

# Faith-Based Entertainment Venues Provide Safe Hangout Spots for Teens

**Christian nightclubs are popping up in cities across the country, providing unique evangelism opportunities**

Christians are taking back the night as more and more faith-based nightclubs are popping up in cities across the country. Sponsored mostly by churches and Christian youth ministries, these venues ban cigarettes and alcohol, are open to all ages and feature bands with positive lyrics.

“Christians want a place to go to hear music and have fun that’s not church and not a bar, and they’ve wanted that for a long time,” said Russell Hobbs, owner and founder of The Door in Dallas, a club he opened in 1998.

Once lone rangers, Christian club owners such as Hobbs are part of a growing crowd. In October, Club Three Degrees moved into the heart of the downtown Minneapolis club scene after occupying two previous locations under a different name, the New Union. After a \$3 million renovation, Club Three Degrees has the largest capacity of any Minneapolis nightclub.

In addition to its regular club activities and concerts by such groups as ZOEgirl, Kutless, GRITS and Skillet, Club Three Degrees—an outreach of Living Word Christian Center in Brooklyn Park, church services on Sunday and Wednesday evenings that include rock-inspired praise and worship and “relevant, keep-it-real teaching.”

“We’re so accessible now,” Club Three Degrees co-pastor Nancy

Aleksuk said. "Thousands of people walk by on their way to other clubs and come in."

In the six weeks following the club's opening in its new location, 43 people had accepted Christ, including a crack dealer who came off the street for a nightclub-style church service.

The Murray Hill Theater opened in Jacksonville, Fla., in 1995 and has a 500-capacity concert hall, a cybercafe and music shop. The Murray Hill Theater even sparked an economic revival in its declining area of Jacksonville.

"We're hoping the Christian community will use the theater not just as a place to come and have fun and Christian social interaction," Murray Hill Theater President and founder Tony Nasrallah explained. "But our vision is to have Christians invite non-Christian friends to a concert setting, not in a church where it would be threatening, and use it as a place to hang out and build relationships."

Those relationships are being built at clubs across the country, including the Underground in Cincinnati; Club Praize in East Orange, N.J.; The Wreck in Kendallville, Ind.; Rocketown in Nashville, Tenn.; and Club Jubilee in Atlanta.

Creating a safe nightspot for youth is an attractive idea in itself, but making it financially profitable isn't so simple. The Door is one of the few self-sufficient clubs, partly as a result of Hobbs' wealth of experience. He started an entire club scene in a depressed area of Dallas in the 1980s before his conversion. That business savvy has reaped benefits for The Door, which recently opened a second club in Fort Worth.

Club Three Degrees in Minneapolis is mostly self-sufficient, but relies on support from Living Word Christian Center in tight financial times. "I think that's the reason we were the first and have been around since 1989," Aleksuk told Charisma. "I really believe it's because we have the backing, spiritually and financially, of a local church committed to reaching people in their area."

However, leaders at the Underground found church-sponsorship to be a hindrance. After Tri-City Assembly of God started the outreach in their basement, other local ministries complained that they were trying to steal teens.

"We've tried to tell youth pastors and senior pastors that this is not anything about building our own church," said the Underground's Chris Human. "It's about building the kingdom of God."

Still the Underground recently left its church to form a nonprofit organization, teaming with Christian music show The Zone and building a new 13,000 square-foot facility set to open this spring.

Even independent clubs are thankful for the support from individuals and local churches. Nasrallah started the Murray Hill Theater with money from his own pocket. Today the club manages to break even, thanks to the support of individual donations and local churches.

No matter how they're funded, the clubs meet Christians' desire for places where they can be entertained without feeling threatened by the negative aspects of the bar scene, or stifled by the traditional aspects of church, leaders say.

“God is pushing the church out of the Sunday morning box,”  
Hobbs said.

**Kevin D. Hendricks**