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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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Crewe United Methodist Church

by Daija Harris

Human Spirituality has opened my eyes and allowed me to experience different religions and see different views from other people's perspectives. Last month I ventured to Saint Paul's Baptist Church which was an experience I enjoyed very much. This month for the second trip I decided I would venture to a Methodist Church.

Last Sunday on October 4, 2015, attended Crewe United Methodist Church. The church is located in my hometown at 607 E. Georgia Avenue, Crewe, Virginia 23930. There was only one service which was different from Saint Paul's, but it was at 11:00 am. The presiding minister at Crewe United Methodist is a woman named Christina Perkins. I honestly have not seen many women "running" churches so this alone was intriguing. It wasn't what one would call a "norm."

Crewe is a very small town so the church is located in the back of a neighborhood. When I was driving down the street I could see the huge white cross at the top of the building. The outside of the church was brick and the roofing was brown. There was a red front door which stuck out like a sore thumb. It's definitely a touch I won't forget about the church. From the outside I could see the windows which had the artwork and colorful paintings on them. You could definitely tell this church was very "homey."

After I parked my car and I got out, as I was

walking towards the red door everyone was greeting me. I felt as if they knew I was coming to experience the service here for the first time. I was glad everyone was so friendly because I was nervous in the beginning. When I walked inside all I could think was that the church was so clean and it was beautiful. Top to bottom was very unique and different from any other church I could remember going in. There were grand chairs and a glass case that were so pretty. The air in the church smelled so "pure." From the outside of the church I thought the inside was going to look old and brown.

Immediately when you walk in there, the chapel is to the right and when I walked in I was speechless. It was like a scene from out of a movie. Everything was in its place and looked so bright and just welcoming. When you walked in there was a little table stacked with bibles and coloring books and crayons. I thought it was the cutest thing ever. In front of the small table were big, long pews crossing the entire chapel. They were wooden with red cushioning. In the front was a stage or platform area with a podium and an area for the choir behind it. To the sides were the amazing windows I had seen from the outside and they added a great amount of lighting through the room.

I sat towards the back and waited for the service to start. I thought I would feel out of place but I didn't. There were close to about

45- 60 people and they were all white. The average age was about 55-60 years old and the dominant sex was male and I would say they were upper class. Everyone smiled at me and I wasn't treated any different. Although everyone was polite no one offered to sit with me but I suspect that if I had asked anyone they would have been more than happy to.

After about 10 minutes the service started. The tone and environment was very relaxed and subtle. Personally I felt as if the entire sermon was relaxed as well. It was definitely calmer than my first trip. The atmosphere was more relaxed than I anticipated. I could sense that people were getting into it when a lot of people started nodding. Emotionally, I could tell the audience was into it but it seemed as if they were scared to show it. The sermon started off planned and I would say ended planned. One thing that was different was the silent prayer. I was not expecting that but I enjoyed it and I felt as if I had time to reflect on that morning's events. At the end of the service there was music and hymns. The hymn books were provided and I was able to follow along. The organ player did a wonderful job and the music was truly beautiful.

Since it was the first Sunday of the month, it was very ritualistic. On first Sundays, Crewe United Methodist does communion and offering. The offering came first before the communion. I thought offering would take longer but it was pretty quick.

There was also a time for everyone to greet each other and I would say this was ritualistic as well. People walked around hugging and shaking hands. It was like the "neighbor" ice breaker at Saint Paul's Baptist Church. The scripture readings were also ritualistic and

added the traditional touch.

There was also some symbolization. One would be the cross on the top of the church on the outside. Another would be the paintings and murals made into the windows. I don't think the symbolism plays into the feeling blessed and worshipping the lord. I do think the rituals and the traditions play into the feelings and emotions of the church though. This can be the difference in someone feeling at home in that church or them feeling like they don't belong there.

My experience was different than my first but I can truly say I was pleased with how the morning and the sermon went. I was a little nervous about understanding the message the preacher was trying to convey but I ended up having no trouble. There weren't a lot of people there and I wasn't exactly blending in but I would say field trip number two was a success! •

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