

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST, SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO AN INTRODUCTION

In January 1994 a small group of local Christian Scientists felt the need to rethink how church could be more relevant to the needs of the times. Some in this group were interested in reaching out to the Hispanic population. Others were impelled by a desire to restudy and rethink how best to express church. Others desired to build bridges to our neighbors and community.

For six months this group gathered at Bob Hansen's photography studio in San Juan Capistrano every Monday evening from 7 to 9, to pray, listen, and share unfoldment on church. From the beginning there was great freedom of thought and respect for other's ideas, no matter how different or unconventional they were. A desire to serve the community along with a desire to reach out to the contemporary newcomer were two of the themes that developed. A statement of purpose evolved: to demonstrate spiritual growth, unconditional love, and healing, based on the teachings of Christian Science found in the Bible and Mary Baker Eddy's writings, and in accordance with the Church Manual. The group's desire was to evolve progressively the highest spiritual sense of church. It was expected that the demonstration of church would always be a continuing work in progress.

A single room was rented in an office building at 31591-C Camino Capistrano, San Juan Capistrano, with Sunday and Wednesday services and Sunday School beginning July 31st of that year. Outreach to the community had already begun when one individual in the group discovered that the homeless in Laguna Beach were not being fed on Thursdays and undertook with some other members of the group to fill that gap, feeding as many as seventy people and sharing Christian Science with them at Main Beach. This activity continued for three years. In establishing a voice for Christian Science in San Juan Capistrano, a community of 34,000, we have also reached out to the one third of its residents who speak Spanish.

At this time the church was called the Christian Science Activity Center. The name was chosen to convey to the community that here was a place where people would find interesting activities. In 2000 we began advertising our services in the *Christian Science Journal* as the Christian Science Society in San Juan Capistrano. In 2017 we voted to become First Church of Christ, Scientist, San Juan Capistrano.

Early on at members' meetings which continued weekly for the first year or so, community leaders were invited to share their challenges with us so that we could understand community needs and find ways, metaphysically and otherwise to help. These leaders included the mayor of San Juan Capistrano, the police chief's representative, the director of Gang Prevention, the Director of the Women's and Children's Shelter (Laura's

House), the founders of Mainstream (a group of seven drug rehab houses), the manager of the Public Library, and the president of the Chamber of Commerce. These meetings were followed by metaphysical work on the problems shared by the speakers, and often by Wednesday readings, financial contributions, and follow up.

We continued to consider how to make our services comfortable as well as inspiring for the newcomer. As a result, everyone attending the Sunday Service was given a program so that the newcomer will know what to expect throughout the service. Dress is very informal. A search for contemporary hymns, solos, and music was ongoing. Friendliness was characteristic, and our guest book was well-used. The idea of prayer requests was introduced. As a result some wonderful healings have taken place, in partial fulfillment of Mrs. Eddy's definition of church as an entity that "affords proof of its utility." (S&H 583:12- 19)

From the beginning there has been a conviction that the most important business of church is spiritual. As a result, members meetings explore how to demonstrate church spiritually, and reports or money issues, for example, are given a secondary role in meetings. Similarly, Mrs. Eddy's emphasis on self-knowledge has resulted in very open sharing in these meetings as well as much soul-searching and self-evaluation of how we are fulfilling the church's purpose. The requirement of all members to love each other, as well as the world, unconditionally makes criticizing each other unacceptable and openness much safer. Rather than focusing on the shortcomings of a member, the question demanded of love is "How can I support this person in his or her spiritual growth?"

In an effort to recognize that everyone is valued equally by God, every effort is made to avoid hierarchy. For example, for the first eight years, all members were involved in the day to day business of the church. As we grew, we decided to elect a "management team" (now called the "facilitating team") to ensure that the operations and business of the church is carried out smoothly. But the entire membership is still the governing body for all important policy decisions; the facilitating team does not make decisions that affect the members or impact the direction of the church. It is not a traditional "executive board" as found in most Christian Science churches. All decisions and issues are discussed openly among our members and friends in our monthly workshops.

We believe that while the concept of "membership" has certain administrative value, it has come to symbolize exclusivity or to some extent a sense of denominational status. From the beginning it was our intent to minimize any sense of who is "in" versus "outside" of our church. Hence all of our meetings and workshops are open to anyone interested in helping further our mission, or simply learn more about being an effective church. Also all of our church positions are open to both members and non-members. The primary qualification is a simple desire to help carry out our purpose. A related value has been the desire that everyone learn each of the jobs in church. This has been

demonstrated most to date in the readership, which changes every month for Sunday Readers, and weekly for Wednesday Readers. This has allowed many who have never read to have this privilege and develop these skills.

Finally, an effort is made regularly to keep the big picture. We are engaged in sharing ultimate truths with the world, truths which can literally save the world from sin, disease, and death, war, poverty, and the various ills of believing in mortality. It is a great privilege to know these truths and a demanding responsibility to share them. Commitment to this task is the nature of membership in this church. It is a demanding, joyous, and rewarding role.

In late 2004 we secured a new, larger location at 31897 Del Obispo, suite 120, and our first service was held March 20, 2005. The move was necessitated by our need for more space and a desire to have a more adequate Sunday School. Teleconference and internet access has been added so that those at home can call in and listen live to our Sunday and Wednesday services.

You will find that you are joining more than a church. You are becoming part of a family that will love, support, and, yes, sometimes challenge you to go up higher. Welcome! We're so happy you are here.

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