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2015

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Mariano Hernandez

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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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First Baptist Church

by Mariano Hernandez

On Sunday, October 4th 2015, I visited First Baptist Church. It is located on 1905 Lebanon rd, Crawfordsville, IN 47933. The service began at 5:00 and it was about an hour long. Pastor Hernandez conducted the service, however volunteers read the first two readings.

The building is built similar to many other churches seen around Richmond Virginia. What makes it stand out is the beautiful garden that stretches around the front of the Building. The inside is beautiful very similar to small catholic churches. The main difference is the type of images, this Baptist church seems to not have many images. Just a few small crosses here and there. There is no altar, just a podium on the right side and there are many pews for people to sit.

The inside is very large and it did not get fully packed. There was plenty of space in the back and there were no kids under 10. Right in the beginning of the service they introduce the people visiting so they introduced me during this time. The service was mostly families, though I was very surprised at the amount of young adults who attended. This service was in Spanish so all of the people were of Hispanic background. Everyone in the service was dressed business formal. I didnt wear a tie but I also dressed with a suit. It is about 50/50 women and men in the service.

For the most part I felt comfortable during

the service. During the beginning I was a little nervous when I had to introduce myself because I wasn't aware that I had to. My uncle is part of the community so they announced my name and I had to give a couple facts and mention the place where I was visiting from. When they said my name I stood up and everyone turned to look at me and I felt a little intimidated during this moment. After this moment I didn't have to speak again.

The service had a simple opening with a small choir. There wasn't a formal opening, they simply did the introductions of visitors and they began the preaching. I was a little disappointed in the beginning since I was expecting something similar to what the Catholic cathedral did. The choir was mostly young people, three guitar players and one piano player with about five young people singing. For the size of the church they filled up the whole place with sound and the singers were actually very impressive. I think that the opening song made up for the lack of introduction to present the beginning of the service. The music was upbeat and the voices of the women were angelic. I arrived early for mass so I am not sure if they had a greeter in the entrance but it seemed that most people who were at the service were a community and not many outsiders come in. For every song all of the people in the church participated in the singing and they all seemed to know exactly what to do. There was a lot of preaching done by the pastor and other people who are part of the leading board. They

didn't do the sign of the cross or any kneeling, just standing and sitting. They did three readings before reading the Gospel. There weren't any ritual ceremonies done, most of the service was preaching and singing.

I was very surprised to not see more prayer done during the service. I was waiting to see the "Our Father" prayer be done but it seems that most of the service is focused on readings from the bible and even an open discussion. It reminded me of a bible study group which I used to be part of. I think that the part that stuck out to me the most was the singing. I am more than certain that the choir practices many times a week because the guitar players were playing both the melody and the harmony and it just sounded beautiful.

I did not write down the readings that were said during the service but I do remember what the preaching was about. The preaching was teaching about not being a hypocrite and representing what you preach. He went on to describe that people teach one thing but they represent another and gave many biblical examples. Something that stuck out was seeing that everyone brought a bible in with them. Obviously I wasn't prepared but the person next to me was sharing the bible when the Pastor read out the Gospel. During the preaching he would also tell us to turn to certain readings and again the young man next to me would let me look on with him. The end of the service was also very simple with not much going on except a farewell from the Pastor. After that everyone clapped and started to make their way out. After the service was over I was invited to have a dinner with them but I wasn't able to attend because I had to reunite with my family.

The service was simple and it seemed more like a bible study with no rituals going on. I was expecting to see more going on but there wasn't. I would really like to try Baptist churches around the Richmond area and compare the differences. Perhaps I just went to a not so traditional church. •

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