

News and Current Events :: Los Angeles Churches Make Worship...Hip?**Los Angeles Churches Make Worship...Hip?, on: 2015/12/13 9:05**

Joe Jonas, Viola Davis and Justin Bieber are among those attending services in Los Angeles that offer texted prayers, neon lights and other 2015 accouterments.

Excerpt:

Inspiring and entertaining thousands of people every Sunday is a production. At Mosaic, two dozen assistants hustle through the aisles, talking into headsets and waving flashlights. Between services, Mr. McManus retreats to a makeshift green room behind two doors with punch-code locks. Inside, on a Sunday in November, there were bowls of raspberries, blueberries and granola. A live feed of the stage played on a small television; Mr. McManus sat in a plastic chair and sipped a smoothie from the Body Factory. He gets louder as he preaches and can grow hoarse, bordering on hysterical, when making a point.

Mr. McManus's son, Aaron, 27, heads Mosaic's design team, finding minimalist photos of palm trees and dreamy Los Angeles cityscapes to project on the big screen to encourage people to donate and get involved in Bible study groups. A Mosaic music video with cool kids skateboarding through Hollywood plays as people file to their seats.

"Sometimes at Mosaic, it can feel a little commercial, when it's just, like, this really homogeneous hipster-y space of selling Mosaic and they kind of get into this mode of 'Hey, fill this out, tweet, link up with us,'" said Bobak Cyrus Bakhtiari, an actor who commutes to Mosaic from his home on a yacht in Marina del Rey, Calif. "When that happens, I think it's a little obnoxious. But I try not to think about that and redirect my attention inside."

Reality LA plays down the performance part of its music, lighting band members in such a way that their faces can't be seen from the auditorium seats. "There's a tendency to focus on the talent of the musicians rather than on God," Mr. Treat said, "especially in Hollywood, where being on stage, that's accentuated even more. We want the focus to be on Jesus, not on whoever's playing lead guitar that Sunday."

"It's not an event to come and watch," he said. "And, unfortunately, some churches have turned into that, where the church is a show and the people who come are consumers."

Reality LA is not particularly welcoming to openly gay members. "We have lots of people who say that they experience same-sex attraction but who are not acting on it because they're following Christ," Mr. Treat said.

Mosaic is more accommodating. "We have people in our community who are gay and live openly gay lifestyles," Mr. McManus said. "We have people here who would say, 'Homosexuality is clearly against the scriptures and is wrong,' and we're teaching them how to walk together. Our position is, you have to be for each other."

At a recent Mosaic Bible study for young professional women, Ms. Van Dyk, the wardrobe stylist who hosted the event at her home in West Hollywood, Calif., began by asking if anyone had bought the new Justin Bieber album. Two women burst into one of his songs. "What about his hair, though?" another asked. This prompted a brief discussion of his cross tattoos.

Before opening their Bibles, Ms. Van Dyk laid out a couple of house rules: "Whatever's said here, stays here," she said. "We all have beautiful and interesting lives, and we don't need to be gossiping or talking about someone else's."

Despite the neon lights, social media accounts and the casual style of dress, these churches preach about the same God and the same things that, as Reality LA's Mr. Treat put it, "most Christians have believed for the last 2,000 years." But they can scramble the signals of traditional churchgoers, even young ones.

"I think it kind of bedazzles people," said Mr. Bakhtiari, who once brought four foster children he works with to Mosaic. "When I first mentioned it, they were like, 'I don't want to go to church.' But they were into it. They were super-confused in a cool way."

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