

Huffington Post Nov 8, 2013 (Article titled: Beer churches bubbling up across America)

For many, church time is a sobering time. But for a growing number of American Christians, it's the best time to crack open a beer. Just ask the so-called "Church-in-a-pub" gathering in Fort Worth, Texas, which worships at the Zio Carlo brew/pub and toasts with craft beer.

These Sunday evening services are meant to offer "salvation and everlasting life with really good beer," according to a recent broadcast by NPR. The creative approach appears to be working: The event attracts about 30-40 congregants weekly, and the group is looking to expand to more locations.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America recently deemed Church-in-a-pub a "Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community".

Religious leaders behind the trend defend this unique brand of worship. Among them is Pastor Matt Bistayi, who organizes Allendale, Mich., church meetings known as "What Would Jesus Brew?" "Drunkenness is a sin, ... but beer or alcohol in moderation can be a gift from God's creation," he tells his congregants, as reported by The Wall Street Journal.

... Ultimately, these gatherings are about much more than just beer. Susan Sparks, senior pastor at New York City's Madison Avenue Baptist Church who also pioneered a monthly "Beer and Bible" gathering to appeal to younger members of her congregation, told The Huffington Post that "we aren't trying to encourage drinking." Rather, she said, "we are trying to encourage honest, intimate gatherings where food and drink (alcohol or not) are enjoyed. It's about finding family. That's all we are trying to do."