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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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Dar Al-Hijrah: “My time in a Mosque”

by Rihana Ahmed

The place i visited for this project was a mosque called Dar - Al - Hijrah. It was located at 3159 Row St, Falls Church, VA 22044. I went on Friday the 25th for the Jumaa/Friday Prayer around 12:50pm. Dar-Al-Hijrah is an Islamic Mosque led by Imam Shaker Elsayed.

The mosque is a really big place. As soon as i drove through the front gate, i was greeted with a big, elegant arabic scripture written on the top wall of the building. The building itself was built with a typical mosque like structure. There was a moon and a star on one of the pillars that stood tall against the main building itself. There is another smaller building for office - use and security details. When i got to the parking lot, two security guys were directing traffic. Out on the main road, police cars directed the crosswalks because of the many worshippers that park outside. The amount of people that showed up was incredible. Thankfully, i found a parking inside and followed the ladies to the women section of the building. The inside is also huge. There is a big lobby where the information center is located. To the right, there is a prayer room for women that came with their children. And to the left, there is a stair that leads to another prayer room for women where kids are not allowed. That prayer room is the most beautiful worshipping room i've seen so far. The room is furnished with red, thick and soft prayer carpet that filled out the room from corner to corner. The place smells softly of perfume and holiday celebrations. An intricate chandelier

hangs in the corners of the ceiling. And up front there is a half glass wall that overlooks the men's prayer arena down on the ground floor. There is a big plasma screen on the wall that shows the men and the Imam.

Dar-Al- Hijrah is very diverse mosque. People of all kinds and all ages go there to pray. There are Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshi, Arabs, Egyptians, Africans, British, Americans, African Americans. The list can go on and on. Everyone is dressed to their best. Most of the women wore a long garment and a scarf. The guys wore a white clothing that went up to their knees and a white cotton pants under it.

It was very awkward at first when i got to the place. I had draped a scarf on my head not to stand out too much. I had the pleasure of meeting a young girl like me who gave me a tour of the place and talked me through the service . The service was neither too long nor too short. Mariam, the girl i met, took me upstairs to the women's prayer area where we took our shoes off, placed it on a shelf in the hallway and sat down inside on the rug. There is no chair or table. Most of the ladies sat with their legs crossed. It was actually quite comfortable. There was a shelf in the corner filled with an impressive collection of the Quraan. As i looked around, almost everyone have one in their hand, their heads bent, reading it with undivided attention. Mariam told me that On fridays, it is good to read Sura Al - Kahf (The Cave) before the Jumaa

prayer. Sura Al- Kahf can be found in the 18th chapter of the Quraan. It talks about the Trials and Tribulations of Mankind. I noticed people praying as soon as they walked in. They all do the same thing. They cross their hands on their chest, read Sura's or paragraphs from the quraan. Then they bend at the knee while muttering a prayer, this act is called a Ruku. And then they stand back again and go down for a Sujood with their foreheads touching the ground. They repeat this several times before ending their prayers. After a while, the imam cleared his throat and tapped his microphone. Everyone put their Quraans away and prepared to listen. Mariam said this part of the friday prayer is called a Khutba or lecture.

Thankfully, the lecture was in English. The Imam began by saying, Assalamu Aleikum, a greeting in arabic which means Peace be up on you. That's one of my favorite saying in the culture of Islam. A lot of muslims greet one another with this line, the receiver of this greeting then responds, " Waalaykum Salaam" which basically means may peace be upon you as well.

The Imam was a very soft-spoken man. He began his lecture by reading a passage from the Quran, he elaborated on the passage. The passage talked about being gratefulness in times of adversity. He gave a heartbreaking account of what's happening in the muslim world around the globe and the sad situation people are facing. He talked about the refugees that were coming to Europe and fervently asked the attendants of the mosque to make Dua'a (prayer) for the refugees from their sincerest heart. At this point in the lecture, the atmosphere got electric, some people cried when he talked about those refugees. Then the Imam went on to talk about the

Prophet Muhammad and the love and respect he had for people, including his enemies. He mentioned one Hadith/ story that stuck with me. He was talking about the time where the prophet was being abused by the people of Mecca. He was hurt and bleeding when the angel Gabriel came up to the prophet and asked him if he wants him (Gabriel) to hurt the people of Mecca like they've hurted him. The prophet told Gabriel to leave the people of Mecca alone. They didn't know any better.

The service concluded in the calm manner it started. After the Khutba/ lecture. Everyone stood up to follow the Imam in the official Friday Prayer. The Imam began by reciting the Quraan. At some point in the reading, the Imam said something in arabic and everyone in the mosque uttered the word "Ameen" in unison. It was the most startling and unique sound i have ever heard. There was a melody in the way they said it. Their "Ameen" echoed around the mosque. It literally gave me goosebumps. The prayer ended with the imam thanking everyone and making a quick prayer/ blessing for everyone. Mariam and i walked out of the mosque. I thanked her for her help and made my way to the parking lot. People stood in the parking lot chatting and greeting one another. The children played basketball in the court and the playground. As i drove out of the mosque, i felt awfully quiet. I kept replaying the sound of the people when they said "Ameen." I know for sure that i will go back someday. •

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