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2015

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InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

by Barrett Martin

For this second “field trip”, I chose to attend a nondenominational Christian student ministry service. The specific organization is called IntersVarsity, and our ministry leader for the night was named Brandon Samuel, a pastor from nearby Commonwealth Chapel. We met on Friday, October 30, at 6:30PM, in Room 101 of Harris Hall at VCU (1015 Floyd Avenue, Richmond, VA, 23284).

As a third year at VCU, I’ve taken many classes in Harris’ large lecture room, so the architecture was familiar to me. Clearly, since this was a nontraditional worship service and this room is primarily used for classes, nothing about the space gave itself to religious influences, and no additional decorations or displays were added to the room to achieve that.

I was greeted warmly upon entering the building by multiple people. They asked my name, introduced themselves, and we began chatting right away about our majors, the weather, TV shows and clothes while waiting for the service to begin. Meanwhile, I continually assessed the amount of people in the room as more and more filed in. I would guess there were about sixty or seventy people present by the time we all took our seats, many more than I was actually expecting on a Friday night on a holiday weekend. Nearly all of them were VCU students, aged in their late teens and early twenties, with the exception of the pastor, his wife, and a couple of older group leaders. Besides age, however, this group was about as

diverse as it gets. There was a fairly even split of men and women in the room, and they were evidently of all ethnicities. I did have a friend to accompany me, but I found that the other members of the group, all “regulars”, were trying to be very comforting and welcoming.

The service itself was simple and straightforward. We began with one of the members standing at the front of the room and addressing us while she projected slides about upcoming events pertaining to student ministry, including some that targeted Christian students of minority ethnicities. She even shared a video about a large ministry conference in St. Louis, welcoming anyone who was interested to join a smaller group in the ministry who were organizing the trip there.

After these matters were out of the way, she led us in a group prayer, followed by a few songs performed by a small band and the congregation before the pastor began his sermon, one about how a Christian way of life relates to sexuality. I noticed that throughout the entire service, everything was kept very casual and lighthearted, despite there seeming to be a specific order to the way things were done. It seemed like this caused worshipers to react freely and emotionally to the music, the sermon, and even the announcements, in truth. Our pastor discussed with us romantic relationships and how they benefit us, but also how it was important to have a relationship with God in order to have successful romantic

relationships. I personally found the message positive, strong, and helpful in my own life, but he was able to make it fun and humorous by cracking jokes about the subject matter and working to make the topic applicable to our age group and lifestyle.

When he finished, another group of songs bookended the sermon, and our original speaker took the mic again to casually dismiss us. In total, the service lasted approximately an hour and a half.

Though I did enjoy the sermon, and I felt that people were friendly, I did find this service a tad awkward, especially the musical breaks where we were expected to stand and sing along with the band—even though I didn't know the words, and found most of the songs pretty silly. I also felt a bit uncomfortable with how friendly and chatty some of the other members were. While, of course, I didn't mind having casual conversation with them and discussing the sermon or the other parts of the service, I definitely felt pressured by them to fully join this group and to attend more services and other events, things I just didn't feel sold on right away.

Overall, however, I consider this a positive experience and I'd consider attending again, or recommending to a friend who expressed interest. •

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