

Site Visit: Hope Midtown

Katie McCoy

Urban Church Models

November 6, 2019

Walking down the sidewalk of East 52nd Street between Second and Third Avenue you wouldn't know that a church meets there unless you were looking out for it. The entrance doesn't stand out, but the friendly faces do as you walk into the small lobby. Hope Church Midtown has its unique charm as they rent their space from a Salvation Army.

I attend what was called a Hope Night on Sunday. It was a smaller service that focused on praise, worship, and prayer. Hope Church is part of the Evangelical Covenant Church denomination. From my understanding Hope Church could be categorized as a Collaborative Network/Partnership model. Hope Church has nine locations but also helps other church plants in New York City. Hope Church also created a New York City Network for urban church planting, and they have helped plant over 23 churches. Their mission statement from their website is, "Hope Church exists to lead a family of diverse churches into a transforming relationship with Jesus and a community of faith."

Hope Church achieves their mission statement through six different methods or programs. One method is Home Groups in order to provide community for members. Another method is by partnering with Hope for New York in order to serve the community. They develop churches as another method. They also created a program called learning gatherings. Learning gatherings provide training in order for people to serve. They have three special programs and workshops they group together called Alpha (for new or non-believers seeking to know more about the Christian faith), The Hub (a newer initiative to serve more throughout NYC), and Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Workshop that provide more knowledge to their community. These programs foster mentorship, community outreach, discipleship, leadership, and community both in and outside of their church.

When walking into the church I was greeted by Lupe Robledo. Lupe is on staff at Hope as the Youth Director. She has been attending and serving at Hope the last four years and joined staff this year. We walked into the sanctuary together and she explained the service I was attending was a little

different than their usual service. It was a worship service. The pews weren't filled, and people were spread throughout the space. We took a seat near the back as it started.

The structure of the service was opening prayer, worship, a smaller message from the worship leader, more worship, and end in prayer. Since it was primarily a worship service there was a lot of room for the congregation to pray and worship during the service. The thing that struck me was how spread out the people were from each other. They were all on different sides of the room and people would feel comfortable to sit as they pleased fit and pray.

While this service felt somewhat more relaxed than some of my personal experiences, it was beautiful to observe how this church worshipped. What was refreshing about this service is that no extra lights were added. There wasn't a centerpiece, or something added to give the sanctuary flair. It gave a come as you are atmosphere. The worship team wasn't playing rocking Christian songs or loud and upbeat hymns. The worship was demurer and more delicate from what I have traditionally experienced as a worship service. In my experience there usually there is more lights or an atmosphere set with a large stage setup. There can be a larger band with more amplification and the band will play different genres of songs some more upbeat and louder than what was played that night. The members of the church seemed to have more reflection and personal prayer happening during the service. It was overall, an enjoyable service to witness as their community was given a time to reflect and worship.

What was interesting about Hope is that their church does a lot more than was advertised to me. After visiting the service, I did more research from their website and I was surprised by all the programs they offered. The service was so focused on worship and prayer and giving that space to their community. Hope Church has made an impact on church plants throughout New York City but going to this service, an outsider would have never guessed that their church is so involved in more

projects and events than what was presented. Hope Church is a great example of don't judge a book by its cover because you never know the impact that is happening inside.