



Elvis has not left the building, or even entered the building, as far as anyone knows, but he'd love this kind of church service.

# Praise the Lord and welcome to ...

Churches 1999

By REBECCA ANDERSON  
Sentinel correspondent

**T**HE MAN STEPS UP onto the stage. He looks like a surfer version of Elvis Presley. Bouffant hair and tight black jeans — only he is blond. The rock band behind him finishes the last song. The room is darkened, the stage illuminated by dozens of candles glowing on spectacular candelabras. The crowd is huge, resonating with contained excitement. The man clears his throat, the crowd quiets.

Only this Beach Boys Elvis is speaking, and not singing. And the message is different than rock and roll.

It's about God. Faith. The Bible. Welcome to Graceland.

Contrary to a first impression, not Elvis Presley's version of Graceland. Only this is the Dan-Kimball-and-Santa-Cruz-Bible-Church version of Graceland.

Kimball is the founder and pastor of this burgeoning two-year-old ministry at Santa Cruz Bible Church. The blond Elvis-like confesses he is indeed an "early" Elvis fan. Yet he explains that the real

message behind the name Graceland is "God is Grace" and not Elvis Presley's mansion.

**G**RACELAND BEGAN as a 40-member college-age group in the fall of 1996. Kimball remembers it became evident that something different was needed to reflect the cultural changes taking place.

This "postmodern shift" can be defined as a "modern era" transitioning into a "postmodern era."

"We live in a time where we are seeing major transitions occurring in the way we view life and religion," Kimball explains. "You can see changes in the cultural landscape of music, in the arts, in the new philosophers and even at the university level."

"This is the first generation in American history that has been born into a world where Christian truth is no longer the reference point for defining the story of man."

To reflect that shift, Kimball visualized a new and unique church service. He took into account the need to use a different approach in communication, atmosphere, and worship style to attract the members of this younger generation.

"I realized that if the church didn't start changing, we were going to lose the generations that come along after

this transition," Kimball explains. "Today's college age kids are raised where no one is teaching them Biblical principles. We had to do something."

So, Kimball interviewed a dozen people in their younger twenties, asking what church had to do differently to cater to them. Comments ranged from "We don't want a Walmart service" to "We don't want to be preached at" to "We don't want to see performances on a stage."

"So we redesigned that room (at Santa Cruz Bible Church). We put the stage lower. The candles speak spirituality. We try to maintain some of those spiritual symbols," he says.

Instead of preaching, leaders share stories from their lives to demonstrate the message of the week.

"A great thing is the power of story. Jesus taught in parables. People don't want to hear they should share their faith because the Bible says so. They want to hear 'real people' stories," Kimball says.

"From working with kids, I've learned it's necessary to be real. They sniff out phoniness in two seconds."

**T**HE CHANGES HAVE worked. Officially incorporated into the Santa Cruz Bible Church program Sept. 14, 1997, Graceland grew from the 40-member college-age ministry it started as to a church service for an open age range. It now includes married couples, children and those of any age who identify with the

Graceland community and culture. The numbers reflect the success; more than 733 people were at last Sunday's gathering.

Because of those numbers, the church is adding another Graceland service for the first time this Sunday.

By offering services at 6 and 8 p.m. on Sunday evenings, Kimball hopes to better

serve the families in the community.

"We added the children's ministry to Graceland last year. Every week parents say they want to bring their kids, but the program runs too late. We hope the 6 o'clock service will be more convenient for them."

**C**HRISTINE BEITSCH, GRACELAND'S Team Coordinator theorizes about the program's overnight popularity.

"This is a very spiritual city," Beitsch said. "People are seeking 'something' and what they find here works in their life. Then they tell their friends."

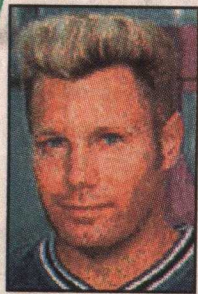
Being a leader in Graceland for two years has benefited her as well, she said. "I came from an unstable background and a wild past. I appreciate the fact that people are accepted as they are here."

Another way to check out Graceland is through the modern medium of the Internet. At Graceland's Web page ([www.santacruzibible.org/graceland](http://www.santacruzibible.org/graceland)), web surfers can view photographs of the weekly gatherings and read about the group's history and upcoming events. There's a collegiate discussion about traditional faith in a postmodern world to read, too.

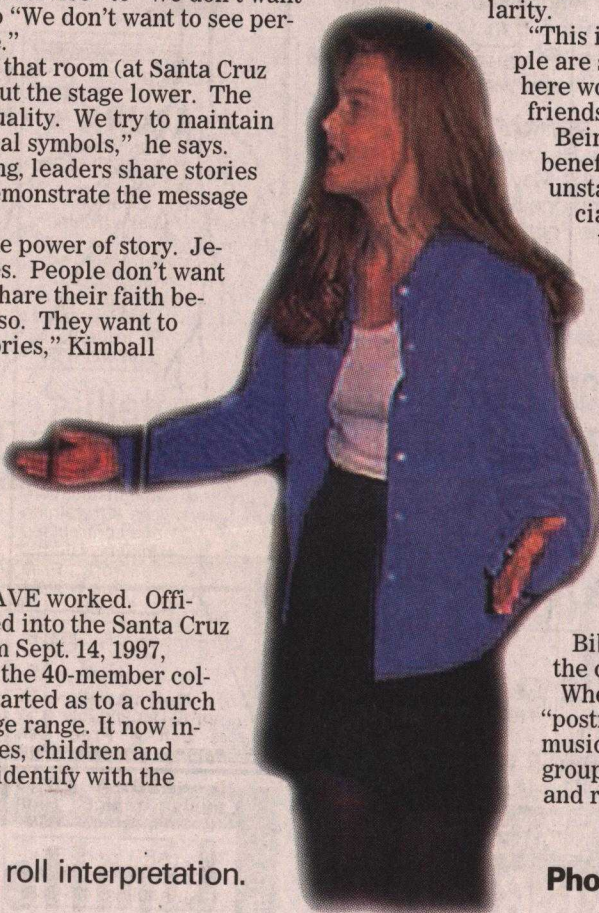
Suitably, the Graceland web page features a quote by the King himself, Elvis Presley: "I am not King. Christ is King."

The ministry of Graceland at Santa Cruz Bible Church has obviously filled a void in the community of Santa Cruz.

Whether it is the modern talk aimed at the "postmodern" generation, the candles and the music, or the authenticity of the leadership group, the focus is still the same: God, Faith and reading the Bible.



Kimball



This singer (right) spreads the word, with a rock 'n' roll interpretation.

Photos from Graceland Website