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Arise SDA Church

by Janis Woodward

On Saturday, October 24th, 2015, I visited Arise Church. Arise Church is located in the city of Silver Spring, Maryland. The people who attend this church identify as Seventh-day Adventists, also known as Protestant Christians. The pastor of the church's name is Gamaliel Feliciano. I arrived at Arise at 10AM and the service was ready to begin.

Located in Silver Spring, Maryland, Arise is a small building situated amongst a strip of buildings. The area is very nice and city like. The streets are very busy— filled with zooming cars and pedestrians. The streets are even busier on Saturday, the Holy day, because church goers are gathering to attend the service. However, from the looks of the outside of the building, one would not be able to tell that this building is a church just by passing by it. There is a sign hanging that reads “arise” in a hip, modern, font. It looks more like a community center or art studio rather than a place that holds religious services.

I enter through the door of the building and am immediately greeted by a male in his late thirties, who is a member of the church. He says, “Good Morning!” and then motions me to walk down a set of stairs to reach the place where the service was going to be held. Every single person who entered the church was also greeted by the church member, whether by a simple handshake and hello, or a hug. The first thing I notice about the church is how small the area is; it is nothing like a large

Catholic or Baptist church. The ceiling is low and the space is tight. There were rows and rows of chairs set up all facing a mini stage. Although it was very small, I could feel this very cozy vibe.

As I look around, I do not see one particular type of gender, age, or ethnicity. It is the most diverse church service I have ever been to. Most of the church members were part of the middle class. However, the people ranged from American, African American, to Asian, to Hispanic. There were men, women, and children. It was as if the entire world came together to this small room to practice the same beliefs and faith. Everyone mingled with everyone—there were no cliques or segregated groups of people. I felt very welcomed, warm, and accepted. I blended in with this crowd of people. My friend Gabriela Segovia is a Seventh-day Adventist and invited me to go to the church service with her. She introduced me to the pastor, Gamaliel Feliciano, who had a very calm, easygoing personality. I did not feel alienated at all, especially since this was my first time at this church.

It is Saturday morning and I get a phone call from my friend Gabriela De Jesus Segovia. She is calling to invite me to go to church service with her. My ignorant mind blurts out, “but it's Saturday?!” She says, “Yes, Seventh-day Adventists see Saturday as the Holy day, the Sabbath.” This intrigues me and I want to learn more so I decide to go with her. After

a forty-five minute car ride (my friend and her family make this drive every Saturday) we arrive at Arise. I am greeted with smiles and warm welcomes. No one was singled out because the people were so diverse in ethnicity, age, and gender. I felt as if I had been a member my entire life.

The first thing that happened during the service is something called Sabbath School. All the members, ranging from kids to adults went into a classroom. I was told by my friend that this is where we would learn a lesson or story from the bible. After about forty five minutes of Sabbath school, everyone was allowed to take a five minute break to mingle and converse with each other. I look around to see everyone conversing and laughing and smiling. I talked to a lot of Gabby's friends about everyday life like work and school. It was all very laidback and easygoing. The actual service started after the break. The opening was very uplifting; a band took the stage and sang about 3 Holy songs. After the songs, everyone sat down and listened to announcements. The announcements included things like: church events, concerts, community service opportunities and so on. I can tell that these people who belong to the church value community, health, and helping others in need. These people were a display of the humanity left in the world. After tithes and offerings, a group of children comes up to the stage and tells a story. This church is very inclusive to all its members. Everyone says a prayer and the preacher begins to preach. His tone is emotional, yet laidback. He speaks in a calm conversational tone. The congregation is not reserved, but merely listening. Most of what the preacher talks about is love, the idea that God is love, and the idea the one should give their heart to Jesus Christ. The service is very

ritualistic and routine based, in that they follow the same schedule every time. The service ends in prayer and song and everyone is very participative in singing the songs. Before going home, the church offers lunch and we all eat and continue to talk and mingle. There weren't many symbols or art decorating the walls of the church, but there was a big wooden cross hanging on the wall. Seventh-day Adventist's logo consists of an open Bible with a cross rising out of it. Hence; you can figure out where they got the term "Arise" from. •

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