

'Occupy' movement comes to church

by [Bob Allen](#)

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) – As the Occupy protest movement spreads into cities across the United States and around the world, one North Carolina Baptist congregation says it is time to occupy the church.

A sign in front of the church urges passersby on heavily traveled Park Road to “Occupy Church! Give Sundays their due!” On Nov. 18 church members camped on the church lawn in a whimsical “protest” message to the congregation and community that church is important.

Russ Dean, co-pastor of Park Road Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C., said he got the idea for “Occupy Church” one day while driving to work after reading the morning news.

While Park Road has a reputation as a progressive church -- it is one of the few Baptist churches in the South to have a woman co-pastor (Amy Jacks Dean) -- Russ Dean said their Occupy isn't part of the protest movement but rather a successful challenge to church members at a time when attendance was lagging and offerings were falling behind.

The [message](#)

to the community was intended as “a conversation starter,” he said, and a reminder that Park Road Baptist Church is open to anyone, according to its website, “regardless of race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or theological belief.”

Dean said the Occupy Church slogan hasn't prompted much conversation within the church about aims of the [Occupy Wall Street](#) -- and other cities -- resistance movement against corporate greed and corruption, but that might happen in the future.

Christians are divided in their support of the movement, which uses civil-disobedience tactics borrowed from the revolutionary Arab Spring.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams said he believes Jesus would be alongside protestors being arrested for refusing eviction from encampments on public grounds.

"The Jesus we meet in the Bible is somebody who constantly asks awkward questions -- especially questions addressed to religious people, moral people and rich people," the leader of 78 million Anglicans worldwide [wrote](#) for the Christmas issue of *Radio Times*.

"What would Jesus do?" Williams asked. "He'd first of all be there: sharing the risks, not just taking sides but steadily changing the entire atmosphere by the questions he asks of everybody involved, rich and poor, capitalist and protester and cleric."

Tony Perkins, meanwhile, head of the conservative Family Research Council, said in a CNN blog that Jesus was "a free marketer, not an Occupier."

"Jesus rejected collectivism and the mentality that has occupied America for the last few decades: that everyone gets a trophy -- equal outcomes for inequitable performance," Perkins said. "There are winners and yes, there are losers. And wins and losses are determined by the diligence and determination of the individual."

"Some would argue that such an approach encourages abuses, the likes of which we have seen on Wall Street," Perkins [said](#). "While some egregious abuses have taken place, they are not inevitable or intrinsic to free enterprise."

Baptist minister Jesse Jackson has compared the Occupy protests to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, in which he served alongside Martin Luther King. Jackson showed up Dec. 1 to encourage a fledgling Occupy Phoenix protest, the day before five people were treated for pepper spray injuries suffered while handing out Occupy literature at a popular art walk in downtown Phoenix.