

Opinion: Interested in unreached people? Churches should love their nerds

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It's a Friday night at First Baptist Church in Marble Falls, Texas. People gather around tables with boxes, cards and brightly-colored tiny wooden pieces. Yes, these board games are an opportunity for church members to come together and fellowship with one another, and they're also an opportunity for the church to show love to the nerds in their local community.

In 2017, [64 percent](#) of the US population identified as gamers. This summer, the Marvel movie *Avengers: Endgame* became the [highest-grossing film](#) of all time. The global board game market [continues to expand rapidly](#). Overseas sales have pushed Japanese animated media to [new heights](#). If you were waiting, it's happened: Nerds have inherited the Earth.

The church embracing nerds

[First Baptist Church in Marble Falls](#) has “owned the term ‘nerd’ and tried our best to show people that everyone is nerdy about something,” said Bubba Stallcup, the church’s technology director and chief community nerd at [Love Thy Nerd](#).

“Football, basketball, NASCAR, fishing, etc. There is something out there that they are really into, and we think that’s pretty cool,” Stallcup said. “We also started hosting regular game nights for our church, and they were launched alongside a sermon series titled ‘The Games We Play.’ We really

like to celebrate recreation in our church. We believe it to be an important part of positive spiritual health.”

Across the nation and across Texas, the church is turning towards this demographic. Nerds, however, continue to feel largely unwanted by the church, largely because many members were—and still are—quick to denounce anything they don’t understand, as many Christians did with relation to [Dungeons and Dragons](#).



From the LTN July 18, 2019 Twitter feed: “As seen at San Diego Comic-Con, one of the largest nerd conventions in the world. On behalf of all of us here at Love Thy Nerd, we’re sorry this is a thing and we’re doing everything we can to love and serve our nerdy neighbors everywhere. Jesus loves you, nerds!” (Used by permission.)

“The basic act of acceptance is critical,” says Casey Flynt, worship pastor at [South Georgia Baptist Church](#) in Amarillo.

“Churches—especially SBC churches—can get the reputation for being ‘judgy;’ so, acceptance of gamers and nerds is key,” Flynt added. “From that, showing interest in what they do—even if the person showing interest doesn’t care a bit—goes a long way toward reaching people. But perhaps the most important thing that we can do is show love to nerds. Don’t just accept them but show them actively that we care. This is crucial.”

Learning to appreciate nerds’ interests

“It’s my belief that anyone can make another person feel comfortable by not downplaying the things that bring them joy,” Stallcup said. “Obviously, there can be unhealthy sides to those things, but acceptance starts with understanding. Nerds already feel like they are on the outside looking in, and this intensifies when it is confirmed. Simply understanding that ‘nerds are people, too’ can really do a lot for how someone views them.”

Other than hosting a game night, how can the church show love to nerds in their congregations and communities?

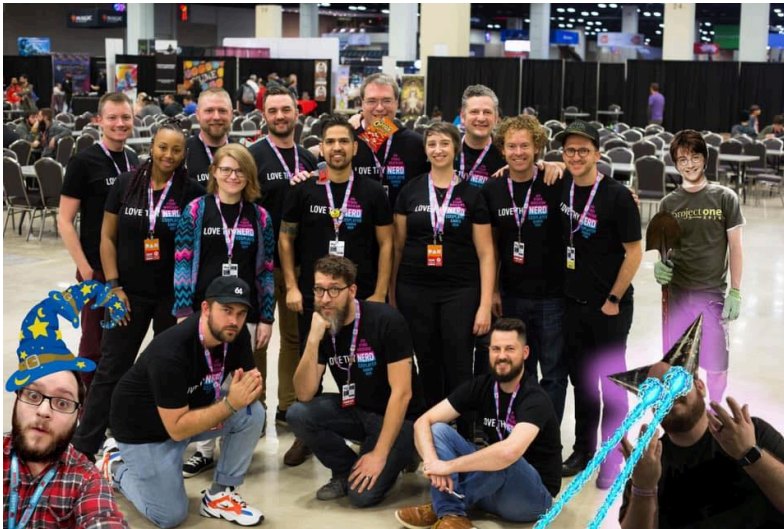
“I try to make sure and spend some time in my friendly local game store as often as possible to forge good relationships there,” Flynt said. “I’ve played tabletop role-playing games at one, bought quite a few things at another.

“It’s also important to get involved in your local nerd scene,” he added. “The biggest missed opportunity I see is that churches as a whole have nothing to do with [nerd conventions](#). They’re huge gatherings of nerds, and they happen all over the place. Churches don’t need to get cheesy about it, but something as simple as just volunteering to help at the convention—depending on the location and laws, giving out water outside, and just telling people that God loves them can go a long way in forging

relationships.”

Opportunities to love nerds in Texas

Texas plays host to a large number of those conventions. In January 2019, Love Thy Nerd sent a [team of missionaries](#) to [PAX South](#) in San Antonio, one of the largest nerd conventions in Texas. Throughout the three-day event, the missionaries talked to and played with nerds of all stripes, including some [spoofing poor evangelism tactics](#) to promote their new game.



Love Thy Nerd at PAX South, San Antonio, January 2019 (Used by permission.)

Love Thy Nerd’s team was able to be the love of Jesus to convention attendees and exhibitors, to listen to how they’ve been hurt or ostracized in the past, to grieve the past failings of the church, and to demonstrate nerds are loved and valued and that there is a place for them in the kingdom of God.

This fall, Love Thy Nerd is hosting its [first conference](#) in Irving to educate and equip the church to minister better to their nerdy communities.

Jesus is so much more than the face many nerds have been shown, and nerds are so much more than what much of the church has assumed. Love Thy Nerd wants to bridge the culture gap between nerds and the church and invites others to [join them](#).

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