

# The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

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## Frontier Place

*The Rev. Tally H. Jarrett, D.D.*

My knowledge of Nevada was limited to having met its bishop, the Rt. Rev. William Fisher Lewis, when he visited my seminary, Seabury-Western, to meet with a postulant of his. Some years later, I was considering leaving the Air Force Chaplaincy after having served in Korea, and was at the Air Force Academy at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, when Bishop Lewis visited me and offered me the position of City Missioner of Las Vegas.

At that time, Nevada was a Missionary District (which it remained until 1972), and had just been granted the Lenten Mite Box Offering that year for church expansion and youth work. In addition, the Atomic Energy Commission had moved its headquarters to Las Vegas. There was tremendous growth potential. However, my first response was, "Raise my children in Nevada?" Bishop Lewis replied, "Well, I did! Come and see." He gave me two airline tickets, and my wife Lillian and I flew out on Easter Monday in 1958. Las Vegas was then a city of some 45,000 people. There was one stop light. We were captivated by the people and the beauty of the spring desert. We accepted the challenge and signed on.

We had a wonderful time in this new beginning. I acquired several properties that today are large, active churches. We experimented with a youth vestry concept which flourished, and its members went on to become parish leaders. All went well and the Church's mission was on track.

A year along, Bishop Lewis, who had just been elected Bishop of the Diocese of Olympia, called the rector of Christ Church, Las Vegas, to work with him, and the vestry asked me to become their new rector. The city was growing and we felt part of this new frontier, which was expanding. Christ Church had been downtown, but ten years before had moved out near the Strip; the new University of Nevada was built further out. In 1961, we built a larger church, a beautiful Spanish Mission style which seats 700.

Las Vegas was a wonderful place to live and work. People came from all over the world, and we saw new faces every week. We never lacked interesting clergy to come and preach. I remained active in the Air Force Reserve and was assigned to Nellis AFB for my reserve duty. The Ministerial Association was active and an important part of my ministry. Las Vegas was a convention city and clergy were often asked to give invocations. And dignitaries often came through town. At a dinner celebrating the 25th anniversary of NATO, I was privileged to sit with Prince Bernard of The Netherlands as the military representative for churches. The President of the NAACP invited me to join him and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for lunch, just the three of us. I shall never forget that experience. And, in September 1963, two months before he was assassinated, President Kennedy came to give a reclamation address, and I was invited to be

on the dais with him and give the invocation. He looked down on the high school orchestra before him and proclaimed, “This is our greatest natural resource — our children. What are you doing with your lives? You must move on and not live marginal lives! We depend on you for our future.”

Christ Church was a busy place, with families of all sorts — scientists with the Atomic Energy Commission, military families, tourists, and people working on the Strip. In fact, I became a chaplain to the English girls dancing on the Strip. It seems that every theater in England is required to have a chaplain, and when Canon John Hester, the chief chaplain to the English Actors Church Union was coming to Las Vegas to check on the conditions of the young dancers fresh out of ballet school to make sure they were not being asked to do anything other than dance, he wrote to the bishop, who put him in touch with me. After spending a week with us, Canon Hester appointed me Chaplain in the Actors Church Union. I enjoyed the work and performed several marriages for the girls.

Undoubtedly, the visit of Michael Ramsey, the then-Archbishop of Canterbury, is our most enduring memory of those times. On his way to General Convention in 1967, the Archbishop stopped in Las Vegas for two days. We held a huge ecumenical service in the Convention Center on Sunday evening, September 17, and over 10,000 people attended. There was a 50-piece orchestra of Strip musicians and a 100-voice Mormon choir. The procession walked down a red carpet with the Knights of Columbus and the Knights Templar holding crossed swords, and over 100 clergy from Nevada, Arizona, and Southern California, including bishops from the Episcopal, Roman Catholic, and Greek Orthodox Churches, participated. After the service, we held a formal dinner for over 400, with Danny Thomas presiding; he and Archbishop Ramsey traded jokes at the podium after dinner. On Monday morning, we held a Eucharist at Christ Church with over 700 attendees, and after breakfast, the Archbishop offered three meditations on the Transfiguration and the Resurrection for 150 clergy. A concluding luncheon for 150 clergy and family members was given by the Roman Catholic Bishop at the Desert Inn. A biography of the Archbishop states that this trip to Las Vegas was one of his most memorable times. I had always wanted to give the world another picture of Las Vegas rather than just “Sin City.” I feel it had a great impact on the city at that time.

It was hard to leave in 1969, after so many exciting and challenging years, and we shall always be grateful for our time there. But we loved our California years, as well.



Fr. Jarrett retired from St. Peter’s, Del Mar, California, in 1987 after 18 years as rector. The Jarretts moved to Walnut Creek, California, and he served three Interims for Bishop William Swing. He and Lillian returned to the Diocese of San Diego in 1991. They reside in Solana Beach and attend St. James Church in La Jolla. Tally is a retired Chaplain (Col.) of the USAFR. He is on two boards in the diocese and plays a little golf. Lillian is a Chaplain to the Retired Clergy, Spouses and Surviving Spouses for the Diocese of San Diego. They love taking cruises, where Tally plays duplicate bridge.