Movie-Theater Churches Catering to Kids

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The topic was one of the high- lights on the agenda of a confer- ence of about 3,000 ministers who met this week in Silver Spring. It was sponsored by National Cine- Media, a movie theater chain that houses about 200 churches, including about a dozen in the Washington area.

Most theater churches are evangelical and geared toward people in their 20s and 30s who are not drawn to conventional churches. But as those congregations age and theater churches begin to appeal to families with young children, a growing number of the churches are using children's ministries and a high-tech envi- ronment to attract those families.

"If you ask kids, 'Hey, do you want to go to church at a movie theater? They're more up to say, 'Yeah,'" said Barry Brown, director of worship solutions for CineMedia.

For younger children, many theater churches block off the area between the front row of seats and the movie screen with colorful partitions to create play areas.

Deshawn Jones, co-founder of what is known as a church that meets in the Regal Majestic 20 in Silver Spring, said volunteers created a mural of a downtown scene that runs underneath the screen. He said children meet in age groups throughout the auditorium.

Outside and in the hallways, ministers say they hide racy movie posters behind Christian murals and large plants.

David St. John, minister of DC Metro Church, has more than 75 kids who attend each Sunday at an Al- exandria theater. For children under 5, he said, a commercial Christian curriculum is project- ed on the big screen.

They love it," St. John said. "They're begging their parents to come to church."
A Life's Work of Exonerating Inmates

CENTURION, From B7 said.

Costs for a case run from $150,000 to $300,000, according to McCloskey. Overall, the organization has an annual budget of about $1 million, mostly from private donors.

McCloskey, 66, came to his cause in midlife. Born into a well-to-do Philadelphia family, he graduated from Bucknell University and had a successful business career.

Yet despite financial success, "I felt shallow, selfish, unfulfilled, lacking any real authenticity in my life," he said. "I was single, I didn't have a family, and something was really missing."

He had stopped attending church in college but started worshiping again at a Presbyterian church outside Philadelphia. Over time, he started to feel a calling to enter the ministry.

"I'm reading the Scriptures on a Saturday night at home, and I just happened upon the 21st Chapter of Luke, where the resurrected Christ is talking to Peter and he says, 'When you were young, you walked where you would. When you are older, I will guide you and lead you to another place.' And so I thought the Scriptures were talking to me."

That other place would turn out to be Princeton Theological Seminary; from there, he went to a prison ministry that led to his current work.

He entered the seminary in fall 1979, and in his second year chose an internship as a student chaplain at New Jersey State Prison in Trenton, where he would counsel 40 men on a single tier. One was Jorge "Chiefy" de los Santos.

"From day one, all de Los Santos would talk about was his innocence. He would exhaust me, he was so obsessed," McCloskey said. "All he could talk about was how he got framed."

Unsure whether to believe him, McCloskey read through the trial transcripts.

"Around Christmastime, I came back to Chiefy and said: 'I believe you are innocent. Of course, I don't know if you're innocent, but I believe you, and I'm going to take a year off to move the ball forward, to see what I can do. That's my Christmas gift to you.'"

"But it was also his gift to me. Because I thought, if this man is innocent, and I believe he is, and if I can help free him, that is a meaningful, purposeful endeavor, and this makes me feel as if I'm really doing something for someone else."