

CharisMatters

A High-Five for High Fiber

The Line Is Drawn

Rounding Up the Lost

The unique subculture of the Western cowboy has been misunderstood and ignored by the church. But charismatic cowboy evangelists are charging out of the corral to boldly share Christ with those riding America's rodeo circuit.

The Mission of Journalists

News Service Briefs

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A Bridge to the Punk Crowd

They're tattooed and pierced, and they keep ear plugs handy during worship. That's how they like it at The Bridge, a punk church in Oregon that is reaching the younger generation with loud music and God's love.

As the sun breaks through gray clouds over Portland, Ore., a small group of people are gathered outside the door of an old warehouse in the city's business district.

"Welcome!" someone calls from the group, greeting a person who has just walked up. The voice is that of a young man dressed in torn jeans and a flak jacket that brims with chains and round, colored pins that bear the names of his favorite bands. He steps away from the crowd to introduce himself, and his

spiked blond mohawk, body piercings and tattoos identify him as a punk.

His outstretched hand and warm smile identify him as friendly.

“My name’s Gecko,” he says. The others join in the greeting, and a bridge is instantly formed between the newcomer and the group of counterculture Christians who have come to the scruffy-looking building to worship God.

The friendly exchange is appropriate, since this is The Bridge—the aptly named church started Sept. 27, 1998, by three middle-aged baby boomers whose specific goal is to pastor and meet the needs of a young and searching “Generation Y” population. Gecko is one of that younger generation. He was born a crack baby and raised in a home where alcohol and drugs took priority over any other needs the family had.

Today, at age 19, he hovers near the door waiting for what he calls his “double-dose” of Jesus. In that regard he’s different from most of his punk peers, who shun the idea of going to churches because they often don’t feel welcomed in them.

“This is the only church where I’m accepted,” Gecko admits.

He turned to Christ in December 1998, and although he has experienced rejection from the mainstream church ranks, he has never let go of his commitment to Jesus.

“I heard about this place from a friend of mine,” he says. “I love to worship, and

I love the people. They don’t care about piercings and tattoos. They care about what’s in your soul.”

Inside the Meow Meow

If they weren’t more concerned about the inner person than the outer appearance, The Bridge staff probably would not have

made it their present ministry. That's because the punk "look"—though there are many exceptions—has historically been an imposing one: radically cropped or bleached hair, tattoos, black leather, T-shirts, chains or studded clothes, and lace-up military-style boots. And the look has been in keeping with the culture's origins.

Historically "punk" is a counterculture that coalesced primarily in a generation of anti-establishment youth from England's working-class in the 1960s. Its appeal has been embraced in one form or another in the United States since about the latter 1960s, and in the 1970s bands like the Sex Pistols gave many Americans their first introduction to punk. Music is a core element, and it's usually played hard, loud and very fast.

Gecko is just one of the many punks, proud of their against-the-grain identity, who frequent The Bridge, a church of about 150 that's pastored by the baby boomer trio of 55-year-old Ken Loyd—a Richard Dreyfuss look-alike with spiked gray hair—his wife Deborah, 49, and their friend Crystal Ward, 38. Their congregation meets in the warehouse, which stands near Portland's Burnside Bridge and is distinct from the other structures around it only in its purpose.

Three days a week, the facility doubles as a punk-rock club called the Meow Meow. It's run by Bridge members who are always ready to answer questions about Christianity or to walk through difficult circumstances with the people who attend.

"We don't proselytize," Deborah emphasizes.

Inside the building's street-level doorway, a diverse array of people climb the dark stairway to the top floor of the warehouse that double-duties as church and nightclub. A basket full of complimentary ear plugs sits next to the coffee at the top of the stairs.

Inside the club it's dark and dingy, but also daring—that is,

filled with people daring to break the “norm” to reach those who don’t fit the norm and daring to worship the Lord with music so loud that some of them opt for the free ear plugs. Lights flash from exposed wooden beams as people mingle and greet one another around the concrete-block room, and Gecko notes that the band is playing in the style of the Christian punk band The Pirates.

“They’re great, but we write a lot of our own stuff too,” he announces, then begins to dance with others gyrating on a small dance floor at the front of the room. As bodies sway, some of the congregation create artistic works on paper attached to the wall. Others worship from rows of folding chairs, arms outstretched.

Here there are no white shirts with ties, no Sunday dresses and no barber-fresh haircuts. The Bridge is not your grandparents’ church.

Called to the young, disenfranchised and broken, pastor Ken Loyd uses plain English and a dose of rock ‘n’ roll to reach his congregation. Sometimes he offers a humorous spoonful of daily news to lighten their load—a tactic, he says, that is very well-received.

“I use things in my magic bag of tricks to hit home points,” he says.

At a break in the music, a woman’s voice rings through the sound system: “Jesus is not going to dump on you. He set you free. Now what are you going to do with that freedom?”

Pastor Deborah Loyd is preaching, but her slam-dunk slice of Christianity lasts only about 7-1/2 minutes. “This is a video-bite generation,” she explains. “That’s about all they can hear at a time.”

Ken, Deborah and Crystal share the “sermon” time at Sunday and Wednesday services. They are the moms and the pop of this

congregation of young people.

“The word is spreading,” says Crystal, who met her husband, Michael, at the church. “We’re into hearts and saving souls.”

Suffering for Their Faith

One of the world’s leading defenders of the suffering church calls Charisma’s readers to identify with our persecuted brothers and sisters.

Sight & Sound