

15-minute Assignment PRIOR TO JANUARY 13, 2017 CLASS
Field Observation in a Congregation

One of the ways we understand the culture and theology of a congregation is by observing its social setting, its building, its artifacts, and its rituals. This is a very brief introduction to how to start this process.

Visit a church building – preferably one you do not know. It can be for a worship service or at a time when worship is not held. Write brief notes to answer the following questions.

What does a quick look at the neighborhood tell you about the community surrounding this church?

The church is across the street from Howard University seminary in a black neighborhood in Washington DC.

What does the building tell you about the culture of this church?

The grounds almost felt like a looked like a college campus. It was tall and dignified. From the reading, I would identify this as a pillar church. The church values order, propriety, and human dignity. The building is large and prominent but modestly decorated with plain glass windows.

What do the material objects inside the church tell you?

The Church was definitely part of the Disciples tradition. The table is at the center of stage. There is a cross on the wall and modest Christian, the pulpit was recessed with images of our denomination. There is a cross on the wall but it was covered by a projector screen (I believe this was deliberate as it was an interfaith service). The screen indicates that they value being contemporary.

Looking at the bulletin (if one is available inside the sanctuary), what do you learn about the symbols, rituals, worldview, tradition, and culture of this church?

The worship service was a special ecumenical and interfaith service to advocate for justice and resistance to the Trump presidency. The bulletin had speaker's names and an order of service but was very minimal. The order of the service consisted of prayers, and testimonies.