

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

In January 1994, a group of local Christian Scientists felt the need to establish a voice for Christian Science in San Juan Capistrano, a community of 34,000, one third of whom are Hispanic. Some in this group were interested in reaching out to the community. Others were impelled by a desire to restudy and rethink how best to express church. Still others felt it was time San Juan Capistrano had its own Christian Science Congregation.

For six months individuals gathered at Bob Hansen's photography studio 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. Reaching out to the community by providing lunches to the homeless at Main Beach in Laguna on Thursdays, we fed as many as seventy people and shared Christian Science with them. This activity continued for three years.

At this time the church was called the Christian Science Activity Center to expand ideas of what church could be. The group was not as yet recognized by The Mother Church, a process that takes some time. The name was chosen to convey to the community that here was a place where people would find interesting activities related to spirituality. 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, 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 Wednesday readings, financial contributions, and follow up.

Much thought continued regarding how to make our services comfortable and welcoming, as well as inspiring, for the newcomer. Everyone attending the Sunday Service was given a program so that the newcomer will know what to expect throughout the service. Dress was very informal. A search for contemporary hymns, solos, and music is still ongoing. Friendliness was characteristic, and our guest book was well-used. In addition, we invited people to write down a problem they would like prayerful support for and these needs would be announced to the congregation prior to silent prayer.

These practices continued, and 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 very minor part of the meetings. Similarly, Mrs. Eddy's emphasis on self-knowledge has resulted in open and trusting sharing in meetings as well as much soul-searching and self-evaluation of how we can fulfil the church's purpose. The goal of all members to love each other as well as the world unconditionally reduces criticism and encourages openness. 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 equally loved of God, every effort is made to avoid hierarchy. For example, the church board consists of every member. We elect a 5-member "Facilitating Team" to ensure that the operations and business of the church are carried out smoothly. However, this team does not make decisions that affect the members or impact the direction of the church. All decisions and issues are discussed openly among members and friends in our monthly workshops.

We believe that while the concept of "membership" has a certain administrative value, we wanted to avoid any sense of exclusivity. From the beginning, it was our intent to minimize any sense of who is "in" versus who is "outside" of our church. Hence all of our meetings and workshops are open to anyone interested in helping to further our mission, or simply learn more about being an effective church. Also, most 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. The readers only need to be members of The Mother Church. While elected by the entire membership, the readers change weekly or monthly. Many who have never read before now have this privilege and can develop these skills.

Finally, an effort is regularly made 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 mortal belief. It is both a great privilege to know these truths as well as a 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 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 adequate space for our Sunday school. A teleconference line and an internet connection were added so that those at home or who do not live in the area can listen live to our Sunday and Wednesday services. Our Sunday school classes are available on Zoom video conferencing. In 2017, we became First Church of Christ, Scientist, San Juan Capistrano; however, 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 interested in us!

Sincerely,
The Members of First Church of Christ, Scientist, San Juan Capistrano