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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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Iglesia Asambleas de Dios Emmanuel

by Andre Santamaria

On November 22nd at 2:30pm I attended a Sunday Worship Service at Iglesia Asambleas de Dios Emmanuel located at 7900 Walmsley Boulevard Richmond, Virginia 23832. It is an Evangelical Spanish-speaking Christian church and the presiding official is Reverend Ernesto Gil. Although it mainly caters to people of the Christian faith I was told by one of the deacons that people of all walks of life and faiths could attend the service. One of the first things that I noticed when first entering the premises was the fact that the church parking lot is absolutely massive and the land owned by the church expands one acre. The main church has the name of the church painted on the front side and there is a pagoda located on the west side that seems to have a grill built into it. On the east side of the church there is a rather large building whose sole purpose is to be a dining hall where the members of the congregation can join together and eat. As for the inside of the church, I did not think much of it seeing as it looks small from the outside but entering the building all I could see were rows of chairs and a pretty long altar space where the instruments are. There are two pulpits on the altar and right below which my friend explained that the top pulpit is for the members of the worship group and the preacher while the bottom one is for people that read scripture and sing hymns and are not baptized. The members of the church were very friendly and welcomed me with open arms as well as opened the door for me which felt as if I was a special guest. There

were people of all ages ranging from infants to people in their late 80s. It seemed as if they were truly part of a loving community and everyone seem so involved and submersed in the service. In addition to my friend helping me translate I also had the preacher's wife explain all of the elements of the service. In regards to the service it was alot livelier than other services I have attended and all of the congregation was singing along in great voice and seem very emotionally submersed. I was given the official count of how many people were in attendance and I was surprised to hear tat about 400 people attended. Usually there is an hour before the main service where all of the church attends Sunday School in different sections of the church based on age group and then the service starts with prayer and a scripture reading. Soon after that , the worship group sings a few solemn hymns to set the initial ambience so that people can start connecting on an intimate level with God. Then the mood picks up and mny gospel songs are played and people all around start getting into it. The part of the service that blew me away was when I saw a young women start flailing uncontrollably and speaking in tongues in front of the congregation. The deacon told me not to be alarmed and it happens rather frequently in the church. My friend went on to explain that the cause of the sudden outburst according to them is that the Holy Spirit manifests itself in the body of the person and often times they cannot help but dance around. After that they collected the offering and sang

one more song before the preacher came up to deliver the sermon. I have to admit it was really cool to see that although pastors are perceived to be serious and solemn individuals, the pastor was cracking a few jokes and really just preaching life advice instead of cramming Christianity down everyone's throat. At the end of his sermon he made a calling to anyone that felt compelled to accept Christ as their savior to step up and convert. What I respected about that is that the pastor did not single anyone out instead he issued an open invitation to anyone who wanted to convert. Not many symbols were used during the service except for many people during the service referring to the Holy Bible as many different things such as "the word of God", "the daily guide for living your life", and my personal favorite, "the sword of God." •

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