Temple of Rodef Shalom

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Temple of Rodef Shalom
by Theophano Nghiem

Friday, September 11th the service started at 10:30am at Temple Rodef Shalom. Temple Rodef Shalom is located at 2100 Westmoreland St. Falls Church, VA 22043. Rabbi Amy Schwartzman was born and raised in Philadelphia, PA. Her ordination was in 1990 from the Hebrew Union College, a Jewish Institute of religion in New York City. Temple Rodef Shalom is one if the largest congregations headed by a woman Rabbi. It is also the largest Jewish congregation in VA serving over 1600 households form McLean, Arlington, Falls Church, Vienna and other nearby Northern Virginia areas. The Synagogue was founded in 1962. The Name “Rodef Shalom” translates to “pursuer of peace” in Hebrew.

The outside appearance of the Synagogue was very welcoming and one of the most beautiful buildings you will see in Falls Church, VA, it is made out of stone. It is a wide building with a beautiful stairway entrance. Just from looking at the Synagogue on the outside, which looks like an art museum, you can already tell that the inside is gorgeous. Once you enter the building, there is a common area where people sit and socialize before the service, or after the service. There is a quote on top of the entranceway to the sanctuary, which says, “Build for me a sacred place that I may dwell among you.” Unlike a Catholic Church, the inside of the sanctuary is very pain: white walls and tan seating area. The accessibility in the sanctuary is all rounded: there is an assistive hearing device, a large printed prayer book that is located in the back of the sanctuary, a ramp leading up to the Bema, a sign language interpreter upon request, an electric recliner in the quiet room, and a live stream for those who can't attend.

Once you arrive at the Synagogue, you aren't greeted by anyone; you just enter whenever you feel. But once you enter there is a seating area where people sit and socialize before the service. The Synagogue is filled with people from all ages; most of them have families, which made the experience very approachable. Falls Church, VA is a small city in northern Virginia, and is already known of a loving community. Even though people that attend the Synagogue, do not necessary live in Falls Church, you can tell that they have a strong and loving community. I attended the service with my friend's family, which made this experience more relaxed. They explained everything to me before hand: what to respond when the Rabbi says something, or when to stand.

On Friday night, you “welcome in the Sabbath” or Shabbat, which is the day of rest, sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. The service consists of songs, prayers, psalms, and reflections, which are found in a prayer book at the synagogue. Most of the prayers are also said on Saturday mornings as well and most of the texts share some theme of peace. Each Synagogue will say prayers a little bit differently, with different tunes and adaptations.
The Rabbi will start to talk about the Torah portion that will be read the next day, and will tell some sort of story or reflection to the congregation. Because I had attended the service on 9/11, the Rabbi talked about how all she wanted to do was help out but didn’t know how too. And eventually she found that just being they’re talking to people and comforting them was more helpful than some sort of organized help. The point that she was trying to get across was to “just be there.” On that day, the leaders of the service took a prayer that was about peace and sang the song “one day” while singing the prayer too. There is room for creativity, but it’s always a very rewarding experience. Oftentimes after a Friday night service, the synagogue will host what is called an Oneg, which is like a short reception. Sometimes the place will have a whole Shabbat dinner, too. That night the synagogue had small desserts, but the main focus was small cups of wine or grape juice and Challah, a traditional Jewish bread, over which we say prayers before we eat them on the Sabbath, there is a blessing for wine, Kiddush, and for the bread, Motzi. There are a couple other prayers that were said, just to thank god for the opportunity to celebrate another day of rest.

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