

Why This Church Shut Down Its Kids Ministry

The two girls, their brother and their parents were about 10 rows in front of me. During the first worship song, the dad realized his young son was seated, distracted and not singing.

What happened next is one of the best things I've seen in a long time. The dad got his wife's attention and, by pointing, communicated his concern. She gently helped their son to his feet. Then she guided him to switch places with one of his sisters. His dad gently put his large hand of security and love on his shoulder when he arrived next to him. I believe he communicated, "You're my son. I want you here by me."

All of this took place in just a few seconds and I bet most people didn't even notice. Everyone in the family was calm. The boy wasn't shamed. Rather than the dad communicating, "You are bad," he communicated, "God is worthy to be praised."

That dad impressed me.

When this church service began, the pastor explained that children are welcome in the service. There's no other place for them to be. They discontinued their children's church program a while ago. The leadership want children to worship and learn alongside their parents.

To help him make the point that it is possible for children to handle a church service well and benefit from it, he asked us to raise our hand if that was our experience. Of course, many of us raised our hands.

As the pastor acknowledged that church might be challenging for some children, he held up a bright lime green "Pastor's Pal" bag that doubles as a backpack. Children who had one stood and waved and we clapped because they were in church. I

wanted a bag!

The church is self-publishing quarterly books for their children to use during church. There are fun things to do, a place to write notes about the sermon and questions parents can ask children after church.

Everything in me wanted to applaud what this church was doing:

- The church leadership wondered if something they had been doing a long time was the best thing to do.
- They asked God for guidance.
- They decided, planned and bravely made the change, losing some families in the process. These parents didn't agree that "adult church" was in their children's best interest. They were unwilling to guide their children and risk being occasionally distracted. They were sad to lose some families, but I'm impressed that these pastors knew this might happen and didn't get discouraged. They kept the big picture in mind.
- They created the Pastor's Pal program to help children be successful.
- They've checked with parents to see how it's going and have collected great testimonies.

During the pastor's "Pastor's Pal" announcement and then throughout the service, I thought about these fortunate children. Might they be less apt to leave the church and their faith later because they're experiencing more of church now? Might worshipping as a family help everyone in the family? Might parents' modeling help children see their parents as their authority?

I am still smiling as I think about this. I'd love to know what you think. {eoa}

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