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THE BIBLE AND THE BIG SCREEN: NEW CHURCH PREMIERES IN REGAL WARRINGTON THEATER

HORSHAM, Pa. -- Choosing a 20-foot movie screen and comfy chairs with cupholders over the traditional pew and pulpit, Riverside Community Church will launch church services in the Regal Warrington Crossing movie theater on Sunday, October 15, 2000 at 9:30 a.m.

Holding a church service in a movie theater may seem odd, but Riverside is actually the latest in a nationwide trend of progressive churches that meet in cineplexes in an effort to be more accessible to the community. "Everyone goes to movie theaters," says Aaron Harvie, Riverside's pastor. "It's a comfortable, non-threatening environment for people who are curious about church but would never set foot in a traditional steeple-topped building. Instead of bringing the people to the church, we're bringing the church to the people." Harvie says that several area locations were considered but that the Regal Cinemas offered the best atmosphere for the kind of church he envisioned. "Not only do we have the most comfortable church seats around, but they have cupholders, too!" he says.

Riverside's hour-long service will feature music led by a five-piece rock band and a short to-the-point message about a relevant topic. Keeping with the setting, dress will be casual and comfortable, with jeans the norm. The church will begin with a five-part series on making marriage work, a topic of interest to many 20- and 30-somethings. "Talking about Moses and the Ten Commandments is great, but unless people understand how what he went through affects their lives today, it's basically a 'So what?' question," says Harvie. "We want to speak to issues that people are dealing with every day in the real world."

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The groundwork for Riverside was laid over the summer, with several announcements about the new church being distributed to the surrounding area. In addition, over 30,000 area residents recently received a direct mail piece announcing the new church. A small group of about 50 people has been meeting since April, but October 15 marks the official launch of the church.

According to Harvie, Riverside's goal is to reach out to the needs of young people in the 21st Century.

"Younger generations simply aren't interested in church as it's been done before," says Harvie. "Someone has to show that a church community can be a vital part of life. It's the way you communicate that message that makes the difference." Although targeted to the so-called "Generation X," Harvie believes that the church's style will resonate with a wide range of age groups. "People are not necessarily less religious today than they were 20 years ago," he says. "They are just looking for different things from their church experience."

Riverside Community Church meets Sundays at 9:30 a.m. at the Regal Warrington Crossing 22 Cinema, located at the intersection of Route 611 and County Line Road (104 Easton Road) in Horsham, Pa. Additional information can be found at www.rccweb.org.

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