2015

West Broad Church of Christ

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by Dzhuliyana Handarova

For my first field trip I decided to visit West Broad Church of Christ located on 813 West Broad Street in Richmond, Virginia. I chose this church for the simple reason that it is located very close to my apartment and it is one I walk by daily and had been curious about. I attended the church’s Christian service on Sunday, September 20th at 10:30 a.m. I was not aware refreshments and a meet-and-greet took place before the service therefore by the time I arrived most of the other attendees were already at the church. The worship was led by the church’s minister, James, who I liked almost immediately.

The church is a relatively small church located in the midst of Broad Street. If someone was to walk by it and was not paying attention they would most likely mistake it for a storefront of some kind. The outside is simple and gray, with glass doors and a small sign stating the name of the church and service times. The inside is also simple, but nicely furnished. As someone who has never attended any sort of religious service before, I was surprised at how casual the atmosphere was – I was expecting a small, stuffy, dimly lit room full of a lot of serious-faced people. There was a lot of light coming in through a wall of windows and people were sitting on folding chairs which made me feel more comfortable, as if because the church itself was casual I did not need to feel out of place. When I attended the service I chose to bring along my best friend who is a Christian and who I felt could explain things to me throughout. The West Broad Church of Christ family was mainly composed of African Americans, however there were people there of all ages. There were attendees who were my age (early 20s), young children, people in their 30-40s and even some elderly people. When it comes to gender I would say the guests were pretty much 50/50. Some people clearly attended the worship service as a family, and others, like me, came with friends or alone. There did not seem to be a dress code at the church; some people were wearing their Sunday best while others were dressed casually in jeans and comfortable tees. I could tell almost immediately upon walking in that this particular church was very close-knit and seeing an unfamiliar face to them was somewhat of a rare occurrence. Although they seemed curious as to whom my friend and I were, they were welcoming nonetheless and certainly seemed warm and friendly. There was a greeter at the door who welcomed us and handed us a pamphlet. At the beginning of the service the minister asked any newcomers to stand, which we did. As I previously said, I had never attended any sort of religious service before therefore I was sort of uncomfortable and reserved and did not spark up conversation with anyone. My friend and I sat in the back during the service and kept to ourselves during our visit.

The service began with singing songs of praise, which continued for about thirty minutes. Afterwards, announcements were given about
the church’s upcoming events and some people of the church were mentioned as they were in need of extra prayer. Afterwards, the guests “offered thanks and sook guidance from God” by prayer. Then James, the minister, preached and spoke of God and the Bible (most of which I did not understand as I am unfamiliar to the subject). After this, we were given the opportunity to financially support the church. I cannot speak about the ending of the service because my friend and I chose to leave after offering because frankly I felt that I was an outsider in this church community. Although everyone was incredibly friendly, I could tell their religion was extremely important to them and I felt as though my presence as a non-believer was off-setting. The opening of the service was extremely casual, and it was clear the entire church wanted to create a welcoming and warm environment for everyone to share their love for God. I would definitely say all attendees were incredibly emotional, and during the preaching some would make comments or yell out “Amen!” throughout. There was spontaneous clapping and shouting and I could tell everyone felt very comfortable in the environment of their church. My friend told me that the service went as expected, with singing first then announcements then preaching then offering, therefore I suppose this was a typical and fairly ritualistic process.

Overall, I am pleased with my short experience at the West Broad Church of Christ, because I believe they made me feel as comfortable as possible during my visit. Although I did not stay for the entire service I enjoyed the beginning and I do appreciate how welcoming and friendly the other church attendees were. Even though I am not religious and will probably not attend another Christian Sunday service, I would most definitely recommend this church if someone asked for my opinion.

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