

Love your Neighbor in a Bar

A number of years ago, I was at a workshop being run by Mike Piazza in Grand Rapids, MI. He spoke at that time about “Inside Out” ministry. The essential point is that this sort of ministry is to be done outside of the walls of the church. This notion encourages us to meet people out in the community, as Mike said “church buildings can be a foreign landscape for people.” This Inside Out concept is something I have tried to incorporate into the ministry of which I live and lead. One particular area where encountering people in the community has been successful is the Theology Pub which First UCC – Carlisle hosts. It has been occurring on a weekly basis since 2015. Sunday afternoons is when a group of people gather at a table in a local bar and restaurant,

Variant forms of Theology Pub are seen in a number of places around the country and the world. The Pub Theology webpage lists about 140 locations around the country. This is not the complete extent of these sorts of meeting. The Catholic church has Theology on Tap sessions, and I imagine there are a number of other events occurring which may be parallel or similar to this model of ministry.

I suspect that each group is run differently. Our church approach is to have a minimal leadership presence, so that everyone at the table can feel as empowered as possible. There is a loose framework of a schedule to achieve the basic goals of the group (meet people, socialize, discuss theology topics, share in a meal). The group espouses openness and acceptance to have any person to join the table or to engage anyone in a conversation. People are welcome to participate as much in the conversation as they wish.

Some of this group’s goals are: to connect and build community, engage in healthy discussion behaviors, expressing care and compassion to the people around us and to remain respectful at all time. There are no limitations on what can be talked about at the table or in conversation. Another thing to note about this particular ministry is that it just does not occur solely at the table. People in the group take opportunities to meet new people from the community, whether it is at other tables, at the bar, or even the working staff. It has certainly been fruitful and successful in the connections made thus far. I look forward to seeing what will happen in this ministry which gives us the opportunity to love our neighbor