

Entertainer Danny Gans Remembered for His Faith Offstage

✖ The Las Vegas entertainer best known on stage for his masterful celebrity impressions is remembered offstage for his faith in Christ.

Danny Gans, who died in his sleep Friday at age 52, was honored Sunday at several services held at the charismatic church he attended, The Church at South Las Vegas. In an interview with the local NBC affiliate, pastor Benny Perez said Gans “wasn’t just an entertainer that said ‘I believe in God.’ He actually lived out his faith.”

In addition to supporting several charities, Perez said the entertainer donated several CDs to the church to raise funds for its building project.

“Danny Gans loved God, No. 2: Danny Gans loved his family, and No. 3: Danny Gans loved life,” Perez said. “And if we could just do those three basic things—all of us love God, love families, our friends, our people around us, and love life—I think Las Vegas and the world would be left a little bit better. And that’s the message of Danny Gans.”

Gans spent more than a dozen years performing at several casino hotels in Las Vegas, winning praise for his impersonations ranging from Frank Sinatra to former President Bill Clinton to Clint Eastwood. He had been named Las Vegas Entertainer of the Year for 12 consecutive years.

He was pronounced dead in his home after a family member called authorities and said Gans was struggling to breathe,

the *Los Angeles Times* reported. Police said there were no signs of foul play. A cause of death has not been released.

"When you think of Danny Gans the first thing you think of is entertainer. The second word you think of is 'best,'" CNN talk-show host Larry King told ABC 13 in Las Vegas. Gans was a guest on *Larry King Live* in March.

Gans often played down his talent. In a 1998 interview, he told *Charisma* he wasn't the best singer, dancer or comedian. "I want people to leave my show feeling totally entertained," he said. "There is so much pressure and stress in everyone's lives that hopefully for an hour-and-a-half I can help them forget-and maybe think about the Lord."

Although Gans was best known in Las Vegas, he was mourned by legendary entertainers such as Wayne Newton and even U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada.

"He was a talented performer who used his celebrity to give back to our community and those in need," Reid said in a statement, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. "Las Vegas is a better place because of Danny Gans."

Aspiring to be a professional baseball player, Gans fell into entertainment. Drafted in 1980 by the Kansas City Royals and Chicago White Sox, Gans signed with the Los Angeles Dodgers. But during his first season, he severed his Achilles tendon, ending his baseball career but deepening his faith in Christ.

"Suddenly I was faced with, 'What am I going to do with my life?'-and I had no idea. I think that's where God wanted me-like everyone-just to have faith," Gans said.

Known as the family jokester and master of "clubhouse voices," Gans was encouraged to go into entertainment. He started as part of a revue in Palm Springs, Calif., and built a reputation in the corporate world. A big break came when he

sold out a one-man show in Los Angeles, where he attended The Church on the Way, and was booked at the prestigious Neil Simon Theater on Broadway in New York. But the show closed after six performances.

"Everybody in the business thought I was crazy," he said. "But I did not feel right about it. It was this battle of 'success vs. being with my family.' When I turned it down, something happened in my life, a spiritual maturity. I realized that whether I made it big or not, that was never going to bring me happiness."

On the strength of word-of-mouth reviews, Gans was invited to perform with Bill Cosby in Las Vegas in 1993 and was later invited to headline there. He spent eight years doing his family-friendly show at the Mirage, in a showroom built specifically for him, before moving to Encore, the city's newest luxury hotel, in February.

"One of the most unique human beings and entertainers in the world has been taken from us in an unexpected moment," said casino mogul and Encore owner Steve Wynn in a statement. "We will all try to go on with our lives without our dear friend. At this moment it seems almost impossible."

During Sunday's services at The Church at Las Vegas, Gans' son, Andrew, said he is at peace knowing his father is in heaven. "I am going to live a good life and my family is going to live a good life in memory of him knowing that he would be proud of all of us," Andrew Gans said.

Gans is survived by his wife, Julie, and their children, Amy, Andrew and Emily.