

The old church located in downtown Oklahoma City had creaking wooden floors that announced you long before you entered the large sanctuary. Once inside Covert Life Church and seated in the hard wooden pew, I tried to take in the details of my surroundings. There were beautiful stained glass windows down both sides of the church. A large center section of wooden pews was lined with two sections of pews on either side of it facing inward. An upstairs balcony surrounded the sanctuary. Although the balcony was empty of worshipers, it was enclosed with plexiglass for safety reasons or perhaps to prevent mischievous children from dropping objects onto friends below. The podium area was centered up front. There were rows of cushioned theater style seats for a choir; however, this Sunday there was no choir. Just in front and to the left of there was a large grand piano and drum set, which provided the music for the service.

Feeling like a fish out of water, I tried to settle into my seat and blend in as much as possible, knowing full well that a fair-skinned blonde would not exactly blend into an African American church. Not wanting to go thru this assignment alone, I was attending the service with a classmate and her friend who knew some members of the church. We arrived early in hopes of finding a seat in the back and being inconspicuous. I had preconceived ideas of old ladies in hats fanning themselves while singing and swaying to old hymnals. I was surprised to find that there were no hymnals. This gave me a new concern, what if I didn't know the words to the songs? Would I look rude if I wasn't singing along? Would they think I was less spiritual than they? I tried to put that worry aside and stay focused on the task at hand.

My attempt to blend in and be inconspicuous was soon shattered. The service had not yet begun when one by one, each person there came over and not only wanted to

me

greet me with a handshake, they asked my name, where I lived, and what brought ~~me~~ to this church. Many of the women would not settle for a handshake, they felt that a hug was in order. I am not accustomed to hugging complete strangers in a place that I have never been in before, so this was way out of my comfort zone. At the same time, I didn't want to appear rude, so I smiled and endured trying not to look uncomfortable. However, with each hand shake and smile, I did find myself feeling welcome by each person's very sincere gestures. I have attended church regularly most of my life, but I have never been greeted by so many in one service. Their sincerity and openness made me feel much more at ease.

To my surprise the preacher did not stand on the platform and preach from behind a pulpit. Instead he stood in front of his congregation, at their level, and walked up and down the isles and back and forth across the front as he spoke. He was among his people instead of above them. He didn't use notes, but rather, he appeared to speak from his heart. Again, this seemed to make me feel more comfortable. Occasionally an "Amen" arose from the group, but there was not the hand waving loud "Preach it brother!" I had expected.

My preconceived ideas from movies and television did not mirror what I experienced that Sunday morning. No one danced in the isle, there was no condemning hell bound message. Instead I found a group of people who had common goals much like the goals at my own church; worship, teach, and reach out to others. Although our methods differ, I don't feel one is more right or wrong than the other, just different. Knowing that is somewhat comforting as well as empowering. I have heard it said

before, "There is more than one way to skin a cat." I suppose one could also say, "There is more than one way to hear God's word."

Example of student report on Cross-Cultural worship experience for Cultural Anthropology (Bridge program in Southern Nazarene University's adult studies division)

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