

Rattling Ears and Reaching Hearts

Music, not message, reverberates through the Meow Meow in Portland, Ore., on Thursday through Saturday nights. The punk-rock club is the primary outreach of The Bridge, a church for the city's street kids.

"This is an all ages music venue in the same building as the church, but separate from it," explains Angie Fadel, who runs the club with her husband, Todd. "Many of these people have been so burned by the traditional church, they wouldn't come if they knew we were connected to it."

The Fadels, members of The Bridge, are "trying to make a safe place for young people, especially those under 21, to hang out," they say.

"It's not a stealth evangelism type of thing," Todd Fadel says. "We're making a connection with the punk culture in Portland through arts and music. We found that people respond so much more to us because we're Christians, though. It breaks through their stereotypes."

The Fadels and other Bridge members who help out from time to time are "always ready to answer any God-questions or walk through difficult circumstances" with the people who attend, Todd emphasizes.

"We're a punk club that accepts people where they're at," he adds.

The only exception is that clubgoers must leave their cigarettes, drugs and alcohol at the door.

"But sometimes it gets pretty ugly," Todd says. "They bring their own stuff in."

One rock band that performed used profanity, singing such lyrics as “I wish I were dead,” when about 20 Christians walked in. According to the Fadels, the band members were overwhelmed by the acceptance of their “enemies.”

“This is becoming the best club in Portland,” Todd says. “There’s a legitimacy here. We don’t patronize people by proselytizing. Our first step is to relate.”

Todd believes a lot of mainline churches miss the boat by preaching first and relating later. “People respond to what comes out of our hearts, not out of our mouths,” he says. “Then they come to church, when they’re ready.”

Everyone longs for love, says Angie, mother of a 10-month-old named Zion, and a member of The Bridge—which like the Meow Meow caters to all ages.

“Even my mother attends,” she says.