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Meet the Brewing Pastor of Austin, Texas

Feature

By [Cody Westbrook](#) / May 31, 2017

Beer and religion have a surprisingly intertwined history that dates back centuries. Back in the Middle Ages, [monks began brewing beer](#) as part of their effort to remain self-sufficient and offer hospitality to pilgrims and travelers. Over 1,500 years later, ordained Presbyterian minister Christian Cryder with his Austin brewery, Lazarus Brewing Company, is like the modern-day version of this centuries-old [monastic brewing tradition](#).

"Folks sometimes say to me, 'Wait, you're a pastor?!? I thought Christians have a problem with beer!'" Cryder says. "To which I reply, 'Yeah, if it's bad beer, we have a problem.'"

Cryder's ministry work dates back to 2006 when he completed his Masters of Divinity at Westminster Theological Seminary and went on to help found a church, All Souls, in Missoula, Montana. The church was geared toward the "un-churched, de-churched, and burned-by-the-church," people who Cryder had been inspired by while in seminary.

As All Souls slowly grew over the next few years, the seeds of beginning a brewery were planted. Cryder had a large home garden with a massive pergola that could use some greenery climbing up it. After spotting some hops at a local garden store, he settled on Nugget and Willamette bines, and in a couple of years, they grew to cover the entire structure. Now it was a question of how to put his new crop to use.

"After all, it would be poor stewardship to waste it, right?" Cryder says. "I was just being responsible. At least, that's what I told my wife."



Christian and Marilyn Cryder

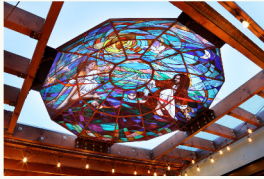
With Cryder being a self-proclaimed geek surrounded by a community fond of brewing its own beer, it was the perfect storm for him to take up homebrewing. All the while, something else was brewing: his thoughts about what job he could do to support himself financially without having to depend on money from the church.

Things started coming together when he partnered with Big Sky Brewing in 2010 to raise money for his other endeavor, a non-profit called Imagine Missoula, with a specially brewed beer called All Souls Ale, an 11% ABV Imperial Saison. Eventually, Big Sky Brewing's co-founder Bjorn Nabozny would be the one to give Cryder the final push towards opening his own brewery. While Cryder was initially skeptical of the idea himself because of his work as a pastor, Nabozny won him over by offering his help and telling him that if it hadn't been for monastic brewing back in the day, there probably wouldn't have been a craft beer revolution in America.

Cryder eventually settled on Austin, Texas as the perfect place for his next move as it offered a larger city for his ministry work coupled with a budding beer scene. He and his family moved there in 2013, and in 2016, Lazarus Brewing Company opened on Austin's East Side, fittingly on Christmas Eve.

Besides Lazarus' name there are nods to religion scattered throughout the branding and brewery itself, ranging from the subtle to the overt. For example, the logo is four L's arranged in a cross. Then, there's the colorful, overhead stained glass feature outdoors that depicts a scene from Luke 7. The religious touches extend to its diverse beer menu, where you'll spot names like 40 Days & 40 Nights American IPA, Pradigal Pils, and Holy Mother of God Religion barleywine among its wide range of offerings.

When he was working on his business plan, Cryder spent a lot of time thinking about how much he should or shouldn't say about his faith. Once again though, Nabozny's guidance led him to realize that leaning into his own authentic story was his ticket to success in an increasingly crowded beer market.



Chris Malone

Lazarus Brewing Company

To be clear, walking into Lazarus doesn't feel like you're stepping into a church. The building itself is painted a bright turquoise and feels inviting and airy with its garage door-style windows that open up to an outdoor patio. Along with the bar (behind which brewing equipment is visible) and high-top seating inside, there's a cozy cafe-esque corner where his wife, Marilyn, roasts coffee and where you'll find a table made from a walnut tree his grandfather cut down back in the '80s. The brewery's tap handles are made from the same wood.

While Cryder thinks some of his staff might have initially wondered about how exactly religion would factor into the brewery, Cryder never planned to use his business to get people into church.

"I don't actually think my job is to convert people. In fact, I don't think I can. I think God has to change people's hearts," Cryder says. "My job is just to try and make the best coffee, beer, and tacos that I possibly can as if I were working for Jesus, which I kind of think I am, and to try to treat every single person that walks through our door with dignity and respect and make them feel welcome."

So while it's not a matter of converting people, the ways in which faith affects how he runs his business are apparent.

"It reminds me of who I'm working for, of what I'm supposed to be about—serving people," Cryder explains. "I actually think it would be much harder to do this job if I didn't have faith because it would be really easy to think it all depended on me—how hard I work, how good I am at it—or to maybe get distracted by success, the bottom line."

As Lazarus continues to expand (last year, it sold about 1,250 barrels all on premise without any distribution), Cryder has maintained his ministry work through All Souls, the faith community he started in Austin after his original Montana church. He says that at their heart, both of his callings require him to provide leadership and are a means to serve the community.

"At the end of the day, I have to trust that the quality of our beer and our food and our coffee and our experience will actually speak for themselves. And people might think, wow, that's kind of an interesting backstory but dang this is good beer! That's what I'm hoping for," Cryder says. "I really just want it to be a great brewery that happens to be run by someone who is a follower of Jesus and also a pastor."

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