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## Chippenham YSA Ward

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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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# Chippenham YSA Ward

by Amy Parks

On November 22nd I attended the Chippenham YSA Ward sacrament meeting for the 1-3 o'clock service. The church is located on 5600 Monument Avenue, Richmond VA. The Bishop who presided was Roland McClean, and the administration of the Sacrament speakers were Elder Walton and Elder Peterson. After the opening announcements and singing, Candy Chester taught the lesson of the sermon.

The outside appearance looks mediocre. There is simple landscaping, and the church is built with brick. There is one grand, white steeple in the front with the title of the church, "The Church of the Latter Day Saints" displayed. There is a large parking lot surrounding the church to accommodate all the members. The inside appearance is just as dull. The color palette of the interior are light shades of brown. In the sanctuary, there are high ceilings and glazed windows. I was shocked to see there were no sacred pictures, or any decorations. It only had a piano, pulpit, and rows of wooden pews with plain cushions.

The people were all very warm and inviting. I was greeted with a brochure and a smile by a few men at the door of the sanctuary. Everyone was dressed to impress. The men wore a suit and a tie, while the women wore either a modest dress or skirt. The majority of the people were white, young adults and middle class. There seemed to be an equal ratio of men and women. There were about 100 people

in attendance.

It was a mellow environment. In the beginning, there was soft chatter before the sermon started, but when it started, it was silent and serious. There were a lot of breaks in between the announcements with hymns. All the hymns sounded similar to me. They were all about giving thanks since Thanksgiving was right around the corner. It was a reserved and formal feel.

The speaker shared an intense story that happened to her son. Her son became very ill, and she had him stay home from school for bed rest. Little did she know the severity of his illness. His sickness quickly progressed into needing hospitalization. He was diagnosed with diabetes and needed instant treating. She expressed that she could not have had the amount of strength she had during this difficult time, if it were not for God, and Joseph Smith's teachings in the Book of Mormon. I could sense her sincerity of her faith when speaking of this. She broke down in tears of pure gratitude that her son survived and recovered after being so sick.

After the lesson came to a close, the church implemented the ritual of communion. Communion is a way the church remembers the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Bishops pass along pieces of bread to represent His body, and small cups of grape juice to represent his blood that shed on the cross. This is a very

somber time during the sermon for all the members, as they reflect on what Jesus endured for their sins.

After the sermon ended, all the members are divided into different small groups depending on one's level of faith maturity. Since I have not converted, I went to the "primary school" which discusses the foundations of the Mormon faith. Here, the leader taught that God created the world and all the beautiful things in it because he loves us. There were times to share thoughts in between the lesson with people that you are sitting beside. One question I discussed with my neighbor was, "What is an example of how God shows us that he loves us?" The person next to me said that when God "restored the church and the gospels" that proved His love to us. This is what the Mormons believe. They believe that a man named Joseph Smith back in the 1800s had visions from God and prophets from the Bible. He wrote these visions down, and added them to the Bible. They believed that these visions restored the Christian faith into what God planned it to be.

Overall, it was a very interesting experience for me. This was my first time ever going to a Mormon church. I did not know anything about the faith, until I visited this church. I enjoyed meeting everyone, and learning about what they believe. •

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