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CS501: People as Social and Cultural Beings: OA

Ethnographic Project

This the analysis of the new church plant, Church at the Well, which is located in Yonkers, New York. The pastor of the church is Pastor Michael Dent. His wife Tia Dent is one of the ministers at the church. It is a second generation church with its congregants who are mostly West Indian, Hattian, Jamaican, Islanders and many people from the south. The language spoken in this church is English. The hope is to add other languages and cultures to the church dynamic.

The Church at the Well is a multi-cultural Pentecostal church. Along with the Pastor Michael Dent is his wife, Tia Dent, who is a licensed minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pastor Dent is 38 years old. There is approximately 25-30 members on the church congregant rolls with the age range averaging between 20-30 year olds. There are some small children around the age of one and a few members around the age of 50-60 year olds.

Although, the Church at the Well is a new church plant, it has many functions of a church that has been around for many years. They have both men and women ministers of the Gospel who are licensed to preach and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Only the Deacons and Elders get ordained. They do have women who will be Deacons and not use the term, "Deaconess."

The social composition of the Church at the Well, as previously stated, is that of second generation English speaking young adults. The church is situated in the middle of the city of Yonkers in a Community Center. It is centrally located in the heart of the middle to lower class neighborhood, purposefully, so that they can be the church without wall for the community they

are in. Although all are welcome to come, no matter what ethnicity and what culture they come from. The social climate of the church is that of those who are not happy with church as usual. They are a people who want to be loved and seen by Jesus. They don't want to be lost in a big congregation, but want to experience Jesus and have a relationship with Him for themselves. They are not interested in having church the way the first generation has had it. They want to have their hand on the pulse of the community. Everyone is welcomed to the church and is allowed to know and feel loved and accepted. They are a church full of people who looking to partner with God in bringing His plan and purpose to fruition. Their earnest desire is that when people see them, they don't just see church goers, but that they see a reflection of Jesus Christ and is drawn by His love and acceptance.

This is a church steeped in the church of Acts. They believe in going out into the community and compelling the lost to come to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. They are a Bible-based, independent church whose basic tenants of faith can most closely be identified with the Word of Faith/Pentecostal Movement. The Godhead is a "Trinity" – three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – yet only one God (Deut. 6:4, Matt. 3:16, 17). The Bible is the divinely inspired and infallible Word of God, designed to be used for establishing all doctrine, answer all criticisms, set correction and instruction in all things righteous (2 Tim. 3:16). The Word of God, His Bible, is alive, powerful, and able to recognize and distinguish the thoughts and intentions of our hearts (Heb. 4:12). You must be born again, in order to enter into the Kingdom of God, by believing in your heart and confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord overall and that God the Father raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9, John 3:3). Just by hearing the Word of God, faith can come to the believer (Rom. 10:17) and faith alone provides personal access to all the grace and promises of God: salvation, Baptism of the Holy Spirit, knowledge of the Word,

healing, prosperity, answered prayer, and a personal relationship with God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:2, Matt. 9:29). All believers have power over the enemy and are empowered to do mighty works and miracles (Luke 10:19, Matt. 10: 7-8). The only way to be cleansed from sin is through true repentance and faith in the precious blood of Jesus (Eph. 1:7, Rom. 3:25, Rom. 5:9, Heb. 9:14). They teach that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church on earth with all honor to be directed to Him alone as He sits at the right Hand of the Father in heavenly places (Eph.1: 20-23).

It's a church that Jesus divinely established offices in the Church—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—each to do the work of the ministry and all these offices are alive and operating in the Church today (Eph. 4:8, 11, 12). This church is being taught by the Pastor how to be the church that God has called. He is teaching them how to rightly utilize their gifts and gives them the opportunity to use them. He assigns them all, not just the Ministers, Elders and Deacons to do ministry, but those in the congregants. He does not want people to feel comfortable coming to church and not participating, so he encourages them to move about and flex their spiritual muscles. Of course, under his guidance and within proper confines.

They believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues, is freely available to all believers who ask for it (Acts 2:1-4). They are encouraged to spend time with the Lord and seek Him for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. They are also taught to pray in the Spirit.

There is an excitement that they must work for the Kingdom of God and seek to have a strong relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ because Christ will return to the earth in the rapture to literally take His Church back to heaven where we will reign with Him until His Second Coming (Luke 18:8, Eph. 5:27, 1Thes. 4:16-17). They are taught that all will be judged

at the Final Judgment: the saints for their good works to everlasting life; sinners to everlasting damnation with Satan and all his demons to the Lake of Fire (1Cor. 3:13-15, Rev. 20). Finally, that Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His miracles, His atoning death and resurrection, His ascension to glory in heaven and the right Hand of the Father, and His personal return to this earth with His raptured Church in power and glory, where He will rule and reign for 1,000 years. Is the summation of our belief in the Lord Jesus Christ and why they believe what they believe.

The history of the church stems back to 2020 where Pastor Dent, who was just a musician for other churches and up and coming artists, felt the leading of the Holy Spirit to begin what is known as The Believers Fellowship (TBF). This was a Bible Study and fellowship of all believers no matter the background, ethnicity, culture etc. and they would come together weekly and have Bible Study and fellowship with each other. They stayed in prayer for approximately two years when Pastor Dent felt the Lord leading him to begin the church, Church at the Well and for him to be the pastor of it. So, on Sunday, April 2, 2023, they had their official church launch.

The Church at the Well, is a church that is committed to doing the work of the early church in Acts of the Apostles. They are going to the highways and by-ways and compelling them to come. They are a diaspora church that is committed in fostering a community of believers where all are welcome and will experience the love of Jesus.

Like the Apostle Peter had to learn with the vision God gave him, not to call anything God has made unclean. That includes all people, races, nationalities and tongues. The Church at the Well is making great strides in the West Indian culture of believers as they are learning to be who God is calling them to be in today's society.

CONCLUSION:

In my conclusion, upon spending time with Deacon in training, Lloyd Richards, Jr., Pastor Dent and the congregants of Church at the Well, I have come to see that although the church is new and although the congregants are a variety of mostly young adults along with some children and some older adults, these people are just as hungry for the presence of God as those of us who were born here in the United States and have much larger congregations.

They have a pure understanding of who God is and why they are worshipping Him. They are just as hungry for God and yearn for a relationship with Him. It is confirmed that God loves them and has a great plan for them as He does for all of His creation. Their ministry is not marred with all of the pomp and circumstance of the traditional Pentecostal churches. They attend church in whatever they are wearing, yes it may be jeans, but their hearts are pure for and toward God.

Each service at Church at the Well begins with a special time set aside for prayer, public praise and worship which is led by an anointed and contemporary worship team. I have not heard any hymns, not that there is anything wrong with it because it's not. Nevertheless, all are encouraged to worship openly in an orderly manner and within scriptural guidelines singing, lifting up of hands, praising, clapping, and dancing.

The pastor is committed to building the faith and spiritual strength in and of the believer. Pastor Dent preaches and teaches only from the uncompromised Word of God, The Holy Bible with a personalized and simplified, teaching style which makes the Bible understandable and applicable to everyday life situations. Pastor Dent's approach in leading people to full spiritual maturity, is through practical sermons and teaching of the Word of God. All are challenged and

encouraged to develop a deeper faith and trust in God with the ultimate goal at to help develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and experience the life-changing power of God through dynamic and uplifting services.

The spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ is essential to church growth no matter the culture or denomination. As born again believers we have the example of Jesus Christ who walked the earth preaching and teaching the Gospel of hope and reconciliation. Even after His brutal death on the cross, of how He suffered, bled and died, buried in a borrowed tomb and then rising again, it is essential for every believer to take notice that Jesus ministered to all cultures and genders and ages. He didn't discriminate, but all who wanted to come to Him He welcomed. This is what church is supposed to be about and this is what I believe the Church at the Well is called to do and if they keep their faith in God and not on people, they will succeed at it.

In fact, like many churches today, they are utilizing the free event of The Believers Fellowship to draw all communities together. They are centrally located for all to attend. They are young and excited about their relationship with the Lord and are an active congregation. Jesus said to His disciples, "Go therefore into all the world, baptizing in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen."

My hope and prayer is that they will reach out to other immigrant churches and as they grow in their faith, eventually they will have a thriving missionary based outreach program. As the members of Church at the Well are encouraged to practice the biblical principles of tithing and free-will offerings to help garner support for trips and for an even bigger and thriving ministry here in the United States.

FIELD NOTES:

Date: Palm Sunday, April 2, 2023 at 6PM.

Location: Church at the Well, 342 Warburton Ave, Yonkers, NY 10701 (**IN PERSON**)

Observations: I, alone attended, Church at the Well, Inc. They are located in the Community Center where there is minimal parking. So, I ended up parking on the street. Upon walking into the church, I was greeted by two ushers with the most glowing smiles that sang of its sincerity. They offered me a one page, front and back program that looked professionally done. The church was full of people of many races. People standing and worshipping God as the Praise and Worship team was singing in harmony in their microphones. The sound that emanated from them was amazing. I must have looked like I was in awe because I was ushered over by another usher who brought me to my seat on the third row. Before walking up the center aisle to my seat, I was then greeted by the ministers and deacons who were standing at the back of the church. As I walked up the middle aisle, I could tell that people wanted to be there and were actually enjoying themselves. The visiting ministers were sitting by the side of the stage. No one was seated in the pulpit but to the side of the pulpit. Everyone who was a Minister or Elder wore their vestments which included, all black with the white collars. The Deacons wore all black with no collar. After the Praise and Worship, then the offering was lifted and then the Church's Overseer, Bishop Designate Damien Sneed, preached a good message for the pastor and the church. After the sermon, he had the pastor, his wife and church members come up to be prayed for. He gave a charge to the Pastor and his wife, prophesied over the both of them and then had the church come up and get prayed for. For the next few minutes, we all worshiped and danced before the Lord.

FIELD NOTES:

Location: On the phone interview with one of the Deacons in training, Lloyd Richards, Jr.

Observation:

In an online interview with one of the Deacons in training, Lloyd Richards, Jr., he was very candid with me as to how he became involved with the Church at the Well. He is a second generation Jamaican American. He is 26 years old and was attending the church of his youth with his parents and other family members. He said he had been praying to God for a couple of years wanting to do more for God and to go deep into his relationship with His Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He knew he had a calling on his life and was beginning to feel God stirring in his spirit. He found out about The Believers Fellowship (TBF) and had begun attending it regularly on Friday evenings for about a year. He enjoyed how he felt being around people who were just like him, around his age, seeking God together and just knew within his spirit that that was the place God has sent him to. He became close with the founder, Michael Dent and when he decided to answer God's call to start up and be the pastor of Church at the Well, he knew within himself, that he was to join the church. He is now Pastor Dent's Armor bearer and is also a Deacon in training. He is eager and has such an excitement when talking about his pastor, his training, and the things he is learning at the church and about himself. He is learning how to seek God for Himself and feels like he is growing more and more in love with the Lord Jesus Christ. His faith is stronger and He is excited to do the work God has called him to do. His pastor is personally training him. I found myself getting excited just speaking to him about his faith and the church and where he sees the church moving spiritually in the future. He spoke of how he has witnessed personally miracles take place in the congregation and people get filled with the Holy Spirit. Great talk!

FIELD NOTES:

Date: Sunday, April 23, 2023 at 6PM

Location: Church at the Well, 342 Warburton Ave, Yonkers, NY 10701 (**ONLINE**).

I was watching the service online. The service is opened with prayer by Pastor Michael Dent's mother who is the Overseer. She was wearing a pair of jeans and a leopard top. I notice a trend in the past times I watched Church at the Well's service, that the dress code is relaxed. I can hear the congregation praying along with her and are clapping and praising God.

The prayer of the Overseer is authoritative and she is praying the Word of God over the house of God and the people of God. As she is praying she is walking back and forth on the stage with her eyes close and as she is walking back and forth she is praying, praising, worshiping and speaking in tongues. She spends most of the time praying just thanking God for all He has done, all He is doing and all He plans to do in the lives of His people. I learned in my interview with the Deacon in training, Lloyd Richards, Jr., that Pastor Dent usually chooses a different person in ministry or those in training in ministry to open the service with prayer. There is no restriction on how long the prayer is. He stated that the Pastor is sensitive to the Spirit of God and allows those who are leading prayer not to be restricted by time, so they have at least 30 minutes to pray because by 6:30PM, Pastor Dent wants the Praise and Worship Team assembled on the stage and leading the congregation in a medley of approximately three songs to sing, the pastor will come back onto the stage and give the church's announcement, the offering is taken, the Word of God is preached and then the Altar Call takes place. He will make the appeal for anyone who wants to become a born again Christian and also for those who want to receive prayer. After all of that takes place, then the benediction.

FIELD NOTES:

Date: Tuesday, April 25, 2023

Location: Church at the Well, 342 Warburton Ave, Yonkers, NY 10701 (**ONLINE**).

Observation:

This time I attended the Church at the Well online. This time it was a panel of discussion of Ministers and Deacons and the congregation. The panelists wore their everyday clothes, not church or clergy vestments. This time, the Ministers and Deacons were seated on the stage and the congregation was seated in the audience. They had a microphone and each Minister and Deacon spoke for a few minutes on a particular subject. Not sure how they came to those subjects they spoke on. Not sure if the congregation submitted the questions or if the pastor gave each of them topics to prepare.

You could tell that these were inexperienced speakers, who were being trained by their pastor on how to stand or sit before the congregation and speak. This church gives the vibe of a teaching church. It appeared that the pastor was teaching the Ministers and Deacons in training how to be able to minister the Gospel in practical ways to the audience.

Once the individual Ministers and Deacons spoke, you could see the Spirit of God moving on the hearts of the people as many began to cry tears and seemed that that Word that was preached really ministered to their hearts individually. The Ministers and the Deacons then proceeded to get up out of their seats and minister to the emotional congregation. They prayed for them and you could tell the healing of God healing the hearts of the people. The people cried out to God and He was answering them before our eyes.