



stuff you wish they taught in seminary

UNSEMINARY

23 Lessons

**FROM 12 THRIVING
MOVIE THEATER CHURCHES**

RICH BIRCH

23 LESSONS FROM 12 THRIVING MOVIE THEATER CHURCHES

Every weekend hundreds of churches meet in rented movie theaters. Whether they are multisite campuses, church plants or established churches, movie theaters continue to be a great choice for churches that need a place to meet. **Recently, we talked with 12 leading movie theater churches and today we're sharing what we learned for the benefit of other church leaders considering meeting in a movie theater.**

We recommend that you connect with the team at [Regal Theater Church](#) because they have dedicated staff ready to help church leaders who are wondering about using one of the 400+ theaters they have available this weekend! They are the industry leaders in serving church leaders who rent theaters.

5 Reasons Thriving Churches Choose Movie Theaters

- **Culturally Relevant //** When a church chooses a location for its next campus or church plant, they often consider schools and movie theaters. Movie theaters are a great option because the people we're attempting to reach have more positive feelings about them than they have for schools. Be honest: Would you rather revisit your middle school cafeteria or the place you saw your favorite movie? As a local church, you can leverage these positive feelings when people invite their friends to attend!

o "We wanted to create a unique worship experience that would be non-threatening to first-time church goers or those who have been hurt by the church in the past."

Stephen Francis, [Valley Christian Church](#)

- **Easy to Find //** Church is a retail "business." We need to be found easily in the communities that we serve. The organizations that own and run these theaters spend a lot of money to ensure that the city you are attempting to reach knows the theater exists. We get to ride on the coattails of that spending. Typically, movie theaters are the anchor of a larger development in the center of a community.

When people describe where your church meets, the people they invite will know where it is ... that isn't typically the case with other potential locations.

o "We intentionally sold our permanent facilities on the outskirts of our city in 2014 so we could move into Wilmington. The Regal Mayfaire Stadium 16 is right in the middle of the largest shopping center in our city. The excellent location, seating, screen and staff made it an easy decision."

Bryan McGee, [ROCK Church](#)

- **Flexible Locations //** The needs of a growing church often shift and develop over time. Renting from a movie theater gives you the opportunity to grow into what you need. There is usually an ocean of parking at these locations, which will accommodate your church for a long time. You could possibly start your adult service in a smaller auditorium and then shift to progressively larger rooms as you grow. Most churches don't rent all the spaces and so you can add more rooms as your ministry develops over time.



- **Economical //** Renting movie theaters for your church is surprisingly inexpensive when compared to schools, hotels or other options. In fact, many church leaders who rent movie theaters feel like it's the best-kept facility secret... they feel like they are getting away with something! Many theater companies see this as an augmentation of their revenue stream during a time when they can't make money in their core business. They are pleased to have the extra revenue but aren't looking to gouge anyone. Theaters also see it as a plus that your church will bring people to their locations.

- o "It's at the largest mall in our area. It's where people normally go. Seats and screens are already set up and it has air conditioning."

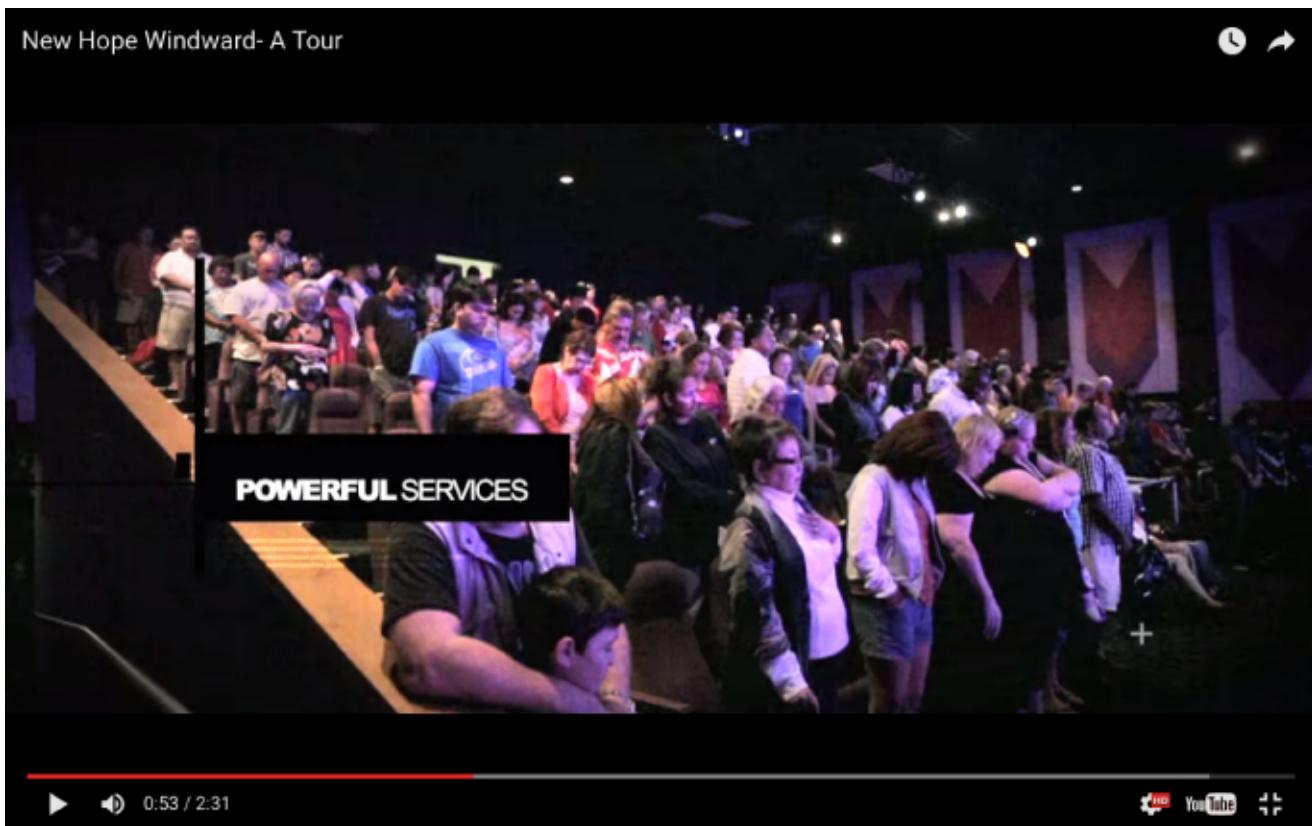
Dave Barr, [New Hope Windward](#)

- **Take Church to the People //** Take a look through scripture and it seems like God's preference is to reach people in the marketplace rather than in holy places. Moses was tending his flock when God spoke through the burning bush. Many of the prophets in the Old Testament stood in the city square to proclaim the word of the Lord. Peter was fishing when Jesus gave him a new vision for his life. Paul was on the road going about his normal routine when he was called to change his life radically. By meeting "in the marketplace," you put your church in the midst of where people go about their daily lives. You're taking the mission to the people rather than asking people to come to you!

- o "Makes for a very comfortable inviting experience and removes the stereotype that God only meets with people in religious-looking structures."

Mark Nelson, [Northridge Church](#)

Movie Theater Church in Action // New Hope Church Windward Campus



4 Tips for Doing Church in a Movie Theater

- **Build Management & Staff Relationships //**

Work to build strong relationships with both the management company and the staff you'll interact with on Sundays. Understand that the management has a clear motive to make more money for their business... so find ways to reduce costs and stress for them. Go out of your way to care for the staff serving you on Sundays. Bring them coffee just the way they like it or offer to cater a meal for an all-team meeting the theater is hosting. These two prongs of relationships are vitally important for making theater church work well. [Regal Theaters](#) has a dedicated team at the corporate office who only works with churches like yours ... reach out to them for more information!

- **Embrace the "Publicness" //**

You are going to be doing church in a very public forum. Some weeks there will be large stand-up advertising for the latest blockbuster. Moviegoers may be lining up to see a Sunday matinee as your team is cleaning up. You'll need to work with the theater to exit the building on time on Sundays so they can open. Rather than seeing some of those minor inconveniences as major annoyances, make sure people see them as a great opportunity. What a privilege to work so closely with a place where people love to come!

o "People who are unchurched love the idea of church in a theater ... The curiosity of church in a theater brought them in and allowed us to tell them about Jesus."

Bryan McGee, [ROCK Church](#)

• **Think Through Kids' Environments //** One of the challenges of doing theater church well is hosting great kids' environments. More specifically, some leaders might feel like doing infant or toddler programming well could be a problem. In fact, I felt the same way when we started on our journey in theater church so many years ago. But with a little innovative thinking, you can turn this into a win. What kid doesn't love going to the theater?

o "Many people enjoy the great way we do our children's ministry in the theaters and have our cafe in the movie theater party room."

Stephen Francis, [Valley Christian Church](#)

• **Empower an Environment Team //** There are great leaders in your church who are waiting to connect to the mission, but they don't fit easily into leadership because they love working with their hands. Often these tactical- or logistical-minded leaders struggle to find a place because we don't require these skills in a typical "brick and mortar" church. These leaders will thrive in your theater church if you release them to use their skills in the set up and tear down side of transforming the space. They will geek out making it great if you let them. Trust me, you're going to find some amazing leaders who will jump in and thrive in this ministry area.

o "Great opportunity for community to be built on service teams, especially for men."

Kenny Dean, [The Bridge](#)

14 Images of Great Theater Church Set Ups

14 Images of Great Theater Church Set Ups

Rich Birch // unSeminary



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12 Theater Churches Worth Following

- [The Bridge](#)
- [The Cathedral](#)
- [The Chapel](#)
- [Connexus Church](#)
- [The Meeting House](#)
- [Mission Church](#)
- [New Hope Windward](#)
- [Northridge Church](#)
- [Relentless Church](#)
- [Riverland Church](#)
- [ROCK Church](#)
- [Valley Christian Church](#)

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