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Mersina Grljevic

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Student perspectives on worship services from Instructor Jennifer Garvin-Sanchez's Religious Studies 108 Human Spirituality undergraduate course at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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All Dulles Area Muslim Society Mosque

by Mersina Grljevic

During my second fieldtrip, I decided to visit a mosque as my second institution and experience and learn the prayer that Muslims do. Since I am originally from northern Virginia, I felt more comfortable going with my friend and her family during Friday Jumma Prayer at their mosque since I know that this experience would be a lot different than my previous Christian church fieldtrip. I visited this beautiful Sunni mosque called The Adams center located in 46903 Sugarland Rd, Sterling VA on October 9, 2015. There were different interval times for when the prayer started but we went in at 12:30 pm. Adams stands for All Dulles Area Muslim Society, and there are many different branches of the Adams center but the one I visited was the main center. The presiding official was Mohammad Magid.

As I approached this destination, the mosque was beautifully constructed with many windows in similar shapes as mosques with a long set of stairs that leads into the main entrance. As I walked in with my friend and her family we saw a lot many people walking in with us and some outside of the building chatting before prayer began. As we walked in, there was no one at the front to greet us. My friend informed me that there is a help office located inside the mosque in case visitors are wanting to convert and/or learn to pray. As I walked in I was told to go to the bathroom and to rinse and cleanse myself off prior to stepping into the gym for prayer. If people don't do this at their own house beforehand, they must go to

the bathroom and do so. Physically purifying yourself before you start praying in the Islamic religion is known as Tahara. There was a specific way of doing this. In the sink I started by washing my hands, threw some water in my mouth and swirled it around before spitting it out. I blew my nose and wet my face by tracing out the side of my face with my right hand going counterclockwise and left hand going clockwise. After cleansing my face I proceeded into rinsing off my arm, up to my elbow. After cleaning my arms, I took my first, second and third fingers and traced it around my forehead, cleaned behind my ears, concluding in the back of my neck. After that process, we had to clean our feet as well before stepping inside the prayer room. Everything was repeated three times, from right to left, to ensure purity and cleanliness.

After the quick pit stop to the restroom to get cleansed, I entered through the gym where the prayer takes place. The tile floor in the lobby transitions to a green carpet where shoes are not permitted. Other than the carpet being green, I noticed that all of the decorations inside the gym were also a forest green color. The green represented the color of Islam, where it is said that the Islamic prophet wore a green cloak and turban and that his writings were in reference of this color. Women and children are separated from the men by a small border in the gym. I noticed that there were approximately 200 people in this large gymnasium with the majority being

men. Everyone seemed to be of the middle class and by the looks of their garments, it was majority Pakistanis and the rest were Saudis. The women were all covered up in different colored headscarves and hijabs and some men were in casual clothing while others were in a thobe, an ankle-length Arab garment, in colors of mainly white and grey. A prayer rug was not required during the prayer since the carpet accounted for it. For the elder men and women who could not kneel, the men sat in a straight line on the right side of the room while the elderly women sat in the back of all the women and children. Unlike the church service, this service didn't have benches, just a couple chairs to aid the elderly. The interior was richer in color and lacked posters like the church had.

Before the congregated prayer began, presiding official Mohammad Magid started the service with a speech. This particular speech was about learning etiquette. His speech went on for about 45 min until the prayer began. He spoke in English throughout his speech and informed us about proper etiquette that should be used in our everyday lives. The person who lead the prayer was Dr. Altaf Hussain who is Sheikh (honored title in the Arabic language) certified to give the khutbah, the formal occasion for public preaching in the Islamic tradition. Muadhan Saab was reading the Qur'an through the intercom while everyone was praying. The prayer had a specific rhythm to it, almost song-like. It lasted for only about ten minutes. Coming into this I was nervous since I did not know how to pray nor was I aware that there was a specific direction we had to pray. We all faced the same direction, toward Mecca but specifically the Kaaba which is the Mecca's Great Mosque, and the holiest Islamic place. My friend and her family

helped me along the way and told me to just follow what the rest of the women were doing. The prayer was a series of kneeling, bowing your head to the floor while eyes were shut and standing occasionally before you had to kneel again. I observed them more than prayed since I had to understand how they did it before I could perform it myself.

After the prayer was over, they asked for donations to help make the mosque better. I compared the conclusion of this service much like my previous one at a church when it comes to donation. They all try to better themselves by bettering their building of prayer. As I walked outside of the mosque there were tents with people selling baked goods and different article of clothing. It was very interesting to see how everyone communicates and gets along through donations. I thanked my friend and her family for an inspirational experience that will go in the books for me. •

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