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# Bethel Baptist Church

by Katherine Gillies

For field trip #1 I attended Bethel Baptist Church located at 1100 Huguenot Springs Road Midlothian, Virginia 23113. I attended on Sunday Sept. 20 at 10:30am. The presiding official was Todd Bradbury.

Baptists are one of the largest Christian denominations. Baptists view the Bible as the ultimate authority in shaping a persons life. A primary Baptist distinction is their practice of believer baptism rather than infant baptism. They believe that baptism is not a requirement for salvation but an act of obedience to Jesus Christ. The Baptist church is autonomous and has no hierarchical body. Pastoral leadership positions are reserved for men.

The church itself consists of two buildings. The outward appearance is a brick structure with white pillars in the front and a steeple. There is a cemetery located in the back. The sanctuary is what I would call traditional. There are rows of wooden pews, dim lighting, stained glass windows and a baptism pool. Although I am not affiliated with the Baptist church, this is what I believe a "typical" church to look like. Services are performed in the sanctuary for baptisms and on the first Sunday of each month. Otherwise, services are performed and attended in the adjacent building called the "People of Hope Center". That building is quite different from the sanctuary. There are no pews. Instead there are cushioned individual seats. There are two giant tv screens that flank the stage/altar.

There is a Giant cross on the back wall. The choir sits directly in front of that and to the left is the band. Compared to the sanctuary, the People of Hope Center is quite modern. I attended the service with a friend and member of the church. I was told the reasoning behind having the services in the adjacent building rather than the sanctuary was because of numbers. More people can be accommodated in the People of Hope Center. As we discussed this, he told me that some members of the church feel closer to God when the services are offered in the sanctuary. I found this odd. I personally feel that I am close to God regardless of my surroundings.

I attended with a friend and member of the church. I was very comfortable and welcomed with open arms. There were about 100 people in attendance. I would say they were mostly white males with the average age of 60. Most of the people were dressed in typical church clothes but some were quite casual. Everyone was friendly and there was a lot of fellowship prior to the service. The service began with music and the lights being turned down. There was no procession. The pastor began with an overview of the weekly bulletin and birth/death announcements. There was an opening prayer and then the opening hymn which was sung by the band not the choir. As they were singing, the lyrics were projected onto the two large tv screens. There were four men standing in the back of the room. I was told they were ushers to show any late comers to

their seats. After the hymn there were prayers for sick church members. "Prayers for the People" was shown on the big screens. Shortly after this there was the offertory hymn and the basket was passed for donation. The pastor began the reading of the scripture which was Romans 12:1-7. This and the following discussion was very short and to the point.

This was a special service because a Deacon was being ordained. In the Baptist church when a Deacon is ordained there is a ritual called "laying of Hands". The person who was ordained was Shirley Roberts. She was seated in front of the congregation. All the deacons of the church (there are 19) lined up to touch and speak words of affirmation and prayer to her.

At the end of each service, the pastor offers an invitation to anyone who would like to accept Christ into their lives and hearts. The hymn of Invitation is played and anyone willing to do so goes up to the front to speak with the pastor. While I was there, Joe Bice accepted this invitation. It was kind of emotional to see the congregation welcome the newcomer to their church.

Growing up Catholic, this service was quite different from what I have known. At mass, there is a lot of symbolism and ritual. For example, the procession, the robes, the sacrament, stand/sit/kneel, etc. With my experience at Bethel baptist, I witnessed the ritual of Laying of Hands and invitation. I would say that the service was quite ritualistic and reserved. Aside from the giant cross, there really was no symbolism in the way of art. The service ended with applause for the newest Deacon and the newcomer. There was more fellowship after the service. All in all I think that even though the services from different

denominations of Christianity are quite different, the message is definitely the same. The message is to serve others and follow God's will. •

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