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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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InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

by Antoniah Brown

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship was the name of ministry I attended. The service meeting I attended was on October 30, 2015 and they were meeting in 101 Harris Hall at 6:30 PM. The denominational affiliation was evangelical and interdenominational. The actual guy who brought about the sermon was the lead pastor from Commonwealth Chapel located at 1836 Park Ave, Richmond, VA 23220, by the name of Brandon Samuel.

Well since the meeting was inside Harris Hall, it was classroom like. It is the larger lecture hall so it is spacious and kind of like a partial colosseum shape to it. Seats are in two sections, with higher level of seating in the back, although everyone was seated in the front two sections closes to the stage. The projector was down, and a wooden podium was off to the side. There was also a glass podium chilling in the center of the stage.

Once entering Harris Hall, there was a girl who was setting out sort of advertisements for the ministry, and I was greeted by her. My friend and I were a tad bit early. We chatted with her, and then she introduced us to some of her friends. She was a nice girl and quite personable causing me to feel welcomed from the beginning. She initiated conversation asking general questions that are in everyday life and not like some other Christians I have met that seem to want to shove the bible down your throat as soon as you walk through the door.

The people that I saw around were all college age except maybe two or three others that seemed to possibly be leaders of the group. I would say it was pretty diverse, much like the diversity you would see in a medium sized lecture hall at Virginia Commonwealth, although there were more people of the Caucasian ethnicity. Everyone there were students at the university as far as I could tell and there were about maybe 80 or so of us. I was quite comfortable talking to those within the service because they were nice and did not try to ostracize my friend and I. They made sure we were comfortable and even sat with us during service and talked to us after.

The emotional tone was laid back. Everyone was dressed casually, like any other school day, and conversing before the service began. My friend and I actually were having a lovely conversation with a young lady about TV shows because my friend had made reference to a character in Empire. The other girl asked what we were talking about, and we found out that she also viewed the show as well, and, in addition, was interested in Scandal and How To Get Away With Murder. The opening of the service was definitely casual. Someone went on stage and greeted everyone, and we kind of all did an ice breaker game. It was called This or That? and basically everyone had to line up in the center of the room and the lady on the microphone would ask whether you liked pizza or hamburgers (for example) and either

you would go to one wall or another depending on which thing you liked more. She would lead it up with another question related to the previous, before asking another this or that. Before the pastor himself got on stage there were some announcements, then a worship team, consisting of some the students, got on stage and sung two songs.

During the delivery of the pastor's actual message the audience was neither emotional nor reserved really. There was not anyone yelling, but people were laughing along with jokes the pastor made here and there and it was a very calming and just comfortable atmosphere to be in. The service landed somewhere between ritualistic and spontaneous. There were not things happening off the wall, there was definitely an organization to it, but at the same time it was not like the Catholic Mass I attended the other month where things were literally listed out on this brochure thing. It kind of all just flowed in a natural way. The service ended much like that of how it began. They said a prayer, and the worship team came back up and sung three songs, followed by more announcements before everyone was released. It was interesting because after everyone was released a lot stayed and were talking to other people and even my friend and I sat and talked to the girl we were beside all service and exchanged numbers. I do not think there were any particular rituals used, other than the fact of praise and worship and prayer. Both are meant to be a blessing to those within the congregation as well as to usher in the Spirit of God and to get everyone's souls in kind of a receiving place.

Overall, I found the service to be refreshing. The pastor spoke on sexuality and I was kind of wary that he might say things that could

offend, but he mostly spoke on it from the aspect of being in healthy relationships and not having a "substitute savior". Substitute savior meaning to not allow those you are in a relationship with to take the place of who God is and what he wants you to have in your life. This also means not looking towards a person to "save" you when God is the one who is supposed to be in control. He gave tips on what guys and girls should look for in one another and ended it on a nice note that sex is not God, but it is also not gross. It is something that is beautiful in the context of doing it in accordance to God's plan. He did a good job of not bashing people for things that are in their past as well. I thoroughly enjoyed the ministry, and will most like attend once more in the near future. •

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