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DAVE EARLEY

THE  
*How to  
Start a  
Great,  
New  
Church  
in  
5 Months*

*Dave Earley*

# **How to Start a Great, New Church in Five Months**

By Dave Earley

On November 11, 2012, we launched Grace City Church [www.gracecityvegas.com](http://www.gracecityvegas.com) as a great, brand new church, from scratch (we did not know anyone in Las Vegas eleven months earlier), in Las Vegas, with 231 people (175 locals) at our launch service.

One year later, on our first anniversary, we had over 300 people in attendance.

# Part one: Pre-Vegas

Originally, the full title of this chapter was ***How to Create a House of Prayer, Start a Successful Campus Ministry, and Plant a Church in Las Vegas Nevada in Five Months***. But that is a tad long. I choose this title to get your attention. Many of you are church planters or one day will be. I wanted to put something on paper that might help you. (Thirty years ago Elmer Towns wrote a booklet titled *84 Steps to Plant a Church*. As a 26 year old church planter, it was my most treasured book other than the Bible.)

I understand that formulas are hokey and how-to's are not necessarily trustworthy. But with the goal of giving God glory, I want to show you actions we took that created the human side of the many blessings we have seen **In Las Vegas**.

But, before I go on let me make **three disclaimers**.

**Number #1: We did not do what this title suggests in five months sitting in a vacuum.** I have thirty years of ministry experience in pastoral ministry, church planting, missions and leading young adults. I have already started one base church and several daughter churches. I have experience with two successful collegiate church ministries. **I have spent 15 years training and coaching church planters.** I spent six years studying and teaching others how to do ministry, spiritual warfare, and church planting.

**Number #2: We spent one year preparing, praying, planning, studying, recruiting, assessing, training, and fund raising before we arrived in Vegas.**

**Number #3: We intentionally took on four very large challenges that I don't recommend to those of you watching at home.**

1. We selected a large lost city far from the Bible belt. **Las Vegas has 2 million people and is only 3.7% Evangelical Protestant)**
2. We chose a city that has been crushed by the economic recession.
3. We targeted a large lost university that is also a commuter campus. **(UNLV has 29,000 students of which only 1200 live on campus. It was founded with a Mormon church in the middle and was so hard to reach that Campus Crusade gave up).**
4. We focuses on a zip code (89123) that is the least reached in the city. It has very little Christian presence (only four Christian churches for over 60,000 people), with no new homes being built in the last ten years.

The bottom line is that **God is the One ultimately responsible for any of the favor, blessing, and success we have enjoyed. *It is all about Him. It is all for him. And it is only possible because of Him.*** But our sovereign God sovereignly often chooses to limit much of His activity on earth to the efforts and prayers of His people. The more we work *and pray* the more God works as a result. Rest assured, what is happening in Las Vegas is a result of 17 months of very hard work and prayer.

#### **June 1 to December 30, 2011**

1. Cathy, Andrew, and I began meeting to **pray together daily** through the **Gospels** and ask God to give us capable laborers for the harvest. God added to this number monthly.
2. I studied the **demographics** of Las Vegas. I created maps showing every church in the Paradise section. I began to contact pastors and denominational leaders in the city of Las Vegas and the state of Nevada.
3. I wrote down **the vision and the values** of the new church.
4. Three times a week **we held** Word-based prayer meetings at the Prayer Chapel at Liberty University.
5. We **met weekly with potential team members** in a house church/ disciple group to train our team to obey everything Jesus commanded. We committed to pray three times a day, fast one day a week, and to read at least one chapter of the Gospels or

the book of Acts daily. The group quickly outgrew my house and moved to the Seminary student lounge on the campus of Liberty University.

6. We ordered a **block party trailer** to use after we got to Vegas.
7. We also **held regular information meetings to share the vision** with any who were interested. We did *not* recruit people to a job or a title. We told everyone that everyone on our team had the same job description: prayer warrior, evangelist, disciple-maker, and missionary. If anyone wanted to **come with us**, they would have to raise their own support. Month by month people were added to the team.
8. We went to the **Secretary of the State of Nevada** to officially acquire and reserve the names Grace City Vegas and Grace City Church.
9. We opened a **checking account** at a bank that has offices in both Virginia and in Vegas.
10. We created a **website**, a face book page, a blog, and designed t-shirts.
11. We created **an application for potential team members** to submit. Then we interviewed each of them.
12. We **trained team members how to cast vision and raise prayer partners and donors so they would be able to serve full-time.**
13. They were instructed to use Christmas break as a time to cast the vision and meet with potential donors.
14. I began **contacting church planting organizations, pastors and friends sharing the vision** and enlisting prayer partners.
15. I **set some big goals and started raising money** for my family to be able to leave our jobs and move to Las Vegas AND I also began to raise funds to get the church off the ground.

### **January 1 to June 1, 2012**

1. Six of us took a **vision trip** to Las Vegas. We met with various pastors and looked for housing.
2. We held a **Freedom Encounter** for our team to introduce them to the concept and to free them experience God on a more intimate level.

3. We put a **final push on recruiting of new team members**. We stressed that this was not about going to be a *mission trip*. It was about becoming a fulltime *missionary*.
4. We **held our team accountable to secure prayer partners and donors** so they could be missionaries when they arrived in Vegas. Everyone has to raise a certain amount of money in order to be able to make the move.
5. We created a **team covenant** and asked potential team members to sign it.
6. We **built a prayer culture** in our church DNA by praying together with potential team members three afternoons a week in the prayer chapel. Plus we held a Thursday pm Discipleship Group/ Prayer meeting. And we held a Sunday PM House of Prayer. The **focus of our prayers was first** praying through the chapter of the day from our Gospels/Acts reading and second intercession. **Three times daily we asked the Lord for H.A.R.V.E.S.T**

**H:** Please be working as we pray to prepare to give us an abundant **HARVEST** of souls in Las Vegas. (John 4:35-39)

**A:** Guide us to strategic **ATTRACTIVE / influential people of peace** who are spiritually receptive, relationally connected and who have a reputation. (Luke 10:5-6)

**R:** Guide us to the **RIGHT places** to live, Right places to work, and the right place to worship.

**V:** May Your will be done and Your kingdom come in Las **VEGAS** (Matt 6:9-10)

**E:** Send out **EVANGELISTIC, EXCELLENT, ENERGETIC, ENTHUSIASTIC, EXPECTANT laborers** for the harvest and *from* the harvest. (Matthew 9:38, Luke 10:2)

**S:** **SUPPLY** our needs as a church and as individuals as we seek first your kingdom. (Matt. 6:33)

**T:** Bless our **TEAM** with divine protection, love, unification, and sanctification (John 17:11,15, 19, 21, 23).

7. We prepared and **moved 18 missionaries** 2,300 miles across the country from Virginia to Las Vegas at the end of May.
8. We **unloaded our trucks**, got our housing set up, and readied ourselves to go to work by June 1st.

Everything we did in the twelve months *prior to* getting to Las Vegas laid the foundation for what has happened so quickly since we have been in Las Vegas.

## Part Two:

# In Vegas June - August

In the previous chapter, I talked about what we did for the twelve months *prior to* moving to Las Vegas. In this chapter, I want to talk about what we did *after* we got here in order to begin to develop a launch team to actually plant a church with a “large” Sunday worship service.

### June 2012

1. The most important thing we did was **launch the Vegas Grace City House of Prayer** with 40 days of prayer with our missionary interns. We met in the auditorium of Tropicana Christian Fellowship, a small urban church made up of people from over a half dozen nationalities. The first two weeks we met from 8 am to 3:00 pm daily (Monday through Thursday). Our times consisted of reading and praying the scriptures, singing worship songs and interceding for each other. We believe that this is the most significant thing we could have done.
2. Because people wanted to come, we **began holding house church** at my house on Sunday mornings. I began going verse by verse through the Gospel of John.
3. We also held a **teaching/worship-based prayer meeting** on Sunday evenings.
4. We encouraged the team to **meet their neighbors**. Andrew held several cook-outs in his apartment complex.
5. During week two of our 40 days of prayer we shifted the focus and turned our prayer time into a **week-long Freedom Encounter**. God broke many chains as we applied

truth, confessed sin, and prayed for each other. One of our team members was saved.

6. During the third week, we **ran VBS for a small urban church** at night.
7. Sam began to **look for a place to worship on Sunday's**
8. During the fourth week, we **began to prayer walk around the school where we hoped to meet**. We were faith walking and primarily asking for an out pouring of God's presence and for favor with the administration, teachers, and students.

### July 2012

1. The primary focus in July was **community outreach**.
  - We handed out 250 fliers in my neighborhood inviting my neighbors to a **Neighborhood Block Party** at my house to be held on July 5<sup>th</sup>. Eighty people showed up!
  - We handed out 800 fliers inviting people to a Neighborhood Block Party to be held at Desert Bloom Park on Saturday evening July 7<sup>th</sup> and 6 pm. One hundred people came!
  - After passing out 1000 fliers, we held our second block party at Duck Creek Park on July 21. 125 people came.
  - We passed out 1800 fliers the next weekend and had 200 people come to our Block Party at Legacy Pecos Park.
  - Over the summer we gave out 17,000 fliers, held 10 Block Parties, and fed and invited 2,000 people to our church.
2. We **continued holding house church** at my house on Sundays. My neighbors, Randy and Mickael opened their home so we would have a place to watch the kids during the message on Sundays. They also gave their lives to Christ!
3. We **continued holding teaching/worship-based prayer meetings** on Sunday evenings.
4. We **signed a contract to meet at Schofield Middle School**, the only school that welcomed us. It also "happened to be" in one of the least reached zip codes in the city, which is where we wanted to be. In answer to our prayer walk prayers,

God has shown us nothing but favor at that school, even though the principal is not yet a Christ-follower.

5. We **extended our forty days of prayer to five days a week, every week by meeting Sunday nights and daily Monday through Thursday from 8 am to noon** for Word-fed, Spirit-led, worship-based prayer. We began each day prayer walking around the school. Then we would prayer walk in the areas where we would pass out fliers and in the parks where would hold block parties. Then we would shift to the church to worship.
6. We were able to **gather some needed supplies** from two churches that had previously met in schools. Hope Church gave us much needed children's ministry equipment and Grace Point Church lent us some sound and lighting equipment to temporarily use to launch a worship service in a small school auditorium.
7. July 22, we held our **first Preview Worship Service** at the Middle School auditorium. We prayed for 75 people and ....75 people came! A young father was saved and threw away his drugs.
8. We **rented office space at the Southern Nevada Baptist Association** near UNLV. We also shifted our morning times of prayer to the SNBA library/meeting room just a few blocks from the University.
9. We began to **put team members on specific teams**. (Children's Ministry, Office, Sunday Mornings, Worship, Finance, UNLV, High School, Middle School, Adult /Assimilation Ministries).
10. We prayed and worked behind the scenes to **secure funding from potential partners** in order to purchase equipment, supplies and advertising materials needed to launch a Sunday Worship service in a school cafeteria. New Life Church in Columbus Ohio gave us \$20,000 to pay for our rental of the school for 8 months. The North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention gave us a church planting grant for \$50,000.

## August 2012

1. August was a **second month of intense outreach**. We not only continued going door-to-door handing out fliers and hold Block Parties every weekend, we also launched a campus ministry at a large unreached urban university – UNLV (University of Nevada at Las Vegas).
2. On Sundays, we continued **alternating between house church at my house and Preview Worship Services at the middle school**. New people came every week and more people committed to become part of our church launch team.
3. We continued our **Disciple Maker Training and Prayer meetings** on Sunday evenings. The training focus was apologetics and evangelism.
4. I began **meeting with each of our nine teams every week**.
5. We jumped threw the hoops to **receive campus club status at UNLV**. This would give us access to campus and the opportunity to book rooms for Bible studies on campus. The week before classes started we held Jericho Week of Prayer at UNLV. We moved our Sunday PM prayer meeting and our 9:00 am -noon Monday through Thursday prayer meetings to UNLV. We believe that this event positioned us to do what we were told would be nearly impossible, start a large Christian ministry on campus.
6. The first week of classes at UNLV, we held abbreviated prayer meetings from 9-10 am daily, then shifted to running **four straight days of Block Parties on campus** in the Free Speech Zone. The temperatures were 105-110 degrees daily. We played loud, fun music and gave away a several thousand free water bottles and snow-cones. By Thursday afternoon, 500 students had given us their contact information. We also held another big block party on Monday of the next week.
7. We also hosted **a lunch for the 120 teachers and staff** of the Schofield Middle School. As a result, several teachers began attending our church! The principal was so impressed that he invited us to be on campus as much as we wanted, even asking our young men to sit in the cafeteria daily to talk with the students.

You have just read a brief summary of the foundational activities we did in order to be able to start a campus ministry and develop a church launch team in a large unreached city in only three months.

## **Part Three:**

# **In Vegas September – November**

By way of review, I understand that formulas are hokey and how-to's are not necessarily trust-worthy. But with the goal of giving God glory, I want to show you actions we took that created the human side of the many blessings we have seen In Las Vegas.

I also want to remind you that the bottom line is that God is the One ultimately responsible for any of the favor, blessing, and success we have enjoyed. *It is all about Him. It is all for him. And it is only possible because of Him.* Our job is to merely cooperate with Him. Remember, our sovereign God chooses to limit much of His activity on earth to the efforts and prayers of His people. The more we work *and pray* the more God works as a result. Rest assured, what is happening in Las Vegas is a result of 17 months of very hard work and prayer.

### **September 2012**

- 1. We launched our UNLV afternoon Bible Study with 40 students!** The next week we **added an evening edition** and soon had as many as seventy students a week participating.
- 2. September was the third month of intense outreach.** We went door to door handing out fliers and held Block Parties every weekend.
- 3. We held our first Friday Night of Worship and Prayer** to introduce our people to worship-based prayer.

4. On September 4, we **baptized four people** in my next-door neighbor's pool after house church.
5. We continued **alternating between house church at my house and Preview Worship Services** at the middle school. Our attendance grew to 85 people in the Sept 25 Preview.
6. We continued our **training/prayer meetings on Sunday evenings**. The training focus was disciple-making.
7. We continued our **Monday through Thursday morning prayer meetings**.
8. We **chaperoned the first two middle school dances**. At the invitation of the principal, several of our young men volunteered at the middle school on Wednesdays to mentor middle school boys.
9. We **launched our Middle School and High School Bible Studies** on Wednesday afternoons after school. The middle school group met in a near-by park. Interestingly, the middle school now has a dozen kids, none of whom were already Christians! The high school group started at a nearby coffee shop. They also have a dozen kids and only two were already Christians.

### October 2012

1. **Street kids and street musicians** who live off tips from tourists began coming to our church, getting saved and giving up their addictions. Many of them were homeless. Some of them now live with some of us and are really growing in Christ.
2. We held our **first Vegas Freedom Encounter**. Sixty-six people participated, four of them were saved. Many were freed of longtime areas of spiritual bondage.
3. October 14, we held **our last house church gathering** at my home with 57 people jammed in. then we held Preview Worship Services at the middle school weekly. Several people were saved every week.
4. On October 20, after a team from River Cities Church helped us pass out 2,000 fliers inviting people to a **Fall Family Festival**. 270 people came. The next day, 115 people came to a Preview Worship Service.

5. The first few weeks of the month, we **continued our Disciple Maker Training and Prayer meetings** on Sunday evenings. The training focus was leading various types of Disciple Groups. Three new groups were launched for young adults.
6. We continued being a **house of prayer** maintaining our Monday through Thursday morning prayer meetings.
7. We held out first **Sunday Celebration of the Lord's Table**.

### November 2012

1. November 1-4, teams from Jersey Baptist Church and Forest Park Baptist Church helped us pass out **8,000 fliers** inviting people to our Launch Worship Service.
2. We continued being a **house of prayer and held our first Friday Night of Worship and Prayer in the school cafeteria**. We believe that God can do things bigger, better, and much faster than we can. Therefore, we pray a lot. If we have a secret, it is our commitment to prayer.
3. 149 people came to **our first Sunday baptism service at the school**. 13 young adults ages 16-35 gave incredible testimonies of changed lives and were baptized by the person most responsible for the conversion and follow-up!
4. November 9-10, teams from New Life Church and Hope Church helped us pass out **5,000 fliers** inviting people to our Launch Worship Service and Family Festival.
5. **November 11, 231 people participated in our official Launch Worship service and the Family Festival afterward!**
6. We added **two more adult Bible Study groups giving us a total of 9 groups for adults and teens**.
7. We held our **first child dedication service** with five families participating.

There you have it. That is a summary of the activities we did in order to be able to parachute drop into a place none of us had ever lived and cooperate with God to start a large campus ministry *and* launch a church with 200 people in only five months.

Of course, as a Mom will tell you, after the hard months of labor and delivery of the new baby, the hard work of parenting begins. This month, we have been busy evangelizing the lost, discipling the saved, and training potential leaders.

Pray for us. Our church is *not* made up of nice people from other churches. We are a church with many teenagers, college kids, street kids, Strip musicians and homeless guys. We are a church of not-yet Christians and brand-new Christians. We are a church of young adults living by faith as missionaries. Obviously, this does not reflect very well in the offering basket. Finances are very tight.

But, we feel like what are doing is what Jesus and His disciples would be doing in Vegas. Maybe God is calling you to come out and join us?

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**For more information on this subject check out:**

- ***Evangelism Is...***