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Antoniah Brown

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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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Grace and Holy Trinity Episcopal Church

by Antoniah Brown

The place of worship I decided to attend for the third, and final field trip of this class, was Grace & Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. The location is at 8 N Laurel St, Richmond, VA 23220. The denominational affiliation of this congregation is Christian, more specifically Episcopal. The day I attended was November 29, at their later service which convenes at 5:00 PM. The presiding official was Rev. Kimberly Reinholz.

The outside of the place is quite different from the buildings around. It is located between the Landmark Theater, now known as the Altria, and The Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. The buildings coloration is much more sinister, for a lack of better words, in color. It is much like that of the gothic tradition with hues of grey. However, one of the most eye catching features of the building is its red doors. They are a stark contrast to the rest of the building and cause you to feel like you are entering a castle of sorts. When entering the building it was actually a bit startling in comparison to the outside. One of my other trips having been The Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, it reminded me a lot of that interior with its stained glass windows and church pews. The ceilings were very high and the lighting quite dim. They also had lit candles all across the stage, to which we were invited to sit.

Upon entering my friend and myself were greeted by a girl who was around our age. She told us to sit up front, handed us a bulletin,

and welcomed us to the church. My friend and I took a seat at the front of the congregation, but a few minutes after sitting Rev. Kimberly Reinholz approached us with greetings and instructed us to actually go sit on the stage where the choir pews were. She said this was the first Sunday in the Season of Advent and so they were doing something new. She explained that Advent had something to do with the weeks leading up to Christmas. Rev. Reinholz and some other ladies were light-hearted and welcoming saying this would be an intimate group and they weren't going to bite. Everyone in attendance were primarily college aged, and there were only about twenty of us. There were two elder men there, but they looked no more than late forties. Everyone appeared to be middle class by the way they dressed, and although primarily there were Caucasians present, there were quite a few minorities consisting of what appeared to be of Asian, Middle-Eastern, and African American background in this small group. There were definitely more females than males present, there only were five guys that I can definitely remember.

I felt very welcomed to the group, and with this brought an ease in conversation. To my surprise, I actually knew one of the young ladies who was a part of the church. They were very accommodating for the new comers walking us through the bulletin with the hymns that would be recited and what was to occur in the service. It was quite similar to the

Catholic mass I attended, but a lot more open. There really did not need to be independent explanation with the bulletin in hand and the way the Reverend and a few of the members went about singing the hymns and having us sing after. Everything was self-explanatory and went by with a certain practiced elegance.

Something that was quite interesting to me was the reciting of the hymns. When practicing we only sung it through once or twice, but actually executing it we sung it through quite a bit more than that. It was funny because looking at the people who normally attended you could tell they were also confused as to how many times over we had to sing it, and some of us would stop in the middle then hearing that the girl leading the hymn reciting was still singing we continued on. Soon, I think we all caught on that when the Reverend rang this bell that meant that was the last time we were singing this and we could continue on.

The emotional tone of the service was definitely one of ease and openness. The opening was not so much “dramatic” as it was rehearsed. Everything was all there in the bulletin to follow along with, so you never really had to question where we were and what was happening next. The Reverend also did a good job as to motioning with her hands as to when we needed to stand and sit, and sometimes saying it out loud as well. The Reverend at the beginning asked everyone to say and sing along regardless of how loud, or how bad it was as long as everyone participated. I think this helped when it came to our responses. They weren’t so much emotional as they were unified and the service was definitely ritualistic.

The service ended with “The Breaking of the

Bread”, which in the Catholic tradition would have been the Eucharist. After, a blessing was said over us by the Reverend and we were dismissed to leave. This is where it differed from the mass I attended. Everyone remained seated at first and some announcements were given, they offered dinner for anyone who wasn’t otherwise obligated, mentioned cookies for those interested on Wednesday, and also said they would be having study breaks in the congregation for those who wanted to get out of their residential hall. It was very welcoming, although I was unable to stay after. The Reverend also offered to answer any questions of those who were new letting us know we were more than welcomed to shoot her and email.

Within the congregation there was symbolism within the stained glass windows that held biblical depictions within them, seemingly from the New Testament. Also, the Breaking of the Bread itself was symbolic of Christ sacrifice of his body and blood for his people. This happening was very similar to the Eucharist, as I said before in the Catholic tradition, and what other churches might refer to as Communion. It is something I realized is a very common practice amongst Christian affiliated churches and seems to be that way because of the gravity of the event it reminds its followers of. •

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