

## Our Guest Experience

### **Arrival**

We arrived at your church 10 minutes before the worship service began. We immediately identified the guest parking but parked further back near the railroad tracks since the guest parking was already full. We followed people entering the building and entered along the side of the building through double gray doors. (We could tell that this was not the main entrance but it was where people were entering, so we simply followed.) There was no greeter at the outside door as we entered. We proceed to the foyer and easily identified the Guest Center where we were greeted. A man named Micah welcomed us, introduced himself and led us to the children's check-in.

### **Children's Area**

There was one family in line before us but as we waited a man named Brock approached us, introduced himself and began to explain to us not only about the children's but the youth as well (since we have two older sons). He also told us about Sunday School and invited us to his class, showing us a class list and telling us where his class meets. His wife, Cassidy, checked in our younger two children and then led us to the children's worship room. One of our younger sons, Titus, decided to stay and one of our sons, Nathan, wanted to attend worship with us. While we were at the door talking with Cassidy, the children's minister introduced himself, greeted Titus, who was staying and told our other son that he was welcome to join them next week. He then led Titus to where he needed to go in the room and talked with him for a few minutes. I liked that the children's minister leaned over and talked with Titus on his eye level. Cassidy led us to the worship service along the second level breeze-way, also explaining what was available to our older sons in the youth on Wednesday evenings and pointing out to us the building down the street. I liked also that she spoke highly of your youth minister.

### **Worship**

We entered the worship service from the upper level and a man named Brent greeted us. He pointed out several places where seats were available. The service had already begun but we didn't feel like we had missed much. We found a place to sit about 10 rows up on the right-hand side of the platform (to the left if you're facing from the stage). We stopped part way down the pew and the man whose family was next to us said, "I'll move down so you can see better." About half of our view was obstructed by the black curtains but he moved down about 10-feet which allowed us a much better side view.

### **Slipping Out**

I slipped out just before the message. I wanted to see what it was like outside the worship center and wanted to see how accessible the children's area was. I also wanted to peek in on my son. I found my way back to the children's area along the upper floor. I only passed two people along the way and visited the restrooms outside the children's area. While I was inside children began to enter as well. This peaked my curiosity since those restrooms are probably the most dangerous place in your church. Restrooms that are accessible to anyone and close to the children's area are usually the primary place a pedophile targets. But I was glad to see a man at the door—he propped it open and stood there while the kids were inside. He seemed a little surprised to see me but didn't mention anything. I briefly looked into the children's worship room but since it seemed there was a transition going on, I moved away quickly and returned to the worship service.

We enjoyed the service. I especially enjoyed the music and the relaxed atmosphere. To my left a man was wearing jeans, to my left a man was wearing shorts and a man wearing slacks in front of me.

### **Exiting and Leaving**

We were able to easily navigate back to the children's pick-up area. There was a very short line. My son saw me and came my direction but was stopped at the doors by the leader until I showed my tag. I asked, "What happens if I lose my tag?" The reply was a little disappointing. "Well, we're going to give you your son. As long as we know he belongs to you." I wanted to say, "But I'm a first-time guest. Nobody knows he belongs to me." I started to ask about the process if someone shows up without a tag but didn't want to hold up the line.

As we left, several people said hi to us as we walked past them—something that doesn't always happen.

### **After**

During lunch we talked to Titus about what he learned in the children's area. He identified the Bible story as having been about Adam and Eve and told us about music with a guitar and an activity with marshmallows. He also talked about watching a video—It sounded like the Walk Thru the Bible videos by the Veggie Tale company.

### **Thoughts**

-My wife summed up the best part of our experience by saying that the job Brock and Cassidy did is what "would make us want to come back."

-I like the speed of the children's check-in but also realize that there is no way for the church to follow-up on us—no way to contact us. The blue form was optional. Depending on your strategy, you might consider at least getting a name, phone and email. Having my cell number would also allow you to text or call me if my child was injured as well.

-No allergy information was collected. One of our sons has a peanut allergy. Usually this means that there won't be any snacks available but Titus also mentioned eating a marshmallow.

-Questions: Are children always monitored when in the bathroom? Is there any kind of security in the children's area? It was easily accessible. Is there any kind of security throughout the church? When I walked through to the children's area, the building was open and empty. Are there any valuables that could be taken?

Concerning security, at my former church, we had both marked and unmarked security throughout the building and they have helped us deal with issues that range from stockers, a marital dispute that almost turned physical in the parking lot, a small run-in with the Russian mafia (who came to find the family of a man who owed them money in an attempt to locate him), sexual predators, etc. They watch the parking lots, question suspicious behavior and would even intercept someone approaching the stage during the worship service.

We were never given a bulletin and didn't realize we didn't have one until I noticed that the people sitting in front of us were looking at one.

Concerning picking up children, I'm sure you have a process but here's one we've used: If someone loses their pick-up tag, certain leaders have the authority to "sign-off" on their pick-up. We ask to see their driver's license and record the name and license number. This at least gives us

information about who picked them up just in case someone else shows up with the tag. I'm not saying this is the best system but it has worked well for us in the past.

Overall, visiting your church was a great experience. If I were grading, I would give you an A. The people were welcoming. The processes were simple and all of it made for a pleasant time.