

TRANSCRIPT
ONOMATOPOEIA
Connecting with God in Spanish

[TAPE] [Blue Dot Sessions music plays](#)

HANNA TAMRAT At the door, a man, Jose, tells me that the prayer and bible study don't start for another hour or so. But, I'm welcome to come in. He speaks to me in English. But, the service and prayer at the church is in Spanish-only. And, I don't speak or understand Spanish.

Back in California, I attended the Ethiopian Christian Orthodox church which primarily used Amharic: my native tongue.

I regularly walk by the unmarked, cream-color building of Meeting With God Church. I often see formally dressed people come out looking energized, chatting and laughing. I've wondered what it would be like to attend a service there. So I decide to stay.

[TAPE] [Theme music](#)

HT: I'm Hanna Tamrat and this is Onomatopoeia- a podcast about the people and places of New York City. In this episode, I'm connecting with God in Spanish.

I walk past some empty chairs and sit in the back. Across the aisle to my right a man quietly chants "Hallelujah." It's a word I know and can relate to.

[TAPE] [The man chants "Hallelujah" and murmurs.](#)

HT: His eyes are mostly closed. He chants and murmurs every now and then. A couple of women sit in the next row in front of him. They look as though they are listening to his prayer with their eyes closed.

People trickle in and drop to their knees on the tiled-floor below their chairs. A few women passing by try to speak to me in Spanish. I give a blank stare. They smile, nod and walk away. They understand.

As the service begins, a man on stage plays the piano.

[TAPE] [A man plays the piano](#)

HT: A woman walks up near the stage and faces the congregation with a mic in her hand.

Jose brings a message to me from the pastor.
I can't record the service.

The woman at the stage starts what I'm sure is a prayer.
I make a cross sign as we do at my Christian Orthodox church.
But, no one else does. Then, I remember what Jose told me when I first walked into the church.

[TAPE] Jose speaks "This a pentecoastal church, Assembly of God,..."

HT: And from the little I know about Pentecoastal church, people don't do cross signs.

[TAPE] Blue Dot Sessions music plays till the end

HT: There were people scattered in the hall: a few were near the stage, some at their seats, sitting, standing. Some kneel on the hard floor. A few sway with raised arms.

I recognize a couple of words in the prayer

"Gracias"
"Familia."

Since I don't understand the words in the prayer, I decide to close my eyes and just take it all in.

And let the sounds of the prayer echoed by the congregation keep me immersed in a feeling of connection with God and the people there.

I'm lost in the prayer of the woman near the stage.

It takes me a while to realize the place is nearly full. Close to 80 people: women, men, a toddler and a restless kid who blurts out a few words in English now and then.

A man wearing a creme-color suit walks on stage to an acrylic pulpit. Could he be the pastor?

He gives a lengthy sermon.

“Amen” and “Hallelujah” are the only words I understand.

There’s a laughter - and I wonder what the man in the suit has said to make everyone laugh.

Then suddenly, the pastor starts to speak in English. He looks in my direction, says my full name and welcomes me. He says sorry that the service was in Spanish. But he’s happy I am here.

Bodies turn toward me and some 80 pairs of eyes are now on me. I got what felt like a standing ovation.

I say “thank you,” “thank you.”

As people leave, mostly the women, tap me on the shoulder, or squeeze my arm.

“God bless you,” they say.

They tell me to come back Sunday. That’s the day they have a bilingual service. Spanish and English.

But, I feel quite capable of attending another Spanish-only service - and next time I’ll be a little less conspicuous.

[TAPE] [Theme music.](#)

HT: This episode of Onomatopoeia- was created by me, Hanna Tamrat. Onomatopoeia is a production of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. Joanne Faryon is our executive producer and professor. Original theme music by Lee Feldman. Other music by Blue Dot Sessions. Our graphic is designed by Sunni Bean. Special thanks to Columbia Digital Librarian Michelle Wilson and to my fellow student David Newtown.