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## What is **truth**?



### The History and Development of the WELS Evangelism Website

[www.WhatAboutJesus.com](http://www.WhatAboutJesus.com)

The History of WAJ told by the  
men responsible for her development.

By Kelly Huet  
12/08/08

#### Site Highlight

##### Questioning God

Got questions about God, religion, and church? Here is the place for you! [Got Questions? Get Answers!](#)



#### Featured Article: "Promised beforehand"

"Don't take my word for it -check it out!" With the important things in life, that's the approach we take, isn't it? When we buy a home, we don't just take the owner's word that the house is in good shape; instead, we have the home inspected. There's too much at stake, so we check it out!

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*WhatAboutJesus.com exists to enhance the Evangelism efforts of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and to connect the world to Jesus Christ.*

*"My primary joy, is that we were going to be able to reach the unchurched people directly."* Retired Pastor Robert Hartman.

*"One lady, gets to work fifteen minutes early to read the devotion in her email, and then sends it to all the people in her work group. The email often then becomes the talk of the day at break time. That's what it's all about. Helping people share Jesus with those they work with."* Pastor Michael Hintz, WELS Administrator for Evangelism.

*"I want people to meet Jesus first. I want them to fall in love with Jesus first and then I'll introduce them to my church."* Pastor Kenneth Fisher, Project Director for WhatAboutJesus.com.

On a daily basis WhatAboutJesus.com reaches out with the Gospel to over 10,000 individuals who sit at their computers either at home or at work. Some 8,000 others have access, via downloading podcasts, to hearing the Gospel proclaimed in five minute devotions. In addition to those 18,000 individuals an average of some 37,000 plus people visit WhatAboutJesus.com on a monthly basis, to ask questions, get answers, and to learn the simple truths of Scripture in a non-threatening environment. WhatAboutJesus.com was created to introduce people to their Savior, Jesus, and that is exactly what it does, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in the U.S. and around the world.

#### **A Brief Summary of The History of WhatAboutJesus.com**

The history of WhatAboutJesus.com is not all that long of a story. At the writing of this paper it is only barely eight years old, but in those short eight years, many have heard the Gospel for the first time. This paper is to serve as a summary of the content covered in the video interviews that took place in November of 2008.

In 1999, the WELS COMMISSION on Evangelism began exploring using the internet to reach out to people who did not know Jesus. It would be the first time that the commission at a synod level would be doing outreach itself. In the past the Commission on Evangelism equipped, trained and aided individual congregations in doing outreach in their own communities. The idea was not to take

evangelism out of the hands of the congregations, but rather to create a website that would enable individuals within the congregations to reach out to their unchurched friends and neighbors.

The idea began when then Administrator for the Commission on Evangelism, Pastor Robert Hartman, tried to find a website that told people who Jesus was. In his searches, he found a plethora of websites that talked about different denominations and faiths, but no website that talked specifically about Jesus. In an age when more and more individuals are becoming biblically illiterate, Pastor Hartman saw a need to create a website that introduced people to Jesus first and then would lead them to find a church which taught biblically sound doctrine.

Pastor Hartman had a problem though, as he would be the first to admit, he was to say the least not computer savvy, much less internet savvy, this is where the Lord opened the door for a young pastor just returned from the world mission field to offer his experience and expertise. Pastor Kenneth Fisher had recently returned from serving in Russian and was doing some web work for WELS World Missions, when he was asked to aid the WELS Commission on Evangelism on their new website. Pastor Fisher started as an advisor and, as often happens in ministry, before he knew it he became the project director.

The history from this point forward is best to be heard in the interviews on the tape that accompanies this paper. In general the website grew over the course of its eight years from an obscure little website in 2001, to one of the most visited websites on wels.net in 2008. One portion of the history not told on the video interviews, is the active role Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has played in the website's development and daily maintenance. Since 2001, four separate seminary students have been employed part-time by the Commission on Evangelism to maintain the daily operations of the site under the oversight of Pastor Kenneth Fisher, and the Administrator for the Commission on Evangelism.

**Interview with Pastor retired Robert Hartman, former Administrator for the Commission on Evangelism (18 min)**

Pastor Hartman as stated above was the one who initially came up with the idea of a website to reach out to the unchurched in a non-threatening way. His actual involvement in the design, concept and oversight of the website was limited as he delegated most of the work to Pastor Kenneth Fisher. His interview offers not so much the technical numbers, schematics, of the development of the site but the history of where WELS was at as a synod and the philosophy behind developing a site to reach out to the unchurched. Pastor Hartman does recount sitting one day searching for a website that talked about Jesus and how all he found was denominational websites that gave you what their faith was. He did have one unfortunate encounter during this process when he typed in [www.jesus.com](http://www.jesus.com) or [www.jesuschrist.com](http://www.jesuschrist.com),<sup>1</sup> he does not remember which, the link he clicked turned out to be porn site. As shocking and sad as this is, the event made clear to Pastor Hartman that a true website about Jesus was needed, and the name of the website would be very important.

**Interview with Pastor Michael Hintz, WELS Administrator for the Commission on Evangelism (11 min)**

Up to this point Pastor Hintz has not been mentioned in this paper, it is not because he does not play a role but his role is drastically different than that of Pastor Hartman and Pastor Fisher. When Pastor Hintz became the Administrator for the Commission on Evangelism, WhatAboutJesus.com was already up and running in its first format. Pastor Hintz's role in the website is that of long range planning and oversight with Pastor Fisher. One aspect of the website that Pastor Hintz talks about extensively is his role in adding to the website WELS Daily Devotions. Daily Devotions are perhaps the most public aspect of WhatAboutJesus.com as they are emailed out to over 10,800 people daily, as of November 2008. Two other areas of the website that Pastor Hintz talks about in his interview are his involvement with the long range planning of the website and the grant writing that takes place to financially support the continuing development and up keep of the site, as well as publicity for the site.

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<sup>1</sup> Thankfully since the time of Pastor Hartman's original search the site has changed hands to some non-denominational quasi-Christian group.

In the interview with Pastor Hintz the objectives for WhatAboutJesus.com came across most clearly; namely, “getting the Word to the world through electronic means” and “helping members of our congregations with their friendship witnessing.” Pastor Hintz’s role in the website is that of overseer, and he does his job well, his guidance and direction for the site help keep the focus of the daily work on the objectives just stated.

**Interview with Pastor Kenneth Fisher, Project Director (31 min)**

For the full history of WhatAboutJesus.com from its inception one must watch this interview. Pastor Fisher recounts the early days of the planning process, the interviews, the field research, the struggles and joys of building a website that introduces people to Jesus. When I began doing research for the history of WhatAboutJesus.com everyone said, “Call Ken he can tell you more than I can.” This is why his interview was conducted last.

In the interview with Pastor Fisher three salient areas of the development of the website are highlighted. First he highlights briefly his account of how he became involved with WhatAboutJesus.com. Second and perhaps the most interesting part of his interview is hearing him recount his research trip to Las Vegas to field test the idea of a witnessing website. It was as part of this trip that the whole philosophy for WhatAboutJesus.com completely changed, for the better. Up until this point WhatAboutJesus.com was going to have little reference to WELS, at the Las Vegas interviews it was made clear that credible denominational ties were a must. The final important part of development that Pastor Fisher covers is the relationship and atmosphere of WhatAboutJesus.com and the WELS.net web development team. This is an important part of the story as WhatAboutJesus.com was actually developed and hosted by an outside vendor for a number of years prior to moving to WELS.net. To better understand watch the video and listen to Pastor Fisher’s description of the situation.

**Final Summary**

WhatAboutJesus.com is the WELS Evangelism website, designed to tell people about Jesus in a non-threatening and biblically sound environment. At eight years old, WhatAboutJesus.com has already reached hundreds of thousands around the globe with the message of the Gospel, I continue the pray that the Lord bless the efforts and ministry of WhatAboutJesus.com that through this website many may come to know and fall in love with Jesus.