

Participant Observation 4 – Religious Gathering

Visit a place where a group of people are gathered for religious purposes. This may be a group that is reflective of the most common religion in your country or a Christian group. Participate in culturally appropriate ways without violating your testimony as a believer in Jesus. Your purpose is absorb the activity of the gathering from a cultural point of view. Take nothing but your eyes, ears and notebook or electronic device (to be used only for recording your observations).

Take your time as you take it in. Your goals are...

1. **Observe** and **describe** the gathering without being judgmental or presumptuous.
2. Identify your own feelings and attitudes as you make your observations.

Consider drawing a simple map of the place of gathering.

Using the questions below, observe and record as much as you can about the gathering.

Questions to open your eyes:

1. Describe the settings (the building, layout and decor).
2. What objects or things are in central or prominent positions?
3. What is the posture of the people?
4. How is the seating arranged?
5. What props and equipment are used or displayed?
6. Roughly how many people are present?
7. What are the demographics of the congregations - age, sex, class, family composition?
8. Describe the attire. Who is in uniform? Describe the uniforms.
9. How do people greet each other?
10. Are there clear gender roles?
11. Are children included? If so how?
12. What happens during the gathering?
13. Does the gathering appear to be pre-planned or spontaneous?

Questions to stimulate your thinking: Now you are invited to do some inductive thinking.

Using the evidence you see, try to build some tentative generalizations about the people and their culture patterns.

1. What would you say is acceptable behavior and etiquette? What kinds of behavior appear to be unacceptable?
2. Who are recognized as leaders in the setting? Why are they seen as leaders?
3. Who is honored/respected? Who is disrespected/marginalized?
4. What traits do people value in others?
5. Are the people deeply religious? Why do you say so?

Toward a Hypothesis:

1. What does the gathering communicate about the cultural values of the people who attend?
2. What function(s) does the gathering fulfill?
3. What are some of the chief ways that the religious gathering reveals the cultural characteristics of the people who attend?