

Religious Site Visits: Assignment Instructions

What to do

The religious traditions we are studying this semester are not merely historical oddities about which one can learn only through the pages of our books. Rather, they are living traditions, with adherents who believe in and practice them. This component of the course asks you to encounter two of these living traditions and to contrast them with what you have read in our books and heard in the class lectures and discussions.

Over the course of the semester, visit two different Christian congregations of your choice. There are literally hundreds in the greater Fairfax area. The two congregations should be from different Christian traditions. You may not choose a site to which you belong or have a personal or family connection. This is an opportunity to see new places and learn new things!

You are welcome to participate or not in the service as you wish; you may go alone or with a group of fellow students. Your main task is to observe. Please visit the website of the congregation you visit for information about service times. Contact the sites themselves or your instructor with any questions about visitor etiquette. **Above all, conduct yourself with respect both to the service and to the participants.** Respect does not imply agreement: common courtesy is a common virtue.

Afterwards (before you forget!), write up notes on what you see and hear. What religious art do you see in the building? What do the clergy or ministers wear? Who is at worship? Are they old or young? How are they dressed? What happens before, during, and after the service? What kind of music is used? How does what you see connect to the history of Christianity as we have studied it this semester? How does it contrast to other Christian congregations you may be familiar with (if any)? If there was a sermon, what was it about and what was its style like?

What to write

Finally, write one or two double-spaced pages on *each* of the following questions:

1. What similarities *and* differences did you observe in the artwork (or lack thereof) and liturgy in the two sites?
2. How did your observations connect to the historical developments we have studied this semester?
3. How did your observations either confirm or force you to revise your preconceptions about the two traditions? Was it comfortable, or uncomfortable, for you to visit the two sites? Why or why not?

Include a cover page listing with your name and where you went and when.