

WELS OUTREACH IN LAS VEGAS: MOVING FORWARD WITH THE GOSPEL BY
LOOKING AT THE PAST AND PRESENT

BY

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ABSTRACT

It may be surprising to hear that there are seven Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) churches in Sin City, USA. It may also be surprising that one of these churches is a Korean church. In addition, an already existing African refugee church is working its way toward becoming a WELS congregation. With the possibility of a new mission start in the Southwest part of the Las Vegas valley, the total number of WELS churches in Las Vegas could be as high as nine in the next five to ten years. This paper will briefly examine the history of Las Vegas to see how the history of the WELS fits in. The history of WELS outreach efforts will educate how the WELS has continued to grow in Las Vegas. In addition, looking at current outreach strategies of the Las Vegas WELS congregations as well as other non-WELS churches, this paper will prove that the WELS can do better in its outreach to those living in Las Vegas.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

INTRODUCTION 1

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 3

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WELS ENTERING LAS VEGAS 7

 Mt. Olive Lutheran Church 7

 Green Valley Lutheran Church 8

 Summerlin Lutheran Church 9

 Water of Life Lutheran Church 9

 Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church 10

 Korean Fellowship Church 10

 Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church 11

 Upcoming WELS Churches in Las Vegas 11

 Final Thoughts on the History of the WELS in Las Vegas 12

INITIAL WELS OUTREACH IN LAS VEGAS 12

 Mt. Olive 12

 Green Valley 13

 Summerlin 13

 Water of Life 14

 Beautiful Savior 14

 Shepherd of the Hills 15

 Final Thoughts on Initial WELS Outreach in Las Vegas 15

OTHER WELS OUTREACH STRATEGIES: SUCCESSES AND FAILURES 15

 Mt. Olive 16

 Green Valley 17

 Summerlin 18

 Water of Life 19

 Beautiful Savior 21

 Shepherd of the Hills 22

 Final Thoughts on Other WELS Outreach Strategies: Successes and Failures 23

OUTREACH STRATEGIES TO TRY	23
From the Perspective of a Mission Counselor: Challenges with Optimism	24
Looking at Other Churches	25
Reaching the Homeless	26
Lutheran Grade School	31
Presence Ministry	32
Mercy Corps	34
Service Project	35
Final Thoughts on Outreach Strategies to Try	36
OUTREACH STRATEGIES TO STAY AWAY FROM	36
Reaching Out to Tourists	36
UNLV Campus Ministry	41
Final Thoughts on Outreach Strategies to Stay Away From	42
CONCLUSION	42
BIBLIOGRAPHY	45
APPENDIX: WELS LAS VEGAS PASTORS SURVEY	48
Pastor Pieper- Green Valley	48
Pastor Buch- Summerlin	51
Pastor Vogt- Water of Life	52
Pastor Mueller- Beautiful Savior	55
Pastor Strong- Shepherd of the Hills	56
Pastor Unke- Shepherd of the Hills	59
Pastor Kruschel- Mission Counselor	61

INTRODUCTION

The day was August 8, 2015. My wife and I were driving south on Interstate 15 from Salt Lake City, UT to our final destination of Las Vegas, NV for my vicar year. After hundreds of miles driving through desert surrounded by mountains, we were about 25 miles from Las Vegas. At this point, Interstate 15 bent slightly left as a hill crested. Tall buildings appeared out of the dry air. Numerous houses dotted the horizon. Las Vegas was suddenly in full, panoramic view. Descending into the Las Vegas valley gave me time to think about the upcoming year and the city we would call home.

Sin City is a common nickname for Las Vegas. This city has a reputation for providing what a pagan society would consider playful fun, but it is simply sinful fun. It is an extravagant weekend destination getaway. Through ads on the radio and television, people have heard the catchphrase “what happens here, stays here.” The lure of Las Vegas is a supposed escape from reality. It promises a grand time with no consequences when one returns back to the mundane life of work and home. Certainly, the reputation of Las Vegas is wild fun.

Christians rightfully consider this type of wild fun to be blatant sin. Thus, Christians might have a bad taste in their mouths when they simply hear the words “Las Vegas.” This thought popped into my head as we banked left on Interstate 15. As Las Vegas came into full view, I could not help but think of Abraham looking down on Sodom and Gomorrah as the LORD pronounced fatal judgment on those cities. Perhaps Abraham thought, “I wish my nephew Lot would not have gotten involved in the wickedness of those cities. I want Lot and his family to be safe, but the cities and their immorality should be wiped off the face of the earth.” Sinfully, I wondered, “Is Las Vegas worth saving? I want the believers to be safe, but I think it would be better if this rotten, immoral city was gone.”

I also thought of Jonah when God told him to go to Nineveh. Jonah told God why he fled. “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”¹ (Jnh 4:2) Jonah did not think Nineveh deserved to be saved. He probably also thought the gospel would have no effect on this

¹ All quoted Scripture will be from NIV84 unless noted otherwise.

corrupt city. I wondered if Las Vegas was a present-day Nineveh. I was acting like a present-day Jonah.

However, those thoughts did not last long as I remembered what I had been called by God through the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) Assignment Committee to do. “To this end we will require that you assist with preaching, visiting the sick and unchurched, administrative work, and other ministerial duties, as directed by the supervising pastor.”² My supervising pastor, Matt Vogt, had started a mission congregation 18 years ago. That was not even the oldest church in Las Vegas! There were older WELS congregations and a pastor with more Las Vegas experience. The gospel was doing great work in Las Vegas for decades before I even moved there for a year.

I was going to be a part of WELS gospel outreach in Las Vegas. I was going to hear stories of past successes. I was going to help with current outreach strategies. I was going to witness the gospel at work in Sin City. This was a city worth saving because souls were at stake. “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.” (Eze 33:11a) Las Vegas citizens and tourists alike deserve to witness the gospel presented to them in words and actions. Many have already witnessed the gospel since the WELS began doing work in Vegas. WELS continues to expose thousands to the gospel. God-willing, millions will have the chance to hear the gospel through continued and new outreach strategies. Obviously, the WELS churches in Las Vegas need not learn anything doctrinally from churches it is not in fellowship with. Yet, the WELS churches can learn how to do outreach better by looking at what these other churches are doing.

This paper will explore past and present WELS gospel outreach in Las Vegas in an effort to pave the way for better outreach in the future. By providing a brief history of the city’s founding, I will set the backdrop for WELS gospel outreach in Las Vegas. Then, I will explore how the WELS situated itself in Las Vegas from the founding of its first church, Mt. Olive, to its present-day seventh church, Shepherd of the Hills. Following this brief history of WELS in Las Vegas will be each church’s initial outreach tactics. These tactics will provide wisdom for future WELS churches in Las Vegas in their beginning stages. As this paper then looks at past gospel

² These words were part of the call sheet which was given to me on vicar call day.

outreach successes and failures, it will show what should continue to be done as well as what should no longer be attempted so that time and finances are not wasted. All these topics build up to the need to take a careful look at what other non-WELS churches are doing in Las Vegas. The WELS churches do a good job at self-evaluation when it comes to gospel outreach, but this portion of the paper will show the benefit of thinking outside the WELS box by observing strategies of these other churches. Finally, there are two strategies which seem like good ideas at first, but this paper will educate its readers that these ideas should not be a part of Las Vegas WELS outreach.

Information submitted by former and current Las Vegas WELS pastors for a previous paper done by Pastor Aaron Strong helped in writing the history of the WELS in Las Vegas. I also used the primary sources from the Las Vegas WELS churches which Pastor Strong used in his paper. Personal accounts through interviews of WELS Las Vegas pastors went a long way to forming my thoughts for this paper. By looking at what other non-WELS churches are doing for gospel outreach, I was able to narrow my scope in what I was looking for in books on evangelism. Since there is not much written specifically about evangelism in Las Vegas, all these resources served me well to write this thesis.

There needs to be more education about what has been done and what is being done in Las Vegas concerning WELS outreach. This paper will show that there is not enough being done in the community. To solve this problem, there needs to be more involvement from the members of the WELS churches. Implementing new outreach strategies will provide more opportunities for the members to serve. They will see that they can serve in other ways besides just knocking on doors which can be a daunting task. One thing is certain. God has blessed the outreach of the WELS in Las Vegas so far. He has blessed canvassing and outreach events done on church property. However, this is not enough. This thesis will show that the Las Vegas WELS churches must begin doing purposeful outreach in the community if they want to reach as many lost souls as possible.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

People love to go to Las Vegas to gamble, but Las Vegas' foundation is not its casinos. In fact, the desert geography surrounding this city contrasts with the natural flowing water

beneath the valley of Las Vegas. Las Vegas historian and manuscripts librarian Su Kim Chung phrases this fact well. “The existence of Las Vegas hinges on one simple thing: water. The city’s harsh desert surroundings would be unlivable if not for the natural springs that have flowed underground for centuries, creating an oasis in what is now the Las Vegas Valley.”³

Las Vegas is currently only 111 years old, but some think this area has been inhabited for over 3,000 years. Michael S. Green has a PhD in history, and he believes this historical thought, “Petroglyphs and other markings left by Basket Maker peoples and other hunter-gatherers provide evidence that people lived in southern Nevada as early as 3,000 years ago.”⁴ It is more commonly known that the Paiute tribe settled in southern Nevada around 700AD.

Obviously, there is no pictorial evidence of how lush the landscape may have been during the days of the Paiute tribe’s first settlement. Judging by the harsh desert geography which still survives outside the city limits, it is easy to imagine how welcoming this oasis was to travelers. It was so welcoming that it became a stopping point for travelers along the Old Spanish Trail which connected New Mexico and southern California.

January 7, 1830 predates the city’s official founding by 75 years, but this date could still serve as the birthday of the city’s name. Rafael Rivera, working as a scout for New Mexico trader Antonio Armijo, camped for the night with his company just southeast of the current Las Vegas Strip. They named this area “Las Vegas” which is Spanish for “the meadows.” Yet, the birthday of the city’s name was not enough to put this area on the map. That would come as a result of John Frémont.

John Frémont was a captain in the U.S. Army’s mapmaking corps. His travel through this area of the country on May 2-3, 1844 brought recognition to the unsettled area of Las Vegas. He reported on his travels, and people were informationally exposed to the natural springs in this desert region. His report caught the attention of another famous individual. When Brigham Young found out about Las Vegas, he sent 30 men to begin a mission there.

In 1855 these Mormon missionaries built the Mormon Fort. This fort would stand for quite some time; however, the mission itself failed three years later, and the Mormons left town.

³ Su Kim Chung, *Las Vegas: Then & Now* (London, UK: Pavilion Books, 2015), 6.

⁴ Michael S. Green, *Las Vegas: A Pictorial Celebration* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 2005), 7.

The fort changed hands several times after it was abandoned. After the missionaries left, it became a supply depot for nearby miners. It changed again to the Las Vegas Ranch. In 1902 it was sold to Senator William Clark. Clark was a Montana copper baron who envisioned the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad traversing through this area, and he needed a train depot. The railroad was completed on May 1, 1905. Clark would then auction off his property two weeks later on May 15. The auctioned property created Clark's Las Vegas Townsite. Thus, Las Vegas celebrates its birthday on May 15 each year.

Still, this town had a long way to go before it would become what is currently thought of as Sin City. As in any new city, population would naturally increase because of the opportunity for outsiders to start new businesses. Yet, sin had a hand in building this city. Shortly after its official founding, saloons and brothels began to take shape in Las Vegas. Block 16, an area near the old Mormon Fort, restricted any liquor sales anywhere else besides Block 16 and in hotels. To fight back, restricted business added a room to their buildings and called their buildings hotels. So, these business-hotels could legally continue to sell alcohol. Not to be outdone, Block 16 saloons added their own rooms. However, these rooms housed prostitutes. To this, Green remarks the following:

That's how the oldest profession arrived in Las Vegas, but, more importantly, the 'one-upmanship' that ushered it in established very early on the pattern that is now recognized as 'typical Las Vegas': local businessmen are always trying to build something newer, bigger, better, more amazing (or shocking) than anything the competition has. And that draws tourists.⁵

A familiar, federally owned project would also be instrumental in populating Las Vegas. People began to populate the nearby area of the federally established city of Boulder City. This city was built to house the many workers who came to build the Hoover Dam in 1931, then called the Boulder Canyon Project. These workers flocked to Las Vegas on payday to enjoy the unbridled fun of Las Vegas. Boulder City was no fun to them because of its strict rules on gambling.

People began to see Las Vegas as a place they wanted to live because of all the fun and laxity. Making a mockery of what God says of marriage and divorce added to the sins which

⁵ Green, 13.

built Las Vegas. The divorce process was lessened to six weeks, and the marriage process became the quickest in the nation. These laws added to the lure of Las Vegas because people could seemingly change their lives in an instant.

Still, more sin had its say in building this city. Organized crime allowed businesses to thrive. Mobs had their say through murder and money laundering. Strip clubs began to bring in tourists and citizens. While prostitution is illegal, it is still practiced. Drunkenness is evident as bar upon bar line the streets of the Las Vegas Strip and Fremont Street. While there is nothing sinful about gambling, the sinful addiction and possible waste of money that goes along with it is prevalent. Las Vegas is partly built on sin, and sin continues to support its revenue. While Las Vegas may make light of these lifestyles, and even unbelievers know these actions are not the healthiest or the most moral, it is proud of its history. Las Vegas cherishes the title Sin City. It welcomes its famous catchphrase.

The first 111 years of Las Vegas may serve as a precursor to the next 111 years. After commenting how the book's photographs will show just how much history has been destroyed in lost buildings, Chung writes, "Although Las Vegas is no different from many American cities in this respect, the high-profile destruction of these structures in public implosions has given the city a reputation of having little respect for its past. Others, however, see this as just an unavoidable byproduct of a city that is constantly reinventing itself."⁶ Green would agree with that last sentence. He states his opinion with the following remark:

The city is an American cultural landmark and international icon, but it has never had any qualms with (literally) blowing up parts of its past to boldly try new themes and approaches. It has become known as a place that constantly reinvents itself, and that's more than just a part of the Las Vegas charm: it's the very secret that keeps the city perpetually exciting.⁷

Why is this secular history necessary for a thesis about spiritual matters? Well, Las Vegas is always changing, but the sins which helped build the city will always remain. This provides an atmosphere for a stable law and gospel message which the people of Las Vegas need. Certainly, not everyone cherishes the outrageous, blatant lifestyle and tourist attractions Las Vegas has to offer. Yet, "not everyone" makes up only a portion of Las Vegas. Plenty of

⁶ Chung, 7.

⁷ Green, 6, 7.

people need to hear the law to sting their consciences followed by the gospel which provides eternal hope and comfort.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WELS ENTERING LAS VEGAS

With such great sin in Las Vegas, there is need for biblically sound churches. The gospel certainly does wonders and can work faith, but without a firm foundation in other areas in doctrine, the devil can snatch faith away more easily. What will follow is a brief synopsis of each WELS congregation's history. This will demonstrate that the WELS has continued to see a need for new congregations in Las Vegas. As Las Vegas continued to expand, new WELS churches were started so existing WELS churches did not need to reach too far to reach people with the gospel.

When the WELS became interested in Las Vegas in 1970, the population of urban Las Vegas (Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, and Henderson) was around 150,000. That was double the population in 1960. The population reached 231,000 in 1980 and 388,000 in 1990. A huge boom hit in 2000 when the population hit 807,000. It surpassed one million in 2010, and in 2015 the population was around 1.15 million. This city will grow faster in the following years as it recovers economically. Certainly, there will be more WELS churches in Las Vegas unless Judgment Day first comes.

Mount Olive Lutheran Church

Upset at the choices of churches in Las Vegas, some laypeople demanded the WELS in 1969 to supply them with resources which truthfully proclaimed the gospel. In addition to this, the WELS supplied them with the service of Pastor Herman John who drove over from California as often as possible.

The Arizona-California (AZ-CA) District was officially informed of these developments in Las Vegas at the Ninth Biennial Convention of the AZ-CA District (June 23-25, 1970). Under "Exploratory Fields," the report read, "Group, Hermann John (from Yucaipa); A nucleus is presently served every six weeks. Interest is growing. There are plans to rent a hall."⁸ The

⁸ *Proceedings of the Ninth Biennial Convention, Arizona-California District, Wisconsin Evangelical*

Tenth Biennial Convention reported that things were moving along well, especially after the mission was granted official mission status in November 1971.

Pastor Hugo Warnke, California Missionary at large, moved into Las Vegas in April 1972 to begin serving the mission. Until that time, the mission was served by Pastor John one Sunday a month, with taped services on the other Sundays. A home is being sought where the pastor can live and where services can be held. Sunday attendance has reached into the 30's.⁹

The congregation received a Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) graduate (David Kiecker) as its first official pastor in 1973. In a letter to the congregation 17 years later, Pastor Kiecker reflected on the reason for starting this Las Vegas mission and the benefits resulting from it. He wrote about having an orthodox Lutheran church in Las Vegas to give people the Word of God in its truth and purity. He wrote how their prayers for success were answered because many people heard the great news of the gospel. He encouraged the people to continue in the overall mission of spreading the gospel. If they did that, the church would continue to exist. Mt. Olive would soon not be the only WELS church proclaiming sins forgiven through faith in Jesus. A daughter church was in the making.

Green Valley Lutheran Church

Green Valley would be officially daughtered by Mt. Olive. Donald Pieper was called to start a new congregation. He did extensive demographic studies for 13 months to figure out the best place to begin the second Las Vegas WELS congregation. Green Valley, a community within the city of Henderson (just southeast of Las Vegas), was chosen. Pastor Pieper and his wife were the first two members of the church. Twenty-six members from Mt. Olive transferred in after it was obvious that Green Valley was going to be around to stay. Through door-to-door canvassing, Pastor Pieper brought in prospects who would become members themselves.

Green Valley had its first service on October 29, 1989. One hundred fourteen people attended this service. The next year, Green Valley would be recognized as an official WELS congregation. The Las Vegas WELS church count reached two, and a third was on the way.

Lutheran Synod, Assembled at Grace Ev. Lutheran Church, Glendale, AZ, June 23-25, 1970, 32.

⁹ *Proceedings of the Tenth Biennial Convention*, Arizona-California District, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Assembled at King of Kings, Garden Grove, CA, June 20-22, 1972, 15.

Summerlin Lutheran Church

Mt. Olive would daughter a second congregation. Pastor Jerome McWaters was called to serve an unnamed exploratory mission in northwest Las Vegas. He would officially begin serving that community on August 8, 1990. Summerlin was an up-and-coming community in this area of Las Vegas. It continues to be a high-end community to this day. Through canvassing, Pastor McWaters brought in prospects to worship at his home with his wife and other WELS members from Mt. Olive. The worship services began in February 1991.

It was reported at the Twentieth Biennial Convention that Summerlin had amassed 47 souls and 37 communicants.¹⁰ This all happened within two years of Pastor McWaters arriving to this area. God's gospel was doing wonderful work in Las Vegas. In just 20 years, three WELS congregations had established themselves in a city which no one may have expected.

Water of Life Lutheran Church

The Twenty-Second Biennial Convention reported an exploratory mission field in southwest Las Vegas which was vacant of leadership in the summer of 1996.¹¹ So, at the next WLS call day, Matt Vogt was called to serve this exploratory mission. After several months of worshipping in the pastor's home, Water of Life began worshipping in a storefront. Tremendous synod support allowed Water of Life to move to a permanent location sooner than most storefront churches. This was due mainly to early site approval. The Twenty-Third Biennial Convention reported, "Water of Life, Southwest Las Vegas, has been given permission for an early site purchase. Purchasing now will prevent us from being priced out of the target area."¹²

Several WELS members, including founding members from Summerlin Lutheran, transferred in to bolster support for this growing church. Seven years after beginning services in the pastor's home, Water of Life had a permanent site to call home where it currently sits today.

¹⁰ *Proceedings of the Twentieth Biennial Convention*, Arizona-California District, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Assembled at Arizona Gold Resort, Mesa, AZ, June 15-17, 1992, 21.

¹¹ *Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Biennial Convention*, Arizona-California District, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Assembled June 17-19, 1996, 26.

¹² *Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Biennial Convention*, Arizona-California District, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Assembled June 15-17, 1998, 19.

Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church

Green Valley was expanding and saw need for a daughter church in south Las Vegas. So, Matt Guse was called from WLS in May 1998. After only five months of work, Beautiful Savior officially organized as a congregation with 17 official members. 36 members and 80 visitors attended its first official service at Beatty Elementary School.

The WELS recognized this mission as a full-fledged mission only three and a half years after Pastor Guse began doing mission work. The church moved to a different elementary school that same year. The congregation called Schofield Middle School home until 2007 when it moved in to its permanent home.

Korean Fellowship Church

This church will only be discussed at this point in the thesis because of this thesis' scope. In 2006, a unique opportunity presented itself to Pastor Vogt and Water of Life. Pastor John Kim was a Presbyterian pastor serving as a youth pastor in Las Vegas. When he discovered the conservative Lutheran doctrine at Water of Life, he considered it a breath of fresh air compared to the liberal nature of many other churches with which he had experience. Pastors Vogt and Kim studied together for eight months. After that period of time, it was clear that an informal fellowship was possible. Pastor Kim continued to study through Pastoral Studies Institute and Congregational Assistance Program courses with Pastor Vogt and Professor Allen Sorum of WLS so that he could become a WELS pastor. At the culmination of this training, Pastor Kim was ordained as a WELS pastor and Korean Fellowship Church became an official WELS congregation. This church is fully dedicated to reaching Koreans in Las Vegas. It was Pastor Kim's dream to start a church from scratch which is what he did with Korean Fellowship Church.

The members worship on Sunday afternoons at Water of Life in a separate Korean service. The youth have their own service which is led by the vicar of Water of Life. This church is constantly growing through friendship evangelism. It is evident from a full parking lot every Sunday that this church is dedicated to worshiping God week after week.

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church

Ten families from Water of Life commuted 45 minutes most Sundays to worship at Water of Life. They resided in northwest Las Vegas. So, Water of Life planned to daughter a congregation in that part of Las Vegas. This was confirmed by the AZ-CA District at its Twenty-Eighth Biennial Convention in 2008.

In May 2008, Pastor Aaron Strong was called on WLS call day to begin this church with the ten families from Water of Life being the core members. Since its start, this congregation has been worshipping in a permanent rental facility. However, this church will join the other WELS congregations in having its own home soon. Construction will begin in the near future at a location just off Highway 215, a major Las Vegas roadway. God-willing, Shepherd of the Hills will not be the newest WELS church in Las Vegas in the near future.

Upcoming WELS Churches in Las Vegas

Pastor Isaac David came into contact with the WELS while he was studying to be a pastor in Las Vegas. He was upset about the liberal views he was being taught at a local college. He contacted AZ-CA District President Buchholz, and Buchholz contacted Pastor Vogt since he had already dealt with cross-cultural outreach in Korean Fellowship Church. Pastor David is finishing the Pastoral Studies Institute and hopes to be a full-time WELS pastor soon. He serves immigrants from his native country of Liberia.¹³

Since 2007, Pastor Vogt has seen a possible location for another WELS church. Further south and a little east of Water of Life, a community called Mountain's Edge is expanding. As has been the case throughout the history of WELS in Las Vegas, a new growing community means a new WELS church. Currently, there is no official word about an exploratory mission beginning in this area, but the AZ-CA District Mission Board is keeping this area in the back of their minds.

¹³ Through Pastor David, the WELS is expanding world mission work to Liberia. God provides his people with amazing opportunities.

Final Thoughts on the History of the WELS in Las Vegas

It is obvious that God has provided plenty of opportunities for the WELS to expand its ministry in Las Vegas. As Las Vegas continues to expand, so will the presence of sin. Where there is a presence of sin, there is a need for God's Word. The WELS has recognized this about Las Vegas as it has listened to the Las Vegas pastors' recommendations for new WELS churches. The WELS already has a strong presence in Las Vegas. It helps that each congregation is strategically placed in an area that is big enough to do plenty of outreach without encroaching on another WELS congregation's evangelism efforts. Since the WELS churches are spread evenly throughout the Las Vegas valley, they are able to reach many different people. There will be a definite need for more WELS churches as Las Vegas continues to grow so that more people have a greater chance to be exposed to the gospel through outreach of new WELS congregations.

INITIAL WELS OUTREACH IN LAS VEGAS

"If you build it, they will come." If only it worked that way for starting churches. Building a church is a goal, but there cannot be a church building without members to fill it first. Thus, initial outreach efforts can make or break a mission congregation. Each WELS congregation in Las Vegas has a different story for its initial outreach.

This section will look at each church separately to see how each church used its own outreach tactics to begin its ministry and build upon its own startup. Each church has a different story. Yet, one common link will be evident throughout. Door-to-door canvassing was a must.

Mount Olive

In its early stages, the members of this church took responsibility in reaching out to the community. They could not rely solely on their pastor because their pastor, Hermann John, was not their actual pastor. He served congregations in California, but he had been traveling back and forth to help serve these members in Nevada. Pastor John would come once a month to lead services, and he would do prospect visits and canvassing the following day. That was the only outreach done by the pastor. What a great case of God's people taking responsibility to heed God's command given to the disciples as Jesus ascended into heaven. The members knew that

without their evangelistic work, the community would not sense that this church cared about the community. If there were only once-a-month visits, there would not be a constant presence in the community. Thus, the members did their part to help start this church through their regular canvassing.

Green Valley

After picking the location for this church, Pastor Pieper did door-to-door canvassing as an attempt to establish a core group beside the people who would transfer from Mt. Olive.

While canvassing worked (3 families would become members), the major contribution to getting people to come to the first service on October 29, 1989 was something called “The Phone’s For You.” Pastor Pieper says, “It allowed us to reach out to 15,000 people to get 114 to our first service in 1989, and we used it successfully four different times after that, the last being 1998. It reached a large number of people and allowed us to create a bulk mail list targeted to those who were interested in our church.”¹⁴ This initial outreach tactic worked well because it saved time in reaching more people since there was no driving or walking involved in between visits. Pastor Pieper could call homes which he could not reach by foot because of gated communities. He and others would simply call different phone numbers and ask if people were looking for a church. Overall, it was an efficient way to begin outreach efforts

Because of the advancement of technology with caller ID, this is no longer a usable outreach tool. When people look at their phones, they may not pick up if they do not have a number listed in their phone. If they have put a church in their contact info, it is easy enough for people to ignore the call or block the number because they do not want to hear from that church anymore. Yet, this was a quick and useful tool to help Green Valley get to work.

Summerlin

Pastor McWaters took advantage of this new community and new people moving in. He knew people were looking to settle down, and he made sure to let them know Summerlin

¹⁴A survey was sent to all current Las Vegas WELS pastors and to one pastor who served in Las Vegas but is now in Milwaukee. Some answers are quoted throughout the rest of the paper.

Lutheran was looking to settle down with them. So, he sent out an evangelism mailing to spread word about the church.

Pastor McWaters also took advantage of a local newspaper, the *Summerlin View*, which wanted to focus on the first official church building in Summerlin. Through this article, Pastor McWaters was able to tell the community about the family atmosphere at Summerlin. He could tell the people he was from the church that was talked about in the paper and would continue to boast about the closeness among the members at his church. Through door-to-door canvassing and mailings to new residents in this up and coming community, Pastor McWaters gained interest through classic outreach efforts.

Water of Life

Like the previous three churches, canvassing was key to gaining interest in a new area of Las Vegas. Pastor Vogt went around for months canvassing the neighborhood while also sending out mailings. He ran out of money in the early months because this was just an exploratory church. He was left to do outreach the hard, yet fun, way of knocking on doors. Pastor Vogt did not quit this technique even when the first “failure” came soon after. “After the first two prospect families came so easily (car salesman, furniture salesman), both moved out of state within two months and we were back to square one!” Trusting in God’s help, Pastor Vogt continued to knock on doors to gain interest and spread word about a new, biblically sound church in southwest Las Vegas.

Beautiful Savior

Initial efforts at this church, besides the standard door-to-door canvassing, included hanging 30,000 door hangers to take care of new homes and communities in the surrounding area. At the time of the church’s founding, 180,000 people lived in the immediate zip code of Beautiful Savior, so there was much work to do to reach all these people.

Pastor Guse felt a little pressure in his early stages of outreach. He could not give the community anything new because they were not worshipping yet. Thus, there was nothing to invite the community to. Pastor Guse had to just hope people would still be interested when the time came to begin worshipping. At the time, Pastor Guse was mailing information about the

church in bulk. He had enough prospects to reach out to, but he was not sure if they would stick around. So, they started having church services to give the prospects something to chew on. This was a good executive decision.

Another crucial early outreach effort was mailing information out about Sunday School. God blessed this effort by bringing in several nonmembers who brought their kids to Sunday School. Once they heard what their kids were being taught, the parents wanted to become members.

Shepherd of the Hills

Pastor Strong canvassed his area to gain interest for this church. Through personal invitation to either check out the church or simply keep in mind there was a new church, Shepherd of the Hills prayed for a great start through this initial outreach. In addition to canvassing, the church sent out two rounds of mailings inviting community residents to come to the opening service. Each of these mailings contained 20,000 postcards, and they were sent out to the community within a five mile radius. At the time, this five mile radius was estimated to house 150,000-200,000 people.

Final Thoughts on Initial WELS Outreach in Las Vegas

This all seems so trivial. Why does it matter what each church did for outreach in its beginning stages? It is necessary to review history to see what worked to gain members. Why stop door-to-door canvassing if it worked at first? Why stop mailings and door hangers if they worked in spreading the word about a church or about the Word of God? These churches all successfully reached out to their communities through classic outreach strategies. Yet, at the same time, each church had its own ideas which worked for its immediate surroundings and communities. When a new WELS church will be started in Las Vegas, these initial outreach strategies can serve as a starting point. However, different strategies will need to be used depending on the culture of that immediate area of Las Vegas.

OTHER WELS OUTREACH STRATEGIES: SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

Obviously, outreach does not go away once a church begins. Each church is always hoping to grow. This is part of the Christian's mindset in keeping with Jesus' Great Commission. However, outreach strategies change as a church gets older because outreach goals change. Outreach strategies change because a community's culture changes. Outreach strategies change because there is more manpower and finances available.

This section of the paper will explore the outreach strategies of each church as it grew and matured. Again, each church has its own strategies which work for its area while they would not work for another church in a whole different part of Las Vegas. The successful outreach strategies for each church and the reason for success will be discussed. Yet, this section is not just about success stories. Failures of outreach ideas will also be discussed for each church along with why they failed.

Mt. Olive

Currently, Tim Otto serves as pastor at Mt. Olive. He was installed in February 2016 so he is relatively new to Las Vegas outreach. Part of his call was to help with Hispanic outreach. The Hispanic population in Las Vegas makes up roughly 30 percent of Las Vegas' population. A large part of that percentage resides in the areas surrounding this church east of the Las Vegas Strip. He has seen results through door-to-door canvassing and through contacts of people he already knows. With the Hispanic community being family oriented, he relies on those he currently teaches to help spread the Word. Within a year of being installed, Pastor Otto began conducting Spanish services because God has thoroughly blessed the Hispanic ministry thus far.

Unfortunately, the only WELS grade school to ever exist in Las Vegas was closed after the 2013-2014 school year. It opened its doors in 2000. Mt. Olive Lutheran School was successfully reaching out to many kids, many of whom were unchurched. This was a successful outreach tool which will be evaluated later in this paper. The U.S. economic crash in the mid-2000s brought hardship to the school. As many families were forced to leave Las Vegas in search of new jobs after their jobs were cut, enrollment continued to decline in subsequent years, and Mt. Olive could no longer support itself and keep its doors open. A WELS grade school seems to be a must in Las Vegas to reach out with the gospel which will be discussed later on in this paper.

Green Valley

Pastor Pieper credits Green Valley's preschool as a strong outreach tool. The school was started in 1997. Parents who go through a simplified Adult Information Class get a basic understanding of the Bible and of saving faith. In addition, they understand what their children are being taught at school regarding the Bible. Several families have become involved in Green Valley and some have even become members through this class after being introduced to Green Valley through its preschool.

Another big outreach strategy implemented by Pieper is to visit church visitors. This may seem to be a simple strategy, but Pieper claims that WELS pastors are the only pastors in Las Vegas who visit the church visitors. He bases this off visitors' comments to him. They comment how they appreciate this gesture because it made them seem like the church actually cared they were there. They had not experienced this follow-up visit from other churches they had worshiped at before.

As is the case with much of Las Vegas, Green Valley is located in an area with many gated communities or no-soliciting apartment complexes. To combat this, Green Valley makes use of different mailings to the community. Putting money toward this effort has seemed worthwhile. Just a little expense allows the church to use an online program to generate addresses which can be reached through mail where it would be legally impossible to reach through door-to-door outreach.

The limited access to many residents is not the only reason for not doing door-to-door canvassing. Pastor Pieper mentions the weather as a problem in doing this type of outreach. In the summer, temperatures can reach 100 degrees by late morning. They often peak in the 110s during these months. With desert sand whipping around from high winds, it can also be dangerous walking around at times. Add to this list the matter of the amount of daylight during the comfortable months of fall and winter. When people get home from work, when door-to-door canvassing is most effective, it is already dark. Las Vegas is a murderous town.¹⁵ Pedestrians are also killed weekly from inattentive drivers. It is not safe for an individual to be

¹⁵ Homicides were up 82% as June, 2016.

walking around after dusk. Even if it were safe, many people would be tentative to open their door to a stranger in the dark in such an unsafe city. Thus, Pastor Pieper relies on the church's mailing outreach to reach new communities.

Green Valley attempted a "Festival of Friendship" event to reach out to the community when it was still worshipping in its rental space. However, this did not gain the attention as was hoped. The church tried this again six years ago but with the same result.

This is currently the largest WELS church in Las Vegas. Trying to function as the sole pastor has been difficult for Pieper. Fortunately, Green Valley received a WLS graduate in July 2016 to help this congregation with membership in the 400s. Even with this many people, there seems to be a weak mindset among the members about outreach. There is currently no one participating in outreach activities off the church property. Still, Pieper does not use this as an excuse. "If a pastor is waiting for the church to form an evangelism team before they can do anything, he is unfaithful to his calling. His call details that he is to preach, teach, administer the sacraments, comfort the sick and dying, reprove the straying and have a heart for the unchurched."

Summerlin

Pastor Buch is still getting his feet wet at Summerlin Luther Church. He was called straight out of WLS in May 2014. What poses a challenge to this church is it literally lies in the shadows of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church where 34,700 are considered members. This church is one of the largest in all of Las Vegas. People may not even notice Summerlin Lutheran as they drive by and are attracted to the size of this Catholic church. Another challenge is the vast area that needs to be canvassed again because of new people moving into the area. Pastor Buch has not had the time yet to do so, as he is focused on educating his congregation to see the need for outreach. In commenting on the church's current location, Pastor Buch offers insight about the current outreach challenges and possibilities. "It is my perception that people in my area are locked into their location and their life. I wonder if those who are 'new' to Vegas are looking to make those relationships and are more open to the possibility of walking into a new church. We are using new member movers to try to do that." Pastor Buch uses the website outreach.com to carry out this outreach strategy. The website targets people who have recently

moved to a specific area. The website sends a specified postcard with a specific message worded by Pastor Buch. In addition to this, Summerlin works with a local real estate agent who provides the church with a list of names of new home buyers in the area. A specific, formal letter is sent to these people inviting them to check out the church. These two strategies are used to get people to call or visit the church after they have moved into the area.

Building the mindset of outreach among the members is something Pastor Buch hopes will start to stick. They have done several new things on church grounds to start this new mindset since he arrived in mid-2014. They have had several fellowship gatherings after Sunday worship to gain visitor interest. They also tried a Trunk-or-Treat event in 2015 for the first time which seemed to help get the name out to the community.

Las Vegas is a transient community. People come for jobs but leave after a few years because they do not want to raise their families in Sin City. For others, the excitement wears off after several years, and they move on to start a new chapter in their life elsewhere. The majority of people who move to Las Vegas are not committed to settling down there. This is seen as a problem for outreach to Pastor Buch. “People whom you are trying to make relationships with come and go.” He goes on to say, “I think the bigger problem is the number and variety of churches. This is a consumer driven society. People will find what they are looking for in a church.”

Water of Life

Outreach activities abound at this congregation. Many events bring people to the church property. Each year in October, Water of Life hosts a “Block Party” for the community. Free things are offered including: food cooked by Korean Fellowship Church, other snacks, a bounce house, music, and games. Information about the church is also passed out. Members mingle with visitors from the community. Several thousand postcards are personally delivered by members of the church to the doors of houses within a few miles of church. This gives the opportunity for personal conversation which mailings would not allow. This is the biggest family-oriented outreach event of the year for Water of Life.

Outreach to children is not overlooked. Vacation Bible School in the summer draws many kids, but this is not the only kid event for the year. Christmas for Kids and Creation for

Kids are held in early December and March, respectively. The preschool added a kindergarten class in just its third year of existence. Several families have completed the full Bible Information Class because of the outreach provided through the preschool and through the other events for children.

As core families have moved away, outreach involvement among church members has declined. This is just another example of how the transient nature of Las Vegas affects these WELS congregations. As Water of Life gets older and its start-up days grow distant, outreach steam has lessened among current congregational members. This does not mean outreach is nonexistent off church property.

Door-to-door canvassing happens when new communities pop up and before the gates close to outsiders. Pastor Vogt says, "I'm convinced that still the best outreach, besides friendship evangelism, is that which is done face-to-face and door-to-door. It's so much about building relationships. The other thing is community awareness. You just have to somehow break through all the noise and let people know that you're there for them." In order to reach out to the community at large, a monthly newsletter reaches nearly 600 homes which are part of the church's prospect list. Pastor Vogt wishes they could do more mailings, but a tight budget restricts this type of outreach.

Water of Life used to host a booth at a bi-yearly event called the San Gennaro Festival. When this festival moved to another part of the town, this was deemed to be an inconvenient strategy since members from the church's immediate community would no longer attend. With the axing of this event, Water of Life does not do much else off the church grounds besides door-to-door visits. This will hopefully change in the future.

Pastor Vogt would love to see Water of Life get involved in community impact type activities. He sees as a valuable tool to take up "a project the community might benefit from in an effort to express Christ's love." The reason this has never been attempted is because of a lack of manpower. It has not reached a priority level among the members so there would not be enough support for it yet. This type of outreach will be evaluated later in this paper.

Pastor Vogt knows that outreach is important for Water of Life because the church's location is mediocre. It was a perfect location when the site was first chosen because of a new community which would soon boom. Now, it sits across from one of the city's middle schools

which helps draw attention. Yet, Water of Life does not sit on a major road like most of the other WELS churches. Also, mountains to the west and south limit outreach opportunities. Due to both of these negatives, Pastor Vogt is intent on making sure people know about Water of Life by hitting the streets.

Beautiful Savior

Beautiful Savior currently runs two different programs for mothers. One is called “Beautiful Moms Playgroup.” This is for mothers and their children to get together once a week for fellowship with other moms and kids. Members of Beautiful Savior are able to interact with moms who do not yet belong to the church. Once a month, they meet for a Bible story at church. The other weeks, they get together at locations off the church property such as libraries, parks, and pools.

The other group is called “Mornings with Mommy.” This group is limited to time at church. It allows mothers to get out of the house with their kids and come to church where everything is prepared for their kids. Plus, they get to meet other mothers, and the kids get to make friends with other children. This is a twice a month program. Pastor Mueller has been the pastor at Beautiful Savior since October 2012. He has seen this as a successful outreach tactic. “They’ve worked because of the Meet Up app, Facebook, text messaging, well organized leaders, creative events, and really consistent reminders/follow ups.”

Various other outreach activities include a Vacation Bible School as well as a preschool. Beautiful Savior has become a huge player in outreach in the community. “Outreach is a huge priority of our overall ministries. Probably about 30-40% of our members have actively taken part in outreach ministries over the last 12 months; a higher percentage if we tracked the last 5 years.”

The only outreach tactic that Beautiful Savior has done away with since Pastor Mueller arrived is the monthly newsletter through postal mail. It was identified as ineffective compared to other options of outreach like the church website as well as Facebook and other multi-media outlets. These snail mail newsletters can easily be seen as junk mail along with other mass mailings by big companies. Also, with the transient nature of Las Vegas and people moving to new places within the city, prospects may no longer receive the newsletter through postal mail.

However, they would still receive emails and information through other multi-media outlets even after they moved.

Pastor Mueller does not see specific challenges for outreach in Las Vegas. Because of the outlook, he says there are ample opportunities for outreach in Las Vegas.

Shepherd of the Hills

Shepherd of the Hills put lots of lines out in the community to make its presence known. In the past, whenever special events or worship services approached, the church sent out 10,000-20,000 mailings inviting the community to these events and services. Those same postcards were also delivered personally to other homes. Simple things such as posting A-frame signs on busy street corners gained interest from the community to come and check out the church. According to the community, the web site also helped out in a big way for people to simply drop by church to see what was going on.

Specific big outreach tools include Toddler Time. This is a one hour Christ-focused pre-kindergarten program for kids on Wednesdays and Thursdays, but adults attend as well to mingle with other parents. The tri-semester calendar allows for breaks and no strict commitments where parents may feel pressured to bring their kids instead of willingly sending them. The Spring Fling festival brought in many from the community and gave an opportunity to invite people to the many things going on at Shepherd of the Hills, much like Water of Life's Block Party.

While Pastor Strong was at Shepherd of the Hills,¹⁶ he realized the struggle of trying to canvass with the busyness of Las Vegas schedules. "The 24/7 life of Vegas and crazy work schedules often made it difficult to find good times to reach the most people while canvassing, planning events, worship day and time, or setting up times to meet with people to follow-up with. Being flexible was important." To help combat the worship time problem, a Wednesday worship time was tested. "We dabbled with a Wednesday evening service but never had more than 10-15 people. Visitors would sometimes come and then probably never come back because of such a small crowd." Pastor Strong believes that friendship evangelism was the best type of outreach while he was there.

¹⁶ Pastor Strong accepted a call to serve at Grace Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, WI. He was installed there in August 2015.

Currently, Pastor Tom Unke serves this church. As is the case with any new pastor, Pastor Unke is getting his bearings before trying anything new. He is dealing with all the issues which come from building a permanent church.

When they permanently move, they hope to put on an annual Living Nativity. “That can really have an appeal for young families at Christmas time.” Pastor Unke is excited about the opportunities before him in a place such as Las Vegas.

As far as mission fields go, this is as fertile as it gets! Some missions start in places where people have lived for long periods of time—that can be hard to convince people to try a new church. In a place where nearly everyone is new to the area, it’s not strange to try something new since they are in new school, new banks, new clubs, etc. I see no disadvantage other than unbelief!

Final Thoughts on Other WELS Outreach Strategies: Successes and Failures

It is obvious that each WELS church in Las Vegas is doing outreach. Some are doing more than others. Some have seen a strategy work where another tried the same tactic without any success. The success stories are a valuable asset to learn. God blesses the work of each congregation through its individual ideas. These success stories can serve as a motivational tool for the other congregations to give that idea a try. The failures also teach a valuable lesson. The WELS congregations can learn from past mistakes so they do not waste time or resources in the future on an outreach tactic that will not work in that area of Las Vegas.

Overall, a common theme is outreach events being held on church grounds. This is a great thing. It gets people interacting with the church in some way which can draw interest. Yet, where these churches can improve is to actually reach out to the community and be involved in the community. Other churches in the area are doing just that as this paper will now describe. This is something which hopefully every WELS church wants to do but has not looked into much yet.

OUTREACH STRATEGIES TO TRY

As each congregation moves further away from its beginnings as a mission startup, outreach strategies can become outdated. These congregations can do better in their areas of outreach to reach many more souls which are lost. A quote from the 23rd biennial convention of

the AZ-CA District still rings true today in this regard. “It appears that we not only need a generation of young, energetic pastors to do the work, but we also need to develop and use new strategies to meet the needs for mission work.”¹⁷ The strategies which will follow soon are new to the WELS congregations in Las Vegas, but they are already used by other non-WELS churches in Las Vegas. There are needs in the communities not being met by the WELS churches.

The need for more outreach out in the community itself will be addressed right away in this section. Some may argue that we should stay away from other churches’ ideas since their doctrines may not be biblical. That argument will also be discussed in this section. Finally, this section will explore outreach strategies which non-WELS churches are employing in Las Vegas. Pros and cons of each strategy will be discussed on how they apply to the WELS churches in Las Vegas.

From the Perspective of a Mission Counselor: Challenges with Optimism

Pastor Peter Kruschel is currently serving the WELS as a mission counselor for the AZ-CA District. He lives in Las Vegas and calls Beautiful Savior his home church. He sees some challenges to ministry outreach in Las Vegas. “Perhaps the challenges are these: a transient population as people come and people go, and the relative spiritual immaturity of the new Christians whom our congregations serve. The transiency and newness of the faith make it difficult to develop mature, long-term congregational leadership.” Kruschel does not believe the lack of stable leadership will ever be solved because of the Las Vegas transiency. Yet, he says, “It can be attacked. Ongoing programs and processes for intentional leadership training are a must!” Without these efforts for leadership, there will continue to be a void. With a void, greater outreach efforts will be hindered, but outreach efforts will always exist as long as there is a pastor to continue promoting them.

No matter who leads, Pastor Kruschel does remain optimistic about the outreach opportunities available in this unique city.

¹⁷ *Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Biennial Convention*, 17.

On the other hand, the opportunities to witness to people who have no knowledge of Jesus, to people who have sloshed through the cesspool themselves and now found it disgusting and empty of value, to people who are experiencing mental and emotional and spiritual and physical suffering, to people who are facing the demons of a variety of addictions, and to people who are searching for just one meaningful relationship in their lives—these make Las Vegas an unbelievable rich harvest field!

These people can be reached even without strong lay leadership. It can be as simple as identifying a new idea and trying it out as a group of laypeople. Some of these ideas may be being used in other WELS congregations throughout other major U.S. cities, but they are not being used in WELS Las Vegas churches. Thus, there is a need for the Las Vegas WELS churches to seek out these other outreach strategies. Whatever the need may be, looking at what other churches are doing can be a step in the right direction.

Looking at Other Churches

This does not imply any sort of fellowship. This does not imply changing doctrine to reach those in the community. This simply implies utilizing other church's strategies. Yes, certain churches are rapidly growing because of a feel-good message. Yet, they are also growing because people are aware of their community presence. They see these churches at events off of church property.

Frances Adeney is a professor of evangelism and global mission at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. She writes in her book, *Graceful Evangelism*, "You need not agree with an author's evaluation of the current situation; you may not share all of his or her theological viewpoints. Still, you may find nuggets of truth and new approaches that could be useful in your denomination, congregation, or personal life."¹⁸ Certainly, other churches are doing more community outreach than the WELS congregations in Las Vegas. The size of membership is an important factor. These churches also have more pastors and more leadership. Still, people are excited about doing good things in the community. New outreach tactics may instill the same excitement in the WELS churches. Someone may be excited about leading

¹⁸ Frances S. Adney, *Graceful Evangelism: Christian Witness in a Complex World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 130.

something which is a fresh outreach tactic because it appeals to that person's strengths and interests.

Several Lutheran professors and pastors came together to write the book, *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*. In this book, these Lutheran authors understand what things Lutherans can learn from other church bodies, particularly the Evangelicals. Even though Lutherans do not agree with the decision theology doctrine of the Evangelicals, the book points out three things Lutherans can learn from them. Evangelicals have a passion for sharing the gospel. "As Lutherans seek to forge a new evangelizing culture, we must reclaim our own passion for sharing the gospel with others, both inside and outside the church."¹⁹ The authors also claim that Evangelicals are better at personal witnessing. A key to this is the elder Christians training the youth from generation to generation. The third thing to learn from Evangelicals is similar to the second. It is not being afraid of public testimony out in the community.

While the WELS churches do a great job of getting people on campus for varying events, this is still more of a time for private sphere testimony since this is the home turf of congregational members. Rather, "Public testimony takes Christian faith out of the private sphere and into the public arena. It models a style of speaking the faith to others. Above all, it is a powerful means for the Holy Spirit to inspire faith in the hearer."²⁰ When community members are on their home turf, they are more comfortable and willing to hear a message openly instead of feeling force-fed.

Reaching the Homeless

One big need in Las Vegas is helping the homeless. Helping the homeless with earthly materials is not that difficult because of many opportunities, both organized and unorganized. Jesus tells us this is a good thing for a Christian to do.

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you

¹⁹ Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 120.

²⁰ Bliese and Van Gelder, 121.

in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Mt 25:37-40)

While helping the homeless with monetary donations is a great part of sanctified living, more can be done. Other big churches from denominations outside the WELS are doing their part.

Calvary Chapel Las Vegas, a non-denominational Christian church, has an outreach ministry called “Loaves and Fish.” The church website describes the dire need to help the homeless in Las Vegas in the following way: “The homeless are often ignored, despised and inhumanely treated by our society. More often they are bullied, beaten, and robbed intensifying their belief that no one cares.” Members from this church join other churches’ members to minister to the needs of homeless on the north side of Las Vegas. They do so by providing a gospel-centered message and prayer followed by handing out a hot meal, clothing, toiletries, and offering friendship. The volunteers do this every Tuesday.

A Baptist church has a homeless ministry specifically for kids. Shadow Hills Church, located on the western side of town, ministers to homeless kids through “Caring 4 Kids.” For this outreach ministry, Shadow Hills Church partners with Serving our Kids Foundation. The Serving our Kids Foundation website states, “Statistics are important, as we need to know the nature of a problem in order to solve it. However, let us never forget these numbers represent those most vulnerable: *children*.”²¹ Shadow Hills Church helps out by providing over 400 weekend lunches every Friday to four local elementary schools. The members assist by helping pack and deliver these lunches. While this does not provide an ample opportunity to reach out also with the gospel, it is a start to see what can be done in this regard. Plus, sometimes the best evangelism follows acts of service. Jonathan McKee, an author, speaker, and trainer for evangelizing the youth, makes this point near the end of his book. “Evangelism is intentional, and it’s an action. This takes more work and, often, more money. But this kind of evangelism isn’t about what we say—it’s who we are. And who we are will speak louder than anything we say and often give us opportunities to share our faith.”²²

²¹ <http://servingourkids.org/child-hunger-in-america>, Accessed November 26, 2016.

²² Jonathan McKee, *Do They Run When They See You Coming?: Reaching Out to Unchurched Teenagers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 158.

Convoy of Hope is a faith-based organization helping out the homeless and people living near poverty around the world.²³ They help organize local events. Las Vegas is a city which hosts one of these community events every year. Canyon Ridge Christian Church partners with this organization. At one of these community events, volunteers help provide free groceries, health screenings, job services, family portraits, haircuts, prayer, children's activities, and other free services. The goal is to provide a poverty free day for those struggling with poverty. Getting involved with this community event is a simple registration. A church could set up a booth and provide both earthly and spiritual needs. These events work great because a church gets its name out in the community and gets involved in the community instead of inviting the community to the church. Going out is necessary for others to come in.

It might seem like an impossible task to record specific numbers of homeless in a big city like Las Vegas. Yet, record keeping must be done. Help Hope Home is a regional plan in Southern Nevada to end homelessness instead of simply managing it. This organization's website lists the reason for record keeping.

The Homeless Census is a requirement of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) of all Continuums of Care throughout the country. It may also be referred to as a Point in Time Count. In Southern Nevada, the Homeless Census consists of many activities that occur annually during the last week in January.²⁴

This census is only possible with the help of volunteers. The website describes how the census is accomplished.

- An urban count is conducted during which volunteers canvass Las Vegas/Clark County neighborhoods to obtain a visual count of unsheltered homeless individuals and families, who are living in places not meant for human habitation, like on the streets or in cars, parks, and abandoned buildings.
- A youth count is conducted during school hours during which volunteers canvass public places to obtain a visual count of unsheltered, unaccompanied youth. School district personnel also provide a count of homeless students.
- Homeless service providers conduct a shelter count of the people in their transitional housing and shelter programs.
- Specialized teams of outreach workers and volunteers canvass the tunnels under Las Vegas to obtain a count of people living in those areas.

²³ <https://www.convoyofhope.org>.

²⁴ <http://helphopehome.org/homeless-census>, Accessed November 26, 2016.

- The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department provides air support, using infrared imaging, to canvass desert and mountainous regions that are not accessible by vehicle.
- Volunteers and Code Enforcement perform a count in roaming rural areas.
- Volunteers and homeless service providers conduct a survey to develop more insight into the needs and experiences of people experiencing homelessness, including causes of homelessness and unique characteristics of homeless subpopulations like youth, adults or families.²⁵

This extensive work is done every year. This is important work to analyze to see the important need for reaching out to the homeless with both monetary and spiritual aid. Some brief statistics from the 2016 Comprehensive Report include the following: 6,208 families and individuals are without homes or steady shelter on any given night, 1,765 children and youth are described as homeless, 826 people were victims of domestic violence, 118 homeless families have children with them, and in 2016, 30,000 individuals experienced some sort of homelessness for some period of time.²⁶

Another Southern Nevada homeless organization is called the Nevada Homeless Alliance. This organization provides important details about how to help the homeless with monetary aid. It says that private donations are thoughtful, but they cause problems in heavily homeless areas where house service organizations also help the homeless. Problems include increased trash, which increases the costs to take away the trash, and sicknesses due to unregulated donations of food. Another problem is these donations keep the homeless away from the organizations which provide additional help beyond food and toiletries. If the homeless do not have to move far from where they have settled down, they will not venture off to an organized event because they do not see a need to do so.²⁷

The Nevada Home Alliance does not want to deter people from helping out the homeless. They want people to volunteer and help end homelessness. So, they offer advice on helping. The organization says to partner with a local organization. This benefits churches busy with planning other outreach activities. A church can leave the planning to the organization but still help out. A big event the Nevada Homeless Alliance puts on is called “The Giving Project.” A

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ nevadahomlessalliance.org, Accessed November 26, 2016.

church can help out by distributing items while hosting a booth at this event. With handing out monetary donations comes handing out spiritual support.

Between 2013 and 2014, Nevada's increase in homelessness was the largest in the nation, a *Review Journal* article stated.²⁸ Michele Fuller-Hallauer is the continuum of care coordinator for the Southern Nevada Regional Planning Coalition. The article quotes her saying the following:

Our largest increase took place in the individuals category. Many things contribute to that, especially given that we are a transient community. We have a lot of folks who come to our community thinking they will have a job opportunity and that's not the case. This is such a complex issue. You can't just give one answer.²⁹

The population of homeless people fluctuates year to year. It will always be a problem that needs to be addressed. Stories of people living in Las Vegas tunnels can break a person's heart. Vice.com is a website dedicated to arts, culture, and news topics. One writer traveled to Las Vegas to visit the homeless people who settle in the tunnels. These tunnels were built in the 1990s to help during the monsoon season. The tunnels would keep the streets from flooding. However, they have served as a place where homeless people live. In 2012, Harmon Leon ventured to these tunnels to talk to some of the homeless population to get their stories. At the beginning of his article, he expressed his opinion on the matter of homelessness in Las Vegas.

The homeless people are neither murderers nor radioactive mole people—they're normal American citizens who have lost their way. Las Vegas offers them little help, so they turn to the tunnels for shelter. The police ignore the homeless, and last year, the *Sacramento Bee* reported that over the previous five years, Rawson-Neal Psychiatric Hospital had dumped homeless patients across state lines, sending more than 1,500 homeless people to glamorous locales like Los Angeles's Skid Row.³⁰

²⁸ Yesenia Amaro, "Nevada's Increase in Homeless Individuals Largest in Nation," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, October 30, 2014, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/las-vegas/nevada-s-increase-homeless-individuals-largest-nation>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Harmon Leon, "Inside the Tunnels Las Vegas's Homeless Population Calls Home," June 16, 2014, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.vice.com/read/inside-the-tunnels-las-vegass-homeless-population-calls-home>.

He goes on to make a valid point, one that may keep Christians away from reaching out to the homeless. “They’re stuck beneath the bright lights, living juxtapositions of the bachelorette parties on the Strip—people tourists don’t want to see.”³¹

This is a simple strategy that should be tried. There are organizations looking for church help. The homeless are often overlooked. Many fight for their lives day by day. Why not give them the gospel to hold on to in their dire situation?

Lutheran Grade School

Several churches in Las Vegas have their own grade school. While Green Valley, Water of Life, and Beautiful Savior all have schools, they only go through kindergarten at most. Finances are certainly a problem to face in getting another WELS grade school opened, but maybe the churches could combine efforts to open one joint grade school. There are many outreach success stories already from the three churches’ individual schools. People have become members through the school outreach idea. Kids have been baptized. Others have come to hear about the Bible because friends, who once were unbelievers, invited them to try out these WELS schools. Imagine what a school which educates kids with the gospel through eighth grade could do. More parents may become invested in the church. Even if they do not become invested in the church, there is a longer period of time when they and their kids are exposed to the gospel. As has been mentioned, building bridges without even mentioning the gospel is a great way to begin outreach. Some parents may be looking for a great Christian school, but many more will simply be looking for a solid education.

The state of Nevada currently ranks second to last in the United States for education.³² The Clark County School District in which Las Vegas resides is notorious for poor education in its schools. Kids are neglected. Even the high schools do not seem to care at all about the successes of their students. My wife worked with a senior in high school who notoriously skipped school but would still easily graduate from high school. Since the school district is so

³¹ Ibid.

³² Neal Morton, “Report Bumps Nevada Overall Education Ranking from Last to Next-to-Last,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, June 20, 2016, accessed December 4, 2016, <http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/education/report-bumps-nevada-overall-education-ranking-last-next-last>.

poor, some quality teachers are leaving which makes the comeback for quality education hard to achieve in southern Nevada. Even a substantial number of quality substitute teachers are hard to find. A void of quality teachers needs to be filled. WELS teachers could fill that void in their own private school. Parents are looking for better options so their children can succeed in life. The great teachers which the WELS has to offer would do just that.

There is already a great reputation among the WELS preschools and kindergartens. This reputation makes advertising easy. The simple word of one family to another about the quality education in the WELS schools has been enough for several families to enroll their children. Once their kids graduate from one of the WELS schools, there is often a plea for more grades so their children can continue receiving the same quality education and life lessons. Certainly, a full grade school would do wonders for outreach opportunities because parents are willing to keep sending their children to the WELS schools as long as they are able.

A whole thesis could be written on how to go about reinstating a WELS grade school in Las Vegas. There are certainly obstacles to overcome in going about this. However, if the WELS churches are looking to reach even more people by offering them good for the sake of the gospel, a WELS grade school is definitely an avenue to pursue. Parents may be scared at first to try out a church because they are unsure what they will get. However, they are eager to enroll their children in a quality education system. When their kids return home singing songs about God's love, retelling Bible stories, and telling their parents about the love the teachers show them, the parents become more open to learn the truths being taught at the church. Their hearts may be more prepared and open to hear the gospel.

Presence Ministry

Presence ministry is making sure a community knows that a church is ready and willing to help. It is not unusual for a Christian to be scared to follow Jesus' commission to make disciples of all nations. Going door-to-door can be a frightening task. Even when going out two-by-two, an individual may be nervous to knock on that door or ring the doorbell. Also, people seem less willing these days to open their doors to strangers. Even if someone opens a door, it can be difficult for them to open up emotionally in a conversation. The classic scenario also arises of the door closing after someone hears a canvasser is from a church. These situations

are all evident in Las Vegas. That is why presence ministry is essential for good outreach in Las Vegas.

Presence ministry is a common thing that Christians do without Christians even realizing they are doing it. Because of this fact, presence ministry can be less frightening for those who want to share Jesus with the community but not in a one-on-one way. It also takes away the fear of the unknown response of someone who hears you talking about Jesus. The Christian who conducts presence ministry is already doing something he or she is comfortable doing. George Hunter is a specialist in evangelism and church discipleship. He loves the idea of presence ministry to get people involved. “In presence ministry, it is not necessary that one always (or even usually) verbalize the gospel; the Christian has not ‘failed Jesus’ just because he has not mentioned his name.”³³ He goes on to say, “The following ministries of presence are important, and are less intimidating to new witnesses than are tasks which do mandate proclamation and/or discipling.”³⁴

Hunter states the obvious when he says that churches should have ministries that meet the community’s needs. Some needs pass away over time while other needs enter a community. Calvary Chapel Las Vegas, Shadow Hills Church, Canyon Ridge Christian Church, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church, and other churches in Las Vegas all have plenty of presence ministry events. Some of the different things they do differently include the following: bus transportation to church, fellowship with former military, and visiting shut-ins.

Bus transportation is as simple as letting the community know that a bus or car will be at a specific location at a specific time to bring people to church if they have no other way of getting to church. Anyone who enjoys driving is able to comfortably carry out this ministry.

Fellowship with former military is carried out by visiting the local Veterans Affairs Hospital. This is the same concept as visiting shut-ins at a nursing home. These people simply want others with whom they can share stories and fears and dreams. They want to play games with others. They want human interaction. This type of presence ministry is a simple task that anyone who likes to talk can do. So why is this a type of outreach? If a Christian shows love to

³³ George G. Hunter III, *The Contagious Congregation: Frontiers in Evangelism and Church Growth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 135.

³⁴ Ibid, 135.

a neighbor by talking to someone who wants and needs human interaction, that Christian is carrying out gospel ministry because that person is showing love because God first loved the world.

It is very possible that the WELS churches in Las Vegas are carrying out presence ministry, but they may not realize it. The pastors certainly preach it whenever they preach sanctification. However, more education is needed. Church members should be made aware of specific opportunities to carry out presence ministry. When there is a specific need in a WELS church's surrounding community, a member can carry out presence ministry by attending to that need. The member is present at the need of someone. The person in physical need is attended to. A relationship is formed through the faithful service of a Christian, and a bridge to proclaiming the gospel through God's Word is built.

Presence ministry is great because church members have more opportunities to share God's love. If someone says they cannot knock on doors because God has not given them that gift, then certainly they have some sort of gift that can be used in presence ministry.

Mercy Corps

In their book *50 Ways you can Share your Faith*, Tony Campolo and Gordon Aeschliman offer some unusual outreach ideas. One in particular may be an offshoot of what some WELS churches around the country are already doing. Water of Life itself in Las Vegas has a group of people dedicated to helping those in need within the congregation. The mercy corps idea laid out in this book would do the same thing, but the group would also focus on those who need help in the community. If this is such a great idea, why have most churches not done this sort of ministry? The answer is time. "We admit it: this idea will be the most time-consuming of all our suggestions."³⁵

It is time consuming because of the research involved to find out who has a dire need. People with the energy to do this have a job during the day. The elderly would be a great fit, but they may not have the energy needed for this type of ministry as it reaches its full potential. Still, this is a great idea for two reasons. This is an easy way to get people in a church involved.

³⁵ Tony Campolo and Gordon Aeschliman, *50 Ways You Can Share Your Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 49.

People love to help out, and it is easier to help others when there is a specific need to attend to. Also, “this outreach is simply the integrity of the gospel being lived out.”³⁶ This harks back to Hunter’s point about doing gospel work without actually mentioning the name Jesus. Faith in action is part of the gospel message.

Time is not the only issue to deal with here. The inconvenience that this may cause to the regular lives of those helping is an issue. Donald Posterski has authored many books on evangelism. He understands the inconvenience of looking out for others, but he says this is not an excuse. He writes the following:

Helping people move from one apartment to another is not often the most pleasant way to spend a Saturday afternoon. Driving older people to doctor appointments, baby-sitting children for single mothers, teaching international students how to use the transit system, volunteering at a food bank, collecting for a charity, visiting the sick, encouraging the discouraged and generally surrendering oneself to the needs of others takes willful and methodical determination. Like it or not, being a Christian and serving others is a call to a ministry of inconvenience.³⁷

Gospel motivation helps Christians to see that helping others is not an inconvenience but an opportunity to share the gospel through faithful action.

Service Project

Campolo and Aeschliman offer another simple idea but with profound wisdom. They comment how people of society have a stereotype of church people. They think church people do not care about anything worldly. This is the basis behind doing service projects.³⁸ This can be done as an individual member of the church. In fact, this is the best way behind these projects. Pastors can find individuals willing to help the community and tell them to do so. Then, that individual simply helps out cleaning up streets, building homes, planting trees, or other projects. Again, this faith in action is done without specific mention of the gospel. Then, the opportunity will follow to do further evangelism. “Some people may be shocked to find Christians volunteering for projects that are not church-controlled. Yet, we have seen how

³⁶ Ibid, 49.

³⁷ Donald C. Posterski, *Reinventing Evangelism: New Strategies for Presenting Christ in Today’s World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 154.

³⁸ Campolo and Aeschliman, 67.

conversations develop around a specific need and how eventually a surprised individual may feel comfortable enough to pursue the relationship further.”³⁹

Final Thoughts on Other Outreach Strategies to Try

There are plenty of books, some of which were consulted for this thesis, which list many more strategies for outreach off of church property. The ones listed above are enough to get an outreach team in Las Vegas thinking about new things to try which other churches are already doing well. The WELS churches in Las Vegas already have what is most needed: the pure gospel. They could also now use other outreach tactics to draw people to listen to what they have to say by going off of church grounds.

Some of the strategies listed are done without even speaking an audible word of the gospel. Yet, those strategies speak volumes of Jesus’ love. The WELS churches can express Jesus’ love through their actions out in the community. The goal of these different strategies is to show that the WELS churches not only care about the spiritual needs of the people, but also about the physical needs. Through this goal, the community sees the expressed love which flows from Jesus’ love. Prayerfully, individuals in the community would then come to the church to hear about that love of Jesus which is proclaimed in word and song.

OUTREACH STRATEGIES TO STAY AWAY FROM

The two areas of outreach that will be mentioned in this section are two areas which no WELS congregation in Las Vegas is currently taking part in. As will be discussed, this should continue to be the course of action.

Both of these areas at first seemed to me to be good ideas as I served my vicar year in Las Vegas. However, through careful study and interviews, I will present why these ideas are no longer appealing to me nor should they be appealing to the Las Vegas WELS congregations.

Reaching Out to Tourists

³⁹ Ibid, 68.

For the last three years, Las Vegas has bested itself for tourism. For the first time ever, over 40 million people visited Las Vegas in 2014. The final count was 41.1 million. While that seems like a lot of people, that number was no match for the 42 million people who visited Las Vegas in 2015.⁴⁰ And yet, this number was bested in 2016 when 42.9 million people came to see the lights of Las Vegas.⁴¹ Generally, if someone visits Las Vegas, they primarily stick to the Las Vegas Strip. This is an approximately four mile stretch of Las Vegas Boulevard. This is where many of the Las Vegas ritzy casino-hotels are located. The two main groups of tourists are vacationers and convention goers. Las Vegas hosts several conventions throughout the year. It is no wonder that so many people want to visit this city to see if it lives up to its name.

A person is exposed to sin when walking on the Las Vegas Strip. The prominent blatant sin involves many forms of sexual immorality. Workers are evenly spaced out handing out cards advertising girl escort services. Advertising trucks continually drive up and down Las Vegas Boulevard promoting the same type of business. Others are shouting out invitations to strip clubs. Billboards advertise topless shows full of women for the men. For the women, there are also sexually immoral shows full of mostly, if not all, naked men.

Several miles slightly northeast is the Freemont Street Experience. This stretch of other casinos and bars is a less tame version of the Las Vegas Strip. This is the site of the original downtown Las Vegas. Various people look for tips by putting on some sort of show. Some go as far as to undress as closely as possible to naked as they can without being labeled as nude. People will jokingly pose for pictures with these people. This is Las Vegas. This is Sin City. This is where “what happens here, stays here” lives. This is seemingly an escape from reality for people.

Richard Mouw is a Calvinist pastor. In a chapter of his book, *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport*, he talks about his experiences in Las Vegas on a visit. One interesting comment he made compares Las Vegas to heaven.

⁴⁰ Jay Jones, “Las Vegas Hits Record 42 Million Visitors in 2015, Even Before New Year’s Eve Crowds,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 2015, Accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/travel/california/la-trb-las-vegas-visitor-record-20151230-story.html>.

⁴¹ Thomas Moore, “Tourism Officials Report Record 42.9M Las Vegas Visitors in 2016,” *Las Vegas Sun*, January 10, 2017, Accessed February 16, 2017, <https://lasvegassun.com/news/2017/jan/10/tourism-officials-report-record-429m-las-vegas-vis/>.

Some of the things people mention when they talk about Las Vegas are also things the Bible says about the ‘new Jerusalem’—which in its own way is also a glittering opulent, bustling center of never-ending festivity (Revelation 21 and 22). This matchup should not surprise us, I argued. Las Vegas may be a very wicked city, but it is precisely in its wickedness that it is also a significant spiritual environment. People go to Las Vegas with deep yearnings for security and satisfaction. It is a place that symbolizes promise. Its psychic currency is the stuff of which our dreams are made. Here is a case where popular, glitzy culture reveals some important things about the human quest.⁴²

He continues to write about the immorality Las Vegas offers to people who want to escape. He then clarifies his above statement six pages later.

Las Vegas is a counterfeit version of the “new Jerusalem,” and it shares something of the glorious reality it mocks. But it cannot really chase the night away or put an end to our sorrow. It calls to us, but it does not deliver on its promises. No genuine security or satisfaction is to be found within its dazzling casino walls. It does not quiet the profound restlessness of our hearts.⁴³

These are two accurate statements. People think they are escaping a rut of mundane living by going to Las Vegas.

I noticed this on two roundtrip flights to the Midwest for two, separate week vacations during my vicar year. Both flights back to Michigan were quiet. I knew there were tourists on both flights because of mumbled stories as I waited to board the planes. Yet, I could tell these tourists were exhausted from their time in Las Vegas. However, both flights back from the Midwest to Las Vegas were some of the noisiest flights I have ever been on. People were talking about how they were going to live it up in Sin City. I am not judging these people. They possibly had God-pleasing fun. Yet, this personal experience makes Mouw’s comments ring true. People go to Las Vegas with grand ideas of relaxation and comfort because of everything Vegas has to offer. These people leave with memories but hardly any rest and comfort. They leave to go back to work and home and regular life. This vacation to Las Vegas was only a temporary relief from the ordinary.

So, there is no surprise to find street preachers on both the Las Vegas Strip and on the Fremont Street Experience. It is not a shock to have other people passing out different kinds of cards which promote a vague, biblical message. It is no wonder why several billboards offer

⁴² Richard J. Mouw, *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 95.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 101.

telephone numbers to call and websites to visit which offer information about hell and why people who partake of the wonders of Las Vegas may be going there. Should the WELS join the ranks of these street preachers and billboard messages?

The common consensus among the current Las Vegas WELS pastors is a resounding no. One even referenced Jesus' words from Matthew 7:6.⁴⁴ The reason is not because of what Mouw believes. "Las Vegas certainly struck me as fair game for theological critique. Indeed, it seems to be despised by thinkers across the theological spectrum. Christian conservatives hate Las Vegas because of its gambling, booze, and promiscuity; liberals because of its greed, bad taste, and sexism."⁴⁵ This may have been the case back when WELS was first beginning to look into starting churches in Las Vegas, but that is not the case now.

Pastor Kruschel gives a great reason why the WELS churches have wisely stayed away from street preaching and handing out information on the Las Vegas Strip.

To me, the best answer is summarized by the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:15: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect." Then in chapter 4 of the same letter, Peter goes on to talk about what it's like to live in a cesspool-society and how we should respond to it (with love, hospitality, service, and witness). It doesn't seem to me that we can accomplish the good we intend by handing out church information. One-on-one help, concern, witness and love seem to be what we are encouraged to provide.

Pastor Strong offers the following helpful advice:

Even if you were to hand out general gospel information, I would still struggle to find it worth the time. With all the smut that others are handing out, the occasional "preacher" on the corner damning people to hell, and visitors who are focused largely on less than godly things, it would be a tough crowd to find interest in the gospel message. Plus, there would be very little opportunity to do good (and important) follow up.

Pastor Vogt concurs by saying, "Perhaps you might be able to reach a soul or two for the Kingdom, but it would be very difficult to water the seed which may be sown." The Las Vegas WELS pastors are not saying the people are not worth the gospel message. Yet, there does come a time when you need to put your effort in more viable situations. From what I could tell while

⁴⁴ "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces."

⁴⁵ Mouw, 94.

in Las Vegas, the people preaching and the people handing out information were not affiliated with any formal church. They were simply people trying to tell others about law and gospel.

Pastor Scott Linklater, a former pastor of Expectation Church Network, believed strongly in handing out information on the Las Vegas Strip. In an interview with outreachmagazine.com he said, “Our job in this scenario is to put the gospel in as many people’s hands as we can and let God take it from there.”⁴⁶ At first, Pastor Doug Linderman from Oasis Christian Church in Las Vegas would have agreed with Pastor Strong, but he has since changed his mind. The same article says he “was skeptical about tract-based witnessing to tourists on the strip because there is virtually no opportunity to follow up with them. But after meeting with Linklater, hearing about the website and actually helping pass out the tracts, he changed his thinking. His church plans to help hand out the tracts once a month.”⁴⁷ Linderman himself says, “As far as the type of outreach on the strip to the tourist community, it’s the most positive and potentially effective thing that I’ve ever seen here.”⁴⁸ Yes, this is true, but this outreach ministry is not going to do much. The tourists come to Vegas for earthly entertainment, not something they may get from a pastor knocking on their door back home.

Please Tell Me the Truth Ministries interviewed a street preacher to gain a better understanding on what street preachers say. Some of the preacher’s thoughts included the frustration of people not listening because they think he is trying to sell something. His other advice would not be surprising to a Christian who has a basic understanding of the Bible. He talks about people’s responsibility to God because he made people and gave them worth. His basic law is drawing attention to the Ten Commandments and how people break them. His basic gospel is the news that Jesus came to save sinners.⁴⁹

Why should the WELS not formally take gospel outreach to the Las Vegas Strip? The answer is in the message. A pastor is not going to have the attention he needs to fulfill his call

⁴⁶ Scott Marshall, “Sharing the Gospel with Tourists in Las Vegas,” *Outreach Magazine*, June 22, 2011, Accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.outreachmagazine.com/resources/small-church-america/small-church-profiles/4257-sharing-the-gospel-with-tourists-in-las-vegas.html>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “How to Share the Gospel,” Accessed November 26, 2016, <http://pleasetellmethetruth.org/2016/08/10/how-to-share-the-gospel>.

and training. A WELS pastor's outreach to the Las Vegas Strip begins and ends with sermons and Bible classes. By instructing and motivating his members to witness when they have opportunity if they are on the Las Vegas Strip or Freemont Street Experience, the pastor is doing all he needs to do. Members with basic biblical knowledge are just as effective as the street preachers. They may even be more effective because they are not approaching in a seemingly hostile way as the preachers are. WELS outreach on the Las Vegas Strip is no different from a Christian witnessing in school or at the grocery store through words and actions.

UNLV Campus Ministry

University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) was established in 1957. Wherever WELS congregations are located near a college or university, one would assume a campus ministry would be available. This is not the case for the WELS in Las Vegas. There is currently no campus ministry being conducted by any WELS congregation in Las Vegas. Would a campus ministry by one or several of these churches be a beneficial outreach tool?

The absence of a campus ministry surprised me. I thought this would be a great tool for outreach. However, this is not the case. Pastor Kruschel has vast experience in this area of outreach. He was in charge of administering campus ministry for WELS Home Missions for 12 years. He also had campus ministry during his parish years. His expertise in this area is valuable for arguing against campus ministry as an outreach tool in Las Vegas.

I can see several big challenges for getting a regular campus ministry program going in Las Vegas. First, UNLV has a large number of commuter students which means that many students are gone on evenings and weekends when Bible studies and fellowship would naturally take place. Second, those curricular programs that attract out-of-state students (e.g. hospitality, sports service, healthcare and business administration tied to game) tend to require evening and weekend involvement. Third, UNLV students tend not to stick around for 4-5 years. Many attend school for 1-2 years before transferring elsewhere or just dropping out. Fourth, there is no pastor or lay leader who has exhibited a passion (and the patience) to build up a program—there are so many other outreach opportunities in their own parish areas.

While campus ministry would be a valuable outreach tool, it would be tough to get going without a decent-sized core of WELS students attending UNLV. Campus ministry works the best through friendship evangelism. WELS members attending a university or college bring

their non-WELS friends to events to expose them to the gospel. An open invitation would fall by the wayside without a core.

The WELS churches in Las Vegas do not have many members attending UNLV. Pastor Strong says he had some members who did while he was at Shepherd of the Hills, but he does not think that would have even helped to start a campus ministry. “One challenge though is that most WELS students at UNLV are most likely from the Vegas valley and live at home, still being able to connect with their local church.”

In a sense, this ministry would be similar to doing ministry on the Las Vegas Strip. Students are not in Las Vegas long enough to establish a relationship. The WELS should keep these students in their prayers. WELS members who attend UNLV can do their part by sharing their faith and inviting friends to church.

Final Thoughts on Outreach Strategies to Stay Away From

Indeed, I am not saying that the WELS should neglect the college students or the tourists. The college students can still be reached through outreach ideas. They can be invited to church through an ad on campus. They should be sought out, albeit in a separate way from campus ministry. The tourists may not be citizens of Las Vegas, but they are people in Las Vegas who may have never heard the gospel before. Many are there to fulfill their sinful desires. They can still be exposed to the gospel through a Christian’s words or actions while on the Las Vegas Strip or while on Fremont Street. However, time and resources would be wasted on a formal outreach tactic to these tourists since they are not in Las Vegas for the long haul. They have a need for the gospel but not a need for WELS church membership in Las Vegas.

CONCLUSION

Las Vegas is a fertile mission field abounding in outreach opportunities. Maybe there were no groundbreaking thoughts in this thesis. Yet, education is the first step. Several churches are doing much more than the WELS churches in Las Vegas as far as outreach. With a lack of manpower and lay leadership, it is difficult to get new ideas going. However, think how excited people are with a new mission. There is excitement for something new. Using other churches’ outreach tactics could benefit the Las Vegas WELS churches in two ways. First, people in need

will receive help from an earthly and spiritual standpoint. Second, the members may be excited to try something new. This contagious attitude will boost a dying attitude toward outreach.

By keeping an eye and ear out for the needs of the communities surrounding each church, new outreach strategies can be developed. By keeping an eye and ear out for what other Las Vegas churches are doing, the Las Vegas WELS congregations can continue to take steps in the right direction for doing outreach events off the church property and in their communities.

There is always room for improvement for outreach. By chasing improvement, the WELS congregations in Las Vegas will continue to effectively share the gospel with those who need it most from the homeless to the average community member to those living in perpetual sin. The WELS took advantage of a city which needed the true gospel preached to it. It will continue to take advantage of this city through its outreach program.

Just as Las Vegas was built on sin, it will continue to thrive on sin. Many Las Vegas tourists continue to feed their sinful cravings by indulging in sinful entertainment. No matter how hard any pastor of any denomination works to defeat the sinful persona of Las Vegas, sin will continue to take up residency in Las Vegas. This is a fact of our sinful life in this sinful world. Until Christ comes again, there is a need to comfort those stricken with sin by proclaiming the gospel through outreach. Las Vegas will always need the gospel.

This city is as lost as any other city because it is as full of sinners as any other city. Thus, it is no different than any other metropolis in the world. However, I have a heart for gospel work in Las Vegas from my year of working there as a called servant of God. That is why I specified this thesis to look at only Las Vegas WELS outreach.

As my wife and I left Las Vegas to move back to Wisconsin for my senior year at WLS, my attitude was completely different from when I first set my eyes on the city in August 2015. I wanted to be able to stay in Las Vegas to help out with outreach to those who need the truths of the Bible. I felt no anger or pride against those living in sin. Rather, I had a deep concern for the whole city. While I was sad to leave, I was confident that the gospel was at work. I was confident that God was using his called servants and his children to carry out the work of his glorious, comforting Word.

That does not mean the WELS churches can grow complacent in how they spread the gospel. New outreach strategies must be put into motion by the WELS churches to reach more

people in Las Vegas. Certainly, the desire to do so is present among the WELS pastors in Las Vegas. They want to carry out their respective calls in spreading the gospel to the unchurched. They must use as many resources as possible to begin lighting a fire for outreach in their people's hearts. They can show the success of outreach strategies being used by other churches. They can educate through Bible classes. They can demonstrate new outreach strategies to those who have a passion for outreach already. Whatever the case may be, the WELS churches in Las Vegas need to get their members out in the community doing gospel-minded outreach.

Currently, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few in Las Vegas. My hope is that this thesis will change that statement. I want people to begin saying about WELS outreach in Las Vegas, "The harvest is plentiful, and the workers are many." More gospel outreach tactics done in the communities of Las Vegas will allow more people to help out because their varying gifts are now needed in a specified way.

God has blessed the gospel ministry being done in Las Vegas over the past 48 years. He has provided quality pastors, teachers, and lay leaders. He has kept his promise that his Word will not return to him empty. He will keep that same promise as more outreach is done in Las Vegas until he comes again. By looking at past successes and failures while also evaluating current strategies of other churches, the WELS churches in Las Vegas can confidently move into the future knowing they are doing as much as they can to reach as many people as possible with the gospel.

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APPENDIX: WELS LAS VEGAS PASTORS SURVEY

1. What outreach tactics have you found successful to get people to come to a church service during your years in Las Vegas? Why have they worked?
2. What outreach tactics have you done away with during your years in Las Vegas? Why did you stop using them?
3. What outreach tactics have you wanted to try but haven't done so yet in Las Vegas? Why haven't you tried them yet?
4. How far away from your church do you go to reach potential prospects?
5. What is your take on handing out church information on The Strip?
6. Why does or doesn't your church's location serve the church's outreach ministry well?
7. Where does the need for outreach rank in your members' hearts compared to other church ministry needs? What percentage of able-bodied members actually participates in outreach activities off the church property?
8. What do you consider to be the biggest disadvantage about doing outreach in Las Vegas? How do you think this could be solved?
9. What do you think is the biggest benefit of having numerous WELS churches in one, isolated city such as Las Vegas?
10. What are your thoughts about getting a campus ministry started at UNLV?

Pastor Pieper- Green Valley

1. What outreach tactics have you found successful to get people to come to a church service during your years in Las Vegas? Why have they worked?

The Phone's For You is what we built our church with. It allowed us to reach out to 15,000 people to get 114 to our first service in 1989 and we used it successfully four different times after that, the last being 1998. It reached a large number of people and allowed us to create a bulk mail list targeted to those who were interested in our church. The use of caller ID and unlisted numbers has rendered this tool useless.

The preschool is a great tool to reach out to people, with our "certified non-member" status if they take the highlights of the AIC.

The biggest thing is to visit the visitors. I swear, we are the only pastors who go out and visit visitors in this town.

2. What outreach tactics have you done away with during your years in Las Vegas? Why did you stop using them?

See above.

We don't do door-to-door canvassing because the weather is so inclement and when the temperatures don't kill you the wind kicks up enough dirt to take the paint off a car. And we are in the wrong time zone, so our evening light is non-existent. O to be in Michigan where it is light out until 9:30 pm!

Festival of Friendship. It bombed in our store front days and it bombed about six years ago.

3. What outreach tactics have you wanted to try but haven't done so yet in Las Vegas? Why haven't you tried them yet?

4. How far away from your church do you go to reach potential prospects?

12 minute driving distance

5. What is your take on handing out church information on The Strip?

Don't cast your pearls before swine.

6. Why does or doesn't your church's location serve the church's outreach ministry well?

It serves very well because it is a visible corner by a junior high school. It is easy to get to and everybody knows where we are.

7. Where does the need for outreach rank in your members' hearts compared to other church ministry needs? What percentage of able-bodied members actually participates in outreach activities off the church property?

Not very high. When we have trained people, they seem to have moved or transferred out of town. The talented go-getters get promoted.

I would argue, however, that this might be over-rated. We got up to a membership in the 400s with just me doing the evangelism calls, making them count. If a pastor is waiting for the church to form an evangelism team before they can do anything, he is unfaithful to his calling. His call details that he is to preach, teach, administer the sacraments, comfort the sick and dying, reprove the straying and have a heart for the unchurched.

Currently we have no one participating in outreach activities off the church property.

8. What do you consider to be the biggest disadvantage about doing outreach in Las Vegas?

How do you think this could be solved?

Climate and time zone. No resolution.

9. What do you think is the biggest benefit of having numerous WELS churches in one, isolated city such as Las Vegas?

The congregation doesn't fall into a "metropolitan" mindset that we are just here for WELS people who will drive long distances to go to church, so we don't give a rip about our immediate neighborhoods. It permits us to have ministries outside of Sunday. A metropolitan church will typically ONLY have ministries and meetings on Sundays, to spare people the long drives.

10. What are your thoughts about getting a campus ministry started at UNLV?

Should be done. Green Valley with two pastors should be doing it, once it gets its act together and becomes younger in its mindset.

Pastor Buch- Summerlin

1. What outreach tactics have you found successful to get people to come to a church service during your years in Las Vegas? Why have they worked?

Just starting – seeing what hits the wall and sticks

2. What outreach tactics have you done away with during your years in Las Vegas? Why did you stop using them?

See 1

3. What outreach tactics have you wanted to try but haven't done so yet in Las Vegas? Why haven't you tried them yet?

A canvass of my area, have a church, looking for a church, interested in a church ---- we do not have the manpower and ability to do so

4. How far away from your church do you go to reach potential prospects?

We have a wide range. Our main focus is within a mile or two of our church, but we have those come from 8-10 miles away.

5. What is your take on handing out church information on The Strip?

The perception is a challenge. There are those who hand out porn, would we look like that? The other end of the spectrum is also true, there are preachers who are preaching to the wind on the street corners. Would we be lumped into that, or would it be productive?

6. Why does or doesn't your church's location serve the church's outreach ministry well?

We have lost much of our outreach steam. It is my perception that people in my area are locked into their location and their life. I wonder if those who are "new" to Vegas are looking to make those relationships and are more open to the possibility of walking into a new church. We are using new member movers to try to do that.

7. Where does the need for outreach rank in your members' hearts compared to other church ministry needs?

What percentage of able-bodied members actually participates in outreach activities off the church property? Honestly it ranks pretty low, which is a problem. We have many who like the idea of outreach, but when asked to participate, there is usually a low response. We don't have that mindset because we have not done it actively before I got here.

8. What do you consider to be the biggest disadvantage about doing outreach in Las Vegas?

How do you think this could be solved? Transitory.... People who you are trying to make relationships with come and go. I think the bigger problem is the number and variety of churches. This is a consumer driven society..... people will find what they are looking for in a church.

9. What do you think is the biggest benefit of having numerous WELS churches in one, isolated city such as Las Vegas?

I think, there is potential, as in Tucson to do bank together to do the work more efficiently and effectively.

10. What are your thoughts about getting a campus ministry started at UNLV?

There needs to be a core. If there is a core there, we should start, however, without a core of kids, it would be hard to start. Maybe a ministry that should be looked at.

Pastor Vogt- Water of Life

1. What outreach tactics have you found successful to get people to come to a church service during your years in Las Vegas? Why have they worked?

You are quite aware of much of this in regard to WOL. I think you also know it's not been any "one thing." It's a combination of all of them (mailings, internet, banners, Block party, children's events, reach out into the preschool, new neighborhood canvassing, FIA outreach teams, etc.). I'm convinced that still the best outreach -besides Friendship Evangelism - is that which is done face to face, door to door. It's so much about building relationships. The other thing is

community awareness. You just have to somehow break through all the noise and let people know that you're there for them.

2. What outreach tactics have you done away with during your years in Las Vegas? Why did you stop using them?

Don't know that we've really stopped anything on purpose. We don't mail anything like we used to - or hang near as many flyers door to door. But that is really only due to budget constraints. I'd still do it if we had the money to. Same goes for the San Gennaro Festival outreach booth. We don't do it now only because they are no longer in our part of town.

3. What outreach tactics have you wanted to try but haven't done so yet in Las Vegas? Why haven't you tried them yet?

We haven't done much of the community impact type activities . . . where you take up a project the community might benefit from in an effort to express Christ's love in a service project. Why not yet? Honestly, it's a manpower thing. Haven't been able to make it a priority and drum up the support for it.

4. How far away from your church do you go to reach potential prospects?

We usually focus within 3-4 miles of our church. Would and have reached out to up to 5 miles away.

5. What is your take on handing out church information on The Strip?

Don't really think it is effective for the purpose of reaching souls that we then can minister to with the necessary follow up in the Word. 95% of those people will be tourists from out of town or out of the country. Perhaps might be able to reach a soul or two for the Kingdom, but very difficult to water the seed which may be sown.

6. Why does or doesn't your church's location serve the church's outreach ministry well?

We are on a decent road next to one of the area's middle schools. This gives us some decent community exposure. However, we are not on a major thoroughfare and only those who come to

the school or live in this immediate area will be aware of us. Besides this, if you were to look on an aerial map, you'd see that our 5 mile outreach area is cut off by the mountains on the West and South sides.

7. Where does the need for outreach rank in your members' hearts compared to other church ministry needs? What percentage of able-bodied members actually participates in outreach activities off the church property?

Great question. Unfortunately, I believe that the longer we exist, the less passionate people are for outreach. We still talk a great deal about it, and I believe there are many who are active in Friendship Evangelism. But there are currently only two men (besides the Vicar and I) who serve on the Outreach Team and who go out on a monthly basis to make visits and/or help with new neighborhood canvassing.

8. What do you consider to be the biggest disadvantage about doing outreach in Las Vegas? How do you think this could be solved?

Biggest problem is the transient nature of the community. By the time they come to realize you are there, many are gone. Related to that is the difficulty many find in establishing meaningful relationships . . . this limits the ability to accomplish friendship evangelism. Another problem is the superficial nature of Las Vegas. It takes a while for people to come to appreciate the true needs of the soul (although I'm sure this is anywhere).

9. What do you think is the biggest benefit of having numerous WELS churches in one, isolated city such as Las Vegas?

Not super sure about that. I'd like to think the fellowship aspect is important . . . that WELS members know they are not alone in their faith; that they are a part of a bigger body of local believers, even if their own church is not all that large. However, we don't work this too well here currently. Another possible advantage would be name recognition/identity throughout the community. But again, our city is so big that even 7 or 8 WELS entities just gets lost in the mass of humanity/churches.

10. What are your thoughts about getting a campus ministry started at UNLV?

Could be a good idea. Perhaps the only church in a position to be able to serve them all that well - due to location - is Mount Olive. I'm afraid WOL (and its pastor) is too distracted with numerous other ministry responsibilities to be able to focus on such an effort.

Pastor Mueller- Beautiful Savior

1. What outreach tactics have you found successful to get people to come to a church service during your years in Las Vegas? Why have they worked?

Two different Moms Groups with consistent, thorough reminders and follow ups. They've worked because of the Meet Up app, Facebook, text messaging, well organized leaders, creative events, and really consistent reminders/follow ups.

2. What outreach tactics have you done away with during your years in Las Vegas? Why did you stop using them?

The monthly snail mail newsletter. Ineffective by comparison to better options. Otherwise we've only added strategies/tactics.

3. What outreach tactics have you wanted to try but haven't done so yet in Las Vegas? Why haven't you tried them yet?

Nothing I can think of.

4. How far away from your church do you go to reach potential prospects?

We've gone all over town—as far as Centennial Hills Hospital on the northwest side of town, 45 minutes one way.

5. What is your take on handing out church information on The Strip?

Why waste the time, effort and money on non-residents?

6. Why does or doesn't your church's location serve the church's outreach ministry well?

Our church serves the outreach ministry well because of it's location, proximity to new/growing suburban neighborhoods, relative newness, and quality signage.

7. Where does the need for outreach rank in your members' hearts compared to other church ministry needs? What percentage of able-bodied members actually participates in outreach activities off the church property?

The first question is practically impossible to answer. Suffice it to say outreach is a huge priority of our overall ministries. Probably about 30-40% of our members have actively taken part in outreach ministries over the last 12 months. A higher percentage if we tracked the last 5 years.

8. What do you consider to be the biggest disadvantage about doing outreach in Las Vegas? How do you think this could be solved?

We haven't experienced big outreach challenges and conversely wouldn't know of any silver bullets to the challenges. Overall, outreach opportunities abound in Vegas.

9. What do you think is the biggest benefit of having numerous WELS churches in one, isolated city such as Las Vegas?

Convenience. Referral opportunities.

10. What are your thoughts about getting a campus ministry started at UNLV?

Could be done perhaps. Would likely need increased college aged demographic within our valley congregations.

Pastor Strong- Shepherd of the Hills

1. What outreach tactics have you found successful to get people to come to a church service during your years in Las Vegas? Why have they worked?

There was no silver bullet, but we put out lots of lines...mass postcard mailing for special events/worship(10,000-20,000 a/crack), Canvassing neighborhoods and handing out flyers, posting events on community/media calendars, A-frame signs regularly put out on busy corners, website was huge first step for many people who came to check us out (our front door!), our

Toddler Time ministry (one hour Christ-focused Pre-K program), annual Spring Fling festival that brought in a lot of community and gave us opportunity to invite to worship, VBS was also a great way to connect with the families of our community. The overall best was friendship evangelism, members inviting their friends and family to worship.

2. What outreach tactics have you done away with during your years in Las Vegas? Why did you stop using them?

There wasn't much that we quite doing. We did stop paying for advertising and even a paid listing in the phone book - just not worth the cost for something that is becoming less and less relevant. We also tried the New Mover Program which would each month automatically mail out a welcome invite to people who moved into our area. We never really saw any results from it. We also have so many people moving in and out so often that it didn't really help (because Vegas is soooo transient).

3. What outreach tactics have you wanted to try but haven't done so yet in Las Vegas? Why haven't you tried them yet?

4. How far away from your church do you go to reach potential prospects?

We considered our ministry area to be a 5-mile radius from our church. This alone provided close to 150,000-200,000 people for us to try to reach.

5. What is your take on handing out church information on The Strip?

Not worth it. 40+ million people come to visit Vegas. Many don't leave the Strip. If the purpose of handing out information was to connect people to my local church, it would be worthless as they would go to their own home and we'd rather they connect with a church there. Even if you were to hand out general gospel information, I would still struggle to find it worth the time. With all the smut that others are handing out, the occasional "preacher" on the corner damning people to hell, and visitors who are focused largely on less than godly things, it would be a tough crowd to find interest in the gospel message. Plus there would be very little opportunity to do good (and important) follow up.

6. Why does or doesn't your church's location serve the church's outreach ministry well?

The current rented facility is in a great location in the ministry area. It is a block off of main arteries, is along a well-traveled street, and right next to residential areas. That has been a key thing in our ministry (having a rented space that we could utilize throughout the week, gave the community a sense that we were there for the long run, unlike many churches that were working out of schools and often folded.) People driving by could also see the sign on the side of the building and that attracted attention.

The new location will serve outreach ministry well too. It is located again near main arteries, is right up against a freeway that will give it good visibility and right in the residential community. However, it is tucked back a block from the main road, so it may need creative signage to attract attention.

7. Where does the need for outreach rank in your members' hearts compared to other church ministry needs? What percentage of able-bodied members actually participates in outreach activities off the church property?

Outreach was ranked very high among our members. They realized we were a mission church wanting to grow God's kingdom and that could only be done through outreach. I never had more than 8-10 canvassers, but many were involved in outreach events, and many were great at inviting friends and family.

8. What do you consider to be the biggest disadvantage about doing outreach in Las Vegas? How do you think this could be solved?

I wouldn't necessarily say there were big disadvantages of doing outreach in Vegas, but there were challenges. Transiency was always an issue. Involved members would move away. Projects wouldn't always stay around long enough to get into membership or would move soon after. I don't know that there is a solution that the church could provide to this problem, besides creating community and a sense of family that many in Vegas long for, and just continuing to do faithful outreach. While transiency was always a frustrating issue when you're striving to grow a

church, I learned very quickly, that while people would leave, God always provided us with new people and we still grew!

The 24/7 life of Vegas and crazy work schedules often made it difficult to find good times to reach the most people while canvassing, planning events, worship day and time, or setting up times to meet with people to follow-up with. Being flexible was important. We dabbled with a Wednesday evening service (never had more than 10-15 people. Visitors would sometimes come and then probably because of such a small crowd on Wednesdays, never came back).

9. What do you think is the biggest benefit of having numerous WELS churches in one, isolated city such as Las Vegas?

Shows our commitment to the gospel and that we are part of a larger body of Christians. It was also a blessing to have fellow pastors and congregations for support and encouragement. It wasn't lonely there. We could share in ministry and bounce ideas off of one another. It also provided expanded opportunities for members to be involved in ministry and be served.

10. What are your thoughts about getting a campus ministry started at UNLV?

Not a bad idea. I only had one or two students that attended UNLV while I was there. Not sure how many other WELS students attended there. It would make the most sense for Green Valley or Mt. Olive to base the ministry from there. At the same time, to do it well, you almost need a dedicated full-time worker to do so. One challenge though is that most WELS students at UNLV are most likely from the Vegas valley and live at home, still being able to connect with their local church.

Pastor Unke- Shepherd of the Hills

1. What outreach tactics have you found successful to get people to come to a church service during your years in Las Vegas? Why have they worked?

NA—We haven't done tons of outreach since I arrive in summer. We've had visitors, and we've done some things, but we're still positioning ourselves to do real outreach. Sorry!

2. What outreach tactics have you done away with during your years in Las Vegas? Why did you stop using them?

NA---(haven't been here long enough to try and fail—it will come!)

3. What outreach tactics have you wanted to try but haven't done so yet in Las Vegas? Why haven't you tried them yet?

We are planning to do a Living Nativity that can really have an appeal for young families at Christmas time. We haven't done one yet because we don't have the facility.

4. How far away from your church do you go to reach potential prospects?

We stay in the northwest corner of Las Vegas, but do draw some from Nellis AFB.

5. What is your take on handing out church information on The Strip?

I'm not close enough and the people on the strip don't usually live here. It would far outside the parameters of my Call.

6. Why does or doesn't your church's location serve the church's outreach ministry well?

Our temporary facility is difficult to find with very poor signage. It has also become far too small. It's time for SOTH to build—and thankfully construction should start in February.

7. Where does the need for outreach rank in your members' hearts compared to other church ministry needs? What percentage of able-bodied members actually participates in outreach activities off the church property?

Our people have not been trained for outreach—only 2-3 assist right now. This is part of being in a mission congregation!

8. What do you consider to be the biggest disadvantage about doing outreach in Las Vegas? How do you think this could be solved?

As far as mission fields go, this is as fertile as it gets! Some missions start in places where people have lived for long periods of time—that can be hard to convince people to try a new church. In a place where nearly everyone is new to the area, it's not strange to try something new

since they are in new schools, new banks, new clubs, etc. I see no disadvantage other than unbelief!

9. What do you think is the biggest benefit of having numerous WELS churches in one, isolated city such as Las Vegas?

The brotherhood of pastors and the fellowship opportunities among WELS saints. There are many more isolated places than Vegas.

10. What are your thoughts about getting a campus ministry started at UNLV?

I haven't had any thoughts on that.

Pastor Kruschel- Mission Counselor

5. What is your take on handing out church information on The Strip?

It is obvious to anyone who has ventured down to The Strip (and Fremont Street!) that there is good reason for LV to carry the Sin City label. Moral decadence and depravity are always on display...at the same time, this is not so different from other cities that cater to the sins of the flesh: Times Square in New York, Sunset Drive and Venice Beach in Los Angeles, the Castro district in San Francisco, the French Quarter in New Orleans, Orange Avenue in Orlando, South Beach in Miami, etc., etc., etc. Each of these areas – and the many more like them – should receive our attention.

But who should be our intended audience? Should we target the tourists who come for a short visit and then return to their “normal” lives back home? Should we target the people who hold legitimate jobs? Should we target the purveyors of the filth? The answer is Yes! But what is the best (or better) way to go about proclaiming law and gospel? To me, the best answer is summarized by the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:15: “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have, But do this with gentleness and respect.” Then in chapter 4 of the same letter Peter goes on to talk about what it’s like to live in a cesspool-society and how we should respond to it (with love, hospitality, service, and witness). It doesn’t seem to me that we can accomplish the

good we intend by handing out church information. One-on-one help, concern, witness and love seem to be what we are encouraged to provide.

6. Why does or doesn't your church's location serve the church's outreach ministry well?

After working with hundreds of missions scattered across North America for the past 40 years, I'm impressed with the locations of our churches around the Las Vegas metro area. Continual growth (population, housing, etc.) impact each of our churches in positive ways. Because of the constant influx of new people, the opportunities to witness abound.

8. What do you consider to be the biggest disadvantage about doing outreach in Las Vegas? How do you think this could be solved?

I have a hard time thinking of a disadvantage because the advantages far outweigh any disadvantage. Perhaps the challenges are these: a transient population as people come and people go, and the relative spiritual immaturity of the new Christians whom our congregations serve. The transiency and newness of the faith make it difficult to develop mature, long-term congregational leadership. (On the other hand, the opportunities to witness to people who have no knowledge of Jesus, to people who have sloshed through the cesspool themselves and now found it disgusting and empty of value, to people who are experiencing mental and emotional and spiritual and physical suffering, to people who are facing the demons of a variety of addictions, and to people who are searching for just one meaningful relationship in their lives – these make Las Vegas an unbelievable rich harvest field!)

The vacuum of mature lay leadership, which can hinder even greater outreach efforts, will never be 'solved,' but it can be attacked. Ongoing, programs and processes for intentional leadership training are a must!

9. What do you think is the biggest benefit of having numerous WELS churches in one, isolated city such as Las Vegas?

Mutual encouragement and support.

10. What are your thoughts about getting a campus ministry started at UNLV?

Having been in charge of administering campus ministry for Home Missions for a dozen years and involved in campus ministry in my parish ministry before that, I can see several big challenges for getting a regular cm program going in LV. First, UNLV has a large number of commuter students which means that many students are gone on evenings and weekends when Bible studies and fellowship would naturally take place. Second, those curricular programs that attract out-of-state students (e.g. hospitality, sports service, healthcare and business administration tied to gaming) tend to require evening and weekend involvement. Third, UNLV students tend not to stick around for 4-5 years; many attend school for 1-2 years before transferring elsewhere or just dropping out. Fourth, there is no pastor or lay leader who has exhibited a passion (and the patience!) to build up a program – there are so many other outreach opportunities in their own parish areas.