

# Adventist Sunday church reaching the unchurched in Las Vegas

by C. Elwyn Platner



**MOUNTAIN VIEW**

**COMMUNITY**

**10:15 am**



taking their places. While the visitors finish their breakfast Dunfield welcomes the growing crowd of almost 50 people by this time for the first meeting in their new location. Led by Brad Reed and Wally Hanson, the band provides accompaniment for singing for the next 20 minutes.

"It's a high tech "seeker-style" service, not designed for Adventists, but for Anglo Boomers and GenXers who may not be acquainted with the inside of any church," explained David Gemmell, pastor of the nearby Las Vegas Mountain View church which is sponsoring this creative evangelism project.

"Most Adventists would not be



Members from the Las Vegas Mountain View church provide accompaniment for a half hour of praise songs prior to the devotional message.

It's early Sunday morning Nov. 7, and more than a dozen members of the Las Vegas Mountain View church are busy mixing pancake batter, setting out dishes and other tableware, preparing breakfast in a local public elementary school auditorium.

Outside, signs posted earlier on street corners and in the parking lot point the way to the Higher Grounds Community Church

By 10 a.m. the smell of frying pancakes greets the first visitors from the surrounding community as they approach the school, many of them for the first time. They've come as a result of a mass mailing of invitations to homes a local postal zip code to attend Sunday morning religious services.

## Service begins

As the crowd grows and enjoys pleasant conversation around two dozen small tables scattered throughout the auditorium, members of a music group follow Pastor Tim Dunfield to the platform and begin

comfortable in this service with its contemporary band and laid-back style," he remarked. "But this type of service has already proved highly successful with three other rapidly growing churches in Las Vegas.

## Projected attendance

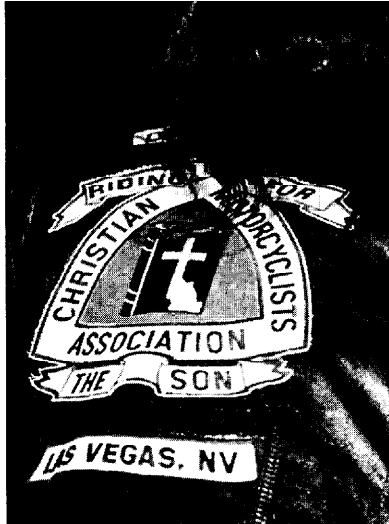
"If the thesis holds true," Gemmell wrote in requesting evangelism endowment funds last year, "by the end of the 52-week evangelistic campaign, there will be a regular attendance of about 600 at the weekly evangelistic meetings. Of those 600 at least 20 percent will have officially been baptized and will be worshipping with their Adventist brothers and sisters on Sabbath."

"Sunday morning evangelism may sound unconventional or even radical," Gemmell said. Yet the concept has roots in solid theology. Jesus did not confine his ministry to Sabbath services at the temple. Some of his greatest ministry opportunities occurred in secular times and places with worldly people," Gemmell's project proposal said.

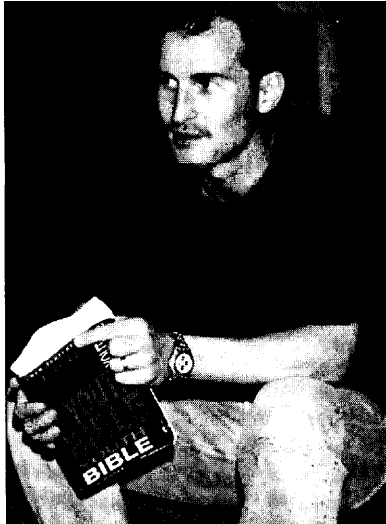
"Sunday morning Evangelistic



Pastor Dave Gemmell, left, welcomes visitors to the Sunday morning worship service



Among those attending one of the first services in the elementary school are four members of the Las Vegas Christian Motorcyclists Association.



After he and a group of Mountain View church members finish preparing for the Sunday morning service Pastor Tim Dunfield presents a devotional message and prayer for the upcoming service.

Project will bring the gospel to unchurched people at a time when they are most receptive to religious things. This project will not be a worship service for the believers, but instead will be an evangelistic meeting that believers can bring their unchurched friends to."

The seekers will be gradually drawn into a home cell church where they can begin to grow in their walk with Christ and their understanding of the fundamental beliefs of the Adventist faith.

Deeply committed members of the 600-member Mountain View

church launched their experiment on Easter weekend at a school in the rapidly growing Summerland area of the city. Their initial invitation went by mail to 30,000 homes and drew 150 people that Sunday.

As the plan unfolded, Dunfield was recruited from Williams Lake, British Columbia, where he was a Bible teacher and chaplain at Caraboo Adventist Academy. He had coordinated a similar program titled Blue Rock while attending the Adventist seminary in Berrien Springs, Mich.

"You won't feel like you've been sentenced to prison when you visit Mountain View Community," says this postcard invitation mailed to homes in the postal zip code area where the Sunday morning services are held. "It's for people who have given up on the traditional church, but not on God."



### Adventist Message

Each Sunday Dunfield presents a clearly Adventist message which is aimed at people who "don't know how to talk church, people whose lives have fallen apart with divorce or terms in prison. "We want to be seen as having something they will want," Dunfield said. "Each one is invited to participate in a small group to build friendships with other new people who come to the service."

Gemmell and Dunfield see a bright future for Higher Grounds Community Church because Las Vegas is growing at the rate of 5,000 a month. They hope that this model can be replicated in other cities across the country.

As they donned their helmets after their first service at Higher Grounds Community Church that Sunday morning, four members of the local Christian Motorcycle Association, all dressed in their black leather jackets and pants, commented, "We're really excited about what we saw and heard here this morning. We're comin' back next week and we're bring in our kids."

## New Nevada-Utah Conference treasurer

Joining the Nevada-Utah Conference as secretary-treasurer is Gary Norman who had been associate treasurer of the Oklahoma Conference since 1993.

Norman received a BS degree in business administration from Pacific Union College in 1972. In earlier denominational employment, he was chief accountant and patients' business manager at Feather River Hospital and director of patient business services at Simi Valley Hospital. He also served as chief financial officer at Monument



Gary and Rosanne Norman

Valley Hospital prior to its closure. Norman is also an accredited trust officer for the Adventist church.

Norman and his wife Rosanne moved to the Reno, Nev., area in mid-January, 2000. They have two grown children, Jim, who works for the State of

Nebraska while his wife, Cindy Haycock Norman, attends Union College; and their daughter, Angeliqua and her husband, Tim Kripps, who live in Des Moines, Iowa, and work for the Iowa-Missouri Conference.