



Sharing the Gospel in “Sin City”

The History of the WELS in Las Vegas

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THE HISTORY OF THE WELS IN LAS VEGAS**

Bright, flashing lights. The dinging and clinging of slot machines. Cheering and excited chatter. Hustle and bustle. Crowded streets. Extravagant lounges. Luxurious hotel rooms. These are a few of the many sights and sounds of the twenty-four hour city that never sleeps. They are the sights and sounds of billions of dollars being won and lost. They are the sights and sounds of “The Entertainment Capital of the World.” These are the sights and sounds of Las Vegas.

Las Vegas is one of the biggest tourist destinations in the world. People come from all corners of the world to play in the adult playground of Vegas. In fact more than 38.9 million visitors were attracted to Las Vegas in 2006.¹ They come with the hope of striking it rich with one pull of the lever, flip of the card, or roll of the die. They come to be entertained by some of the greatest entertainers in the world. Visitors come to be pampered and attended to in some of the most lavish and luxurious accommodations anywhere. Las Vegas is a destination where people can come and let loose. It’s a place where almost anything goes. It’s for this very reason that the following famous phrase was coined, “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.”

Las Vegas has another well-known moniker – “Sin City”. While the city itself has in recent years shied away from using that name to describe it, there really is no arguing the name. One only needs to walk along the Strip on a busy Friday night, or any night for that matter, and see that the city lives true to this name. Las Vegas Boulevard is lined with dozens of men thrusting fliers at you for clubs, escort services, phone-sex lines, and more. Gambling becomes an addiction for many as they chance away their life savings in the hope of something better.

¹ “Las Vegas hosted record number of visitors in 2006,” *USA Today*, February 14, 2007, http://www.usatoday.com/travel/news/2007-02-14-las-vegas-tourism-record_x.htm?csp=34 (accessed December 1, 2007).

With the lure of free drinks, it is no surprise to see displays of public drunkenness. Lying, cheating, sexual immorality, drunkenness, greed; these sins are all prevalently displayed throughout the Vegas scene. Yet, Vegas isn't unique in that these sins only happen here and nowhere else. Sinfulness permeates even the most remote places. But it is a unique city because so many sins are glamorized and looked upon as normal and okay. People come to do things they wouldn't usually do, and then return home to live their regular lives. Sin City could be considered a modern day Sodom or Gomorrah.

Satan is hard at work in Las Vegas. If he had an earthly home, it wouldn't be too far off to say that Las Vegas would be it. He works through the many temptations that are available to lure people to fall into the depths of sin. Yet, even in the midst of a sinful world, there is a power far greater than the devil. That is the power of an almighty and loving God. His son, Jesus Christ conquered sin and Satan with his sacrificial death on the cross. Jesus bore all the sins of all people of all time and paid the enormous price of the punishment of hell for each one of those sins. Christ died for all people, even the people of Las Vegas and the sins that are committed there.

This is the sweet Gospel message that Jesus commands believers to share with all nations. However, when a person looks at Las Vegas and all the wickedness that is in it, it is easy to fall into the fatalistic thinking that it is a city that cannot be saved. It is such a wicked city that it doesn't deserve to hear the Gospel message. That message can't be for them. Las Vegas is a city that the Gospel would never take root and thrive in. This is the exact mindset that Satan would love for believers to have. But the good news of Christ works in the hearts of believers to squash that outlook and leads them to see all people, no matter how sinful, as lost

souls that God wants to be a part of his family. Since Las Vegas is a part of all nations and in need of a Savior, the gospel message must be shared with Sin City as well.

THE GOSPEL MISSION

This is where the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) comes into play. It is not the intent of this paper to trace the entire history of the WELS or even how it arrived at its mission. But it is important to take a brief glance at the mission of the WELS in order to understand its work in Las Vegas. The official Mission-Objectives-Vision (MOV) statement of the WELS states that its mission is “to make disciples throughout the world for time and for eternity, using the Gospel in Word and Sacrament to win the lost for Christ and to nurture believers for lives of Christian service, all to the glory of God.”² The WELS takes very seriously the great commission from Matthew 28, to go and make disciples out of the lost sinners of the world using the means through which God works saving faith in the hearts of believers.

Objectives two and three pertain to the topic at hand.

2. To foster a sense of urgency for the lost and to seize every opportunity the Lord provides to evangelize lost souls;
3. To establish churches where Christians help each other grow and mature in the faith through public worship and a life-long study of the Word of God;³

There is a real urgency to evangelize lost souls because the Last Day is coming soon like a thief in the night. So it is the objective of the WELS to make use of every opportunity to share the life-saving Gospel and to establish new churches to aid in this endeavor.

Reaching out with the Gospel has always been the mission of the Christian church. Jesus sent his disciples out to share their testimony of Christ. The Apostle Paul was commissioned to

² Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “Mission--Objectives—Vision,” <http://www.wels.net/cgi-bin/site.pl?2601&collectionID=778> (accessed December 1, 2007).

³ Ibid

go out from among the Jews and share the good news of Christ crucified with the Gentiles. Throughout the history of the Christian church various other men and organizations continued to proclaim life in Christ not just to their own people, but to many other foreign lands and different cultures. If it were not for the efforts of European mission societies in the 18th and 19th centuries to bring the Christian faith to the distant and foreign land of America, the Wisconsin Synod would not be where it is today. While over the years the methods that are used and the people who are evangelized may have changed, the mission and message have always remained the same.

The Wisconsin Synod, which started out as a few churches around Milwaukee, Wisconsin, made up predominantly of German immigrants, has grown to a present-day church body whose reach spans the globe. The WELS love of mission work has led it to far off countries to work with people of very different cultures and ethnicities. But that mission work doesn't just happen in places overseas. The Wisconsin Synod has also reached out to the mission field in its own backyard; for there is a great need to reach out to the lost souls of their own land. While they have expanded to over 1,200 locations throughout North America, there are still many places where the Gospel needs to be shared.

The world over the years has become a much smaller place. The leaps and bounds in technology have led to much easier and faster ways of communicating and traveling. No longer do families stay in the vicinity that they grew up in surrounded by extended family. More and more families move around the nation and the world following jobs or new opportunities. Members of the Wisconsin Synod are no different. As WELS members moved out to different places, away from their church and synod, their synod often followed them in keeping with its

mission to win lost souls and nurture believers in Christ. This is what, in the late 1960's, would bring the WELS to "Sin City."

HISTORY OF LAS VEGAS

Las Vegas is located in a desert valley in the southern portion of Nevada. This area was first inhabited by the Paiute and Anasazi Indians. The Paiute still inhabit the area on a reservation located to the northwest of Las Vegas. Rafael Rivera was the first person of European descent to look upon the Las Vegas valley in the early 1800's as he led a Spanish exploration group through what is now the southwestern United States. He named the valley "Las Vegas," which is Spanish for "the meadows," because of the abundant green areas of wild grasses that grew due to the plentiful water supply from artesian wells.

The Mormons came to the Las Vegas valley in the mid 1800's and constructed a fort. This would serve as a halfway point for the journey between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles where they would go for many of their supplies. They attempted to convert the Indians living in the area, but were unsuccessful. They eventually abandoned the fort. They would later return once Las Vegas was established as a railroad town in the early 1900's. Today they are a major influence in Las Vegas, with a strong presence and holding positions of power within the government and community.

Las Vegas was officially founded as a city on May 15, 1905. It began as a railroad town with its availability of water making it a good place to refuel. Along with the railroad, the mining industry and some farming brought about early growth to the city. During the Great Depression of the 1930's, two major events helped spur the growth of Las Vegas and shape its future. On March 19, 1931, gambling was legalized in Nevada. This coincided with the building

of the Hoover Dam along the Colorado River which began in 1931 and would be completed in 1936. Along with this immense construction project came a great influx of workers which sparked a population boom in Las Vegas. Both of these events have had a lasting influence on Las Vegas. Gambling has been a huge part of the economy of Las Vegas and the Hoover Dam continues to play a critical part in providing water and electricity to the city.

The federal government brought the armed forces to the area as the Nellis Air Force Base was built in the northwest part of the Las Vegas valley during World War II. This added to the population growth and brought in another important industry to Las Vegas. Nellis is today the largest employer in the city, employing more than 10,000 personnel.

Throughout the 1960's and 70's, Las Vegas continued to grow. Gambling became "gaming," meaning that it was now a legitimate business. This led to the growth of the gaming industry. Then beginning in the mid 1980's was a period of unprecedented growth for the city. Between 1985 and 1995 the population doubled going from 186,000 to 368,000 residents. Such an increase was due to the continued growth of the casino/resort industry. As that industry continued to grow, so too did the city of Las Vegas.

That growth has not yet slowed down. The population of Las Vegas stands at more than 1.7 million people. It was the fastest growing city in the 1990's growing 83% from 1990 to 2000. More than 5,000 people move into Las Vegas each month. While people come from all around the world to live in Las Vegas, one-third of new residents come from California. Las Vegas also has the 5th largest school district in the United States. It handles more than 280,000 students in overflowing schools. It is also surprising to note that even though Las Vegas is known as Sin City, there are over 500 churches that represent 40 different denominations.

This brief history of Las Vegas gives a needed look at the background of the many issues and challenges that are encountered with such a unique Gospel ministry in Sin City. Christianity faces a much greater Mormon influence than in many other places in the United States. Churches must deal with people who are heavily influenced by the casino industry and all the temptations and sins that come along with it. Marriage and divorce laws are lax, making quickie drive-through marriages and effortless divorces a reality. With such rapid growth, there are great needs and demands that must be met. One of those needs is the desire for belonging and a family atmosphere. Families are also looking for alternative schooling choices for their children who often get lost in an overcrowded school system. Even with all of these issues, God has granted the WELS a great opportunity to reach out to the lost souls that crowd into Sin City.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

In 1969, a group of laymen residing in Las Vegas requested that the Wisconsin Synod supply them with doctrinally sound materials and tapes of sermons. They wanted to have an orthodox Lutheran church in Las Vegas that proclaimed the truth and purity of God's Word. They had grown tired of other Lutheran church bodies in town and their weak doctrine.

Pastor Hermann John, a 1962 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, accepted the call to serve the mission in Yucaipa, California, and to begin new missions in the Riverside-San Bernardino area. Soon after he arrived in California in 1969, he was asked by the California Mission board to call on a number of WELS families who were now living in Las Vegas. At that time, the WELS had a "Membership Conservation Office" to which pastors were encouraged to pass along the names of members who had moved to a place where there was not yet a WELS congregation. This list would be the starting point for the WELS ministry in Las Vegas.

Being that Pastor John was the closest WELS pastor to Las Vegas at the time, he made the 4-hour, 240 mile drive through the desert to meet with the families in Las Vegas. His first visit was on December 10, 1969. He was welcomed by the Arnold Cook family who lived near to what is now downtown Las Vegas. The Cooks helped Pastor John become acquainted with the city and their home served as the location for the first services that were held in Las Vegas.

According to Pastor John, his first impression of Las Vegas as he arrived at the outskirts of the city was not a good one. "I saw a billboard reading "24 hour breakfasts." To me that meant the city had a lot of people who slept during the day because they worked most of the night in the casinos. I had a strong dislike for gambling."⁴ Since Las Vegas had such a strong involvement in the gambling industry, Pastor John considered the city to be "Sin City."

The first service was held on January 22, 1970. This service included all of God's means of grace as the Word was shared, communion was celebrated, and a baptism was observed. During that first year, Pastor John would come to Las Vegas to conduct evening services every six weeks. Beginning on January 3, 1971, Pastor John came on the first Sunday of each month. On the other Sundays of the month, when Pastor John wasn't present, taped services were used.

After the Sunday evening service, Pastor John would stay in Las Vegas at the home of one of his members. The next day he would conduct outreach as he followed up on prospects and canvassed the neighborhood. He would often fly in to Las Vegas from either Ontario or Palm Springs, California, on Hughes Airlines. At this time Howard Hughes offered a 50 percent discount on fares to members of the clergy. Pastor John wished that he would have had the opportunity to thank Mr. Hughes for helping the WELS get started in Las Vegas.

⁴ John Hermann, letter to Aaron Strong, November 14, 2007.

MT. OLIVE LUTHERAN CHURCH

Palm Sunday, April 4, 1971, was an important day for the beginning of this small congregation of WELS Lutherans in Las Vegas. That night after the service, the first officers were chosen as well as a name for the congregation. Mt. Olive Lutheran Church was the name chosen by the members. Here are their reasons for choosing this name.

That name will always remind people of:

1. The time of its beginning as an informally organized congregation with services every Sunday. Palm Sunday 1971 – The day commemorating Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem from the Mt. of Olives.
2. Its location. The congregation is located in a city of olive trees surrounded by mountains.
3. Its purpose. Just as Jesus’ ride from the Mt. of Olives into Jerusalem was a proclamation of Himself as a King who has conquered Satan and delivered us from Satan’s power, so this congregation’s purpose in Las Vegas is to go out from “Mt. Olive” proclaiming to the people of Las Vegas, Jesus’ victory over sin, death, and the devil.

Also as Jesus paused on the Mt. of Olives, looked over the city and wept over it because He knew the wrath of God was coming upon people because of their rejection of Him as their Savior, so the members of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church will constantly look over the city of Las Vegas and with tears of sorrow in their eyes will warn the people of the wrath of God that is coming upon those who continue to reject Jesus and despise the preaching of His Word.⁵

Later in the fall of 1971, Mt. Olive was granted “Mission Status” by the Mission Board.

This small congregation in Las Vegas was no longer considered just an “exploratory.” The WELS had definite plans to remain in Las Vegas and to establish a permanent congregation. The congregation had grown to 35 members. This was mostly accomplished through the efforts of the members themselves. While Pastor John did some of the evangelizing, without a permanent pastor who lived in town, the majority of the outreach efforts rested on the members.

⁵ “The Mt. Olive Name,” *25th Anniversary of Mt. Olive* (May 7, 2000), 4.

With the increase in membership, the homes of members no longer provided sufficient space for worship. Mt. Olive began to meet in rented facilities in what the members considered a “bad part of town.” Some even expressed their fear of driving to the facilities for worship services.

The following anecdote from Pastor John’s ministry in Las Vegas reflects the unique challenges of serving in Las Vegas.

One Sunday just before the church service was to begin, I was told by one of the members that he had purchased a communion set for the congregation. (Up to this point, we had used a regular kitchen plate and glass for communion.) He proceeded to tell me that he had gotten lucky at the slot machine and had used a portion of his winnings to buy the communion set. I thought he was just kidding with me about using slot machine winnings. I assumed the members had decided to use some of their offerings to buy the communion set, so I thought nothing more about it. After the service as I was visiting in this member’s home, he again brought up the subject of the new communion set. He asked why I had not made some mention of it in the announcements after the service. Then he told me that his account of the purchase was the truth. I believe my response was: “I am surprised that the Lord didn’t strike it down with lightning.”⁶

The work of beginning a church in Las Vegas from 240 miles away and the demands that came along with it began to become too much for a pastor who had his own missions back home to work on and on a congregation that needed more than just a once-a-month pastor. At the end of 1971, Pastor John strongly urged the California Mission Board to place a full-time pastor in Las Vegas. The Synod agreed. In February of 1972, Pastor Hugo Warnke was assigned to work full-time in the Las Vegas area. Pastor Warnke was the California Mission Developer. His job was to move to a town where a new WELS mission was beginning, serve the congregation for a short time (perhaps a year or so), and then move on to another WELS mission.

With Pastor Warnke now residing in Las Vegas, regular worship services were held. He recounted in a letter his initial reactions. “Conditions were rather discouraging for a pastor who

⁶ Hermann John, letter to Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, May 16, 1990.

was accustomed to having many people in the Worship Service.”⁷ During this time, Mt. Olive was still without a permanent place to worship. Since land was difficult to come by, especially at a price that the WELS could afford, they began to worship at the Blind Center of Las Vegas. Pastor Warnke reflects on the facilities there, “The Center was an extremely decrepit building on the outside but far more decrepit on the inside. However, there was room for a couple dozen people there. Conditions became intolerable in the Blind Center.”⁸ The congregation then bought a house and worshipped in the garage until a neighbor complained to the city about the cars parked in front of their property. This ultimately led them to sell the property.

Finally, God opened the door for them to find land that was affordable with the added benefit of having a home already on the property. The property located at 3975 South Sandhill Road on the east side of Las Vegas is the same property that they occupy today. The home became the parsonage for Pastor Warnke and his wife Martha. However, the home was not large enough to worship in, so services were held nearby at the Paradise Park Town Hall. Under the guidance of Pastor Warnke, Mt. Olive continued to grow. In 1973, Pastor Warnke took a call to start a mission in Novato, California. While his stay in Las Vegas was short, it was important in the beginning stages of this small congregation.

1973 was a momentous year for Mt. Olive. This would be the year that they were officially recognized by the WELS as becoming organized, or an official congregation of the Synod. During this time they also approached the Wisconsin Synod’s assignment committee for a pastor. Seminary graduate, David Kiecker, was assigned to serve Mt. Olive. He was ordained and installed as pastor at Mt. Olive in the evening of July 1, 1973, in a service at the rented town hall. That summer, building funds were approved and the Mission Board gave them the

⁷ Hugo Warnke, letter to Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, March 3, 2000.

⁸ Ibid

authority to build a church building. Architectural plans were put together and later were approved by the WELS Board of Trustees. Former member of Mt. Olive, Pastor David Peters, recalled the difficulties of this initial planning. “What frustration we felt while trying to arrange financing, just as the price of concrete was sky-rocketing!”⁹ But even amongst the challenges, the people of Mt. Olive eagerly anticipated their church building with great joy.

Groundbreaking for the church took place on September 1, 1974, with construction beginning very soon after. The building was completed in early 1975 and the dedication of the church and fellowship hall took place on May 18, 1975. A simple bronze plaque was placed on the wall in the narthex with the single word “Grace” on it, recalling God’s undeserved mercy to this congregation in Las Vegas.

Mt. Olive continued to thrive by the grace of God under the pastoral leadership of Pastor Kiecker. In 1985, the congregation built a Parish Hall as an addition to their property. Membership had grown to over 350 souls by 1990, at the time when they celebrated the 15th anniversary of their sanctuary and the 20th anniversary of the first worship services in Las Vegas. As Mt. Olive continued to grow and expand, so too did the city of Las Vegas. In 1986, Mt. Olive began the process of spreading the Gospel to other parts of the Las Vegas valley. They would help in the start up of two sister congregations in other areas of Las Vegas. In 1992, Pastor Kiecker left Mt. Olive as he accepted the call to serve at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Black Creek, Wisconsin.

Pastor James Panning, a 1990 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, received and accepted the call to serve Mt. Olive. He arrived in Las Vegas in 1993 and continues to presently serve the congregation. In the late 1990’s, the Christian education of the youth of the congregation became a priority for Mt. Olive. It was decided that a Christian day school would

⁹ David Peters, letter to Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, June 3, 1990.

benefit the congregation and the community. Mt. Olive Lutheran School opened its doors in the fall of 2000 as the first WELS elementary school in Las Vegas. Classes were held in the fellowship hall of the church that first year. The first school wing was added in 2001, with a second completed in 2007.

Mt. Olive currently has a membership of around 260 souls and an enrollment of 85 in their elementary school. The school is served by seven teachers, five full-time and two part-time. Mt. Olive places an emphasis on Gospel outreach through the elementary school, using it as a stepping stone to bring new families in to hear the message of Christ. While Mt. Olive began in an undeveloped desert region of the valley in the 1970's, it is now in one of the more established areas of the city. Because of this, one of the challenges it faces is being just one of 150 different churches within a five mile radius. Yet by God's grace, God's Word in truth and purity will continue to be preached to the members of Mt. Olive and its neighbors for many more years to come.

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

– 1 Corinthians 3:6-7

GREEN VALLEY LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Wisconsin Synod expanded its mission of sharing the Gospel in Las Vegas during the late 1980's. In 1988, Pastor Don Pieper, a 1983 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, was called by the Arizona-California Home Mission Board to start a new mission in Las Vegas. He was installed on June 5, 1988, in a service at Mt. Olive. Pastor Pieper began with no members, no worship facility, and no land to work with. It was just he and his wife who were at

first members of Mt. Olive. Yet his initial reaction was that this was a great place to start a church. So he began thirteen months of demographic studies to find the best place to plant a church that had a chance of becoming sizable. Green Valley, in the city of Henderson, just southeast of the city of Las Vegas, was chosen as such a place.

The process for acquiring land on which to build a church was difficult. However, they were fortunate enough to get in early enough with a master developer to secure a site. A three acre parcel of land was found and purchased in the southern part of Green Valley at a cost of \$160,000. This land was two miles out into the desert from the city but had great potential for growth. It would be the future home of Green Valley Lutheran Church. A temporary worship facility was rented in a new strip mall shopping center nearby as they planned their future construction.

While securing a place to build a church, Pastor Pieper also spent much time searching for people to fill a church. Initial door-to-door canvassing brought thirteen members, which was basically three families. In the months prior to their first service, over 15,000 phone calls were made, thousands of mailings were sent out to neighbors, and hundreds of personal visits were made. These outreach efforts paid off. On October, 29, 1989, Reformation Day, Green Valley had their first worship service with an attendance of 114. God had truly blessed the initial efforts of sharing the Gospel with the people of Green Valley.

Green Valley Lutheran Church was officially recognized by the Wisconsin Synod as a congregation in 1990. It continued to grow throughout the next years by faithfully getting the Word out into the community. An early method for reaching out to the people of the community came through the "Pieper Papers." These one page newsletters were sent out to over 6,000

homes in the area. A new family visited the church nearly every week in response to the Pieper Papers.

Ground breaking for Green Valley's worship facility (on their property at 1799 Wigwam Parkway) was on October 11, 1992. As with all the churches built in Las Vegas, Green Valley received much support and financial aid from the WELS. On Easter Sunday, April 11, 1993, the members of Green Valley worshiped for the first time in their very own church. 335 people joined in celebrating the resurrection of Christ that Easter morning.

The fall of 1997 began another stage of ministry at Green Valley. A building project with the assistance of Builders for Christ completed a classroom building for their new preschool and kindergarten ministry. The early childhood education ministry served two purposes: to give a Christ-centered education to the youth and to serve as an evangelism tool by reaching out to the families of the community. Non-member parents were required to take a four week adult information class so that they would know what their children would be learning. Through this ministry, a number of families have become involved in the church and members of Green Valley.

As the congregation increased in membership, so too did the ministry of Green Valley. Staff minister Jon Ruddat joined the staff in 2000 and served full-time for a year before accepting a call to serve elsewhere. In 2005, Green Valley had grown to the point of needing a second pastor to assist in their ministry. New graduate, Pastor Matthew Pfeifer, was assigned to serve at Green Valley. He and his family joined the ministry in July of that year. The worship facilities also did some growing. They had become too small and in 2006 an addition with classrooms, offices, fellowship hall, and kitchen was completed.

Currently, Green Valley is the largest congregation in Las Vegas with a membership of over 750. It is amazing how God can work through the faithful labor of his servants to accomplish such growth in just under twenty years. But it was not without its struggles and challenges. At times there were strains with the Synod mission board and other pastors because of Green Valley's quick growth. Thoughts of cutting corners or fabricating numbers were expressed. But through much outreach efforts and the education of members that focused on the Lord of the Church, these numbers were realistic.

“Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.”

– Psalm 127:1

SUMMERLIN LUTHERAN CHURCH

The WELS started another home mission project out of Mt. Olive in 1990. This time they would reach out to the people on the opposite end of town, the far west side of Las Vegas. Pastor Jerome McWaters, a 1976 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, accepted the call to serve at this mission start-up which would be the third WELS congregation in Las Vegas. Pastor McWaters had previous experience of planting churches in Southern California and in Honolulu, Hawaii. Now he would lend his skills and focus on reaching out to the people of Sin City.

Pastor Pieper of Green Valley Lutheran did much of the leg-work for choosing a location for the new mission as he conducted research for his own mission church. As with the previous congregations, land was sought in an up-and-coming part of the city. A three acre parcel was purchased from the Summa Corporation in the master-planned community of Summerlin. Summerlin Lutheran would be one of four churches that were included in the first phase of the

community's development. They would join the ranks of the Catholics, Mormons, and Jews who were also planting churches in the community.

Summerlin Lutheran Church originally began as Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church. The congregation debated on whether to include a biblical or a geographic reference when choosing a name. However the Summerlin community was reluctant to let anyone use the Summerlin name in their title. So Hope was chosen because of the hope in Christ that they would share in the gospel. It was also relevant as Pastor McWaters was in the process of negotiating for a church site in the master planned community and hoped to be a neighbor in the community. After three months, the community relaxed their original restraint and the name was changed to Summerlin Lutheran. The church wanted their location in the city to be easily identified.

While they had land and a future place to call their home, they needed a place to worship. Beginning in February of 1991, four families, a mix of WELS members and prospects, began meeting for worship in the McWaters' home. Six months later, Summerlin Lutheran was able to rent a temporary chapel at Advent United Methodist Church. They worshiped on Saturday evenings for their first few years. The first worship service was Saturday, June 22, 1991, and was followed by Bible class.

Early evangelism efforts focused on the perceived need for a family feeling that many residents moving to Las Vegas were lacking. In a developing community, Summerlin Lutheran hoped to be a true "community" of believers. Pastor McWaters expressed this family feeling as he reflected on the early days of the mission. "It was very informal. It was very family like. There was a closeness that one could not duplicate or manufacture anywhere else. The sense of

family was so real.”¹⁰ That sense continues to this day as the members consider each other to be family. Outreach also included sending out mailings to the residents of the master planned community.

Groundbreaking for their worship facility took place on Sunday, March 7, 1993. Summerlin would have the distinction of being the first church to begin construction within the community. They would also be the first to complete their building project. They began worshiping in their new building on Sunday, September 5, 1993, with the dedication later on October 24th. The membership at that time was about 120 members.

Over the years, finding reliable lay leadership and losing key members to a mobile nation were some of the key struggles of this young church. Yet Summerlin Lutheran has continued to thrive by the grace of God. In 2006 an education building was constructed that would give added room for the Sunday school and would also be used as a fellowship hall. There are now 300 members of Summerlin.

“Blessed are those who dwell in your house, they are ever praising you.”

– Psalm 84:4

WATER OF LIFE LUTHERAN CHURCH

It wasn't long before the Wisconsin Synod was reaching out to another part of Las Vegas as the city continued its dramatic growth. The new hot spot of growth was the southwest corner of the city. In May of 1997, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduate, Pastor Matthew Vogt, was assigned to begin the next mission in Las Vegas which would become the fourth WELS congregation in the growing city. He and his wife, Kelli, arrived in town on August 1st and he immediately got to the work of a missionary.

¹⁰ Joe Lowell, “Summerlin Gets First Church,” *Summerlin View*, January 25, 1994, vol. 1, number 8, 1AA.

The name, Water of Life, was chosen for this church. It is was a very fitting name as it reflected the physical need for water while living in a desert climate and also the spiritual need for the living water of God's Word in the spiritually dried up souls of Sin City. After a couple of months of canvassing the neighborhoods of the area and sending mailings, once a month services and weekly Bible studies were started in Pastor Vogt's home on October 12th, 1997. The first service was attended by 19 people.

The church started out with one family that was originally members from Summerlin Lutheran. The first two prospects were Pastor Vogt's car salesman and furniture salesman. Both families had their children baptized and were enrolled in the Bible information classes. However, both ended up moving out of state within two months and then it was back to square one. After nine months of work, Water of Life had their first public worship service in a tent outside of their rented storefront facilities on April 5th, 1998, Palm Sunday. It accepted its first official members a few months later on June 28th – eight communicant, ten baptized members.

It was difficult to decide where to purchase land for Water of Life. Much of the southwest corner of Las Vegas was an undeveloped desert. It would take a great deal of vision to picture a church in this area. It was initially suggested by the Synod to try to locate the church just outside of the developing master planned community of Rhodes Ranch. However, it was determined that they would be too early for basing their church's existence on this one community and the area eventually to be developed around it. It would take ten years for this community to develop. It would also become a gated community making canvassing within it impossible.

Instead, five acres of land were purchased in January of 2000, at the future corner of Grand Canyon Road and Mesa Vista. A four-wheel drive SUV had to be rented in order to

navigate the desert washes to get out to see the future site of Water of Life. The WELS land acquisition manager, at his first meeting with the mission, laughed at their plans to build “way out there” where there were no utilities or roads for miles. When he returned six months later he understood why that location had been chosen as development was quickly reaching out towards it.

The cost of this parcel was \$650,000. Later that same year, 1 ½ acres were sold for \$220,000 in order to help with the cost of building on the property. Without the monetary support of the Wisconsin Synod, Water of Life wouldn't be where it is today. At one time they were just one of five storefront churches within a mile of each other. However, they were the only church with a synod to back them, which enabled them to purchase land early while it was still available and affordable. None of those other churches have been able to develop a physical church in the area.

In 2002, mission status was granted to Water of Life as well as the authority to begin planning for their facility. Groundbreaking for their permanent worship facility took place on October 5, 2003. The church was completed in 2004 with the dedication service held on July 18th. The land that once was nothing but desert was now the home of Water of Life and was surrounded by a growing community.

Water of Life's ministry has focused heavily on reaching out with the Gospel to the community. The lay members make up a large part of the ministry as they assist Pastor Vogt in making use of many opportunities to evangelize. Hanging flyers, canvassing neighborhoods, prospect follow-up, mailing postcards, manning a booth at a local festival, and block parties are just some of the ways in which they have done outreach.

The ministry of Water of Life also included the training of future pastors. Jan-Erik Tiri of Finland served from August, 2005 to April, 2006. He had been trained by Pastor's Vogt's father, John Vogt at Biblicum (a seminary in doctrinal fellowship with the WELS) in Ljungby, Sweden. After Vicar Tiri came two students from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Aaron Strong served from August, 2006 to July, 2007. David Backus served from August, 2007 to the present.

A unique opportunity to reach out to the Korean culture presented itself to Water of Life in 2007. After five plus months of doctrinal training and discussions, which included three days of meetings with Pastor Tom Park (a WELS pastor who is a native Korean), Water of Life declared an "informal fellowship" with Pastor Taesang (John) Kim, his wife, Grace, and their congregation. On September 30, 2007, the Gospel ministry to the Koreans officially began at Water of Life. The Korean congregation took on the name: Korean Fellowship Church, A Mission Arm of Water of Life Lutheran Church. They presently worship on Sunday afternoons and have a membership of 25.

Water of Life has been and currently remains the only Christian church building of any denomination on the west side of the I-215 beltway. This congregation of 271 members continues to carry out the mission of sharing the good news with the southwest corner of Las Vegas. Their immediate future plans are to daughter another WELS congregation on the north part of Las Vegas as ten families are making a 45 minute drive from that area to attend worship services.

“Come! Whoever is thirsty, take the free gift of the water of life.”

– Revelation 22:17

BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH

The fifth and final WELS congregation in Las Vegas started out of Green Valley Lutheran in 1998. After thinking about where they saw their ministry in the next ten years, Green Valley decided they didn't want to be a large church with many pastors reaching out to a wide area. Background work was done by Green Valley in cooperation with the Arizona-California district mission board to explore a new mission sight. In May, 1998, new graduate, Pastor Matthew Guse, was assigned to serve the community in south Las Vegas. He was ordained and installed at Green Valley on August 9, 1998.

Pastor Guse secured a rental office and from there began canvassing and getting to know the community. There was a great opportunity to do evangelism in their area. There was only one Catholic church, two Mormon churches, and one Baptist church in this part of the city. This left Beautiful Savior a wide open range to do mission work as they literally waited for subdivisions to be inhabited so they could get in and introduce themselves. Early evangelism efforts consisted of the mass media approach of trying to get Beautiful Savior's name out to as many people as possible. This was done by hanging about 30,000 door hangers, utilizing as many travel-canvass-witness teams, WELS Kingdom workers, and summer vicars as possible. There were 180,000 people living in their immediate zip-code leaving much work to be done.

After months of hard work, Beautiful Savior held its first worship service on April 4, 1999, Easter Sunday. They worshiped at Beatty Elementary School. There were 116 in attendance with 80 being visitors from the community. Many of the Easter visitors didn't return. The attendance throughout the first summer was in the high 30s to mid 40s. Beautiful Savior's Sunday school program began in the fall of 1999. With that came an increase in worship attendance to the mid 50s. Through special services such as Thanksgiving, Friendship Sunday,

and Mission Sunday, the attendance reached into the 60s and 70s. At the end of 1999, Beautiful Savior had 56 members.

In January 2000, Beautiful Savior was approved by the Synod for an early land purchase. Even though they were not quite at the stage of doing any building, the cost of land was rising and it was being quickly snatched up by the growing city. They bought five acres of land on the northwest corner of Bermuda and Frias. The cost of the property was \$500,000.¹¹ Their future plans for the property included building a church, preschool, parsonage, and eventually a grade school. Over the next years, Beautiful Savior would continue to grow. However, without a place to call their own, they could only grow so large. In 2002, they moved their Sunday worship to Jack Schofield Middle School. While they could worship together on Sundays, during the week ministry was difficult since they had nowhere to really gather groups together. They were unable to have special weekly services, vacation bible schools, and other ministry events, which prevented them from doing the ministry they wanted to do.

2006 was a year of rejoicing for Beautiful Savior. They were approved in April by the Wisconsin Synod for a 2.6 million dollar loan to begin construction of their church building. In August, the church and preschool building construction began. A year later, after years of setting up and taking down the worship space in grade school cafeterias each Sunday morning, Beautiful Savior had a church building to call theirs. The church was dedicated on August 5, 2007. The next day they held their first vacation Bible school with 47 children. In September they opened their preschool with 7 children. They have continued to gain new students since opening. With the opening of their church, weekly worship attendance has gone from around 100 to 160.

¹¹ In 2006, that same 5 acre parcel was worth 3.2 million dollars.

Throughout the difficulties of starting a new mission, not having a worship home, and working with members who live and work in a twenty-four hour town, Beautiful Savior has prospered under the Lord's guiding hand. Their present membership is at 147.

**“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim salvation and say...our God reigns!”**

– Isaiah 52:7

THE CONTINUING SUPPORT OF THE WELS

It has been over 35 years since the Wisconsin Synod began its work in Las Vegas. Since 1969, the WELS has continued to stay true to its mission of seeking the lost with the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. They have supported the work in Las Vegas from the humble beginnings of a pastor who drove 240 miles to share God's Word with a few families to five congregations and six resident pastors serving God's people. It is truly amazing how God has blessed the WELS and its continuing support of the ministry in Las Vegas. Pastor Guse expresses the thanks that all of the city's congregations feel when he says,

And we also realize this would not be possible if it were not for our brothers and sisters in the Lord giving their mission dollars to synod. For without you we would neither be here, nor thinking about building a church, school, and preschool. So thank you from our congregation to you for your gifts of generosity. What a wonderful blessing it is to be a part of a larger synod! May God grant that your efforts continue to be blessed, as well as his hand of mercy upon our little Las Vegas mission.¹²

Since 1971, the WELS Church Extension Fund has invested over 11.8 million dollars in the capital building projects in Las Vegas. It has been money well spent as the mission of the Church continues to be carried out. After 38 years of ministry, there are more than 1,720

¹² Matthew Guse, letter to supporter, unknown date.

members of the WELS in Las Vegas. The WELS joined right in on the tremendous growth that has happened in Las Vegas over the last two decades. While Las Vegas has grown 228 percent in the last 21 years, the WELS churches in Las Vegas have grown 469 percent.

By the grace of God, through the help and support of his servant the WELS, God's Word in all its truth and purity will continue to be spread to lost souls throughout the Las Vegas valley for many more years to come. Areas of the city are being scouted out for new missions. There is an immediate need for another church in the north part of the valley. The Henderson area is primed for another mission. And as the city continues its dramatic growth, more and more opportunities for outreach will present themselves.

What does the future have in store for the proclamation of the Gospel in Sin City? What role will the WELS play in years to come? Only the good and gracious God knows the answers to those questions. In a city that is filled with the great darkness of sin, God's bright Gospel light is shining. Hearts are being won for the salvation won by Christ Jesus.

“What’s happens in Vegas...is the preaching of the Gospel!”¹³

¹³ Paul Janke, said to Aaron Strong on vicar assignment day, May 23, 2006.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pastor Matthew Guse
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Pastor Jerome McWaters
Pastor James Panning
Pastor Donald Pieper
Sue Sargent
Pastor Matthew Vogt

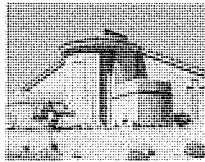
ADDENDA

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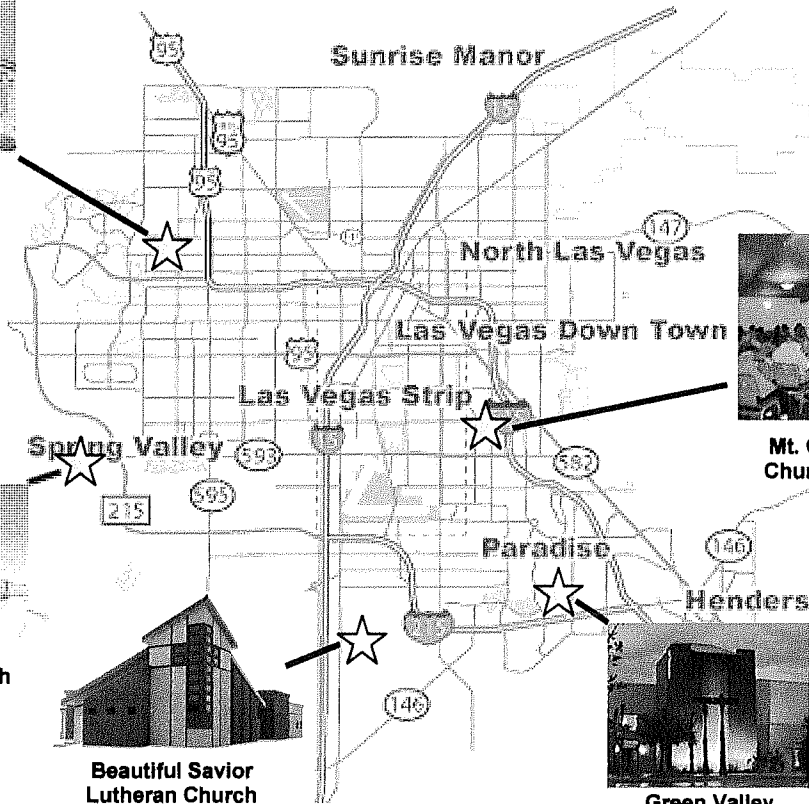
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Map of WELS churches in Las Vegas

WELS in Las Vegas



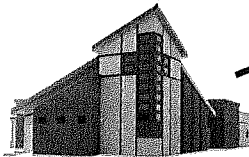
Summerlin Lutheran Church



Mt. Olive Lutheran Church and School



Water of Life Lutheran Church

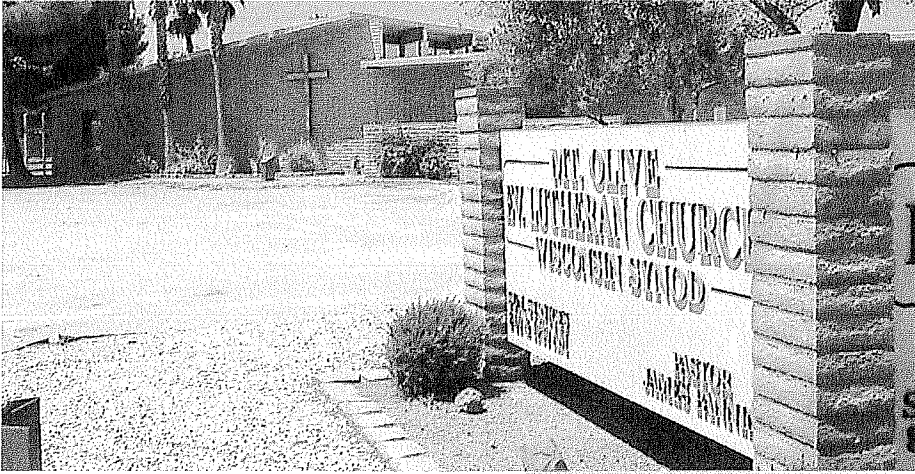


Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church



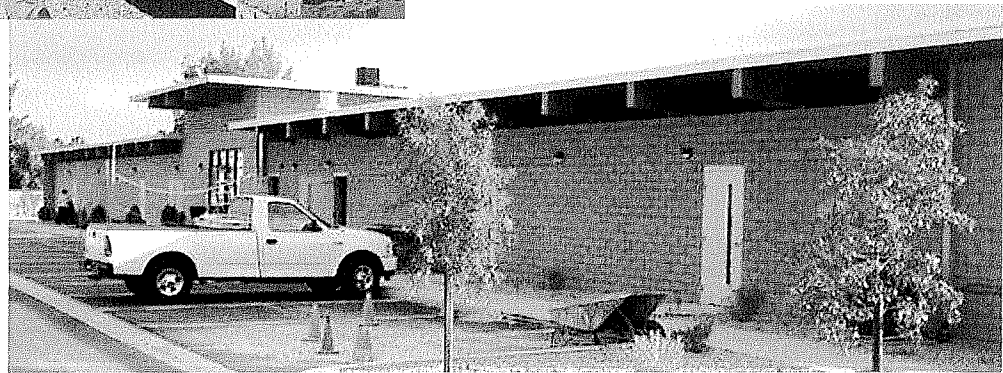
Green Valley Lutheran Church

Pictures of WELS churches in Las Vegas



**Mt. Olive Lutheran
Church**

**Mt. Olive Lutheran
School**



**Green Valley
Lutheran Church**

**Green Valley
Lutheran
Preschool**





**Summerlin Lutheran
Church**

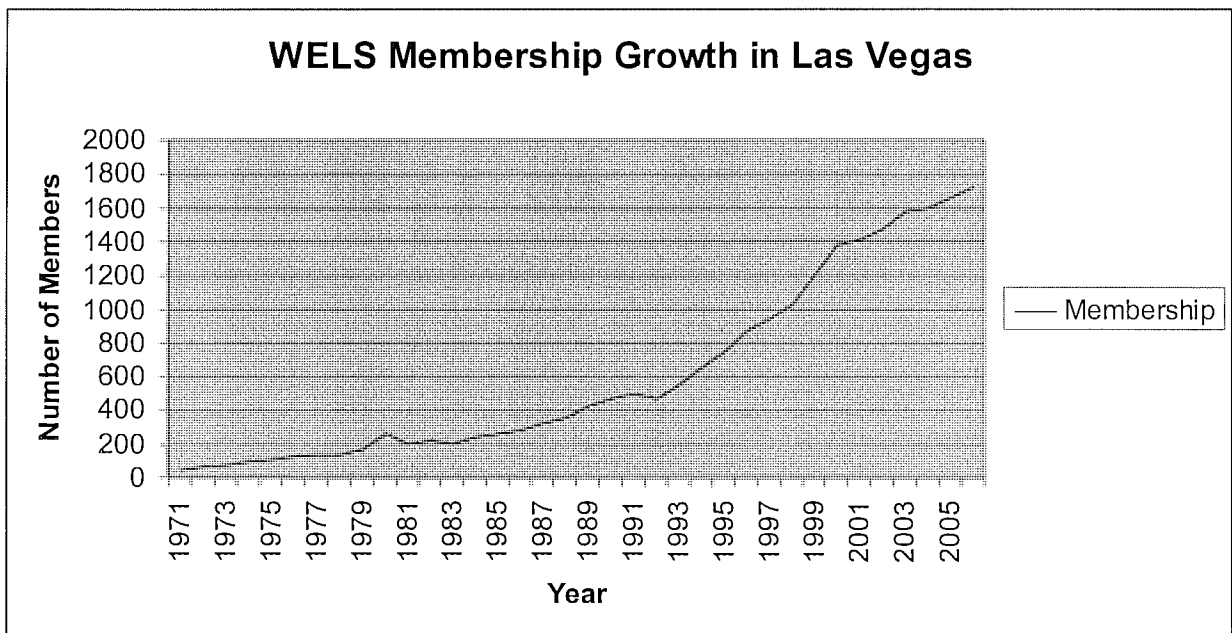
**Water of Life
Lutheran Church**



**Beautiful Savior Lutheran
Church and Preschool**

Total Membership in WELS Churches of Las Vegas Since 1971

Year	Souls	Year	Souls
1971	40	1989	429
1972	60	1990	470
1973	69	1991	498
1974	93	1992	468
1975	106	1993	554
1976	126	1994	658
1977	132	1995	743
1978	131	1996	870
1979	170	1997	948
1980	257	1998	1025
1981	200	1999	1204
1982	214	2000	1375
1983	196	2001	1406
1984	241	2002	1474
1985	257	2003	1579
1986	280	2004	1598
1987	324	2005	1654
1988	351	2006	1720



(Questionnaire sent to Las Vegas pastors by Aaron Strong in October, 2007)

This is a general questionnaire to get the juices flowing. Please feel free to expand on your answers or bring up other points that I don't mention. You cannot send me too much information!

- Year the mission started.
- Year officially a congregation.
- A timeline would be greatly appreciated. (When pastor arrived to start, first service, various milestones, etc.)
- Various locations of worship.
- Why located in the area that it is.
- The beginning stages. Did you have a group of core members to work with? Where did they come from? Did you start from scratch? Where did your first members come from?
- How mission was started. Was it daughtered by another congregation? Was it a home missions start up?
- Initial observations when beginning your ministry there.
- Synodical interest and support.
- Major congregational decisions, events, milestones.
- The mission of your congregation and how you carry it out. Evangelism, education, worship (methodology and philosophy).
- Struggles and obstacles encountered (financial, community, etc) :
- Joys and blessings:
- Looking to the future.
- Any interesting stories or accounts that you could share.

The following pages (vii - xxv) contain a selection of pages from Mt. Olive's 25th Anniversary booklet, May 27, 2000.

HIGHLIGHTS OF MT..OLIVE HISTORY

In late 1969, a group of Lutheran laymen, who were troubled by the doctrinal decay which they saw in some sectors of Lutheranism in Las Vegas, requested the Wisconsin Synod to supply them with doctrinally sound teaching materials and sermon tapes. As frequently as possible, Pastor Herman John, with Vicar Jerome Enderle and / or Pastor Robert Hellmann drove over from California to bring them the Word of God. The first exploratory service was held on January 22, 1970 at the home of Arnold Cook, 343 N. 16th St., Las Vegas.



The Arnold Cook residence (343 N. 16th St.) where the first service was held and the name Mt. Olive was adopted.

In the spring of 1972, Pastor Hugo Warnke, Mission Board Developer for the California Mission Board, began conducting regular services. A number of services were conducted at the Blind Center of Las Vegas, several at the parsonage and later the group worshipped at the Paradise Park Town Hall until the permanent worship facility was completed.

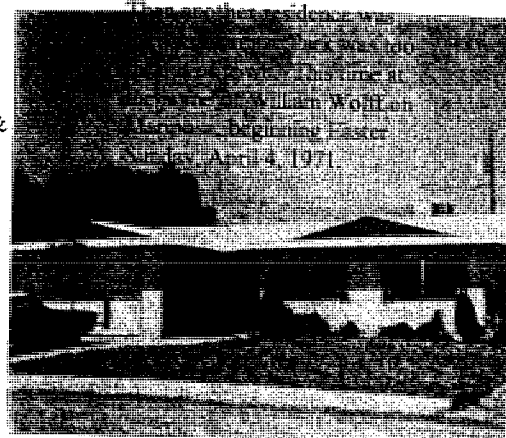


Mt. Olive Garden Club Building at Lorenze Park, Twin Lakes.

The decision to grant Mt. Olive mission status was made early in 1973. At the same time Mt. Olive approached the Synod's assignment committee for a pastor. Seminary graduate David Kiecker was assigned the call and was ordained and installed as pastor of Mt. Olive in an evening service on July 1, 1973.

Building funds were approved in the summer of 1973 and architectural plans were drawn by Duane Anderson and approved by the Board of Trustees WELS.

In a ceremony following services on September 1, 1974, the ground was broken for our new worship facility. Construction of the building began on Sept. 18, 1974. The local architect was Sidney Goldberg & the General Contractor, Rem Construction Co. December 1974 saw the construction of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church nearing an end.



The Mt. Olive Name

The name of Mt. Olive was chosen on April 4th (Palm Sunday) 1971, after worship service which was held at the home of Arnold Cook, at 7:30 p.m., with Pastor Herman John conducting the service.

Temporary officers for the church were also chosen at this time.

They are: Chairman: Mr. Charles Steinman
Secretary: Sgt. Wayne Steele
Treasurer: Mr. William Wolff
In charge of Communion Ware: Mr. Arnold Cook

Reasons for choosing the name "Mt. Olive":

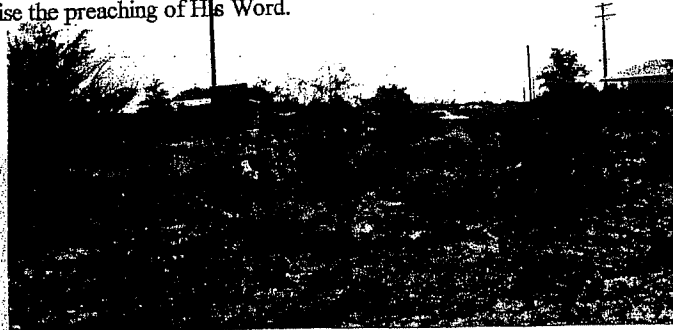
That name will always remind people of:

1. The time of its beginning as an informally organized congregation with services every Sunday. Palm Sunday 1971 - The day commemorating Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem from the Mt. of Olives.

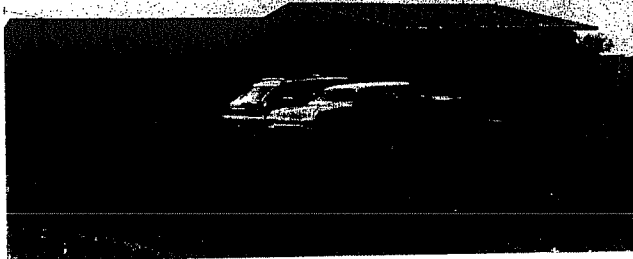
2. Its location. The congregation is located in a city of olive trees surrounded by mountains.

3. Its purpose. Just as Jesus' ride from the Mt. of Olives into Jerusalem was a proclamation of Himself as a King who has conquered Satan and delivered us from Satan's power, so this congregation's purpose in Las Vegas is to go out from "Mt. Olive" proclaiming to the people of Las Vegas, Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the devil.

Also as Jesus paused on the Mt. of Olives, looked over the city and wept over it because He knew what wrath of God was coming upon the people because of their rejection of Him as their Savior, so the members of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church will constantly look over the city of Las Vegas and with tears of sorrow in their eyes will warn the people of the wrath of God that is coming upon those who continue to reject Jesus and despise the preaching of His Word.



Parsonage and property at 3985 S. Sandhill Road.





The
FIRST BAPTISM
 at Mt. Olive was
 James Steele on July 4, 1977
 by Rev. Jerome Enderle officiated
 during that months service at the
 Blind Center.



Bertha Kidder, Wayne Steele holding
 James, and Vicar Enderle.

Cindy Steele, Bertha Kidder,
 Mrs. Wayne Steele, holding
 baby James, Mr. Wayne
 Steele and David Steele.



After one of the services at 3490 Sandhill Rd.
 Pastor & Mrs. Warnke, James Steele
 with Jimmy, Mr. Orstag & daughter
 Janice, Mr. & Mrs. Haddad &
 Michelle, Cindy & David Steele,
 Bonnie Steinman & Stephanie.



3490 Sandhill Rd. where Sunday
 School & Worship Services
 were held before the garage was
 converted into a family room.
 This was home for Pastor and
 Mrs. Warnke until the property at
 3985 Sandhill was purchased.

MT, OLIVE EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH
(Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod)
Las Vegas, Nevada

March 25, 1972



Dear Fellow Christian:

HE IS RISEN! That is the glorious and glad news of Easter.

This year the Easter Service will be conducted by the future pastor of Mt. Olive, the Rev. Hugo M. Warnke. Pastor Warnke will commute from Fresno, California, for this Service, but will be moving to Las Vegas in the next week or two.

Worship will be in The Blind Center, 1001 North Bruce Street, at 9:30 a. m. ;
Sunday School at 8:30 a. m.

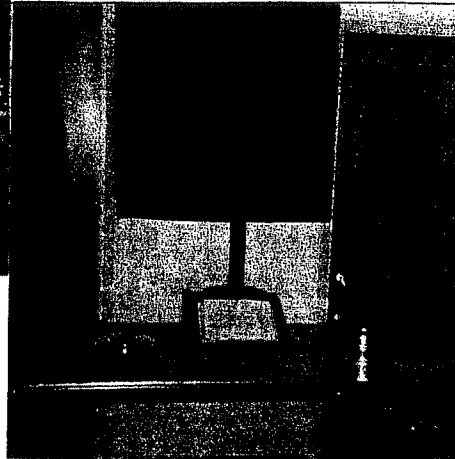
Won't you try to invite a neighbor or a friend to worship with you.

Hoping to see you at Worship on Easter.

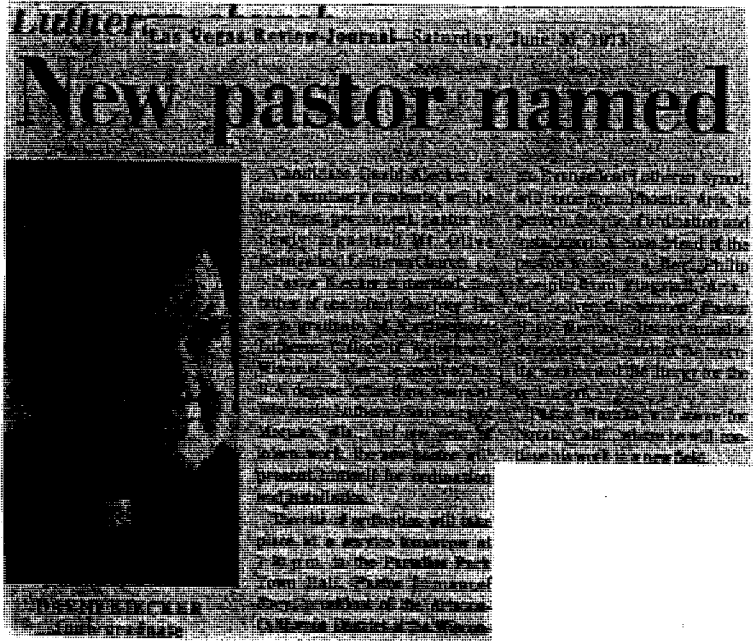


In His service,

HUGO M. WARNKE, Pastor



The fourth place services were held was the Blind Center. The communion ware was first used here on July 4, 1971. It was donated by Mr. & Mrs. Charles Steinman.



Installation & Ordination for Pastor Kiecker. L to R: Rev. I. G. Frey, Rev. Phillip Koelpin, Rev. John Boehringer, Rev. Kiecker & Rev. Hugo Warnke. Took place July 1, 1973 at the Paradise Town Hall.





L to R
 Floyd
 Stucker,
 Jerry
 Deuel,
 Robert
 Patterson,
 Terry
 Petters,
 Pastor
 Kiecker.
 Sept. 1,
 1974.

MT. OLIVE GROUNDBREAKING — Mt. Olive Lutheran Church located on Sandhill Road broke ground with a solemn ceremony for their new 3,800 sq. ft. church building and fellowship hall on Sunday, Sept. 1, 1974. The building is to commence immediately. The new facility will seat 165 in the nave and 130 in the fellowship area, and will be of slump block construction.

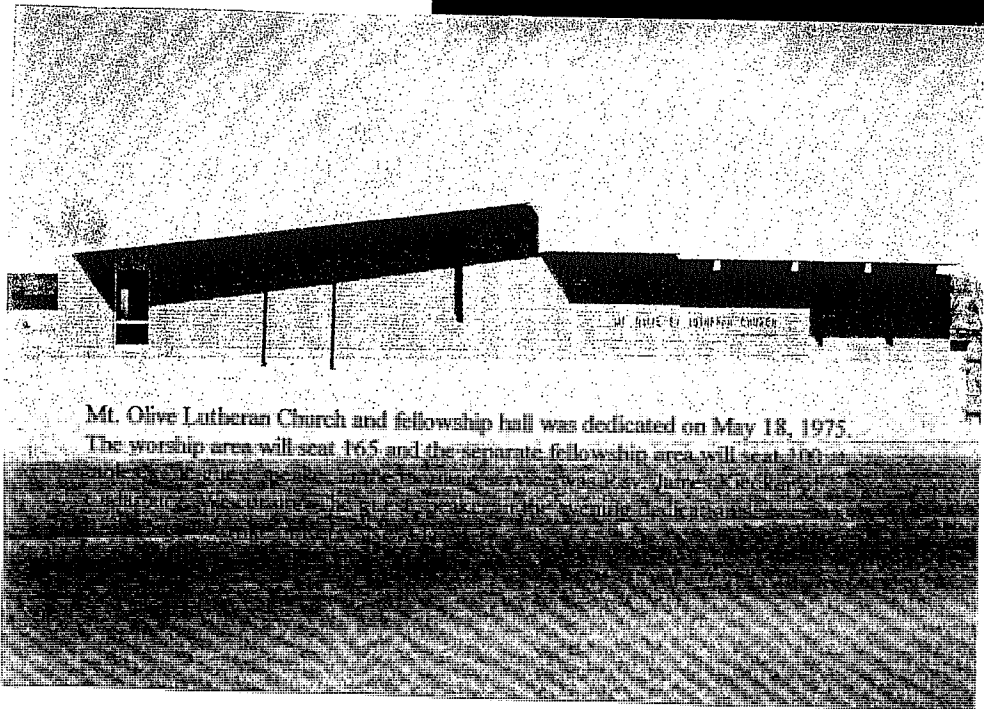
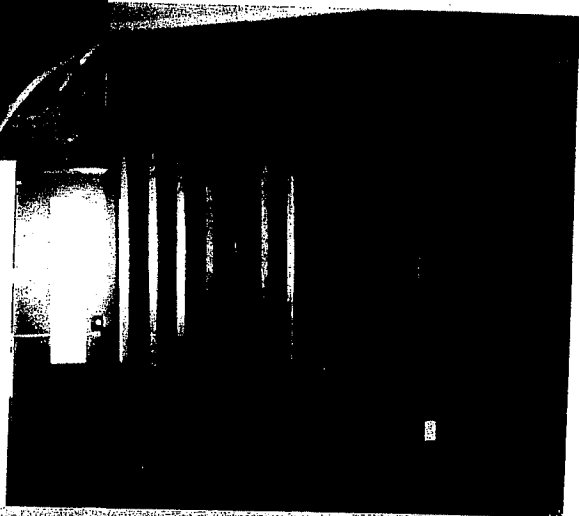


9



Easter, March 30, 1975

We didn't have the alter furnishings but the carpet had been laid March the 26th and 100 new chairs were bought. So that made it a GLORIOUS EASTER. A breakfast was served after the service to celebrate the joyous occasion.



Mt. Olive Lutheran Church and fellowship hall was dedicated on May 18, 1975.

The worship area will seat 165 and the separate fellowship area will seat 200.

MT. OLIVE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

(WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD)

3985 SOUTH SANDHILL ROAD
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89121
REV. D. J. KIECKER, PASTOR

(702) 451-1050



May 4, 1980

Dear Members and Friends of Mt. Olive:

The 5th anniversary of our worship facilities will be May 18th. Special events are planned for that day at which we hope you will want to be present.

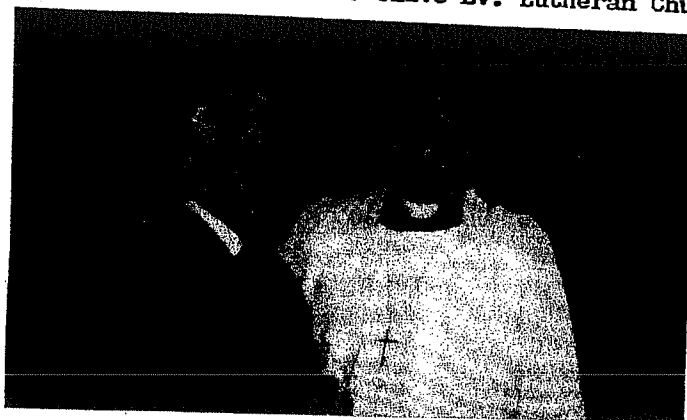
The Lord has been good to us in that we do have a comfortable and attractive worship facility. Also, the untold personal blessings each and everyone of us have received these past 5 years, through Christ, are evident. Please use the enclosed envelope as your additional thank offering on that Sunday, besides your regular offering envelopes. The money collected in the special envelopes will be used for the support of world missions.

Let us join together to hear our guest, Rev. Edgar Hoeneke, at our anniversary celebration in the regular morning worship service. He is truly a dynamic speaker. Then all of us will share a pot luck dinner. Please bring a main dish and a salad or dessert and plan to spend a few hours together in worship of our Lord and Christian fellowship.

During the afternoon Rev. Hoeneke, our Synod's past World Mission Secretary, will present a film on our African medical mission. In all it promises to be a day of great blessings for all of us.

In HIS Name,

The Board of Elders
Mt. Olive Ev. Lutheran Church





HUGO M. WARNKE, Pastor Em.
(Wisconsin Synod)
417 Redwood Court
Paso Robles, California 93446



ne: (805) 239-0302

June 12, 1990

Mount Olive Ev. Lutheran Church
3975 South Sandhill Road
Las Vegas, Nevada 89121

Fellow Laborers in His Kingdom:

We finally arrived home in Paso Robles to collect our bushel of mail. You see, we do not have our mail forwarded.

It was our delight to receive a letter from you wonderful co-workers there in Las Vegas. Unfortunately this letter won't reach you in time for your celebrated 15th Anniversary. But, I do trust that it was a joyful remembrance of how the Lord has blessed you there in the lovely gem of Nevada.

My wife, Martha, and I are thankful that the Lord permitted us to spend at least a small percentage of our lives there as Mount Olive was struggling to be born.

Acreeage in a suitable location was difficult to find even back then-- at a price WELS was able to pay. Finally, by the grace of God, we were led to not only land but a parsonage as well.

How proud we are that Mount Olive now has two daughter congregations-- quite a great distance from our humble beginning in the Center for the Blind which we had to clean up before Service each Sunday.

Jesus keep you all today,

HUGO M. WARNKE

HMW:MW

P. S. We are at present serving vacancies at Our Saviour Lutheran, Grants Pass, Oregon, and Christ Lutheran, Klamath Falls, Oregon.

22

Rev. Hermann John
525-332 W. El Norte Fkwy
Escondido, CA 92026

May 16, 1990

Mount Olive Ev. Lutheran Church
3975 S. Sandhill Rd.
Las Vegas, NV 89121

Dear brothers and sisters of Mt. Olive Lutheran:

I am sorry I cannot be with you in person, but I join you in spirit on June 3 thanking the Lord for the many blessings He has showered upon you. It is my prayer that the gracious hand of our God may continue to be upon you in the future.

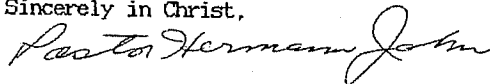
You asked if I had some anecdote that might be of interest to the present members. One stands out in my mind:

One Sunday just before the church service was to begin, I was told by one of the members that he had purchased a communion set for the congregation. (Up to this point, we had used a regular kitchen plate and glass for communion.) He proceeded to tell me that he had gotten lucky at the slot machine and had used a portion of his winnings to buy the communion set. I thought he was just kidding with me about using slot machine winnings. I assumed the members had decided to use some of their offerings to buy the communion set, so I thought nothing more about it. After the service as I was visiting in this member's home, he again brought up the subject of the new communion set. He asked why I had not made some mention of it in the announcements after the service. Then he told me that his account of the purchase was the truth. I believe my response was: "I am surprised that the Lord didn't strike it down with lightning."

Pastor James Schaefer is certainly correct when he writes in the May 1, 1990 issue of The Northwestern Lutheran: "The church is governed by the blundering of people (especially mine) and the providence of God...God's love must shine with special brilliance upon us to have preserved us to this day! That should double our thanks" (above parenthesis added).

May God richly bless you as you celebrate the 15th anniversary of your church dedication, and the 20th anniversary of the first WELS church services in Las Vegas.

Sincerely in Christ,



Pastor Hermann John

**MOUNT OLIVE EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH
3975 S. SANDHILL ROAD
LAS VEGAS, NV. 89121
451-1050**

May 10, 1990

Dear Fellow Redeemed Through Christ The Resurrected Savior,

It might not seem that so much time has passed, but it has been fifteen years since Mt. Olive congregation in Las Vegas, Nevada, dedicated its church.

You were a part of that first building and the reason for the establishment of the congregation. We wanted to have an orthodox Lutheran congregation in Las Vegas that would proclaim the Word of God in its truth and purity to all who would listen.

Over the years our prayers have been answered and hundreds of lives have been touched with the Gospel of sins forgiven through faith in Jesus. By God's grace this remains our only true reason for continuing to exist.

Our congregation now numbers over 350 souls. In the fall of 1989 a sister congregation was spun off to form its own new congregation in the Green Valley area of Henderson. And more exciting news, just last week the California Mission Board of the WELS issued a call for a man to begin work for another new congregation on the far west side of Las Vegas. These are among many reasons for us all to thank our Lord for what he has accomplished among us.

To commemorate the dedication which took place on May 18, 1975, our Church Council has set aside the first Sunday in June, June 3, 1990 for a special day of thanksgiving. Both of our worship services, 7:30 & 10:00 AM, will focus on the blessings that this sanctuary has provided over the years. Our Choir will be singing in both services. Following the second service a dinner will be served in the Parish Hall that was built in 1985. Former members of our congregation who have moved away will be introduced and, if they are willing, will be asked to say a few words about the "old days." If you have old pictures or bulletins or other memorabilia bring it along and share your memories with us.

In connection with this event a special thank-offering is being gathered. The money contributed will go for the sole purpose of retiring the remaining debt on our loan from the Church Extension Fund of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod.

We hope to see you here. If it is impossible for you to be here in person why not send us a note, especially if you have some anecdote that would be of interest to the present 24

members.

In closing I would like to thank you for the service you gave to our congregation in its infant years. It is because you considered the cause of our Savior Jesus Christ important then that we are still here today.

In His Service,

Rev. David J. Kiecker

Rev. David J. Kiecker

REFLECTIONS ON THE EARLY HISTORY OF MT. OLIVE, LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

May 16, 1990

October 14, 1969 - I, Pastor Hermann John, arrived in Yucaipa, CA from Lincoln, Nebraska to serve the mission in Yucaipa, and to begin missions in the Riverside-San Bernardino area. Within two months of my arrival in California, I was asked by the CA Mission Board to call on some WELS families in Las Vegas. Not knowing about California mountain ranges, I was surprised to learn that I was the closest WELS pastor to Las Vegas.

Dec. 10, 1969 - I made my first trip to Las Vegas to call on the WELS families living there. I was welcomed by the Cook family who helped me get to know Las Vegas.

Jan. 22, 1970 - A devotional service with communion was conducted in the Cook home. Christopher Dubis was baptized at that service.

April 26, 1970 - Regular services were begun. I conducted the services every six weeks throughout 1970. Taped services were used on the Sundays when I was not present.

Jan. 3, 1971 - I began coming to Las Vegas monthly (on the first Sunday of each month) to conduct church services and make other calls. The taped ministry continued on the other Sundays of the month. The site of the service was moved several times.

April 4, 1971 - The following officers were chosen:

Chairman - Mr. Charles Steinman
Secretary - Mr. Wayne Steele
Treasurer - Mr. William Wolff

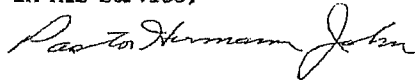
A name was chosen for the congregation. We wanted some name that reflected the area but did not remind one of the gambling industry. Since April 4th that year was Palm Sunday (Jesus approaching Jerusalem from the Mt. of Olives), and since Las Vegas has many olive trees, we chose the name: "Mt. Olive Lutheran Church."

Nov. 9, 1971 - Mt. Olive congregation was granted "Mission Status" by the Mission Board. This meant the area was no longer considered merely "exploratory," but was a place where WELS definitely planned to have a permanent congregation. Attendance at church services had reached 35. The work of outreach was being done almost exclusively by the members since no pastor was in residence or near by to work the field.

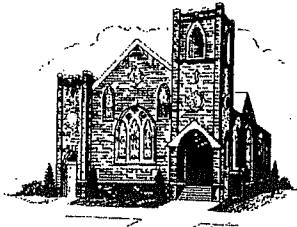
Jan 16, 1972 - Pastor Robert Hochmuth, Chairman of the CA Mission Board, visited Las Vegas. Four days later, Pastor Norman Berg, Exec. Sec'y of the General Board for Home Missions, visited the Las Vegas mission field.

Feb. 20, 1972 - Pastor Hugo Warnke, CA Mission Developer, was assigned as a resident to work the Las Vegas area.

In His service,



Pastor Hermann John



Christ Ev. Lutheran Church and School

1514 North 12th Street

Beatrice, Nebraska 68311

Church Location:
8th & Elk Streets
Phone: 223-4209

Office & Parsonage:
1514 N. 12th Street
Phone: 223-4250

Elementary School:
Rt. 2, Box 149A
Phone: 228-0644

Mt. Olive Ev. Lutheran Church
3975 S. Sandhill Road
Las Vegas, Nevada 89121

June 3, 1990

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Greetings in the name of our risen and ascended Savior, Jesus Christ! As a former member of your congregation, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you all as you commemorate the 15 years of blessings which God has given you as you received the Means of Grace in your present church building.

Surely a few of you recall the days before the Lord provided you with your present worship facility. Remember the years when we gathered together for worship and Bible study in a room behind a swimming pool at a nearby park? A folding table served as the Lord's altar. We set up and took down folding chairs every week. Pastor Warnke brought us hymnals, offering plates and a cross, all transported in the trunk of his car. We dreamed and we prayed that God would someday give us a church building more suitable for worship. In His grace our Lord sent us Candidate David Kiecker, who was ordained as our new pastor at that town hall.

At long last the Mission Board gave us authority to build a church building. What anticipation! And what frustration we felt while trying to arrange financing, just as the price of concrete was skyrocketing! Do you recall the joy of our groundbreaking and dedication services?

By inspiration King Solomon reminds us: "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127:1a). During this anniversary year--and always--keep in mind the fact that the church building in which you worship the Lord has been provided for you by God Himself. He has certainly blessed you over these 15 years as you have grown in His grace and in your knowledge of His holy Word. May the Holy Spirit continue to bless you all as you serve as Christ's ambassadors, reaching out into your community to the unchurched with the one thing they really need--the Good News of Christ's love. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

In His service,

Pastor David G. Peters

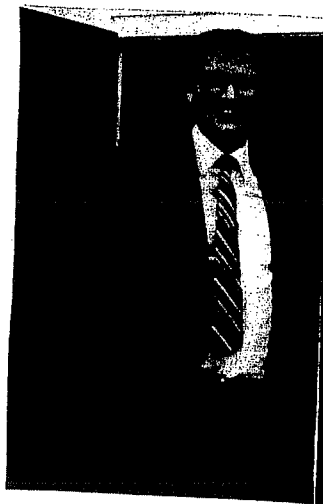
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Arizona- California District news

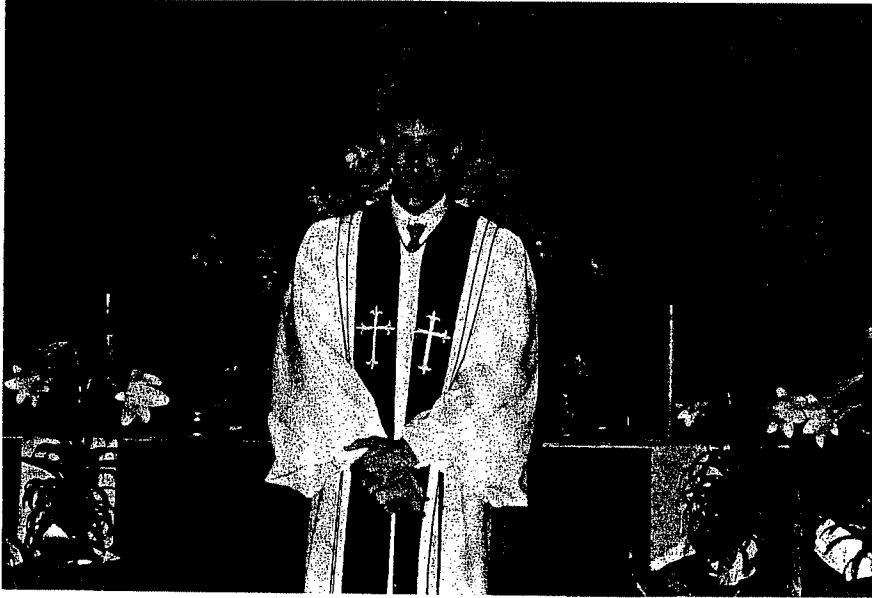
Mt. Olive, Las Vegas, Nev., celebrated its 15th anniversary June 3. In the fall of 1989 a sister congregation was spun off to form a new mission in Henderson, southeast of Las Vegas. In October of this year Pastor Jerome McWaters began work to establish another congregation on the far west side of Las Vegas.



Pastor Pieper (pictured at left) began the Green Valley Lutheran Church.



Pastor McWaters (pictured at right with his wife Carol) began the Summerlin Lutheran Church.



Pastor James Panning.

Pastor Panning is the son of Armin and Virginia Panning and grew up in Watertown, Wisconsin. He graduated from Northwestern Prep School in 1982 and from Northwestern College in 1986, from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1990. Pastor Panning spent his one year Vicarage at St. Thomas Ev. Lutheran Church in Phoenix, Arizona, where he served under the watchful eye of Pastor William Meyer. Upon graduation from the Seminary he was assigned to be the Assistant Pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church and School in Tucson, Arizona. He served in that position until the end of January 1993. At that time he accepted the Call from the congregation at Mt. Olive Ev. Lutheran Church in Las Vegas, Nv., where he is presently serving.

Pastor Panning married Jennifer Oswald on July 6, 1990 and after moving to Las Vegas they have been blessed with three children, daughter Alyssa, 5, son David, 2, and baby daughter Kathryn, one month old.



Pastor Hugo M. Warnke

Pastor Warnke did some of the preliminary ground work for the California Mission Board here in Las Vegas and helped in starting the Mt. Olive congregation.

Pastor Warnke graduated from Concordia Theological Seminary June 14, 1937 and was ordained and installed May 8, 1938 as pastor of the tri-parish of St. John Lutheran, Doylestown; St. Stephen Lutheran, Fountain Prairie; and Trinity Lutheran, Fall River, Wisconsin. In 1949 at North side Lutheran at North Platte, Nebraska. In 1950 at Zion Lutheran Church, Browns Valley, Minnesota and Bethlehem Lutheran at Beardsley, Minnesota. In 1951 at St. John Lutheran in Covina, California. In 1955 at Zion Lutheran Church, Klamath Falls, Oregon. In 1959 at Trinity Lutheran, Indio, California with mission work at Eagle Mountain and vacancy at Palm Springs. In 1962 at Trinity Lutheran at Paso Robles and served vacancy at Atascadero. In 1996 at Immanuel Lutheran, Oceanside, CA.

In 1967 resigned from Immanuel Lutheran and Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod for doctrinal reasons. Went to Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Seminary at Thiensville for a colloquy. Was accepted as a member of WELS.

In 1967 was installed at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Yucaipa, CA, also served Our Shepherd of Lancaster. In 1969 was asked to serve Messiah Lutheran of North Hollywood and also St. John of Victorville. 1970 Hugo was called as District Missionary by the California District Mission Board. His first assignment was in Torrance, CA, Zion Lutheran. 1971 He serve a vacancy at King of Kings, Garden Grove and Shepherd of the Valley, Fresno.

In 1972 Hugo moved to Las Vegas, NV to organize Mt. Olive Lutheran Church.

1973 Moved to Novato, CA to start a mission. Services were held in a neighboring town but it was felt that there was not enough response to continue at that time. In 1974 started St. Andrew Lutheran Church in South Sacramento. While there started having services in Reno, and Lovelock, NV. January 1975 moved to an apartment in Reno. Property was eventually given to the Reno congregation at Lakeside and Peckham and we moved there in the house where Worship Services were also held in two of the rooms. 1976 Started a mission, St. Peter Lutheran Church in Modesto, CA. 1977 Started a mission in San Luis Obispo but found most of the people came from Santa Maria so moved there and started holding services for Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church. 1978 served as assistant to son William at Holy Trinity Lutheran in Kent, WA. After son accepted another call Hugo served Holy Trinity until they called a permanent Pastor Then Hugo accepted a call to Ascension Lutheran in Escondido, CA.

1981 Retired from Escondido then served as vacancy Pastor at Calvary Lutheran, Canyon Country. 1982-85 From August to May served as assistant pastor to Pastor David Schultz at Pilgrim Lutheran In Mesa, Arizona. May and June of 1985 served as Vacancy Pastor at St. Paul Lutheran of Honolulu, Hawaii. 1986 Helped organize and served Christ Lutheran of Klamath Falls, OR. In August 1987 went to serve a new mission for ELS, Peace Lutheran at Jefferson City, MO. 1998 served St. Matthew of Myrtle Creek and Christ Lutheran of Sutherlin. 1989 served Our Savior, Grants Pass. 1990 served Grants Pass and Klamath Falls again. Moved to Fresno, CA in 1990 and from 1990 - 93 assisted Bill at Shepherd of the Valley, Fresno. 1991 served Vacancy at Good Shepherd, Richardson, Texas for six months. 1994 served two months at Grace Lutheran, Sitka, Alaska.

1993 purchased a mobile home and moved next to our daughter Loretta's house. 1995 serve as Vacancy Pastor at Saved By Grace Lutheran Church, Medford, OR from Jan. 15 to August 2.

March 3, 2000

Mt. Olive Lutheran Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

Fellow Believers in Our Lord Jesus:

In 1972 after Easter, Martha, my faithful, loving wife and I moved to the never, never land of Las Vegas, Nevada. Conditions were rather discouraging for a pastor who was accustomed to having many people in the Worship Service.

First of all, there was no regular place to worship. We rented a Blind Center there in town. This Sunday twenty-eight years ago the Center was an extremely decrepid building on the outside but far more decrepid on the inside. However, there was room for a couple dozen people there. Conditions became intolerable in the Blind Center so we bought a house and conducted Worship in the garage now converted into a large empty room.

But soon a neighbor began to complain to the City about the cars parked in front of our property. So we were forced to sell the house. Now the Lord led us way out to Sandhill Street. Here we found property that the Mission Board would approve. There was a house in which we would live but not large enough to house the Worship Service, so we had to rent space in the Recreation Center in a nearby Park.

The Congregation, by God's grace, continued to grow, one person after another. At that time there was not sufficient money to build even the first unit of a church. Then I was called as Mission Developer to start in the City of Novato, California (which was later moved to Petaluma). I was followed by Pastor David Kieker.

In retrospect, all of this was the epitome of joy in serving the Lord for both Martha and me.

Jesus keep you all on this blessed anniversary,


HUGO M. WARNKE

Pastor David Kiecker served the Lord at Mt. Olive from 1973 until 1992.



Pastor Kiecker was born Feb. 6, 1946 in Appleton Wisconsin, the son of Mr. and Mrs. George Kiecker. Following his grade school education at St. Paul Christian Day School, he attended Northwestern Lutheran Prep School and then Northwestern College, both in Watertown Wisconsin. In 1969 he graduated from Northwestern, receiving his Bachelor of Arts Degree. He served as an emergency grade school teacher for the spring semester at St. Matthew Lutheran School in Winona, Minnesota. That fall he entered our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin.

On June 13, 1970 He was united in marriage to the former Audrey Zastrow of Concord, Wisconsin. Their marriage was blessed with three daughters; Rachel, Rebecca and Leah.

Pastor Kiecker served his vicarage/internship at Zion Lutheran Church in South Milwaukee, Wisconsin during the 1971-1972 school year. He returned to the seminary for his senior year of study and received his Master of Divinity degree in the spring of 1973. He continued his ongoing studies by attending our seminary and in the spring of 1991 received the Master of Sacred Theology degree.

After graduation from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1973 he was assigned to Las Vegas, Nevada to establish our Wisconsin Synod's first permanent mission congregation in the state. Mt. Olive was chosen as the name of that Mission. Pastor Kiecker was ordained and installed on July 1st in a special service at the Paradise Town Hall. The little group of about 35 that was meeting in the town hall began to grow and petitioned the Synod for money to build its own permanent worship facility. The church and attached classroom was built on a site just north of the corner of Sandhill and Flamingo Roads in what was at the time an undeveloped desert region of the valley. Dedication was held May 26, 1975. A simple bronze plaque was placed on the wall in the narthex with the single word "Grace" on it, recalling God's undeserved mercy to us.

The congregation continued to grow and starting in 1986 "daughtered" both Green Valley Lutheran and Summerlin Lutheran congregations.

In the summer of 1992 Pastor Kiecker accepted a call to Immanuel Lutheran Church in Black Creek, Wisconsin where he has served his Lord ever since.

Today daughter Rachel is married to Mark Smith of Milwaukee, Rebecca lives in Menasha, Wisconsin and Leah is in her Junior year at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point. David and Audrey reside in the country just outside of the village of Black Creek.

*Rev. Hermann John
525-332 W. El Norte Pkwy.
Escondido, CA 92026
760-747-1390
hermjohn1021@att.net*

Nov. 14, 2007

Aaron Strong
3921 W County Line Rd., #6
Brown Deer, WI 53209

Dear Aaron,

Allow me to fill in some of the gaps in the “Early History of Mt. Olive, Las Vegas” history I mailed to you.

On Dec. 10, 1969 I drove the 240 miles from Yucaipa, CA to Las Vegas – a drive of 4 hours – for my first visit with WELS people in Las Vegas. The CA Mission District Mission Board had given names of WELS people living in Las Vegas to me. At that time WELS had a division of Parish services called “Membership Conservation Office.” Pastors were encouraged to send to this office names of WELS members who had moved to a location where there was as yet no WELS church.

My first impression of Las Vegas upon my arrival at the outskirts of the city was not a good one. I saw a billboard reading “24 hour breakfasts.” To me that meant the city had a lot of people who slept during the day because they worked most of the night in the casinos. I had a strong dislike for gambling.

I had been accustomed to using the brown Catechism – NPH Copyright 1956 – originally edited by C. Gausewitz. In the study of the 7th Commandment, I was familiar with Question 99 “What attitude of mind and heart toward our neighbor does God require of us?” In Bible Passage #213 1 Cor. 10:24 “Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth,” were the following words in parenthesis: “(Beware of gambling, games of chance, etc.)” So to me, gambling was a sin. When I saw that a large portion of the town of Las Vegas was involved with the gambling industry, I immediately looked upon the city as “Sin City.”

The above also explains my rude comment to the member who purchased a Communion set using his winnings at the slot machine. (See a copy of my letter of May 16, 1990 to Mount Olive in recognition of their 15th anniversary of their church dedication.)

The above also explains why I did not think it was very funny when the treasurer of the group would jokingly say to me as he was leaving the service with the thank-offerings “I think I can double this money at the casino.”

Our first worship services were held in the home of Mr. & Mrs. Cook. I do not know their first names or the address of their home where we held the services. On the Sundays when I conducted the services, the services were held at 7:30 p.m. every 6 weeks, but beginning on Jan 3, 1971 I began coming to Las Vegas monthly for worship services on the first Sunday of each month. As time went on and our worship attendance increased (from 12 on June 7, 1970 to 35 on Nov. 9, 1971), we moved the worship services to rented facilities. I do not have a record of what rented facilities we used. I do recall that one of the rented

facilities was located in a “bad part of town” according to some of the members. Some members told me they were afraid to drive to church at those facilities. I never did know what was meant by a “bad part of town.”

A sad note: it was shortly after we began regular worship services in rented facilities that the Cook family stopped coming. They wouldn't say their reason for discontinuing worshipping with us.

On the Sundays that I did not conduct the worship services in Las Vegas, the members gathered and used taped services. I do not recall whether the tapes were furnished by the WELS home office or by me.

By the end of 1971 I strongly urged the CA Mission Board to place a full-time man in Las Vegas. I could tell that the congregation was getting tired of taped services and only once a month pastoral services.

After conducting Sunday services, I would stay in Las Vegas at the home of one of the members and make prospect calls and some canvass calls on Mondays. Usually I flew to Las Vegas either from Ontario, CA or Palm Springs, CA. I would fly on Hughes Airline since Howard Hughes offered a 50% discount to clergy members. I often wished I would have looked up Howard Hughes to thank him for helping us start our first WELS mission in Las Vegas.

The 1971 Statistical Report of the WELS lists Mt. Olive, Las Vegas as a “member of Synod” and “supported by Synod.” The report lists Mt. Olive with 40 baptized members; 21 communicants and 9 voting members.

My notes say Pastor Hugo Warnke moved into Las Vegas with his wife Martha on February 20, 1972 and began serving the congregation on a full-time basis. Pastor Warnke was California's “Mission Developer.” He would move into a town where a new WELS mission was beginning, serve the congregation for a short time (perhaps a year or so) and then move on to another WELS mission. Pastor Warnke's “job description” is printed on page 32 of the 1970 “Proceedings” of the AZ-CA District Convention. It says: “The provisions of the call (to Hugo Warnke as district missionary) include these factors: He is to be regarded as a mission developer, not a scout. He is to work in a new field until another pastor perhaps an inexperienced one can take over. He is to concentrate his efforts in one field and reside there during that time.”

The “Proceedings of the Tenth Biennial Convention of the AZ-CA District” assembled at King of Kings, Garden Grove, CA on June 20-22, 1972 has the following paragraph regarding “Las Vegas – Mt. Olive, Hugo Warnke, Mission Developer. 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.” (Whether Pastor Warnke moved to Las Vegas in February or April, I do not know. I do know that I no longer conducted services at Las Vegas after Feb. 6, 1972.)

Candidate David Kiecker was ordained/installed as Mt. Olive's first full-time pastor on July 1, 1973. From that time on the WELS statistical Report shows Mt. Olive as being organized in 1973. I guess it is still debatable as to what is meant by “year organized” when it comes to listing the date for the organization of a WELS mission. I am of the impression that a congregation becomes “organized” when it selects a name and elects officers. Therefore Mt. Olive was organized on April 4, 1971. However, in the president's report printed in the “Proceedings” of the 1973 synod convention, Mt. Olive, Las Vegas is listed as being accepted into voting membership in the WELS with constitution approved sometime between June 20, 1972 and August 8, 1973. So I guess you may choose whichever date you wish for the “year officially a congregation.”

Pastor David Kiecker celebrated the 15th anniversary of the church dedication in May of 1990. Pastor Panning celebrated the 25th anniversary of the church in May, 2000 (see copy of 25th anniversary flyer being mailed to you). That 25th anniversary flyer thanks God for 25 years (1975-2000) of God's Abundant Grace to the congregation. I am sure there were also many blessings from God showered on Mt. Olive from 1970 to 1975.

God's Blessings on your work on your senior history paper. I would appreciate receiving a copy of the history when it is finished.

In Christ,

Pastor Hermann John

(Questionnaire response from Pastor Donald Pieper; October 2007)

This is a general questionnaire to get the juices flowing. Please feel free to expand on your answers or bring up other points that I don't mention. You cannot send me too much information!

- Year the mission started.
I got into town the summer of 1988. First service October 29, 1989 (Reformation Day)
- Year officially a congregation.
- 1990
- A timeline would be greatly appreciated. (When pastor arrived to start, first service, various milestones, etc.)

See attached pictures

- Various locations of worship.
693 N. Valle Verde Stes 7-8 (storefront)
1799 Wigwam Parkway, current church

- Why located in the area that it is.

I picked it. did demographic studies for 13 months and determined Green Valley the best place to plant a church that had a chance of becoming sizable.

- The beginning stages. Did you have a group of core members to work with? Where did they come from? Did you start from scratch? Where did your first members come from?

No core members at first. Just me and my wife and we were members of Mt. Olive. Started from scratch. Had 13 members from door-to-door canvassing (basically 3 families). When we received our first members at the end of 1989 26 communicants came over from Mt. Olive. That same quarter they took in 26 communicants. We got our big start by doing a 15,000 phone canvass of the area 2 months prior to the opening.

- How mission was started. Was it daughtered by another congregation? Was it a home missions start up?

Home missions start up.

- Initial observations when beginning your ministry there.

Great place to start a church.

- Synodical interest and support.

Extremely generous and supportive

- Major congregational decisions, events, milestones.

Reformation 1989 first worship service 114 in attendance (after a 15,000 phone canvass)

Easter 1993 First worship service in new church

Fall 1995 Fellowship Hall finished out for Sunday School

Fall 1997 Preschool built and opens

Fall 2000 Full-time Staff Minister (takes a call after 1 year)

Summer 2004 Land site plan developed and final parking lot built.

Summer 2005 Pastor Matt called

Easter 2006 Final Church buildout completed

- The mission of your congregation and how you carry it out. Evangelism, education, worship (methodology and philosophy).

Don't really know that much about methodology and philosophy. Anybody breathing who isn't a church member somewhere else is fair game. Get the word out any way you can. Try to get them to come to worship—that's the front door, then go out and visit them and see if we can get them into an adult information class. Typical educational set up with SS, VBS, Wednesday and Sunday bible studies. Worship is pretty traditional, except this year we started a 10210 service.

- Struggles and obstacles encountered (financial, community, etc) :

Mission board and district pastors. We were growing so fast they thought we were fabricating the numbers or cutting corners. Led to a lot of isolation.

Tough to get land. Lucky to get in early enough with the master developer to secure a site.

Hard to try to meet people's needs. For a lot of it (physical) church is not set up for it, yet people expect you to bail them out of bad situations. It seems like the less they are church goes the less they have a clue.

- Joys and blessings:

Good to be in a job where you are forced to stay close to the word. The respect and trust the people show you is tremendous.

- Looking to the future.

When we asked for the start of Beautiful Savior, we put in a request for TWO missions, one on each side of us. They grudgingly granted one (Beautiful Savior). We feel there is room for one more WELS church in Henderson. After all, it is 3/8's the size of all Milwaukee County.

- Any interesting stories or accounts that you could share.

Since 1971, the Wisconsin Evangelical
Lutheran Church's Church Extension Fund has invested over 11.8 million (not adjusted for
inflation) in capital building projects in
metropolitan Las Vegas

1989 Green Valley starts out of Mount Olive

1990 Summerlin starts out of Mount Olive

Beautiful Savior starts out of Green Valley

Over the past 21 years:

The WELS has lost 20,677 souls (-4.9%)

The AZ-CA District has gained 3,389 (15.7%)

Las Vegas has gained 1,463 souls

Over the past 21 years:

Metropolitan Las Vegas has grown 228%

WELS churches in Las Vegas have grown 469%

WELS Decadal Growth Rates
in Las Vegas

1970s 543%

1980s 135%

1990s 175%

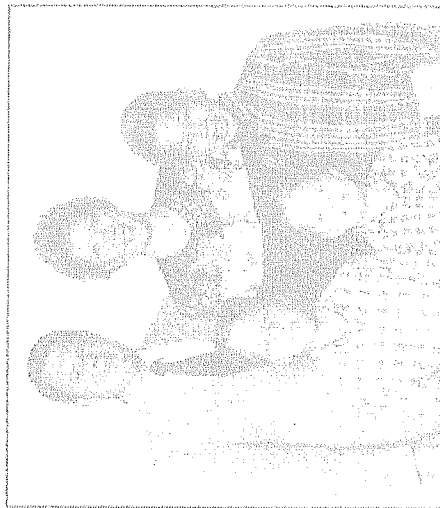
2000s 37% (adjusted)

(Summerlin Evangelism mailing, 1990)

Putting down roots is tough!

Like many of you we're in the midst of our *new-resident* checklist as well.

Permit me to introduce myself and my family. Here we are...



Pastor Jerome McVetters, Carol and Bob Lucas (in yards), Zachary (1st grade) and Caleb (pre-school)

Carol and I spent our growing-up years in Minnesota. Our church planting activities have taken us to Southern California (8 years) and Honolulu. I (will) 6 years).

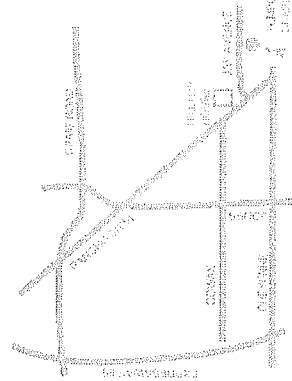
Now, like many of you we wish to plant our roots deeply in this community.

Hope Lutheran Church has purchased a three-acre parcel from Summa Corporation (Summerlin). The parcel is located just a block south of Lake Mead Blvd. at Pueblo Vista (that's one mile West of U.S. 95 across from South Shores). Look for the sign. Construction plans are underway and we hope to occupy a new building by the spring of 1992.

In the meantime, please consider joining us for worship at our temporary chapel located right next to the Advent United Methodist Church in the shopping center at Rancho and Jay Avenue near the Hilltop House Restaurant. Worship services will begin Saturday evening, June 22, at 6:30 p.m. followed by Bible classes for all ages. Again, if you already have a church home, perhaps you will pass this information on to someone who does not. Otherwise, come as you are and BE A PART... AT THE START!

Jerome D. McVetters

Pastor McVetters

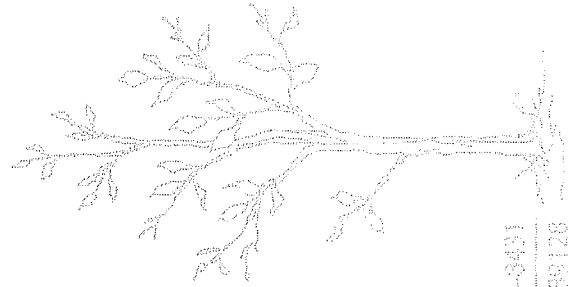


Presently we're negotiating with Howard Hughes Properties for a church site and hope to be your neighbors in more ways than one.

And so the name we've chosen for the Christian church that will be forming in our community is *"Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church"*.

Someday we'll have a church building (with a steeple, pews, parking lot, etc.). But for now we only have Jesus...and each other.

And that's enough to start planting!



(703) 254-3431

Las Vegas, NV 89128

Work begins on first Summerlin church

The Summerlin Evangelical Lutheran Church recently broke ground on the first phase of its 11,000-square-foot worship facility in Summerlin's second village, The Pueblo.

According to Dick Oglesby, Summerlin's vice-president of community development, the building is the first church to begin construction within the community.

Currently, there are three other worship sites under development within the 22,000-acre master-planned community on the western rim of the Las Vegas Valley. They include a Jewish synagogue, Temple Beth Am; a Catholic church and school, St. Elizabeth Ann Seeton; and a

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints chapel. Although the Catholic church is not yet under construction, the parish is currently meeting in a temporary facility located on its lot.

According to Summerlin Evangelical Lutheran Church Pastor Jerome McWaters, construction on the 5,000-square-foot first phase is expected to be complete by late Summer.

"After months of fundraising and planning, we are thrilled to finally begin construction on our Summerlin church," said McWaters. "Just as the community is rapidly growing, so is our congregation. We look forward to becoming an integral and significant member of this award-winning community."

The Summerlin Evangelical Lutheran Church will be constructed by Breslin Builders. The first phase will include a sanctuary with an approximate seating capacity of 300, office space, classrooms and a baptismal font.

"In the next three to five years, we expect to begin construction of our second phase, which will include additional office space, classrooms, fellowship areas, and an early childhood education center," said McWaters.

These worship facilities will play important roles in the development of Summerlin, said Og-

lesby. "The more than 10,000 residents who already live in Summerlin are attracted to the community's many amenities, of which the churches are one."

To visit, take U.S. 95 Expressway west to the Summerlin Parkway and drive to the Summerlin Information Center, which is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The areas first family-oriented villages, The Hills and The Hills South, feature 49 model homes, all open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

In addition to several neighborhoods and The Hills Park, The Hills is also home to a private school, The William R. Lummis elementary school and The Ernest A. Becker Sr. middle school.

Neighborhoods presently offered in The Hills include Serenata by Coleman Homes, Panorama Pointe by Woodside Homes, Las Colinas and Visions by Watt Homes, Valle Del Fiori by Signature Homes, Evergreen and Cypress Grove by Lewis Homes, Belaire Estates by R/S Development, Copper Ridge by Di Loreto Homes, cherry Creek by The Schulman Group, Amaranthe by Pacific Properties and Hillpointe by Christopher Homes. Willow Tree by Lewis Homes is expected to open shortly.

In the Hills South, the custom-home neighborhoods of Eagle

Hills and Tournament Hills are under development around the Tournament Players Club at Summerlin, Nevada's only private 18-hole championship stadium golf facility. Country Club Hills semi-custom homes by Christopher Homes and Montair patio homes and villas by Taylor Woodrow Homes are also being offered.

The third family-oriented village, The Pueblo, is also under development and is already home to a private school, The Meadowlark, The Pueblo Medical Center, and a Bank of America office. A small retail center is also planned.

Those neighborhoods currently open in The Pueblo include Sedona on the Park by Sedona Homes and The Plateau by Durable Homes. La Mancha Summerlin by Stanton Construction, Tamarisk by The Schulman Group and Valencia by Woodside Homes are all expected to open soon.

About our Church

We began as Hope Lutheran Church in the living room of our Pastor, Jerome McWaters, with his wife, Carol, at their piano. Hope was the most appropriate name then because Hope was the seed that was planted there in the Parsonage.

Once planted, our small congregation moved to a temporary Saturday night worship site rented to us by the the Methodist Church on Rancho Blvd. There, under the Father's watchful eye, the seed began to sprout. Our church family began to grow closer and stronger in the Faith.

We now celebrate the transplanting of the seedling that is Summerlin Evangelical Lutheran Church to the ground where its roots can grow deep and firm and support the rich fruit that is ours through Jesus Christ.

Altar Flowers

Altar flowers for this dedication have been given to the glory of the Triune God on the occasion of the special remembrances noted below:

Barbara Brown, in memory of Marie Schoen.

Deborah Dow, in honor of her parents, Chester & Donna Toso.

The Ed Gaertner Family, in memory of Edwin & Alda Gaertner.

Tom & Carol Johnson, in memory of his father, Melvin A. Johnson.

James C. Kilgore & Family, in memory of his father, James R. Kilgore.

Vera McLain, in memory of her husband, Lloyd McLain.

Carol McWaters, in memory of her mother, Belvadeen Menth.

Mike & Betty Raver, in memory of Arnold & Rose Raver and

William Lindenberger.

Corinne Scarzone for her mother, Clara C. Dixson.

Jerry & Barb Stevens, in honor of their parents, Mable & Volney Stevens and Vera & Lloyd McLain.

Harold & Helen Wangerin, in memory of Donald & Margaret Stiemke.

Isabel Westphal, in memory of her husband, Robert A. Westphal.

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Summa Corporation: Land acquisition & Development

Pastor Donald Pieper: Survey & Demographics

Kevin Thistle: Architect

Rick Templeton: Project Manager

Breslin Builders:

Jack Breslin, President: General Contractor

Colours, Inc.; Leslie

Parraguirre, President: Interior Design

Gethsemane Lutheran, Los Angeles, Cal.: Assistance with organ acquisition and installation

Star of Bethlehem, Orcutt, Cal.: Assistance with dedication schedule and organization

Mt. Olive and Green Valley Lutheran, Las Vegas, NV.: Misc. material and spiritual support too numerous to itemize - True Sisters of the Faith in the Las Vegas Valley

Kathi Gaertner: Graphics for cover and layout consultation

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WELS California

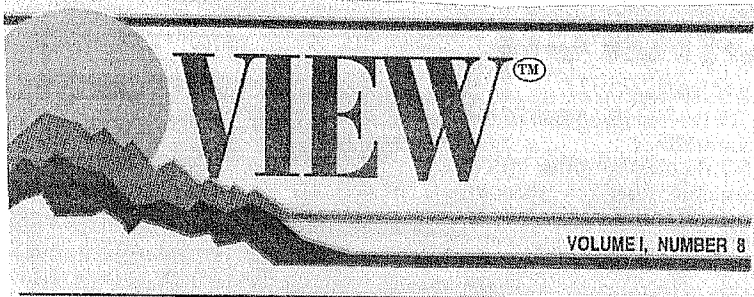
Mission Board; Pastor

Don Seifert, Chairman: Planning Assistance

FEBRUARY EDITION

SUMMERLIN

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION SERVING SUMMERLIN, DESERT SHORES, SOUTH SHORES AND NORTHWEST LAS VEGAS



CHURCHES

Summerlin gets first church

By Joe Lowell
View Editor

The Summerlin Evangelical Lutheran Church has come a long way from its days of meeting in the living room of Pastor Jerome McWaters' South Shore home.

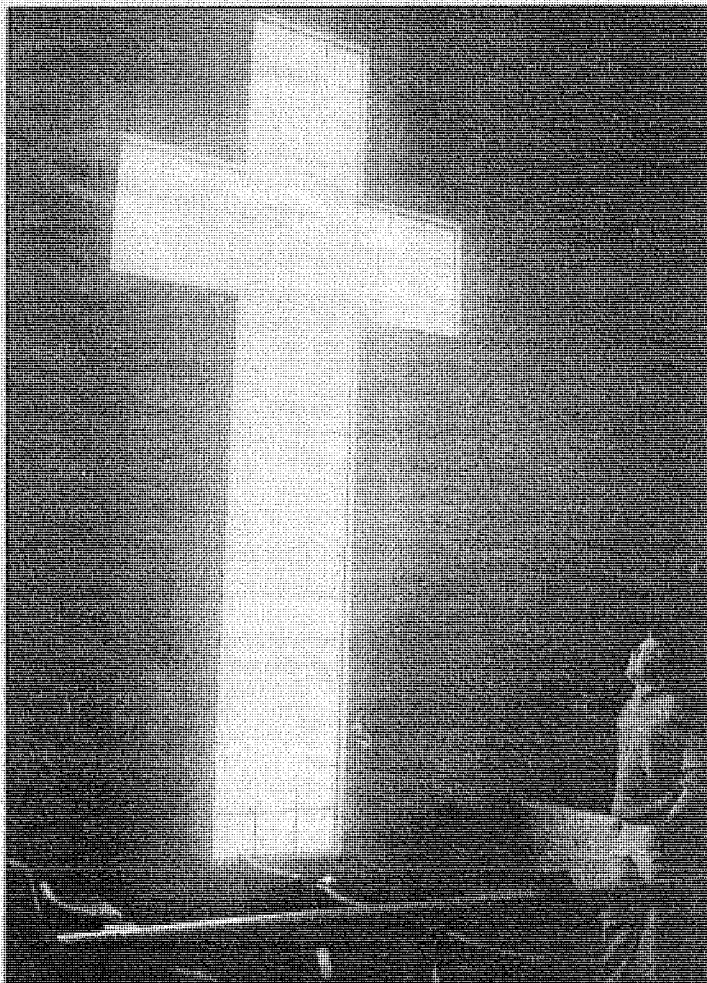
Today, church members gather in a beautiful new Southwest-style church in Summerlin. It is the community's first church.

When McWaters initially founded the church in 1991, his congregation, which consisted of four families, would meet once a month for worship in the McWaters' home.

"It was very informal," McWaters said. "It was very family like. There was a closeness that one could not duplicate or manufacture anywhere else. The sense of family was so real."

McWaters said the new church should help retain that sense of family. Dedicated Oct. 24, the church is located just one mile west of U.S. Highway 95 on West Lake Mead Boulevard and a block south on Pueblo Via.

Please see CHURCH/2AA



Joe Lowell/View

Pastor Jerome McWaters looks at a glass block wall illuminated by the sun in the new Summerlin Evangelical Lutheran Church.

(Continued from previous page)

2AA/View/Tuesday, January 25, 1994

Church

From 1AA

ta Drive in the Pueblo area of Summerlin.

While the building has many beautiful features throughout, the most stunning is the 12-foot high glass block cross that, as it captures the sun, illuminates the inside of the church. At night, the cross is lit up as brightly.

The shining cross leaves no doubt about what the church's mission is, McWaters said.

"Christ ... He is our focus," McWaters said. "Our focus is to bring people into a relationship with Jesus Christ, which in turn will affect every other aspect of a person's life."

Kevin Thistle was the church's architect. It was constructed by Breslin Builders. Leslie Parraguirre, president of Colours, Inc., handled the interior design.

Other internal features include a baptismal font, which McWaters said symbolizes a stream of living water, a stone floor and an altar.

Parraguirre, who attends the church with her husband, Ron, a municipal court judge, said the building basically was white stucco when she started.

"We completely changed it," she said.

She chose a clay-colored exterior to compliment the Pueblo accent walls in the community and added green to the trim to give it a deeper, more environmental look.

Parraguirre extended the earthy look inside by making the floor out of beautifully carved, desert gold-colored Nevada Neanderthal stone, which is mined in Beaty. The altar top also is made of the stone.

"We wanted to use as much product native to the area as we could. It's just a great product," she said.

"We wanted to get away from the institutional look so many



Pastor Jerome McWaters hopes to fill his new church with some of the residents moving to the northwest.

churches have on the inside and create a look that was something more earth-related and, therefore, warmer."

In addition, a suspended sand-blasted ash cross hangs above the altar. Barbed wire from a Nevada ranch encircles the cross bars to symbolize a crown of thorns.

"When you design churches, you've got to aim for something that is classic in nature," she said. "They need longevity."

Of her work on the church, Parraguirre said: "It's a real deep sense of pride. We wanted to be able to contribute something to our church because that's where we want to raise a family."

The church's parent organization loaned the congregation the money for the building.

"They contribute to a fund which allows us to build churches like this one and pay back at a rate that we are comfortable with," McWaters said. "We pay back a percentage of our revenue. It's pretty obvious that a small group of people could not put up

all this money at once."

The church's second construction phase will include space for early child care and a building for fellowship.

Church member Betty Raver said the building was beautiful and that the baptismal font was her favorite feature.

"It's so unique," she said.

Maintaining a family feeling like the one provided when the church began is one of the toughest challenges McWaters said he faces as his congregation grows into its church.

"As we become larger, it becomes a little more impersonal," he said. "But, we've taken efforts to preserve that family feeling, simply by awareness. We all recognize it's different; it's bigger.

"The building offers us benefits we didn't have before. The downside is it becomes a little more impersonal. You work to preserve that feeling of closeness and unity but you have to work at it harder because the people are not assembled in a small place any



Pastor Jerome McWaters explains the symbolism of the water flow in the church's baptismal font.

more. They do not go out one door. There are now three doors they can go out."

Thankfully, McWaters said, the four families who started the church remain.

"That's kind of amazing when you think of the transiency in this town," he said.

Summerlin Lutheran Church is a confessional Lutheran Church, which means potential members must undergo instruction before signing up, McWaters said.

The purpose of the instruction,

which can last up to 16 weeks, helps ensure that "we are one in what we believe," he said.

There are three Lutheran denominations nationally. The largest is the Evangelical Church of America, followed by the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, and the Lutheran Church Wisconsin Synod, of which the Summerlin church is a member.

"Our posture toward the Scriptures," McWaters explains in comparison, "would be more conservative than the largest Lutheran church body."

(From Pastor Matthew Vogt; October 2007.)

Water of Life Lutheran Church

MISSION STATEMENT

**As a gathering of believers by the grace of God,
we commit ourselves under the guidance and blessing of the Lord
to grow in faith through the unchanging Word of God,
to unite in Christ's love to worship and serve our Savior,
and to boldly proclaim Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sin to SW Las Vegas.**

TIMELINE

August 1st, 1997 - Pastor Matthew Vogt and his wife, Kelli, arrive in Las Vegas to begin mission work.

April 5th, 1998 - The first public worship service is held in a tent outside the storefront at 4460 South Durango Drive on Palm Sunday.

January, 2000 - Five acres of property is purchased at the future corner of Grand Canyon and Mesa Vista.

(for \$650,000)

Later that same year, Pardee Homes purchases 1 1/2 acres and makes all the off-site

(for \$220,000)

improvements to the property for the congregation. Property is dedicated in February.

September, 2002 - Mission status is granted to the congregation by the synod's Board for Home Missions.

Facility planning authority is granted at the same time.

October 5th, 2003 - A groundbreaking ceremony kicks off the construction of our congregation's first

permanent worship facility.

December 23rd, 2003 - Actual construction on site begins.

July 18th, 2004 - The completed church is dedicated in a festive Sunday evening service.

- Why located in the area that it is:
 - We were assigned to the southwest quadrant of the Las Vegas Valley. While initially it was suggested to be located a bit more south and east of current location (about 5 miles away) outside of a major master planned community (Rhodes Ranch), it was determined that we were too early for basing our church's existence on this one community and the area eventually to be developed around it (besides the fact that the community itself is gated and we would not be able to canvass within it). (That area is just now starting to fill in – now ten years later.)
 - There remains some concern that perhaps we pinched ourselves a bit close to the mountains on the west side of the valley, cutting off a bit of the three mile circle around the church from which a church usually draws.
 - The backing of the synod has been a real blessing. At one time we were just one of five storefront churches within a mile while we were located on Durango. However, we were

the only one with a synod to enable us to purchase land early, while it was still reasonably affordable and available. None of the others have been able to develop a physical church in the area. In fact, we are still the only Christian church building anywhere west of the I-215 beltway – now here for over three years.

- Beginning stages:
 - Water of Life started with just Roger and Lenore Short and their teenage son, Gabriel (members of Summerlin Lutheran). It was a Home Missions startup (what would be considered a Level One or Tier One mission in today's terminology. At the time we were considered on "Exploratory Status."
 - First prospects were Pastor's car salesman and furniture salesman. Baptized both their children and got them and their wives enrolled in BIC classes. (Then ran out of money – and had to do the canvassing the old fashioned way! ☺) August, 1997 "Monthly Report" includes this note: "*Real Estate Journal* headline reads: 'Spring Valley to blossom as the new Southern Beltway moves west.' We're right in the thick of things! Seems imperative that we move quickly on the land purchase before prices sky-rocket and choice lots are no longer available." After a couple months of canvassing the area neighborhoods and sending mailings, once a month services and weekly Bible studies were started in Pastor's home on October 12th. The first service was attended by 19 people.
 - First baptism was on September 14th at Mount Olive's late service (car salesman's daughter). First baptism on Water of Life's turf (in Pastor's home) was Ashlee Campbell (Pastor's neighbor's daughter) on November 9th.
 - When the first public worship service in the storefront was held (after nine months of work), we had no official members. Officially accepted first members into the congregation on June 28th, 1998. Most were WELS transfers. There was one adult confirmation that day – Connie Campbell (and her two daughters). 8 official communicant members, 10 baptized members. Next set of members did not join until January of 1999, at which point we had 16 baptized members.

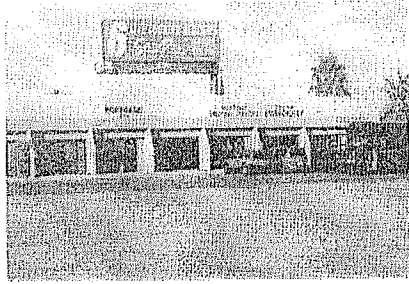
- Initial observations:
 - To be honest, after ordination my question was: "Now what?!" Selected a name, created a logo and started bugging our neighbors! It's always due to God's grace, but an extra measure of it that anyone would drive into a neighborhood (five turns from the nearest major road) on the outskirts of town to come to some young 20-some year old guy's house to rest their soul's welfare in this church's hands!
 - So much potential! So many opportunities! This is going to be quite a ride!
 - This hurts!!! After 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!
 - It took a great deal of vision (and dreaming and prayer) to see a church out there in the middle of the desolate desert someday. Had to rent a four wheel drive SUV to navigate the natural desert washes to get out to future site options. First meeting with synod's land acquisition manager found him laughing at our plans to purchase land "way out there" where there were no utilities or roads within a couple miles of the site. He returned six months later and understood what we were talking about. Still felt, however, that the utilities and roads would be nowhere near us by the time we wanted to build. (By the time we built, development had surpassed us by well over a mile.)

- Synodical support:
 - The synod has generously supported our mission efforts from the beginning! According to the MPGA (Mission Program Grant Agreement), we are in our final year of subsidy

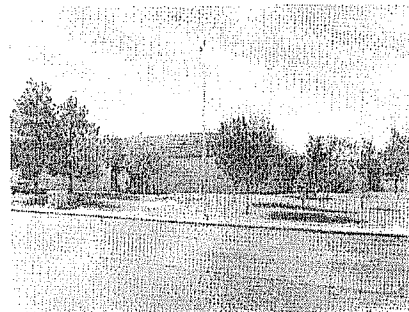
support. However, we are not quite living up to our financial commitment. Are in the process of attempting to negotiate one more year under the following two assumptions: 1) Our MPGA was formulated with the advanced plan (three years prior) that the new facility would open 9 months earlier than it actually did (thus the aggressive projections for growth were nine months behind). 2) We intend to daughter a congregation beginning this summer, thus “cutting off” the support of 7-10 families to start up this new mission.

- Major congregational decisions:
 - Besides the events included in the above timeline: Vicars trained at Water of Life: Jan-Erik Tiri from Finland (trained by Pastor’s Vogt’s father, John Vogt at Biblicum in Ljungby, Sweden) served August, 2005 – April, 2006. Aaron Strong (and Abbie) served from August, 2006-July, 2007. David Backus serving from August, 2007 to present. Tremendous blessing for all involved!
 - September 30th - Korean Gospel Ministry begins at Water of Life: After 5 + months of doctrinal training and discussions (including three days of meetings with Pastor Tom Park – flown out by the Seminary’s PSI program on the recommendation of Prof. Alan Sorum), our congregation declared an "informal fellowship" with Pastor Taesang (John) Kim, his wife, Grace, and their congregation. We had a world mission celebration in our English services in the morning. Pastor Kim and his wife sang a song and made a presentation after worship at both services. Then our choir sang as a part of the Korean's first service in our facility. They had 17 adults and 8 children as a part of their first service. We are looking forward to one joint gospel ministry in two languages! Name:
 - Plans to daughter a congregation in the Northwest part of the valley (about 40-45 minutes away): The congregation is preparing the documentation currently to submit a request at the January, 2008 Home Mission Board meeting for approval to do a level two (daughtering congregation) mission start up in the northwest part of the valley. Currently about 10 families commute the 45 minutes it takes to get to church from that part of town. We are excited about the outreach potential there already now and in anticipation of the future!
 - Future plans include: Once the daughtered church is off and running, participating once again in the “Vicar in Mission Setting” program. Daughtering another congregation about 5-7 miles south of us (south of Blue Diamond Highway; Mountain’s Edge area). Daycare / preschool and grade school on current site.
- Current membership: 184 communicants; 271 baptized members. 94 adults confirmed in the ten years of our history. 135 total baptisms!
- Perhaps one insight: the importance of longevity in the ministry in our transient society. (Happy to embellish if you want.)
- Note also the attached outreach grant justification for a bit more insight on the ministry / environment of Water of Life (outreach oriented; lay people-ministry oriented) and Las Vegas.

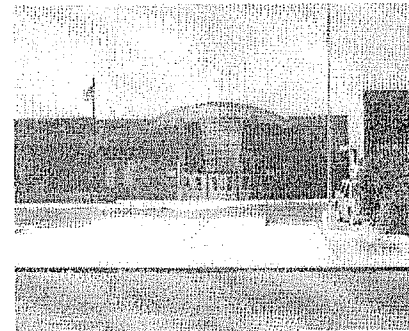
(Beautiful Savior History, 2007)



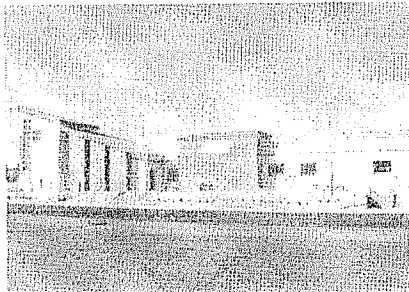
Church Office 1999-2007



Beatty Elementary School
1999-2002



Schofield Middle School
2002-2006



New Church Home 2007

OUR HISTORY

May 1998—Matthew Guse is called from the seminary to begin a new mission church in Las Vegas.

August 9th, 1998—Matthew Guse is ordained and installed as the new mission pastor at Green Valley Lutheran Church, Henderson, NV.

December 1, 1998—The mission church organizes with 17 official members, and the name Beautiful Savior is chosen.

April 4, 1999—Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church holds its first service at Beatty Elementary School. 116 were in attendance, 80 were visitors from the community.

August 1999—Beautiful Savior holds first Sunday School classes with 12 children.

December 24, 1999—Beautiful Savior holds first Christmas Eve Service in pastor's home with 70 in attendance.

January 2000—Beautiful Savior purchases 5 acres of land on the NW corner of Bermuda and Frias. The cost of the 5 acre parcel, \$500,000.

July 2002—Beautiful Savior moves to Jack Schofield Middle School.

February 2002—Beautiful Savior is recognized by our church body as a full fledged mission effort, and begins receiving a decreased yearly subsidy.

August 30, 2003—Beautiful Savior hits the 100 member mark.

December 15, 2003—Beautiful Savior members make Building Fund Drive commitments totaling \$270,000 over next three years,

May 25, 2004—Beautiful Savior receives summer vicar to help with outreach to our community.

March 25, 2005—Beautiful Savior has its largest Easter service with 170 in attendance.

April 2006—Beautiful Savior is approved through our synod for a 2.6 million dollar loan to begin construction.

August 2006—The Church/Preschool construction begins.

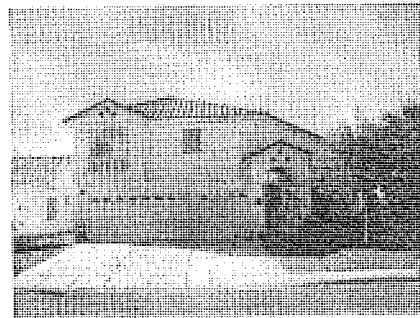
August 5, 2007—Beautiful Savior dedicates its new facility with a special service.

August 6, 2007—Beautiful Savior holds its first VBS with 47 children.

September 10, 2007—Beautiful Savior Lutheran Preschool opens with 7 students.



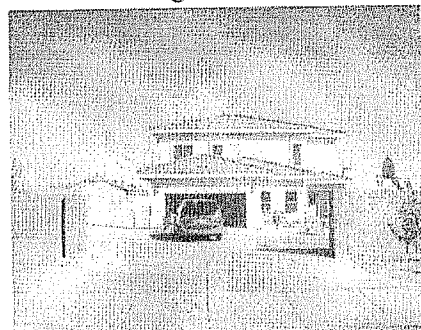
Parsonage 1998-1999



Parsonage 1999-2004



Parsonage 2004-2007



Parsonage 2007

Beautiful Savior

WELS Exploratory - Las Vegas, NV

Our Start - One year ago on August 9th, 1998, I was installed at Green Valley Lutheran Church in Henderson, NV. I still remember the service as well as the 120 degree heat. They teach you a lot of things at the seminary, but starting a new church was not exactly one of them. But we soon found a rental office and from there started canvassing and getting to know our community.

Our First Service - Throughout the winter months of 1999, we had attained enough prospects to acquire a bulk mailing permit. Working with prospects was becoming more difficult because we had nothing new to share with them and had nothing to invite them to. So we decided to start holding services. Through God's grace we were allowed use of one of our local elementary schools. On April 4th, 1999, we had our opening service on Easter Sunday. We had 116 in worship. 80 were visitors from the community. 15 were from other churches. 20 were our own.

The Fall - Most of our Easter visitors did not return. When you live in a 24hr town everyone works odd hours and most Sunday mornings. But yet we thank the Lord for the people he sent to hear the gospel. Our next services were not so well attended 38, 47, 41, 31, 33. etc..... Throughout the summer our attendance stayed in the high 30s to mid 40s. Summer is also a difficult time to do evangelism because of the heat, but we made it through still breathing.

The Start Of The School Year - In August of 1999, we decided to start having Sunday School. We did not have a lot Sunday school aged children, but deemed it necessary to start their Christian education. Through mailers and announcements into our community we did have nonmembers sign up their children. As of now we are averaging 12 in Sunday school. I also hold confirmation class during the week with two in attendance. Our attendance started picking up again reaching in the mid 40s to mid 50s.

The Burst Of People - Through our special services (Thanksgiving, Friendship Sunday, Mission Sunday) we started seeing a burst in attendance. We were nearing the 60 mark for the first time. And then with the help of a member baptism and some out of town guests we ended up with 63 in attendance. Now that we have moved into December the Lord has truly blessed us. Two Sundays in December attendance was 76, 70. It all goes to show the Lord can still grow his church through his meager servants.

Joys Of Our Ministry –

Our People – It was a little odd being such a young pastor and yet still being older than 80% of your core group. We have a very young congregation, so if nothing else we can grow our church from the inside out. Nevertheless, Heidi and I were very warmly received and the support has continued through out our time here. We have made many new friends which has helped with any homesickness. Our congregation likes to fellowship whenever they can, so we try to schedule monthly activities as a way of getting together. Visitors have also remarked how nice it is that we resemble a family. Isn't that what it is all about?

Our Bible Information Classes – This is what I enjoy the most. Teaching people about their Savior, and meeting new faces all the time. Since many of our prospects are new to Christianity. It doesn't matter if I am only one year removed from the seminary – they still think I'm smart. I don't know where the Lord brings our prospects from but he sure does a good job. Right now we have 14 people in our membership class and will be taking them and their families into membership some time in early February.

Our City – There is no city like Las Vegas in the world. Usually when people find out I am a pastor in Las Vegas, the first thing they ask is, "What wedding chapel do you work at?" The second question is, "What casino hotel do you live in?" But such is not the case. We live in a very residential area where people are just as concerned about raising their families as anywhere else. Yet we have the comforts of being only minutes from the city of entertainment. And as long as you know where to go and at what times, things are really cheap. There is a lot to do, and a lot to see. This makes it nice for an evening out with my wife.

Our Hardships Of Ministry – Blessings do not come without labor. Sermon writing, class preparation, and visitations do not get any easier. With the birth our son in February (Ethan), it has also become very tiring. We are fortunate enough to not have Heidi work, but we did have to cut out cable and be reduced to only one car. Yet the Lord manages to help us through the months with enough diapers and formula. Being in Las Vegas a 24hr town means that pastor is also on call 24hrs a day. This makes it sometimes difficult to spend quality time at home. But the joy of serving in the Lord's kingdom is what holds us all together.

Our Future Church Home – We were approved by our synod for Early Land Purchase. Due to the rising cost of land (\$120,000 per acre) and the fast consumption of it, if we do not buy land soon there will be none left. So we are in the process of buying 5 acres and will hopefully close on it by mid-January 2000. We are buying 5 acres for a future church, school, and preschool. Of course this is years down the road but the land we will have. This is a big responsibility and cost for a little mission as ours, but with Jesus guiding us as he is doing we will make it.

And we also realize this would not be possible if it were not for brothers and sisters in Lord giving their mission dollars to synod. For without you we would neither be here, nor thinking about building a church, school, and preschool. So thank you from our congregation to you for your gifts of generosity. What a wonderful blessing it is to be part of a larger synod! May God grant that your efforts continue to be blessed, as well as his hand of mercy upon our little Las Vegas Mission.

(Written by Pastor Matthew Guse, 1999)

(Pastor Matthew Guse, November 2007)

Some Notes About Our History

In 1998 the AzCA mission board was seeking to expand the mission work in South Las Vegas. They were wanting the best seminary graduate at the time, with the most knowledge of the original languages, who had a depth of insight when it came to homiletics, who was unwavering in his dogmatic practices – Is it any wonder why they chose me! *Or maybe it was because I passed sem by the skin of my teeth and they thought I couldn't put the people of Las Vegas in a worse spiritual condition than they already were. (Feel Free to pick either option as you see fit)*

Our church got started largely due the background work of Green Valley Lutheran. Green Valley Lutheran sat down to think of where they wanted to be in 10 years. Did they want to be a large church with many pastors reaching out to a wide area? They decided no they did not, instead “if you want to have community churches – then you better put churches in communities.” By the background work of GVLC and the mission board I was called to serve the nearby Silverado Ranch area.

Early Evangelism – was the mass media approach, trying get our name out to as many as we could. I think for the first year we hung out about 30,000 door flyers around the neighborhoods. Our first Easter service was the fruit of all that hard work. We always took as many TCW teams, WELS Kingdom workers, Summer vicars as we could get – just to get our name in front of people. We had 180,000 people living in our immediate zipcode – we did not want waste time going door to door.

The Only Church

We has a great opportunity starting when we did. There was only 1 Catholic church, 2 Mormon churches, and 1 Baptist church in our target area when we started. The housing developments were so new that grocery stores, retail shops, strip malls, even gas stations were not built or in yet, which also means churches had not gotten there either. We had a wide open range to do mission work – literally waiting for subdivisions to be inhabited so we could get in and introduce ourselves.

Our Land

Were very blessed that we were able to get our land when we did through early land purchase. The 5 acre land we bought in 2000 for 500,000 is now worth in 2006, 3.2 million dollars.

If you need anything else or more info call me again with certain questions and I'll give you an over the phone interview.

Guse