

Community of Faith

A WEEKLY REPORT OF PEOPLE AND EVENTS AT GWINNETT COUNTY HOUSES OF WORSHIP

NEWS FROM HOUSES OF WORSHIP

Theology on Tap helps fill a need

By BRANDY WILSON
bwilson@ajc.com

The Rev. Jason Talsness is one of those guys who can answer your spiritual questions, and have a beer with you while he does it.

"My congregation says, 'You can find my pastor at the bar on Thursday night.' It's become kind of a joke," Talsness said about Amazing Grace Lutheran Church's recently launched ministry, Theology on Tap.

In Theology on Tap, Talsness, or "Pastor Jason" as he's called, sets up shop once a week at Bambinelli's, a local restaurant and bar, with a Bible, a laptop and other Bible reference books.

Patrons are invited to engage him in conversation and question at their leisure. "Theology on Tap is an opportunity to discuss matters of faith in a nonthreatening environment. Not everyone's comfortable discussing these kinds of things in church," he said. He's also there to help answer those hard spiritual questions. "I love it when people ask questions. It's like trying to solve a mystery."

In the beginning, Talsness would go to the bar dressed in his clerical collar, but these days he opts for regular clothes.

Amazing Grace Lutheran has been doing Theology on Tap for about eight weeks and things have steadily progressed since the first night out. "The first night someone came up and ordered pitchers of beer for us. I don't do pitchers. I monitor that because I have to be coherent," he said.

"It's weird, but it's cool how he does it," said Rocque Miller, a server at Bambinelli's. "A couple of tables that I had were like, 'Oh, that's cool.' I think that some people are skeptical that they'll be judged because they drink. [Pastor Jason and the other members] order a few beers themselves, but when I come by he's never off subject. He's not there just to get drunk."

How well has Talsness' weekly trips to the bar sat with his congregation? "They've been hugely supportive. In this day and age you have to be creative."

You can find Talsness and members of Amazing Grace Lutheran Church at Bambinelli's, 4153 Lawrenceville Highway in Lilburn, 7:30-9 p.m. Thursdays and 3305 Lawrenceville Highway in Lawrenceville on Wednesdays and Sundays. For information, call 770-381-1293.