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HOW
VERVE
CHURCH
ATTRACTS
THE
LOST



CHURCH FUEL



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How Verve Church Attracts the Lost

Las Vegas. Its name has become synonymous with gambling, parties, unconventional lifestyles, and general immorality. If you visit the city's official website, you'll find links and videos full of sexual innuendos, instructions on where to find adult-only shows along the famous strip, and even a how-to guide for those interested in a drive-thru, Star Trek themed wedding ceremony. I mean - who wouldn't want to be one of their 115,000 weddings that happen each year?

From before its incorporation in 1911, Las Vegas was known for its

acceptance of Old-West style freedoms like gambling and prostitution. And with an official tagline stating "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas," one can understand why a first timer's experience in the entertainment capital of the world may come with a bit of anxiety about what to expect upon arrival. And with my personal negative perceptions stemming from video games like Grand Theft Auto and movies like The Godfather and The Hangover, I arrived in Las Vegas a bit clueless as to how 'Sin City' could sustain a young church plant.

So, yes, while some who've never made the trek out west often refer to Las Vegas as "The Devil's Playground," those who live there simply call it home. And since the city has seemingly embraced its wild side, it should come as no surprise to discover a church has learned to do the same.

Enter: Vince Antonucci.

Vince has that 'come to Jesus' story most people find hard to believe. Back in college he heard a televangelist preaching, thought what he was hearing sounded ludicrous, and decided he would attempt to disprove the Bible. But somewhere along the way he became a Christian and it radically changed his life. His mother was Jewish and his father was a gambling addict once featured on America's Most Wanted, so maybe it came as a surprise to some when Vince decided to move to Virginia Beach, VA to start a church.



But that's precisely what he did.

Fast forward to a few years later and Vince has a realization that involves fishing for sharks. I'll let him tell you the story (straight from his blog):

"Imagine a few friends decide they want to go deep sea fishing and catch sharks. These guys go to



Wal-Mart, buy some poles, drive down to the marina, pick up some bait, get in their boat, drive out where some other people are fishing, and drop their lures. Fish start biting instantly. By the end of the day these guys catch 92 Grouper, 37 Sea Bass, 11 Tuna and...2 small Sharks..

By chance, another group of buddies also decide to try and catch some sharks. This group gets together the week before to study up on shark fishing.

The next morning they drive to a specialty fishing store and purchase 80lb. class rods with 100 lb. fishing line. They get the right size hooks and a gaff. They also buy a flat of mackerel and some fresh bluefish to use as chum and bait. They go down to the marina, get in their boat, and drive southeast to a pre-determined spot, approximately 30 miles out. This area has a dip in the sea floor and a certain water temperature, both making it a far more likely

home for the type of shark they have elected to target. They discovered that different species of shark prefer varying depths of water. On the way out they troll for fresh bluefish, knowing it will be even more effective in attracting sharks.

Two of the guys begin preparing their bait and chunks for the chum. When they arrive, they create a big chum slick. They have learned that sharks are smell driven and will follow a slick to its source. Then, knowing that shark fishing is drift fishing, they chart their drift, based on the wind and tide, to follow the edge of the chosen structure below. Next they set their four baits, putting the deepest the furthest away from the boat, keeping their drags very loose so they can hear the clicker start to move. By the end of the day this boat returns to shore with 7 Grouper, 2 Tuna...and 29 Sharks.

Who was more successful? Well, I guess it's debatable, but if the goal is

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to catch sharks, I'd say the second group. Sure, the first group ended the day with 104 more fish, but they had 27 less sharks. If it's all about "numbers" the first group can brag, but if the deal is really shark fishing, I'd rather be with the second group. In fact, the first group can say they went out shark fishing, but really the truth is...they're grouper fishermen."

This story, Vince would tell you, is why he decided to start Verve Church. More specifically, it's why Vince decided to start Verve Church in Las Vegas, Nevada...AKA: Sin City.

If you take the shark fishing story and apply it to Christians and non-Christians, you understand the very specific calling God has placed on Verve Church and its pastor, Vince Antonucci. It gives you insights into why the space is designed the way it is, why they play the songs they play, and why the church is located where it is.

As we walked in to Verve, you didn't hear Chris Tomlin or Bethel Music, you heard an Imagine Dragons song blaring through the speakers in the lobby. It was loud. The walls were dark and the mood had an edge to it, but the people were kind and welcoming. As we walked from the lobby to the auditorium, we recognized that the setup felt more



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like a music venue than a church. Along with chairs, there were couches and bar stools for attendees to choose from. And the information desk was essentially a bar in the back of the room. It was all very ‘Vegas.’

As the service began, the first song the band played was by Earth, Wind, and Fire (yes, that Earth, Wind, and Fire) and never once was the music (or anything else for that matter) referred to as worship. This experience was

simply a time to reflect on your life and what God had to say to you, as the attendee.

It’s statements like “Don’t have a Bible? That’s ok, the verses will be on the screen.” and “If you want to just hang, just hang” that make those who

attend Verve feel as though they have the freedom to sit back, listen, and take it all in or participate and engage if they feel comfortable to do so.

It’s this “come as you are” attitude and culture so many churches long to have but seem to always fall short of, lived out in the form of Vegas-style entertainment with a side of church.

During his sermon, Vince engaged attendees very well through jokes and real-life stories of his own. He explained Scripture with humility and tact, reminding attendees they were welcome at Verve no matter where they found



themselves on Saturday night. He connected stories of life and reconciliation with statements like “Sometimes you feel like you have no hope” and it allowed those listening to feel heard and understood.

Verve is a church in arguably the most anomalous city in America. It’s

rich with vibrant culture, large fanfare, and unashamed tolerance. Because of this, the message and the building and the entire Verve experience reflects the diversity and

uniqueness of its city. Attendees range from young couples and small families to rough bikers and former strippers. The building boasts loud music and bright lights and unique experiences. The messages promotes unending grace and an attitude of love above all else. It’s these traits that make Verve a truly unique experience designed as “A

church for people who don’t like church.”

And Vince is unashamed about this.

Remember the Shark Fishing story we told you about? He lives it day in and day out. After the service concluded, Vince took us out to

lunch. He shared with us experiences he’s had with folks who expect Verve to act the way other churches they’ve gone to have acted. He’s heard all the statements about going deeper in theology, allowing a

tambourine player to dance in the back of the room (haven’t we all heard that one?), and making sure there’s an altar call at the end of every service. His response to them all was a graceful and loving synopsis of “maybe Verve isn’t the place for you.”

It’s the “come as you are” attitude and culture so many churches long to have but seem to fall short of.

And that's ok, Vince says.

In the same way you have to be very strategic and intentional when you are trying to catch sharks, you have to be very strategic and intentional in trying to win over lost people for Jesus. Vince is sold out to making sure that he has meaningful relationships with people who are far from any sort of relationship with Jesus. The best part is that he knows it doesn't end there; he wants to get people into the doors at Verve, and push them into the streets and homes of Las Vegas.

And it's working! In the 5 years of Verve's existence, they've had over 250 people say yes to Jesus and get baptized. The homeless and underprivileged have been served and mission teams have built homes in Mexico. They've contributed to church plants in Ecuador, Poland, and India and boast stories of live change and marriages saved.

Regardless of whether you agree with the method of the madness happening in Las Vegas at Verve Church, it's evident that God is doing a work through the very specific vision given to Vince Antonucci. And we believe there are actionable lessons you can put into practice at



your church, regardless of whether or not the style or methods of your church differ from that of Verve.

Don't apologize for the vision God has given you. It's evident that Vince is sold out to what he believes God has called called Verve Church to be. And he'd be the first to tell you he receives criticism and feedback for some of the methods he uses to

reach lost people. BUT you won't find Vince sitting down with every single person who disagrees with him trying to justify why he does what he does. You will, however, see him praying earnestly for outsiders to notice the stories of life-change and grace lived out among the Verve family. You will see him following hard after the message he believes God has given him of grace and hope and life and love. You will see him continue to push the boundaries of traditional church in order to reach people who don't like church.

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Know Your Audience. Verve Church does an outstanding job of knowing the type of people they have coming through their doors, and making sure

their service reflects the needs of those people. The entire experience is designed from top to bottom to be truthful and relevant to those in attendance.

Ultimately there are stories and traditions and people that make

your church what it is. And though the methods of Vince Antonucci and Verve Church are very unique from many places outside of Las Vegas, they are doing the work God has specifically called them

to. And whether you adopt their model or not, we all have something to learn from how Verve connects with their community in a very unique way.