2015

Seacoast Church

Jennifer O'Connell

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/rels108

Part of the Religion Commons

© The Author

Downloaded from
https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/rels108/129

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of World Studies at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in RELS 108 Human Spirituality by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.
On Sunday, August 23, 2015, from 9:00 to 10:30, I attended Seacoast Church located at 1956 Maybank Hwy, Charleston, South Carolina. Seacoast in a non-denominational, Christian Church that approaches the historical Christian faith in a contemporary, unconventional way. The service was led by Greg Surratt, the founding pastor of Seacoast Church.

Seacoast Church has thirteen different locations, the Maybank Highway location lies in the heart of James Island. Its’ appearance was very surprising to me, it situated in a strip mall in an old movie theatre. The inside was very expanse and was much larger inside than it appeared from the outside. The inside still looked exactly like a movie theater, none of the carpet, lighting, drapes, or concession stands had been changed. Outside, there were very friendly women, members of Seacoast Church raising money for missionary trips. Inside several people were greeting guests and handing out church bulletins. The congregation were all casually dressed in sundresses and shorts. Before entering the theatre/sanctuary the people of the congregation and their guests were offered many flavors of hot coffee and tea along with various creamers, I found this to be very inviting as people had congregated here before the service began for fellowship.

Upon entering the theatre, I sat in front of the enormous movie screen, I noticed a small band consisting of a set of drums, two guitars, a female and male vocalists. Most of the congregation, approximately 60, were white, middle-classed, approximately 20 to 65 years old, both male and female.

The emotional tone of the service was light-hearted, welcoming and humorous. The service began with the invitation to join one their small groups, which are a place where people can connect with others and strengthen their relationship with God, study the Bible, and offer the group the opportunity to build encouraging relationships with each other and with God.

The congregation was asked to rise and for song and prayer, and then asked to be seated and the service began. I was waiting for the man who led the congregation in song and prayer to begin the sermon, however to my surprise the large, long, velvet curtains opened and the movie screen lit up with Greg Surratt, Seacoasts’ pastor. I was surprised and unsure of what was happening and this made me slightly uncomfortable as this setting and service was so foreign to me. This whole experience was odd and somewhat comical. Greg began by introducing himself and the church. He gave a brief overview of the church’s history, which explained why he was coming to us via video feed. Greg explained to newcomers that Seacoast has grown too large to house all of its members, therefore Seacoast provides his live service via video fed.
Congregational participation was interactive. The church bulletin that was handed out prior to the service contained a small worksheet that correlated with the sermon, Joshua’s Guide to Wall Removal. It had seven fill-in-the-blank statements from the sermon that helped the congregation remove the walls in our lives. I found this to be a helpful addition to the sermon, I was able to follow closely along with the sermon to ensure sure I received the “answers”. The service was slightly ritualistic, in that there was order to the service; introductions, song, prayer, the sermon, communion, inspirational words, and then prayer.

The only symbolic images that I noticed were the crosses worn around the necks of the service leaders and the use of religious music, crackers and grape juice used during communion. The ritual of communion used at this service consisted of a general statement to the congregation that if you had accepted God into your heart as your savior for the forgiveness of your sins, then line up down the aisles of the theatre and accept a cracker as a symbol for the body of Christ, given for our sins and grape juice the symbol for Christ’s blood shed for our sins. Although, I had been hesitant about attending this service it was insightful and educational. Being less ritualistic then other Christian Church services, lack of symbolism, and the overall casualness of this church may be what appeals to Seacoast’s large and growing membership.

Written Fall 2015. © Jennifer O’Connell.