

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?

I went to St. Matthew's United Methodist Church of Valley Forge. The neighborhood is quiet and residential.

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

The beautiful, large, red brick church with a white steeple tells me it's a formal, traditional setting.

What do the material objects inside the church tell you?

Flowers, a large open Bible, candles and collection plates on the altar tell me this is a place of reverence, but simple and clean. I noticed that there are attendance logs (called Friendship books) in every pew, along with information about the church on the inside of the small book.

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 bulletin I had closely followed the theme of baptism. Their service was similar in structure to my UCC church, with the exception of confession – they didn't have that. They had a reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant. If it's anything like the one we did a couple of years ago, it was probably very powerful. They seem to value justice (they are a Sanctuary church), peace, prayer, humility and living as God's children, following Christ.

I also noticed that they have a women's Bible study, but apparently not one for the general population, and they have a Director of Children, Youth and Family Ministries, so I'm guessing that they have a large youth population. During the week, the welcome the Scouts, and the 59er's (don't know what that is) in addition to Youth Group and other church related meetings.

