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Kia Montgomery

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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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# Chapel Springs Church: “Christian Service”

by Kia Montgomery

On Saturday September 19, 2015 at 6 P.M., my grandma and I went to my first field trip assignment. Chapel Springs Church is located at 11500 New Life Way, Bristow, Virginia 20136. I went there because I was home, this was a service that my grandma was willing to take me to and accompany me in listening to the service. The denomination of Chapel Springs Church is Pentecostal and their presiding official is the lead pastor named Scott Leib.

Structurally, the outside of the church was built more like a school building. It was flat at the top as opposed to the cathedral in Richmond, which is dome shaped with pillars lining the front. There were no stairs to walk into the church and the building has an antique white colored stucco finish with terra-cotta accents going around the building. At the entrance, there was a huge cross placed between two columns right before the entryway of the church. Inside the church there were many rooms off of the main chapel area that I did not get to explore because the service was starting. Where the service was held the seating areas had burgundy red carpeting, the isles were carpeted with sage green. The seats were lined up like a bench. The musical accompaniments were on the mid-size stage.

Grandma and I were surprised at the door when a family friend/ neighbor greeted us. Karen welcomed us with a warm hello and gave us a program for the service. We told her

that it was our first time here and she hoped that we would like it as much as she does. She introduced us to some fellow church-goers that greeted us warmly and made us feel welcomed. An usher helped us find seating when we entered the chapel. The congregation was widely diverse. The age range was from babies to their great grandparents. They appear to come from every social class and it looked to me that there was an even number of men and women in attendance. I would say that there were at least 120 people or more.

No one offered to sit by my grandma and I to explain anything but we were comfortable where we were sitting. Honestly, I don't think there was anything to be explained, we just followed the motions of what was said and done like everyone else. My grandma and I ended up introducing ourselves and having a small conversation with the people near us. I felt comfortable because I was with my grandma but everyone was so friendly and welcoming so that added to the comfort aspect.

The service as a whole was empowering, positive and funny. The emotional tone was happy throughout most of the service. The pastor did talk about some hard times that everyone faces but he turned the little bit of sadness into an empowering moment when he talked about how we overcome it and become stronger from it. I'm not sure if his services are always this uplifting or if it was just this day, but I enjoyed it. The service started with a

quintet singing several songs. Everyone stood up and sang along to the lyrics on the screen. Most people were already standing before the quintet came out so I would think it was more on the casual side rather than being dramatic. The congregational participation was more on the emotional side because everyone was joyful and energetic while singing and praising God. There was a part in the beginning of the service when the pastor had three families come forward with their children to be blessed and prayed for by the congregation. The parents agreed to raise them according to the principals of the church. This meant that the church did not believe in christening their children at their current ages. Once they are older and have their own understanding of God then they will be baptized. I would consider that a ritual, just like with the offerings. The service was more spontaneous to me because he was talking about things from the service before and tied them into the service we were attending. Then he had everyone to start drawing with him. I wasn't expecting that. The service ended with him drawing a graph of how many people were close to him when he first learned about God. He progressed to how many people have stayed close to him the longer he stayed with God. The graph descended until no one was still with him. He said as long as he has been with God, he has not had as many people stay with him who have not stayed with God. I thought it was understandable that people did not stay with him because people change, people may not stay with God, people may not have a belief in God as much as him. I honestly do not remember seeing any art or symbolic images inside the church besides the graph that the pastor made and the cross at the entrance.

comfortable with the topics talked about as well as the people around me. I learned a lot from this experience and I may go back the next time I go back home. •

Written Fall 2015. © Kia Montgomery.

In all the service was enjoyable, I felt