

From Jesus to Bieber, NY Pastor Makes Church Trendy

Every Sunday thousands flock to Hillsong Church in New York City, but it's not your typical, traditional church.

It is complete with strobe lights, concert-like worship and an unconventional leader in its pastor, Carl Lentz.

The 35-year-old Lentz looks more like a rock star than a man of the cloth. He chooses to wear leather jackets and jeans instead of a suit and tie.

Lentz's message is also out of the box.

"Our church is awesome; I love it," he told CBN News. "It's extremely imperfect and that's why everybody fits in."

"One time somebody was like, 'I don't come to church 'cause there's a lot of hypocrites,' and I'm like 'We've got room for one more,' " he joked.

Even Bieber Likes Jesus

Hillsong NYC is located in a nightclub and attracts everyday New Yorkers, NBA players, musicians and young celebrities.

"Our church is about trying to get people to experience the power of God as fast as possible," Lentz said. "The only thing that changes people's lives is the power of the Holy Spirit, so young people love it."

Pop icon Justin Bieber, who has recently had several runs-in with the law, visited Hillsong NYC in 2013.

He tweeted about the service saying, "love to my guy @carllentznyc for that amazing sermon at church this morning. Love you man. I broke down today."

It is reported that Bieber plans to be baptized at Lentz's church.

"I love Justin and he's a good kid; he's trying to figure this out," Lentz said.

"People are like, 'Is he even a Christian?' " Lentz said. "I always tell people ... grace and acceptance does not mean approval," he explained. "I can accept you as a human being and not approve of your actions. That's how we've been loved."

We Reach Them All

Lentz co-founded Hillsong NYC in 2012 as an extension of the main Hillsong Church in Sydney.

But the pastor, who has nearly 70,000 Twitter followers and 59,000 on Instagram, is quick to point out that his church is open to people from all walks of life.

"There happens to be people who are famous so we should be reaching them," he said. "There's also people who are not famous and we should be reaching them."

"So when it comes to celebrities I always say celebrities are people last time I checked," Lentz said.

Lentz on Moral Issues

The pastor is not so quick, however, to address moral issues like abortion and homosexuality.

During an appearance on the Katie Couric's show, Lentz was asked if he had a moral imperative to speak publicly about controversial issues.

"No," he answered. "Because we try to be like Jesus."

He said he doesn't want to make blanket statements about morality, preferring instead to have conversations surrounding

hot button social topics.

"Homosexuality is something right now that people are really, really looking at," Lentz said. "I'd rather talk to these people on my own and walk it out like I would anybody else than make a bold statement in the papers..."

"I hate it when I talk to someone who has a pre-conceived notion of what I'm going to say or do and I don't think it's fair so I just decline to answer it in most forums," he explained.

For that and more, Lentz has his critics, which he says helps him be better as a pastor and as a believer.

"I don't have it all together and there are areas of my life where I'm trying to do better as well, trying to handle criticism better," he said. "I'm going to take it onboard and walk with it humbly and say like I never write criticism off. Most people who criticize us simply do not know us."

And with a growing church and his name among the stars, many question whether Lentz is the next 'big thing' in Christianity?

"I know me so I don't think so," he responded.

"I'm a small thing used by a big God," he said. "And we'll let people say what they want to say because if you start living off the praises of people, you'll die from their criticisms as well, so we live right in the middle."