable diapers in all sizes with greatest need for newborn and adult L/XL. These benefit the families served by the Village Food Pantry. Please leave your donations in the following locations: the Hat, Mitten and Diaper Christmas trees at the Welcome Center and the south entrance; and the entrance near Room 114.

Christmas Pageant and Sing-along

Please join Rev. Len Carrell and Dino O’Dell on Sunday, Dec. 17, in Friendship Hall after the 9:30 a.m. worship service. Children should attend Sunday School and teachers will escort to the pageant.

No Sunday school for Preschool and Elementary aged children on Dec. 24 and Dec. 31. There will be child care available for children ages 0-3.

Village Church Child & Family Development Center’s Annual Pancake Dinner with Santa

Friday, Dec. 15—All are invited to the Pancake Dinner with Santa in Friendship Hall at Village on Mission. Chris Cakes will be serving all-you-can-eat pancakes. Get your child’s picture taken with Santa. Tickets are $10 for adults, $8 for children age 2 and up. Children under 2 eat free. Contact Linda Harmon at 913-671-2310 or linda.harmon@villagepres.org for tickets. Plan to attend the preschoolers’ version of the Christmas Story at 5 p.m. and the dinner at 6 p.m.

Village Preschool Enrollment

Enrollment time is almost here for Village Church Weekday Preschool. Enrollment will be held the week of Jan. 15 for Village Church members and current Village Preschool families. Community enrollment begins Monday, Jan. 22. All enrollment forms can be found on-line at villagepres.org under Connect>: Children and Families>Preschool.

Village Church Weekday Preschool is a part-time, school year program for three-, four-, and five-year-old children. For more information, please contact Preschool Director Sarah McKee at sarah.mckee@villagepres.org or 913-671-2338.
The Place Hope Takes You You  
2018 Annual Fund Campaign

As we approach the holiday season, I ask you to reflect upon The Places Hope Takes You. We will soon be embarking on a new strategic plan and we are ever hopeful about the future of Village Church. To continue our mission, we need your ongoing support – both spiritual and financial. Our one church with multiple locations is allowing us to invite more people to share in our mission, creating greater opportunity and greater obligation for all of us. I ask you to prayerfully consider an increase in your annual commitment, as we strive to expand our ministry. I am grateful for what has gotten us here, and hopeful for what is yet to come. Thank you, friends, for your generous commitment.

—Kathy Collins
As the Christmas season of gratitude and joy approaches, we have found places of hope and been filled with thanksgiving. And, I don’t mean stuffed with thanksgiving turkey, dressing and pecan pie. This fall at Village has already brought us vibrantly courageous hope, creative wisdom, and imaginative love.

Advent is a season of invitation, of joyful anticipation, of awaiting an arrival, of endings and beginnings. Advent is a time for remembering - remembering those who have shown us the gift of this season through their faithfulness. And so, this season we are remembering you in our prayers and give thanks to God for each of you.

When the holidays arrive, we easily get caught up in the hustle and bustle of making sure we are prepared. Who is doing the lights? Where did we put the decorations? When will the guests arrive? Yet, Advent is not a time to be prepared, but a time for preparing.

It is a time for preparing for a God who is with us; a time for preparing the homes of our hearts to let God’s light dwell within us. In my personal preparation, please know that I am taking time each day to give my deepest gratitude for you. There is no way we could ever reach everyone we need to care for without the great faithfulness and dedication of you, our Stephen Ministers. And you bring your own unique ray of shining hope, a hope we cannot bring ourselves, because your light is the light with which God has blessed you. And only you, with God’s help, can make your hopeful light shine.

This past year most of our Stephen Ministers were matched with a care-receiver, which is great news. You are living out your calling to bring grace and compassionate one-on-one care to someone who is grieving or in the midst of life’s toughest transitions. We are also preparing to welcome eight new Stephen Ministers into our midst.

When I first got here and started working with all of you, I often said to people who were inquiring about Stephen Ministry that “it’s a wonderful program,” and then I realized I had it all wrong. It is not the program that is wonderful, it is you who are wonderful people. That is why people love their Stephen Ministers, because you are wonderful people. Giving thanks to God for you and remembering you in my prayers.

Peace be with you,
Len Carrell

**Discovering Stephen Ministers**

Everyone knows someone who cares enough to sit with us during a difficult time. All around us are caring, empathetic people, people who have the gift of listening and holding the hearts of others. Everyday we have conversations and build relationships with such people and we don’t always think about the many gifts God has given them. One of our challenges as Stephen Leaders is recognizing and seeing these qualities in the people we know. When we do see this, we invite them to consider becoming a Stephen Minister. We invite them because we have experienced joy in the ways we love others in God’s name, through our own God given gifts. But we can’t find all of these gifted people on our own.

Recruiting people for Stephen Ministry is a vital part of the caring ministry of Village Church. Stephen Ministers retire or become inactive and go on sabbatical. There are even Stephen Ministers who need a Stephen Minister, at times. In order to keep Stephen Ministry vibrant, we need to find people to serve God in this way. To this end, we ask everyone in our congregation to help us in identifying potential new candidates. Please take a moment to really look at those around
you and see if you know any good folks for Stephen Ministry and the fall training class of 2018. We are always interested in talking with new people. Who knows, you may be looking at one in the mirror.

If you are interested in becoming a Stephen Minister, or learning more about the ministry, or having a Stephen Minister for yourself, please contact Jane Goss, our recruitment leader, at jane.nana.goss@gmail.com. Or contact Len Carrell at len.carrell@villagepres.org.

During this time of year we typically wish one another a happy New Year! And it can sometimes be our custom to look back at the previous year and ask each other, “How was your year?” If we aren’t careful, this question has a way of backfiring on us quickly.

A happy New Year is probably the furthest feeling from the heart when we lose a loved one so close to the holidays. It can be one we dread to face. We fear we’ll pull the covers over our heads and never leave our homes. Time will stand still, or worse yet, will come to a screeching halt. Time can become void and absent of feeling, or we find it slipping away. We are often told that “time can heal.” But what happens when it doesn’t? What if time prolongs the grief, and heightens the pain, and brings no healing?

The poet Elizabeth Jennings writes:

“Time does not heal
It makes a half-stitched scar
That can be broken and you feel
Grief as total as in its first hour.”

The experience of losing someone we love, or anything we value, leaves lasting scars that take an eternity to learn to live with. The truth may be that time alone will not heal the grief, or ease what hurts, or end our tears. Time may not heal, but these are healing times. We may need to find better ways of living through the pain together. Grief has a way of showing up when we are convinced it has ended. The biggest fear is that the pain of one moment can open up those scars that are “half-stitched,” and all those layers of awful can come rushing back again.

This year, the Stephen Ministers of Village want to assure you that we’ll listen. We will help you find new ways to live through the troubles of a New Year. We are here to be with you as you explore your own unique way through your grief, and to strive with you in seeking new ways of experiencing healing times together.

**Stephen Ministry Caring Formation – Upcoming Events**

Dec. 14 – Stephen Ministry Christmas Party

Stephen Ministry Leadership Meeting

No meeting in December

Our next leadership meeting will be at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 16, in Room 124.

“Are you willing to stoop down and consider the needs and desires of little children; to remember the weaknesses and loneliness of people who are growing old; to stop asking how much your friends love you, and to ask yourself if you love them enough; to bear in mind the things that other people have to bear on their hearts; to trim your lamp so that it will give more light and less smoke, and to carry it in front so that your shadow will fall behind you; to make a grave for your ugly thoughts and a garden for your kindly feelings, with the gate open? Are you willing to do these things for a day? Then you are ready to keep Christmas!”

—Henry Van Dyke