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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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Cornerstone Chapel

by Nizama Dervisevic

On October 25th, 2015 I attended a Baptist service at Cornerstone Chapel at 9am up in Leesburg, VA. The Cornerstone Chapel is located at 742 Miller Dr SE, Leesburg, VA 20175. The outside of the church didn't look very traditional, it actually looked like a business building, and if it weren't for the one and only sign, I would of completely missed it. They are currently building a new location in Leesburg, but for the last couple of years they've been located on Miller Dr, right by the airport. The presiding official that morning was Gary Hamrick, who is the pastor of the church.

I attended the Sunday service at Cornerstone Chapel with my boyfriend, whose parents regularly attend their services. As we pulled up to the front of the building, it was difficult to tell where the church was located because all of the other surrounding buildings were identical. Luckily, he knew where to go. As we walked into the building, it was swarming with people. In the lobby there were young adults answering any questions you may have, and there was even childcare options for during the service. As we walked towards the doors to enter the chapel, we were both handed a flyer that highlighted the main focus of that morning's sermon.

As we took our seats in the middle of the chapel, not too close to the pastor, but not too far in the back, I looked around and noticed how diverse everyone was. The church was not formal, but everyone was dressed

decently. There were people from all different backgrounds and ages, but plenty more young adults than anyone else, attending the 9am service. As everyone took their seats, they greeted the people sitting around them and had a big smile on their faces.

Sitting in on the service was very pleasant with the people I had around me. Everyone was quiet but friendly, and mostly kept to him or herself. My boyfriend used a bible app on his cellphone to follow along with what the pastor was preaching, and I just looked off of him. But before Mr. Hamrick began his sermon he had everyone introduce themselves to their neighbors so if anyone had any questions during the sermon, they would feel more comfortable speaking to someone they've already introduced themselves to.

After we introduced ourselves and sat quietly for a few minutes, Mr. Hamrick came up on the stage and announced that before he starts the sermon of the day that they'll begin with some Christian rock music (very unexpected for me but it was a delightful surprise). My boyfriend informed me they actually do this for every service because Mr. Hamrick believes it keeps everyone more awake and interested in what he'll be saying afterwards. As the band was performing the two huge screens on each side of the stage turned on and had lyrics so people could sing along. I was casually nodding my head along to the music, which was actually pretty good, my boyfriend was

playing on his phone, and some of the other people were standing up and belting out the song and even dancing along to it. The beginning of this service was like nothing I have seen before, it felt more like a concert than a religious gathering and I believe that is what made everyone so excited to be there that early in the morning, on a weekend. Everyone around me was so into what was going on that it made me feel excited to be there because no one was dreading the experience. After about 30 minutes of the band performing, Pastor Hamrick comes on stage and thanks them for the amazing performance and everyone clapped as the band walked off. Pastor Hamrick continues on with informing everyone of the current events and volunteer activities the church has going on, and where to go to sign up if anyone was interested. He then pulls out his bible and talks about where they left off the previous week, and as he is going this, the two big screens on the side of the stage turn to the virtual pages so anyone without a bible can follow along with what Pastor Hamrick is reading. As he began where they left off, the words he spoke were highlighted on the screen. He would occasionally stop and ask questions, and even explain things that were more difficult to understand. As Pastor Hamrick was finishing his sermon, I noticed the huge wooden carved cross behind him, it was not hanging from anything but standing up on the stage. That was the one and only religious symbol in the room, so it didn't feel overpowering. The only ritual that was done during the service was communion, which is the breaking of bread and drinking from the cup, which represents Jesus dying for our sins. The bread represents the body of Jesus, and the cup of wine (or juice) represents the blood of Christ. Another ritual that was talked about was the baptism that was happening that

evening. Because this is a Baptist church, their ritual is baptizing people to "cleanse" them of their "sins". There was going to be a baptism later that evening for the younger children who have not already been baptized, or for anyone who wanted to get baptized. •

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