

Faith Communities Essay

Why am I doing this assignment?

In order to help you better understand American religions you will be writing essays that deepen your knowledge of Catholic and Protestant faith communities in Utah. Your essay will apply what you have learned in this class to the “real” world. The assignment will give you a “hands on” experience of religion in America.

Pick a service different from your own faith tradition. Learn something new!

How do I do this assignment?

Those who contract for a “B” will write two essays. Those who contract for an “A” will write 3. Those who contract for a “C” do not have to turn in anything but if you attend a service you will be able to participate more actively in the discussion on those days.

Choose a faith community from this list based on either your interest or your schedule:

May 28	Roman Catholic
June 9	Episcopalian, Lutheran, Unitarian, United Church of Christ, Methodist, <u>American Baptist</u> , Presbyterian (unless you know it is a conservative group)
June 11	Assemblies of God, Baptist, Southern Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist, nondenominational
June 16	Calvary Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, Church of God in Christ

Your essay will be due on those dates.

Go to the service—on Saturday or Sunday—of the community. Catholics have services on Saturday afternoons/early evenings in addition to Sunday services. Do not go to a weekday mass as there is no sermon.

Pretend you are an anthropologists observing the “natives”—take notes (no one will care).

Watch closely what is going on before the service:

Where is the church located? What does the neighborhood look like in terms of race, class, and ethnicity?

What does the interior of the church look like?

Who is going to this church?

Watch closely what is going on during the service:

Is there a leader and what is he/she doing?
Who is participating?
What are they doing?
How is music used? How is movement used?
What are the Christian/Protestant/Catholic themes of the prayers, sermons, hymns?
Consider what is going on after the service (look at the bulletin):
What do people do when it is over?
What kinds of activities do people do during the week?
Is there more buildings than where you are sitting and what are their purposes?

Your essay must serve two goals: First, it should introduce me to the service or services you attended. Be descriptive, give me the facts. Do not be judgmental.

Second it should use the lectures (and the readings when applicable) to explain why things are happening the ways that they are. You should connect the lectures to what you have seen. Use the lectures to give me background. Pretend that I am a Hindu and know nothing of Christianity and tell me what is happening during the service. Show me that after this class, you know what is going on.

Be aware of the non-religious elements of the service—race, class, ethnicity, artistic taste, geography.

If you don't know what is going on or what something means, go to the library or the internet and look it up. Chat with me after class. Ignorance is not bliss.

Keep focused on the religious group you have visited. Do not compare it to your own religious tradition. Use the terminology that *they* use, not that *you* use to describe things. If they talk about their church, don't call it a chapel or a cathedral. If they call their leaders priests, don't call them ministers. Find out what they call things (don't say, "they seem to be reading out of a big book"). Know what you are witnessing and what it means.

How do I find these churches?

The best way is to look at the Yellow Pages under "churches." You might want to call to check on times because during the summer some churches change their times.

There are three (at least) predominately African American churches in Salt Lake and more throughout the valley. If you have problems finding one, see me.

You can also go with a friend or relative. Feel free to ask these people questions, but remember they might not know (or think they know) what is going on so you should **always** go to the library (or internet) and check as well. If you quote something, cite it.

However, this is not a research paper. I want you to tell me about the service **you** went to.

Isn't Going to a Church I don't Belong to Scary?

It may be, but don't worry! Just follow four simple rules 1) Be on time (although they might not be) 2) Dress well (again, they might not but be polite) 3) Put your own beliefs on hold for awhile 4) take a friend along for support.

Before you go, read my lecture over again. Go to the service prepared with background. Keep your eyes and ears open. Be a detective and see what they do that reflects what you have learned. Sometimes they will do things rather than say things.

Religious people are welcoming and interested in helping you learn about their history and traditions. Just explain you are studying American religions and you are writing a report on your visit. Can't go to a church on a Sunday? See me, there is Mass on Saturdays and Seventh-day Adventist services on Saturday.

What Are the Elements of a Good Essay?

- 1) describes the key elements of the service you saw (good evidence)
- 2) illustrates that you have attended class and understood the lectures
- 2) clearly communicates your ideas (organization)
- 3) has no mechanical errors (correct spelling, grammar, notation, proofreading)
- 4) demonstrates your understanding of the community (empathetic not judgmental)

Is There a Particular Style That You Want?

Yes. Make sure it is: 1) at least 5 pages long 2) double spaced 3) left margin of one inch and right margin of 1 ½ inches, one inch top and bottom 4) pages numbered 5) **Stapled** in upper left hand corner. I will turn the essay back to you to fix if you do not follow this style, I'm strict about this.

Does Spelling Count?

Absolutely. In fact, essays that are poorly written (weak organization, typos, awkward prose, simplistic language) will be returned to be re-written. I take writing seriously. College students should be able to write a clear, well-argued prose. See the "Ten Commandments of Writing" handout.

When is it Due and What if the Dog Eats It?

On the date stated above. If your dog looks hungry--if you have any problems--notify me by phone **before** the essay is due.