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Chua Hue Quang Temple

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Chua Hue Quang Temple

by William Van Deusen

For this month's field trip, I visited the Chua Hue Quang Temple. The address was 8535 Hungary Road Glen Allen, VA 23060. This was a Buddhist temple, which I visited with my girlfriend, who happened to grow up in a Buddhist family. I attended their service last Sunday, October 18th, from 10am till 11am. It was led by a monk named Su Sang Vieng.

The temple is located at the end of a long col de sac, which everyone parks their cars along. The outside of the temple is preceded by a big stone patio with a stone Buddha statue with two lions on either side. Behind the Buddha statue is an outdoors temple where you're supposed to put incense, at least that's what my girlfriend told me. The actual temple building itself is red and is built like I was assume is a typical Buddhist temple. It had the curved roof, thin pillars, and a sign with the name of the temple above the main entrance. The inside of the temple was very beautiful with designs all over the walls, tables with flowers on them, and an ornate shrine with a golden statue of Buddha looming over it.

We weren't greeted in any special way as we came in. I guess people are expected to do their own thing. Everyone there was Vietnamese, seeing as it was a Vietnamese temple, so was I literally the only person of non-Asian decent there. I couldn't really tell what kind of social class everyone was, but I'm assuming their mostly middle class families. While most American families seem to go to

Church with only their immediate family, it looked like the people attending the Buddhist service were there with their entire extended families as well. I saw several groups that had over ten people in them. There was no dominant age or gender, like I said; most people came with huge family groups. There were quite a few people there but it wasn't packed. I would estimate around 150 people in attendance.

I wasn't very comfortable talking with the other people attending the service seeing as most of them spoke broken English or very little English at all. Still, my girlfriend introduced me to several people and they were all very friendly. I went to the service with my girlfriend, who is fluent in Vietnamese, so she explained everything to me.

The emotional tone of the service was very laid back. During the first half, people just went around to the different prayer stations within the temple and did their own thing. Trish, my girlfriend, explained what people were doing at each station but neither of us partook in any praying during this portion. The emotion of the congregation was fairly reserved but they didn't seem solemn. Instead, everyone just kept within their family groups and did what they needed to. The first half of the service seemed very ritualistic where everyone went around to each station following what looked like set prayer guidelines. There was a whole lot of incense involved

so the place smelled incredible. I almost wanted to stay all day only for the way the place smelled. Eventually, a monk called Su Sang Vieng came in and everyone sat around him and listened to him talk about all things Buddhism. He wasn't giving a sermon like you would expect in a church but was instead just talking about the Buddhist faith and the proper way to follow it. He was speaking in Vietnamese so I couldn't understand a word so Trish explained what he talked about after the service concluded.

The service ended when the monk was done talking and everyone just got up and started socializing with each other. There was no big ending or song like what happened when I visited the Catholic Church. Trish's family actually knows the monk on a personal level so they talked to him for a little bit. Trish's dad introduced me to the monk and I said hi and shook his hand. He explained to him that I was visiting with their family which he seemed to find amusing. I don't know Trish's dad very well so I wonder if he and the monk were talking about me in Vietnamese. It's very possible, but I'll never know.

Like I mentioned earlier, during the first half of the service, there was a great deal of symbolism present as people went around to the different stations. Each site was intricately decorated with many designs on the walls behind them as well as on the pedestals. There were vases of flowers and jars that held sticks of incense that the congregation is supposed to burn while they pray at the various sites. Each station is supposed to represent different groups of people that you're supposed to pray to. An example would be a station dedicated to people who have recently passed away. The main station within the temple was dedicated

to Buddha. It was obvious due to the fact that it sat in front of a big statue of Buddha and it was also located centrally within the temple. People are supposed to stop at the main station, as well as the other stations and ask for guidance from whoever they represent. There wasn't much symbolism during the second part of the service since we were all just sitting there listening to the monk talk.

Overall, the service was a very unique experience. I visited a Catholic Church for my first field trip, and the two services couldn't have been more different. I honestly preferred the Buddhist service due to the fact that more time was spent praying and learning about the faith than on rituals and singing. If I understood Vietnamese, I feel like I would have learned a great deal about the Buddhist faith just from listening to what the monk said. The community at the temple seemed very welcoming and I would recommend it to anyone who needed somewhere to go for next month's field trip. •

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