

# 2nd Opinion: What I learned from the PTO

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Churches aren't the only people struggling with participation and commitment. It's a sign of the times.



Eric BlackI took my kids to a Parent-Teacher Organization family event to see *The Good Dinosaur*. I assumed a fair-sized crowd would be there and was surprised to see only a handful of households and about 15 kids. Then it dawned on me: About the same number of kids attend our Wednesday night children's activities.

"Where are all the kids?" is a common refrain heard around our church. A common assumption is they're involved in sports. However, last spring, our town didn't have enough children sign up to fill even a single baseball team. This spring, we had enough for just one team.

If the same holds true for other sports, then our assumption is wrong. Sports aren't the problem.

Perhaps something else was going on, like the barbecue cook-off and car show benefitting our local volunteer fire department. That drew a large crowd, but it wasn't composed entirely of our local citizens and didn't account for all those who didn't attend the PTO event. Even this significant competing event couldn't account for all the kids' whereabouts.

As I looked around the room during the movie, I was encouraged to know our church isn't the only place struggling to get kids involved. I appreciated knowing the lack of participation isn't just because we're a church. In a culture that preaches entertainment is king, it's good to know not even a good movie or a baseball game can draw the crowds they used to draw.

I learned something else from the PTO event. At the conclusion of the movie, one of the officers called for attention and began making announcements about PTO activities and made a plea for new members. My immediate thought was, "I didn't come here for that."

My second thought was: "That's exactly what we do at church. And how many people don't 'come here for that?'"

While I understood the desire to communicate their event calendar and the need for participants, I wished they just thanked us for being there and left it at that. "We're so glad you were here tonight. We hope you enjoyed the movie and the time together."

After a nice and succinct "Thank you," I might have responded more positively to a simple announcement tagged on at the end: "If you'd like to know more about the PTO and what we do, we would love to tell you more. Just ask one of us. Good night."

I could see the problem so clearly when it wasn't mine.

I have been guilty of being ungrateful for those who attend our church. I have been guilty of wanting more. I have been guilty of the anxiety that drives a plea for participation. I have been guilty of bemoaning culture without appreciating those who swim against it.

The PTO helped me see the light.

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