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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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Cathedral of the Sacred Heart

by Mariano Hernandez

On Sunday, September 27th 2015, I visited The Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. It is located on 800 S Cathedral Pl, Richmond, VA 23220. The service began at 5:15 and it was about an hour long. Monsignor Patrick Golden conducted the service, however volunteers read the first two readings.

The outside of the cathedral is beautiful with Renaissance style architecture. The inside is beautiful as well with huge domes designed over the altar where the priest presides during the service. The inside has a huge crucifix in the center above the altar. On the left side there is a sacred area where the host goes. On the right side there is a huge painting of the Virgin Mary.

All the seats were taken by the time the service began, and there wasn't any sort of formal greetings from people in their sections. The service was mostly families and older people though there were young people who seem to be in their 20's. The service was filled with diversity, there seemed to be people from many different races. Students were dressed casual and families and older people were dressed more formal. There were a mix number of male and female at the service.

I felt very comfortable at the service. No one made me feel weird and I felt in my comfort zone throughout the whole service. I didn't talk to many people who were attending but during the peace offering and the "our

father" I received many smiles which made me feel welcomed. This was the only time that physical contact happened. I didn't open up to people because I am shy but I felt welcomed and the diversity made me feel even better especially because everyone was smiling.

The service had a very beautiful opening with organ music playing and the priest along with the servers walking down the isle to the altar holding up a big crucifix. The opening was dramatic starting right on time and making a big impact on the beginning of mass. The opening to the mass sort of told people that Jesus was coming in as the founder of the Catholic religion with the crucifix being held up high by the mass servers. The music was upbeat and there was a hymn for every part of the mass. In the entrance they had an usher who handed out programs with the songs and some of the main prayers. For every song all of the people in the church participated in the singing. There was very little preaching compared to other Christian churches I have been to. The sign of the cross was done before many of the readings and blessings. Mass included kneeling and standing and holding hand, kneeling was done mostly during the more sacred parts. An example was during the consecration of the Host and Wine. This ritual is believed to be similar to what Jesus did and said during the last supper with his disciples.

There were two parts of the mass that really stuck out to me the most. The first was the

“Our Father” prayer. During this prayer the whole cathedral holds hands while a hymn is being played and everyone sings the “Our Father”. The way this prayer is done really shows unity and emotion in the church, as this prayer is believed to be the prayer that Jesus taught the church. The second part that stuck out to me the most was the peace offering. This was one of the few times where there was interaction between the people in the church. I went around and shook as many hands as I could around the section where I was sitting. The priest also went around and shook hands and took part in this moment of sharing peace. I think that this moment was special also because you think of all the violence that stretches throughout the world due to religious persecution and to be able to share a moment of peace amongst people in the community is really a good moment.

A special moment happened during the ritual of the host. During this time the priest says a prayer while the whole church kneels. He then said another prayer and he held up the Host high for a few seconds. He then proceeded to do the same thing with the wine. Right after the peace offering he and his servers stood around the altar to hand out host and wine to the whole church. Everyone formed a line to receive communion. After this part of the mass people went back and knelt and continued to pray. After this, there were announcements, which included an invitation to students to attend Sunday supper. After the announcements the priest gave everyone the final blessing and said, “Go in Peace the Mass has ended”. A closing song began to play and everyone again started singing. The closing was similar to the opening, the priest and the servers face the altar and bow then head down

the aisle being a person holding a crucifix. After the song everyone begins to make their way out of the cathedral and most people share a smile as they walk out. At the exit the priest waits to shake people’s hands. I shook his hand as I made my way out.

This service was truly beautiful. I enjoyed it very much and really appreciated the architecture of the cathedral. I can really see myself going back and enjoying the peace that I felt. I think that something that would be good is to meet people and to be part of the community as well. •

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