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## Chùa Hoa Nghiêm

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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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# Chùa Hoa Nghiêm

by Theophano Nghiem

Saturday, October 27, 2015 the service started at 10:30 am at Chùa Hoa Nghiêm, a Vietnamese Temple. Chùa Hoa Nghiêm is located at 9105 Backlick Road, Fort Belvoir, VA 22060. Thich Kien Khai was born into a Buddhist family, and grew to be the refuge with the Patriarch Thich Tam purity with the legal name of Dieu. He got his bachelor of law in 1964, and made servants under the Republican regime, until April 30, 1975 and then taken to the North for education camp for 13 years and then freed in 1988.

The outside appearance of the temple was very welcoming and one of the most unique buildings seen in Fort Belvoir, VA the bottom half of the building is made of stone rocks. When driving past the building it looks like a big normal house. There is a long cement driveway that leads to the back parking lot, which is surrounded by many trees and a garden of flowers. Besides the temple there are three monuments: original teacher, Shakyamuni, the Maitreya and Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, which symbolizes the virtues of compassion, wisdom and equality. Many columns, making it look more formal and safe, surround the doorway. Once you enter the main door, you enter the main hallway, and on each side of the hallway there are doors that lead to different rooms. Each room is assigned to a certain event for each ceremony. For example, one of the rooms is for the lunchtime, and at the end of the hallway is the main room where everyone goes to worship

Buddha. Once you enter the main room, there are columns down the middle and in the front there is a big table with two drums on each side of the table. The room is carpeted, which is cleaned everyday, because you do not wear shoes in that room. Along with the drums, the table is covered in flowers. When people arrive to the temple, they aren't greeted by anyone particular but if they see another family in the parking lot, they will greet each other. Since this is a Religious sanctuary, most people who attend are with their families. My family and I were invited by a family friend to attend the service that day, so we were well educated and everyone was very welcoming.

After arrival, 10:30 am, the parents usually go into the kitchen and help prepare the lunch for the day and the kids go into a separate room and attend Vietnamese class. During class, they learn how to read and write the language, and learn songs for upcoming events. Around 11:15, the service begins, and every one lines up in the hallway to take their shoes off before entering. Once entered into the room, they all stand in rows across the room until the head Monk has arrived. The opening of the service is very dramatic; there is banging of drums and tons of singing. After the opening, everyone sits down, with their legs crossed, and recites prayers and passages. The service ends in a song sung by the children, having the kids sing the closing number lifts the moment. The worshiping service lasts about 30 minutes, after lunch is served. If the weather is nice

out, people sit outside near the garden and eat their lunch, but if it isn't everyone just gathers in different rooms, the kids normally gathers in the room they had class in and the adults in a room of their own. Depending on the day of the service there are more activities after lunch, but if there isn't anything planned, people normally leave after they finished their meals. Overall, this experience was very nice and a positive experience. •

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