



## Theology on Tap



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*Church group starts monthly theology discussions in Kutztown bar*  
By Erin Negley

**(This article appeared in the October 25, 2008, issue of the Reading Eagle. It is used by permission.)**

A visiting theologian was ready to deliver his lecture, so members of the congregation grabbed their beers and found a seat.

Beer in church?

Not quite.

It's theology night in the Kutztown Tavern.

On tap are the brewery's own lager and stout as well as a discussion on religion in politics.

Welcome to *Theology on Tap Berks*, a discussion group focusing on faith, spirituality and contemporary religious issues, all washed down with some beer as a chaser.

If a bar seems an unlikely spot for a religious discussion, perhaps that's the point.

Some people can be intimidated by a church setting, especially if they don't belong to a congregation, said the Rev. Sara Hertzog, pastor of Maiden Creek Union Church in Maiden Creek Township.

"I think theology belongs anywhere," Pr. Hertzog said. "It doesn't need to just be in a church."

Maiden Creek Church, a jointure of United Church of Christ and Lutheran congregations, started the group in September to



discuss contemporary issues and how they affect faith.

"Christianity and your faith don't necessarily involve sitting in a chair reading Bible verses," said Kevin Fisk, 35, a member of the group.

"It's not just a Sunday thing," said his fiancée, Kristen Snyder, 34.

Both live in Fleetwood.

The church's young-adult group lined up some local experts and picked the Kutztown Tavern as the spot to meet for their heady discussions, scheduled every second Tuesday at 7 p.m.

Organizers have already discussed topics like whether Christians can combine conventional and alternative medicine. And recently they tiptoed through the minefield of religion and politics at the neighborhood bar.

The group meets upstairs in a quiet private room, above the long bar and the clinking pint glasses. Their meeting place looks more banquet room than bar with round tables, bright lights and plain decor. A few people ordered a brew at the small upstairs bar. Others sipped sodas during the talk.

Pr. Hertzog, Maiden creek Church's pastor, suggested its young-adult group start the discussion group after she attended a similar meeting in Lancaster. They're trying to present relevant and challenging topics in a relaxed setting.

That was one thing that attracted Dan Leininger, a 61-year-old Exeter Township resident, to follow a friend's invitation.

"I found it a very pleasant setting for discussing important issues," he said.

Leininger went to both sessions looking for a civil discussion where people aren't trying just to win an argument.

At the October session, Dr. Lee Barrett, professor of theology at Lancaster Theological Seminary, discussed the presidential candidates' values and how their faith influences their political and policy proposals.

During Dr. Barrett's presentation, the group was respectfully quiet, allowing the din of the bar below to filter up.

After his talk, people asked a wide range of questions, setting off equally wide-ranging discussions, even touching on normally divisive issues.

As the discussion wound down, another man dropped a bomb.

How can a religious person be pro-choice?

A few people gave their opinions, some quoted Bible verses, and no one lost their temper.

"Religion and politics are both pretty sensitive subjects, but I was impressed that he (Dr. Barrett) did such a good job keeping everything relatively objective and civil," said Josh Ferris, 23, of New Tripoli, Lehigh County.

"I think it's awesome that a church is stepping outside of the box to sponsor an event like this, discussing faith-related topics that actually matter in our society today," he said.

More than 60 people, not all church members, have attended the first two meetings. Their ages ranged from 20s to 70s.

The young-adult group hopes to attract anyone who wants to talk about religion in the friendly atmosphere of the tavern.

Monthly sessions are scheduled through May and will take a break for the summer.

#### **Here's what's "on tap" through January:**

- **November 11**, Dr. Donna Yarri, an assistant professor of theology at Alvernia University, and Dr. Spencer S. Stober, an assistant professor of biology at Alvernia, will discuss God, science and designer genes. Modern genetic science is at the state where we can now control our genetic destinies. What are the implications? Are we playing God?
- On **December 9**, the Rev. Dr. Harry Serio, a retired United Church of Christ minister, will talk about the evidence of life after death. Is the afterlife simply a matter of faith or is there empirical and credible evidence for postmortem survival? A critical look at ghosts, hauntings, reincarnation, near-death experiences and more.
- On **January 13**, Rev. Daniel T. Moser, a United Church of Christ minister in Montgomery County, will talk about keeping Sabbath as a countercultural activity. Keeping the Sabbath is not a suggested spiritual practice we are urged to consider. It is one of the Ten Commandments. So why did God command it? How did we lose it? And what can we do to get it back?