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## Cathedral of the Sacred Heart

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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 Amy Parks

On October 4th, I visited the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart located on 800 S. Cathedral Place in Richmond, Virginia. Rector, Reverend Patrick Golden, and Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo held the service. I was very excited to attend a service here, because I had never experienced a mass before. It ended up being a lovely time.

I had always wanted to attend a service at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart because it is an absolutely stunning cathedral on the outside. The inside is no disappointment. When you first walk in, there is a foyer with dim lighting with tables presenting the church service brochures. The foyer leads to the sanctuary. When I first walked in, I noticed how tall the ceiling is, and the highest part of it is a dome shape. The ceilings are covered in different illustrations of Biblical stories. In the very center above the stage, is a cross with Jesus nailed to it. There are arched, stained glass windows surrounding the Cathedral, and wrapping around the front at the stage. They all displayed pictures of Jesus and saints. There is an aisle going directly down the center between the seating. The seating arrangements consisted of wooden pews, and cushions that extend towards the floor for members to kneel on for prayer.

As for the crowd, it was extremely diverse. I saw many different ages, genders, and races. However, it was a somber atmosphere. At first, I was not very comfortable. I arrived early, and

not a lot of people had arrived yet. Since it was so quiet, I felt like it was not appropriate to talk. People came with either friends or family members, and sat with them. I didn't see much mingling going on. They seemed to be very much to themselves.

Once mass began, most of the pews were filled with people. I started to grow more comfortable as mass proceeded. There was a time the priest had everyone briefly greet each other. Everyone seemed very friendly. When the mass ended, the parish was at the door to shake hands. They thanked everyone for coming, and wished them a farewell. I thought that was a classy way to end mass.

The sermon started off with a prayer and a creed. They began their prayer by doing a hand motion that shaped into the cross. The entire congregation said the creed aloud which was from the gospel of Mark 10:2-16. Afterwards, the Bishop listed all of the announcements of the church. He then read out loud scripture pertaining to the sanctity and origin of marriage. He read a passage that said that a man and woman become one flesh in holy matrimony.

In between his teaching, there were instrumental breaks. There is a large organ overlooking the sanctuary in the back that played while a woman sang old, sacred hymns in soprano. Some songs she would sing solo, while others the entire congregations sang,

too.

The mass was very reserved and ritualistic. One of the rituals was the priest made a grand entrance while holding the cross down the aisle. The cross represents the crucifixion of Jesus. Another ritual was the communion. Only Catholics should partake of it. The wine is believed to be the actual blood of Jesus Christ. It was poured into one cup for all of the church to drink from. There was also a plate of crackers to represent the body of Jesus being broken. Communion was all prepared by the priest and the Bishop. It was set up in the front of the sanctuary at the end of mass. The congregation flooded the aisle making their way down to participate. When they were finished, they did the hand motion shaping into a cross.

At the end of mass, I attended the weekly youth gathering that welcomes all VCU students. Here, I was able to meet and fellowship with people my own age. It was a great time. They were all very welcoming and friendly. There was a huge spread of homemade food—even a vegan option. After we all ate, we played two games of bingo. There were even prizes that people won.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed attending my first mass. It is a beautiful church that reaches out to the community. I really enjoyed meeting with the youth, and learning about Catholicism. •

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