

Learning with love: First Church of Christ, Scientist, New Canaan doors open to community

By Susan Shultz

With its historical building appropriately overlooking New Canaan's celebrated green, "God's Acre," First Church of Christ, Scientist, physically presides with the glory of God and history.

Christian Scientists, as adherents are called, first began to meet informally in town in 1907. The group was formally recognized in 1923 by The First Church of Christ, Scientist in Boston, and its current building was dedicated in 1953. It is one of 2,000 branches in over 70 countries around the world.

The First Church of Christ, Scientist, established in Boston in 1879, is a Christian denomination, centered around the Bible and the teachings of Christ Jesus. The Golden Rule — love for family, neighbor, community and the world — is at the core of its values. At the heart of Christian Science worship is prayer, which is not an intercessory plea, but rather a yielding to the spiritual nature of reality and God's goodness.

Since 1908, the church has published the well-known Christian Science Monitor, international news organization. The Monitor's global approach is reflected in how founder Mary Baker Eddy described its object as "To injure no man, but to bless all mankind."

If you've even been curious about the church, its members want the community to know that everyone is welcome, and the church is an "integral part of the community," members said.

"God's Acre is a treasured focal point in our town, and this beautiful church has become a welcoming landmark," members said.

Services, at 10:30 a.m. on Sundays, are presided over by two lay readers who deliver a sermon from The Bible and the Christian Science textbook, Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures by Mary Baker Eddy, which she designated as the dual the pastor of the church. There are also hymns, a solo and music from "our beautiful organ", according to members. Sunday school is offered at the same time of service for children, from infants to age 20.

The Sunday service consists primarily of weekly Bible lessons studied and applied to their lives by members during the week leading up to the service.

Wednesday evening testimony meetings are offered at 7:30 via Zoom. These consist of inspirational readings followed by testimonies and remarks from the congregation. Though the

Wednesday evening meeting moved online due to the pandemic, they have proven to be popular as an intimate forum for members and guests to share inspiration. The Zoom link is available on the website or by contacting the church.

In addition to being Bible-based, Sunday worship services and Wednesday testimony meetings are based on passages from the Christian Science textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Eddy.

The church also maintains a public Reading Room right off the parking lot, which offers a wide range of books and publications, including 150 years of bound volumes of Christian Science periodicals containing testimonies of healing. The Reading Room is open Mondays from 11-2 and before and after each service.

Members described the congregation as “small but mighty and embracing of the entire community.” They said the church encourages the community to reach out and learn more. Those interested don’t have to be seeking to commit to full membership.

“We want to lovingly invite all. Bring yourself. Bring the kids to Sunday school. Visit our Reading Room. Christian Science can be practiced by anyone — it’s universal,” members said.

Participating is especially encouraged for those who might be looking for something meaningful to add to their lives.

“It is something that helps you every day, with problems you need to solve, healings of all kinds, from any kind of adversity,” members said.

“It is prayer, based on an increasing understanding of our relationship with God that brings healing, and that is what the church is all about.”

“It gives you strength in ways you may not have known — and helps you feel stronger mentally and physically.”

The church is located at 49 Park Street, New Canaan.

Visit <http://christiansciencet.org/newcanaa> or call 203-966-0293 for more information or for the Zoom link for Wednesday meetings. Reading Room hours are Monday 11 to 2.