

When Your Worship Leader Can Drink You Under the Table

With mainline **religious** congregations dwindling across America, a smattering of churches are trying to attract new members by creating a different sort of Christian community, according to an NPR report this week. They are coming together to sip craft beer.

“Some **church** groups are brewing it themselves, while others are bring[ing] the Holy Mysteries to a taproom. The result is not sloshed congregants; rather, it’s an exploratory approach to do **church** differently,” NPR reports.

As the story goes, 30 to 40 people flood Zio Carlo brewpub in Fort Worth, Texas, to nosh on pizzas, kick back pints of beer and fellowship. This so-called Church-in-a-Pub also has a **worship** service complete with Communion.

Irreverent? Sacrilegious? Even **Christians** who aren’t teetotalers may have a problem with washing down their Holy Communion with beer their pastor brewed in his backyard. But it seems quite popular with the 20-somethings.

“I find the love, I find the support, I find the non-judgmental eyes when I come here,” Leah Stanfield, a 28-year-old who occasionally leads **worship** at the pub, told NPR. “And I find friends that love God, love craft beer.”

Some Lutherans are willing to put down on that. The regional council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America last month officially named Church-in-a-Pub a “synodically authorized worshipping community.” And get this—in true missional style, the **church** plans to anoint a **pastor** to take the beer-and-Bible concept into other pubs in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Meanwhile, in Houston, St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church kicks it up a notch with a weekly Sunday afternoon party with beer, boudin, and red beans and rice from the church's kitchen, NPR also reports. Most of the Creole Catholics at the service hail from Louisiana.

"We dance and we praise God and it does talk about dancing in the Bible! It's just great," parishioner Bennie Allen Brooks told NPR.

These aren't isolated events. I wrote a few weeks ago about a pastor who drinks beer in the name of Jesus at a bar-based Bible study. Earlier this year, the *Wall Street Journal* reported members from Valley Church in Allendale, Mich., gather in a bar under the banner "What Would Jesus Brew?"

"My name is Darin," the Methodist congregation's 37-year-old music director said, grinning, according to the *Journal*. "And I like me a 30-pack of Busch Light!"

Really? A 30-pack of Busch Light? I hope he was kidding, but even still, I find it shocking that a **worship** leader would quip about drinking enough to intoxicate an elephant, or at least a large horse.

Call me conservative, but isn't promoting brewsky on tap for the sake of being nonreligious to attract more people to your church a prime example of being of the world rather than just in the world? (See John 15:19.) Whatever happened to separating the profane from the holy (Ezek. 22:26). Having church or doing evangelism is one thing, but basing your church-growth strategy on beer is quite another. Have evangelism and church-growth strategies really come down to compromising with the spirit of the world? God forbid!

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