

Theology Pubs are one part evangelism—getting your church folks beyond the church building and interacting with their neighbors—and one part faith formation—hosting conversations at the intersection of faith and life.

What is a Theology Pub?

Theology pubs are a popular way of gathering people for conversations about faith in a non-traditional, relaxed setting. They are one part evangelism—getting your church folks beyond the church building and interacting with their neighbors—and one part faith formation—hosting conversations at what I like to call “the intersection of faith and life.” Of course, gatherings with alcohol may not be appropriate for your context. If that’s the case, you can use venues like coffee shops or other local community spaces to gather people together for conversation.

I’ve been leading theology pub nights, which we call [God on Tap](#), at [my church](#) for five years. Here is my best advice on how to start a theology pub gathering of your own.

1. Location, Location, Location

Choosing the right location for your gathering is the most important part of starting a theology pub. Select a local pub that has a great community feel to it. Do some “research” and visit local pubs on the date and time you are thinking of gathering, so you have a great feel for the environment.

Choose a night of the week that works for both you and the pub. The pub owners will be very happy that you are bringing in a group on a slow night of the week. We host our gatherings for 90 minutes, from 7:30-9:00 pm once a month on a Tuesday night. You’ll have to determine the rhythm that works best for you. You may gather in a separate room or in a small corner in a larger space. Either way, just make sure people are able to hear each other. Remember, you will be spending a lot of time with the staff. Be kind, show interest, and leave a great tip.

2. Format

Once you have a place and a time to gather, you’ll need to decide on a format. Some

theology pubs have speakers, which present some ideas and then kick off discussions. Others are more open and free-flowing.

I follow the model described by Bryan Berghoef in his book [Pub Theology: Beer, Conversation, and God](#) (There is also a handy companion book [Pub Theology 101](#) you'll want to check out too.) This format helps to create a free-flowing conversation. It is not about how much you know about the Bible. It is not expert oriented in any way. The role of the host is to facilitate conversation.

You might want to visit other established theology pubs, if there are other groups in your area, to see how they do it. There is an extensive directory at the [Pub Theology website](#).

3. Topics

What should you talk about? You'll have to figure out what topics excite your group through some trial and error, but to get you started, we have five years worth of topics on our [God on Tap blog](#). There are great resources at the Pub Theology [website](#) and Adam Walker Cleaveland has created some handy [discussion guides](#).

When we first started off, we focused on our shared lived experience and then asked faith questions about them, like [Does God Really Care Who Wins the Stanley Cup?](#), [Finding God in our Daily Work](#), and [Take Comfort in Rituals](#). Since then, we are tried many different topics and formats and hosted some guest speakers.

4. A Physical and Digital Outpost

In creating a theology pub, you are establishing a physical outpost for people to gather beyond the church building. In the same way, you'll want to have a digital outpost that complements what you are doing at the pub. We realized that people we were hoping to connect with were not looking through church websites to find alternative venues for talking about faith and life. So, we created a [stand-alone website](#) and [Facebook group](#) dedicated to God on Tap.

5. Attend to the Spirit

For me, hosting God on Tap is like leading [Group Spiritual Direction](#), where I listen for God in what is being shared by the group. I hold the space (the physical environment and the time) for the group to gather and talk. I observe the ebbs and flows of the group dynamics,

bring us back when we get off track, and make sure we start and end on time. I serve as host, facilitator, and spiritual guide. More often than not, I approach these conversations in a posture of prayer.

6. Tell and Retell Stories

Although theology pubs have been around for years, it can still seem like a gimmick to many people. It is important to tell and retell the stories of what happens in these gatherings so people can recognize them as a real ministry and true to the mission of your church.

Remember to measure the success of your theology pub in multiple ways. It's not just about who joins your church because of it. That, in fact, may be the least important measure of success.

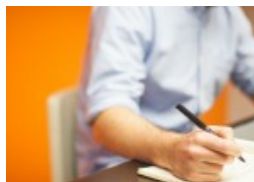
For our church, God on Tap started as part of our evangelism efforts but it became a staple of our adult formation program. By showing up each month, we have developed relationships with community leaders and neighbors, which have led to collaboration on various projects. I even performed a wedding for one of the bartenders! Perhaps most importantly, God on Tap has expanded our understanding of where our ministry happens and where we meet God.

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