

Time of Grace Ministry

Sharing the Gospel Message of Jesus with the World

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## Preface

*In September of 2007, about the same time I received my Senior Church History Thesis assignment, my wife and I attended worship at St. Marcus Lutheran Church for the first time. After the worship service, a new Time of Grace Ministry video was shown followed by an announcement from Pastor Jeske that Time of Grace had just signed a contract with the Daystar Television Network. As my wife and I drove home that Sunday, we talked about Time of Grace and how little we knew of the program. By that afternoon, I had made up my mind to write my thesis on Time of Grace Ministry.*

*My research of this project was mostly personal and phone call interviews with the members of the Board and staff for Time of Grace. My goal had been to learn as much as possible about this media ministry in order to complete my assignment. But what I learned from these individuals went far beyond Time of Grace and even farther beyond research.*

*The individuals I had the pleasure to interview shared with me more than just their time and memories about Time of Grace. They shared with me a “world” of active lay leaders I had never really witnessed before – men and women who needed a way to serve...and found it. It is my hope and prayer that other laymen and laywomen will continue to pursue their desires to serve and find them.*

## Introduction

History is like a puzzle – many different pieces fit together to make a complete picture. The purpose of studying history is to be able to better understand how all the pieces – the *who*, *what*, *when* and *where*, fit together in a meaningful way. However, the most difficult piece to fit into the puzzle is often *why* question.

Historians are forever debating the *why* question. *Why did this happen?* Was it the times and circumstances that caused it? Or was the person or persons involved? For example, why did the National Socialist German Workers Party take control of Germany in the early 1920s? Was it because of the challenging times and circumstances in Germany after World War I? Or was it because of the leader of the party, Adolf Hitler? Or why did the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century spread like a wildfire through Western Europe? Was it because of the scandalous times and circumstances within the Catholic Church? Or was it because of an Augustine monk named Martin Luther? While historians may be able to definitively answer the *who*, *what*, *when* and *where* questions, the *why* question is more open ended and allows for differing perspectives.

A Christian historical perspective involves an additional, far greater, dimension – the hand of the Lord. The *who*, *what*, *when* and *where* questions cannot fully be realized without seeing *how* the Lord works in the lives of His people, and *why* – for what purpose. The *how* and the *why* questions involving the hand of the Lord bring new wonder and amazement to the study of history. The history behind Time of Grace Ministry is a story of wonder and amazement of *how* and *why* the Lord works.

Time of Grace Ministry<sup>1</sup> was started by eight Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) laymen and a WELS pastor. The *who*, *what*, *when* and *where* questions are about them. To a certain extent, the *why* question is also about them. But the real wonder and amazement of the story is *how* the Lord has brought these individuals together and used them as part of this global ministry “to share the gospel message of Jesus with as many people as is humanly and technologically possible so all can know him, find hope in their lives, learn of God’s grace, and live eternally.”<sup>2</sup>

### Background

The story of Time of Grace really begins on the campus of Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC), Milwaukee, WI. It was on that campus, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, that seven of the nine founders of Time of Grace were brought together: Dr. John Bauer, Mr. Cliff Buelow, Mr. Bruce Eberle, Rev. Mark Jeske, Mr. Daryl Raabe, Mr. Arvid Schwartz and Mr. John Zimdars.<sup>3</sup> From time to time during these two decades, the lives of these six laymen and one pastor were connected in their service to the Lord at WLC. But the connection between these men is far greater than occasional meetings at WLC.

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<sup>1</sup> Time of Grace Ministry is a Parachurch organization, which is a Christian, non-profit organization which tends to operate apart from the primary mission of and without direct sponsorship or funding from any particular church or church body.

<sup>2</sup> Time of Grace Ministry Plan and Profile, p. 2

<sup>3</sup> John Bauer – former chief academic officer of WLC

Cliff Buelow – former member (Executive Committee) of the Board of Regents of WLC

Bruce Eberle – former member (Executive Committee) of the Board of Regents of WLC

Mark Jeske – former member of the Board of Regents of WLC

Daryl Raabe – former member (Executive Committee) of the Board of Regents of WLC

Arvid Schwartz – former member and president (Executive Committee) of the Board of Regents of WLC

John Zimdars – former member and president (Executive Committee) of the Board of Regents of WLC

In 1975, WLC called Dr. Gary Greenfield to serve as the college's first full-time President.<sup>4</sup> Greenfield is remembered as a forward-thinker and a man whose leadership and vision found ways to serve the Lord in not always traditional ways.<sup>5</sup> As President, he attracted individuals with those same qualities to serve at the college. Among them were Bauer, Buelow, Eberle, Jeske, Raabe, Schwartz and Zimdars. However, it was neither Greenfield's forward-thinking nor his leadership and vision that influenced these men most.

Greenfield's primary aspirations were to serve the Lord and to reach out with the gospel. These were topics he spoke of frequently and aspirations that motivated everything he did. Schwartz remembers Greenfield as one "who taught me how to do the Lord's work."<sup>6</sup> Greenfield quickly became a mentor to these men. He inspired and challenged them not only to find new ways to serve the Lord, but also to see the joy in doing so.<sup>7</sup>

Early in the 1920s, another forward thinker who found a new way to serve the Lord was Dr. Walter Maier. This Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LC-MS) pastor became interested in the cutting edge technology of radio broadcasting. It did not take long for him to recognize the potential power of this new medium. In December of 1924, Dr. Maier took to the airwaves as a pioneer in the radio ministry.<sup>8</sup> For more than two decades, his weekly radio address was broadcast across the nation, and made Maier and "The Lutheran Hour" household names.<sup>9</sup>

Eberle, who grew up in the LC-MS, remembered his father regularly listening to Dr. Maier's radio ministry program. As an adult, Eberle often wrestled with the question of why the Lutheran church, with its clear understanding of Law and Gospel, did not have more passion in

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.wlc.edu/about/index.aspx?id=1156>

<sup>5</sup> Jeske, Schwartz

<sup>6</sup> Schwartz

<sup>7</sup> Eberle, Schwartz, Buelow, Braun, Jeske

<sup>8</sup> Gram

<sup>9</sup> Eberle

sharing the gospel with others. In 1999, Eberle's childhood memory and his Christian world view converged to form an innovative dream.

During a trip to Milwaukee in 1999, Eberle and his wife attended a Sunday service at St. Marcus Lutheran Church. He remembered leaving church that morning struck by the similarity of gifts that both Maier and Jeske had been blessed with – the ability to clearly and articulately communicate the saving message of Jesus Christ. It was on that Sunday morning that Eberle dreamed of having Pastor Jeske on television, proclaiming the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup> By God's grace that dream became reality.

### Sharing the Vision

Upon returning home to Virginia, Eberle's desire led him to begin exploring the feasibility of broadcasting the true, biblical teachings of the Lutheran church on television. The desire was there. But many questions remained unanswered, and many more needed to be asked. Who better to ask than Tom Baxter? He and Eberle had been friends for over twenty-five years and Baxter had an extensive background in television production.<sup>11</sup>

The two met for dinner one night and Eberle explained his desire to start a television ministry. As Eberle talked about the success of the radio ministry program of Dr. Maier, Baxter's mind began to explore the technical aspects of producing a television ministry program. When Eberle said he was envisioning something similar to the Billy Graham crusades, Baxter was well aware that the production of a truly national television ministry program would be a multi-million dollar project. However, financing the program was not the issue that night. The question

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<sup>10</sup> Eberle

<sup>11</sup> Baxter has over thirty years of experience in the television production industry. From 1993-2006, he served as Chief of Army Television, producing television specials and live entertainment events for the Armed Forces Network.

was, “Is it possible to do this?” The answer was “yes, with the help of God.” That was all that mattered. And so, with nothing to start with except faith in God’s promises and a desire to reach more souls with the gospel message of Jesus, both men left that night willing to further explore the possibilities and eager to see just how far this would all go.

There was never any question that starting a national media ministry would require three critical elements: The blessing of the Lord, a group of active and determined lay leaders, and a willing and gifted pastor. With the certainty that any success depended entirely on the Lord’s blessing, and with the conviction that Christians need to be willing to step out and do things they had never done before, the desire of one became the passion of others.

Once again back in Milwaukee, Eberle shared his desire with several laymen on the WLC Board. He called the desire “Time of Grace.” He believed the name captured the spirit of what he wanted to do – make the most of the time of grace God had allowed him here on this earth by telling others about Christ. He pushed the suggestion with the hope of finding others who would be willing to consider the possibilities. Others were interested, but at that time, few were eager to take on the huge task of starting a national television ministry program.

With many questions and few answers, Eberle’s desire and the future of Time of Grace began to lose momentum. However, several significant events between September of 1999 and September of 2000 sparked new passion and a greater conviction to make the dream a reality.

In September of 1999, Schwartz, the chairman of the Board of Regents of WLC at the time, and others<sup>12</sup>, planned a surprise anniversary celebration for Dr. Greenfield. The event, recognizing Greenfield’s twenty-fifth year in the teaching ministry, included a celebratory chapel service. The invited speaker that afternoon was Pastor Mark Jeske. Although Time of Grace did

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<sup>12</sup> Including Bauer and Vicki Hartig, who both, at the time, worked at WLC. Hartig now currently serves as Vice President of Operations for Time of Grace.



not yet exist, a few men in the audience who had the desire to bring it about left that evening with renewed passion. They were convinced that they had found the messenger they wanted to ask to be the spokesman for Time of Grace.

Eight months later, in May of 2000, Eberle scheduled an appointment to meet with Jeske. His reason was to share the dream with Jeske of getting the Lutheran message out through a national television ministry program, and also to ask Jeske if he'd consider being the spokesman. Jeske was honored and flabbergasted by the invitation.<sup>13</sup> And even though he was somewhat doubtful the dream would ever go anywhere, he humored Eberle and said "yes."<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the first half of 2000, Eberle continued to find other laymen to be part of the Time of Grace exploratory committee. These included Raabe and Schwartz, who, along with Eberle, were all finishing terms of service on the Board of Regents of WLC. As if to keep them busy, the Lord found another way for them to serve.<sup>15</sup>

The first question the committee wrestled with was, "Should we do this – should we try to start our own television ministry?" Since their goal was essentially the same goal that Dr. Maier had had back in the 1920s, they decided to study how the "The Lutheran Hour" began. It did not take them very long to find two striking parallels between the times in which Maier lived and the times in which they were living. Maier had perceived a deep spiritual need in America that was failing to be met. Through the medium of the radio he hoped that he would be able to communicate the saving message of Jesus to a mass audience. The Time of Grace exploratory committee also perceived a deep spiritual need in this nation, stemming from the fact that mainstream Christianity was no longer faithful to Scripture. As they considered both Christ's

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<sup>13</sup> Eberle, Jeske

<sup>14</sup> Jeske

<sup>15</sup> Raabe

command to “go and make disciples” – to simply share the Word of God with others and let the Word work – and the potential of getting God’s Word out in such a broad and encompassing way through television and the internet, they decided to make the effort. The first step was incorporating Time of Grace Ministry in Eberle’s home state of Virginia in July of 2000.

In August, Bauer, then serving as the Vice President of Academic Affairs at WLC, received a packet in the mail from Eberle, inviting him to be part of the Time of Grace exploratory committee. On that same day, the college received an extremely generous donation. The CEO of a post-production editing company called “The Finishing Group,” which was no longer operating, wanted to give the company’s audio and video production and editing equipment to the college as a gift. The gift was valued at about \$2 million. Bauer and President Greenfield both realized there was no way the college could initially make use of the equipment and so they agreed to make available to Time of Grace whatever equipment was needed if and when a television ministry was launched.<sup>16</sup>

Amazed at how the Lord works, the committee believed they now should and could move forward with their plan. And so, in September of 2000, Bauer, Baxter, Buelow, Eberle, Jeske, Raabe, Schwartz, and Zimdars undertook a search for answers on how to proceed and subsequently how to function from day to day as a national media ministry.

Their search included a trip to two well-established national media ministries: Dr. Charles Stanley’s “In Touch Ministries” in Atlanta, GA and the late Dr. D. James Kennedy’s “Coral Ridge Ministries” in Fort Lauderdale, FL. The staffs at both organizations were open and inviting to the committee’s desire to start a new media outreach ministry. They shared with them some of the challenges and issues they had encountered in their infant stages and what they had

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<sup>16</sup> Bauer

learned from them. That information answered many of the committee's fundamental questions in the areas of technology, staffing, advertising, follow-up, media buying, and funding.<sup>17</sup>

The committee also confirmed many of their assumptions about the medium of television. When done well, television programming is the most non-threatening medium of mass media. In addition to meeting certain industry standards, the committee was dedicated to producing the highest quality programming possible. Their strong desire to talk about their Lord with as many people as possible meant that the use of the medium of television had to enhance their ability to reach into the comfort zone of individuals who were otherwise uncomfortable at church. The committee was well aware that Time of Grace would not be a "be all and end all" in the religious life of an individual.<sup>18</sup> But the medium of television allowed them to bring the Word of God to individuals in a non-threatening way. And that was their purpose from the beginning.

In addition, the committee confirmed what they and millions of television viewers around the globe subconsciously demonstrate. Television, and especially religious programming, is personality driven. In order to keep the line of communication open – keep the viewer tuned in – the viewer has to become familiar with and be able to trust the individual speaking to them. That was not an earth-shattering discovery. But fundamental strategic planning required a realistic understanding of the effectiveness of the medium.

The final stop of the trip was to the Blue Moon Fish Company in Fort Lauderdale. Over dinner, the men enjoyed each others' company and shared their enthusiasm for starting Time of Grace. As they each pondered the sense of calling they felt to share the gospel with as many people as possible, there were thoughts of fear and humility, and of confidence and urgency.

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<sup>17</sup> Bauer, Baxter, Eberle, Jeske, Schwartz

<sup>18</sup> Bauer, Boettcher, Jeske

They call it the night that Time of Grace was born; the night that Time of Grace got off the ground. For these men and for millions of others, their lives were changed that night. It was the night their uncertainty started to diminish.<sup>19</sup> And although they were still not entirely clear as to exactly how to proceed, they were all committed to putting forth their best effort with the understanding that only with the Lord's blessing would Time of Grace succeed.

Before this trip, the main question the committee wrestled with was "Should we do this?" Convinced that the time was right to start a television ministry, the question now became, "Can we – how do we do this?" They had a pastor they wanted to serve as spokesman and the production and editing equipment available from WLC. But they had no plan. And none of the men on the committee except Baxter had any experience in launching or producing a television program. They had no location to tape in or studio to edit in, no staff to produce, tape or edit the program, and no office, not even a mailing address. They had much to do and no idea that they would be signing their first broadcast contract just seven short months later in April of 2001. Buelow remarked, "It was a scramble to do this."

After asking themselves, "Do we know what we don't know?" the committee decided to bring on board another individual to help answer the question "How do we do this?" That man was Steve Boettcher. Boettcher, like the others, was an involved layman in the WELS. And he also shared their passion to make the most of his time of grace. In the business world, Boettcher was a motivated and successful entrepreneur, serving as president of a five-time Emmy winning production company. His commitment and abilities were a tremendous help in making Time of Grace a reality.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jeske

<sup>20</sup> Schwartz

When the focus of the committee changed to “How do we do this?” many practical questions needed to be addressed in order to make their initial plan succeed. Their plan was to tape Pastor Jeske’s weekly sermon delivered at St. Marcus and then broadcast it in Milwaukee. Although the goal was to have Time of Grace accessible to 90% of the televisions in America within five years, and ultimately to become a global media ministry, the committee recognized that if Time of Grace had an impact just in Milwaukee or in Wisconsin, it would be considered a success.<sup>21</sup>

The most challenging practical questions involved determining what modifications were necessary to convert St. Marcus’ nearly 125 year-old church building into a workable television production set. After inspecting the building, Baxter determined that it had virtually everything counterproductive for producing a television program. After all, the founders of St. Marcus built their church for worship, not for television production. Extensive electrical, lighting and audio upgrades were necessary. Robotic cameras needed to be installed. A control room and editing studio also needed to be built in the only space available – a small room up in the church’s south bell tower.<sup>22</sup>

Other practical questions involved the members of the St. Marcus congregation directly. By hosting Time of Grace, the atmosphere of worship on Sunday morning would naturally change. In the beginning, robotic cameras were mounted in the sanctuary and a single manned camera taped from the floor. In order to help the television viewer identify with Jeske’s “live audience,” portions of the final edited program included images of individuals in the congregation. For the “live audience” worshipping on Sunday morning, this brought a new and unfamiliar awareness of where and especially, on whom, the cameras were focused.

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<sup>21</sup> Baxter

<sup>22</sup> Baxter, Jeske

In November of 2000, Raabe, who was a member at St. Marcus, presented the Time of Grace proposal to his congregation. Although the members knew that hosting Time of Grace would change them in some ways, this inner-city congregation had a history of being willing to find new ways to reach out to others.<sup>23</sup> And so, in December of 2000, the members of St. Marcus congregation resolved to accept Time of Grace's proposal and serve as the home church for this television ministry program.

### Launching the Program

In March of 2001, the time had come for Time of Grace Ministry to form a Board of Directors. The exploratory committee of nine: Bauer, Baxter, Boettcher, Buelow, Eberle, Jeske, Raabe, Schwartz and Zimdars, became the Board. Raabe was elected chairman and being a Milwaukee resident, became the real "hands-on" organizer of Time of Grace. Each man brought various skills and ideas to the organization. Together, they all expressed their same conviction that launching Time of Grace was their most effective way to nourish believers and reach out to unbelievers with God's message of salvation. All of them shared in the challenge and honor and excitement of being a part of Time of Grace.

As the organization itself took shape, financing it, in a large way, became the personal endeavor of several members of the Board. Having done their homework, the Board was able to project how much funding was necessary to launch Time of Grace and support the ministry for one year. The projected expenditures totaled more than \$750,000. Out of love for their Lord Jesus and through the means God had blessed them with, several members of the Board contributed approximately \$400,000. In addition to those individual contributions, several

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<sup>23</sup> Baxter, Jeske, Raabe

significant grants from foundations known for supporting Lutheran causes made available an addition \$400,000 in order to launch Time of Grace.

The blessings brought about by these generous contributions included several milestones for this young ministry: hiring the first employee, renting and providing for its first office, modifying St. Marcus church, signing the first television contract, taping the first program, and broadcasting on network television for the very first time. All of these, by God's grace, happened in the span of just seven months.

In April of 2001, Time of Grace hired its first employee, a producer by the name of Chad Johnstone. Raabe considered Johnstone a God-send and Johnstone's willingness to come and perform in a position without a very secure future as the "greatest leap of faith" in the history of Time of Grace. He was actively involved in everything from helping pick-up donated office furniture, buying supplies, setting up an office<sup>24</sup> as well as a production studio, making arrangements for St. Marcus church to be modified, checking and re-checking the cameras, lights, recording decks and microphones...and all this in addition to editing and producing the final program for broadcast. In those early days, Johnstone carried Time of Grace.<sup>25</sup>

Before a single program was ever recorded, Time of Grace signed its first contract<sup>26</sup> in July of 2001 with WITI – FOX 6 in Milwaukee. With the first broadcast set for November of that year, it was necessary to begin taping and editing as soon as possible. The Board had always believed in producing the highest quality programs possible at any given time. Although the early programs pale in comparison to the quality of current programs, at the time they were the best they could do.

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<sup>24</sup> 1760 N Martin Luther King Dr., Milwaukee, WI

<sup>25</sup> Raabe

<sup>26</sup> For approximately \$3000 per week, including commercials and ads

The anticipated viewers of Time of Grace were individuals who identified themselves with a Lutheran church. This assumption was based on the fact that the first broadcast market was Milwaukee, the hometown of the WELS, with more than 100 WELS congregations located in the greater Milwaukee area. However, what was most surprising and certainly encouraging was the high percentage of viewers who did not profess membership at a Lutheran church. The goal of Time of Grace had been to reach the lost. Based on the immediate popularity in the Milwaukee market from Lutherans as well as non-Lutherans, the Board began preparing for the future expansions of Time of Grace.

### Expansion

Milwaukee remained the sole Time of Grace broadcast market for a full two years. Those years allowed Time of Grace to establish a viewer base and expand the organization internally. Up until the summer of 2002, Johnstone remained the only employee of Time of Grace, with Daryl Raabe and his wife Nancy volunteering countless hours to support this ministry. Given the current needs of the organization and the anticipated expansion into new markets, the Board decided it was time to recruit a real hands-on individual to serve as president of Time of Grace. Jim Johnson was their man. In August of that year Johnson became president, doubling the number of Time of Grace employees.

In 2002, the members of St. Marcus congregation decided to undergo a building project. The plan was to demolish its old school building, which had stood next to the church and housed the church offices, and construct a new school building and a fellowship area to connect the school and the church. At that time, the control room for Time of Grace was still in a small room in the church's south bell tower and its editing studio was offsite in a small rented office. Seeing



the St. Marcus expansion project as an opportunity to expand its own operations, Time of Grace contributed to St. Marcus congregation \$150,000 toward the cost of excavating a basement underneath the new building. This allowed Time of Grace to set up fully operational production, editing and voice recording studios onsite. Construction concluded and the building was dedicated in September of 2003.<sup>27</sup>

In November of that year, Time of Grace launched into its second broadcast market. Although the decision to determine which market to broadcast in next was a difficult one, the expansion into the Twin Cities market proved to be a wise decision. The state of Minnesota is dominated by a single television market, the Twin Cities. So by launching in the Twin Cities, Time of Grace began broadcasting in most of the state. That was a tremendous blessing considering the goal of Time of Grace to reach as many people as possible. It was also a blessing considering the guideline the Board had set up for expansion into new markets. The guideline was that a new market would become self-sustaining within two years. Given the large number of Lutherans in Minnesota, this new market became self-sustaining rather quickly.

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<sup>27</sup> Before construction began, St. Marcus congregation bought an adjacent funeral home on the corner of N. 1<sup>st</sup> St. and North Ave. The funeral home was renamed “the St. Marcus House,” and became the church annex, in addition to the church and school’s offices. After the new school and fellowship area, which included new church offices, was constructed, the congregation was looking for a tenant for the St. Marcus House. Time of Grace, looking for a larger office and eager to have all operations located at the same site, rented the lower level of House.

Time of Grace continued to steadily expand into new markets between 2004 and 2007.

The chart below gives the dates and markets Time of Grace expanded into during this timeframe.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Market</b>
April 2004	Green Bay, WI
April 2004	Orlando, FL
May 2004	La Crosse, WI
October 2004	Madison, WI
January 2005	Wichita, KS
January 2005	Wausau, WI
April 2006	South Bend, IN
April 2006	Armed Forces Network rotation
January 2007	Chicago, IL
January 2007	Flint, MI
April 2007	St. Louis, MO
October 2007	Washington D.C.
October 2007	Daystar Television Network <sup>28</sup>

Two market expansions of note are the expansions onto the Armed Forces Network (AFN) and the Daystar Television Network. Both expansions have made Time of Grace a global television media ministry. In 2006 and 2007, Time of Grace has been included in the AFN's second quarter broadcast rotation for religious programming and is expected to be included once again in 2008. Through the AFN, Time of Grace is broadcast to every U.S. military base and naval ship in the world.

Prior to the launch of Time of Grace on Daystar, 200,000 to 250,000 viewers watched the program each week. However, the expansion onto the Daystar Television Network, with its

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<sup>28</sup> Available in 60 million homes in the United States, and virtually the entire world via: multiple Satellites, TV Stations, and Cable Systems ([www.Daystar.com](http://www.Daystar.com)).

affiliations with DirectTV and Dish Network, various cable systems, the internet, as well as owning and/or operating over 40 US broadcast television stations<sup>29</sup>, has increased the number of Time of Grace global viewers to an estimated 500,000+ each week. Weekly phone call into the office requesting Time of Grace materials doubled late in 2007, primarily because of the Daystar presence.

The Time of Grace organization also continued to expand internally between 2004 and 2007. The chart below gives the employment dates, names and titles of the five individuals who joined Time of Grace as full-time employees<sup>30</sup> during that time.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>
May 2005	Vicki Hartig	Vice President of Operations
October 2005	Amy Brinkman	Office Coordinator
February 2007	Curt Hanna	Producer
May 2007	Matthew Braun	Direct of Donor Relations
December 2007	Ron Muetzel	Vice President of Donor Relations

### Success

The basis for determining whether or not Time of Grace is a successful ministry has never been a matter of trying to count conversions for Christ. Schwartz comments, “It isn’t important how many people be made into Christians [through the ministry of Time of Grace] because the bottom line is we can’t make anybody into a Christian. All we can do is tell the message of salvation...it’s that simple.” There is no other purpose for which Time of Grace exists. Time of Grace is not about being a church or taking the place of church for anyone. It is not about making the WELS or any other Lutheran synod larger. Nor is it about functioning as a church referral agency. From the very beginning, the purpose of Time of Grace Ministry has

<sup>29</sup> [www.Daystar.com](http://www.Daystar.com)

<sup>30</sup> Jeske continues to serve as Senior Pastor at St. Marcus Lutheran Church and is not an employee of Time of Grace Ministry.

been to communicate with as many people as possible that Jesus Christ is their Savior from sin.

<sup>31</sup> That is the only basis for determining whether or not Time of Grace is a successful ministry.

Although Time of Grace is still a young organization, viewer response definitely indicates that this ministry is successful. Time of Grace ratings continue to climb on a national level as the program expands into new markets and gains greater recognition. Feedback from viewers about how Time of Grace has brought them closer to their Lord arrives daily in the form of letters, e-mails and phone calls. The total number of individuals who have requested regular mailings from Time of Grace is over 10,000. And viewer financial support for Time of Grace is strong and increasing.

However, viewer response does more than simply indicate success. Viewer response continues the ministry of Time of Grace. Viewers pray for the work and the workers of Time of Grace. Viewers share Time of Grace with friends and family and complete strangers. Viewers encourage the staff of Time of Grace to continue their efforts to share God's saving message of salvation. And that encouragement is more than just lip service. More than 4,000 viewers have contributed to this ministry because it is their ministry, too.

The reason Time of Grace is successful is only because the Lord is blessing this ministry. This unforeseen success is a reality members of the Board still laugh at in amazement and stand in wonder of. They give their heartfelt thanks that the Lord is making Christians and strengthening Christians through this media ministry of God's Word. And as long as it continues to remain a ministry of the Word, they trust that the Lord will continue to bless it.

God works through his Word and arranges times and circumstances in order to use individuals to share his powerful Word with others. The history of Time of Grace certainly

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<sup>31</sup> Bauer, Baxter, Boettcher, Buelow, Eberle, Jeske, Raabe and Schwartz

demonstrates this. God has used each member of the Board and the staff to play an important role in the existence, growth and success of Time of Grace.

There are eight laymen on the Board of Time of Grace. They are not unique in the sense that only *they* could have successfully launched a television ministry. The truth, which these men are well aware of, is that God could have used different individuals to start Time of Grace, but he did not. There is one pastor on the Board of Time of Grace. He is not unique in the sense that only *he* could be the speaker for this television ministry. The truth, which he is well aware of, is that God could have used another pastor to fill this role. But he did not. At the same time, the truth is, these nine men *did* start Time of Grace Ministry and they and the staff continue to direct this ministry with the Lord's blessing.

The lay members of the Board of Time of Grace are similar in several ways. Besides being active members in the WELS, they are all entrepreneurs. All of them, to varying degrees, have experienced considerable personal and financial difficulties in the business world and have overcome those challenges. Those challenges have trained them to be men who are willing to put it all on the line; men who can make decisions and stick with them through thick and thin.<sup>32</sup> That confidence, however, is not based on their own abilities; that confidence is based the promises of the Lord. An important lesson these men learned through their difficulties and challenges in life was to be able to look back and see the blessings of the Lord. That experience strengthened their trust in the Lord to provide and bless in the future. When that mindset is combined with their strong desire to serve their Lord and tell others about their Savior Jesus, God can accomplish amazing results.

Pastor Jeske plays a much more prominent role in both the existence and success of Time of Grace. Even though it was not Jeske's idea, as the spokesman for this television ministry he is

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<sup>32</sup> Schwartz

the personality and brand of Time of Grace. To the average weekly viewer, Time of Grace does not exist without Jeske and the Board would not want it any other way.

A critically important element to any television ministry is the spokesman. That person needs to be an individual who can handle himself on camera and can relate to and communicate effectively with the audience.<sup>33</sup> People have to be able to understand the speaker and trust that what he is telling them is true if they are going to continue watching the program. Although Jeske might have been a diamond in the rough initially, the Board never considered asking another pastor. They believed then, and still do, that choosing Jeske was a critical right decision.<sup>34</sup>

The members of the Board have always marveled at Jeske's God-given ability to effectively communicate the gospel. They all attribute that to the hand of God arranging the times and circumstances which brought Jeske to St. Marcus Lutheran Church in 1980. This inner-city congregation is a broad mix of people from many different cultures and backgrounds. Jeske and the members of the Board believe that Jeske's years at St. Marcus challenged him and trained him to be able to effectively communicate the gospel to people from every walk in life. Jeske commented on how his experience at St. Marcus changed him and taught him to proclaim the gospel message, rather than just talk about it. It taught him how to proclaim the true biblical teachings of the Lutheran church, rather than talk about Lutheranism.<sup>35</sup> Although Jeske had a different life changing experience than the members of the Board, his shared passion to reach the lost gave him excitement and willingness to serve as the spokesman for Time of Grace.

Other keys to the success of Time of Grace revolve around the clear sense of purpose behind the organization. Long before the first program was ever broadcast, the members of the

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<sup>33</sup> Baxter, Boettcher

<sup>34</sup> Baxter

<sup>35</sup> Jeske

Board understood the limitations of this ministry. They knew that watching Time of Grace was not a substitute for an individual being part of a congregation of believers. Boettcher remarks, “That’s a home we all need to have. My hope and prayer is that Time of Grace leads people to seek out a church.” Gathering for worship with other Christians involves many different levels of fellowship and blessing which Time of Grace cannot provide to an individual, such as the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

At the same time, the Board knew how vitally important it was for Christians to take full advantage of the modern mediums available. Through the medium of television, Pastor Jeske is able to join viewers in the comfort of their own home and talk directly to them about Jesus. The television ministry of Time of Grace allows more people, each week, to hear God’s Word than the total number of WELS members who hear God’s Word by attending church on any given Sunday. That does not mean that Time of Grace is more important or more meaningful than any means of preaching of the gospel. Proclaiming the saving message of Jesus makes every preaching of the gospel important and meaningful. Time of Grace is just another way to share God’s Word.

In order to best use the medium of television to share God’s Word with as many people as possible, the Board decided *not* to do several things. Since television is personality based and since the viewers needs to have a certain amount of trust in the spokesman, the Board decided not to have a rotation of pastors functioning as the spokesmen. Since the WELS is unknown to most people in America, the Board decided not to use that label to identify Time of Grace. And since the label “Lutheran” in America is most closely associated with a church body that does not hold to the true, biblical teachings of the Lutheran church, the Board decided against using that label as well. And finally, since many television ministries are associated with other

agendas, either personal or political, the Board decided to never ask for donations over the air. Time of Grace, by design, has only one purpose – “to share the gospel message of Jesus with as many people as is humanly and technologically possible so all can know him, find hope in their lives, learn of God’s grace, and live eternally.”<sup>36</sup>

### Conclusion

The future of Time of Grace is in the Lord’s hands. The members of the Board and the staff are encouraged by the success and impact this ministry has had and are excited and eager to see how the Lord will continue to bless it. Guided by their Savior’s words, their purpose remains clear. Their joy remains great. Their expectations remain high. And their desire to serve remains strong. But to God remains the glory.

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<sup>36</sup> Time of Grace Ministry Plan and Profile, p. 2



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