

A NEW CENTURY FOR BARRINGTON'S  
*First Church* OF  
*Christ, Scientist*

By Michael Martinez and Jamie Ruggles || Photography By Jim Prisching



The First Church of Christ, Scientist was recently renovated and expanded. Blue Stem Ecological Services helped create a native landscape on Church grounds.

*From their first gathering in 1890, to a meeting place in 1910, members of the First Church of Christ, Scientist celebrate their faith and a beautifully renovated place of worship.*



As you walk down the glass corridor of the First Church of Christ, Scientist (also known as the Christian Science Church) connecting the new Reading Room with the new Sunday School, you encounter a lovely hand-painted white wooden bench. This was a gift from a former church member and her Sunday School class, decorated by them and presented to the church. This is just one of the thoughtful reminders of the former church building located at 421 East Main Street where it has been a presence in the community for more than 100 years.

**T**HE NEWLY REMODELED CHURCH and addition, at the same location, is approximately 6,800 square feet, and was completed in October 2020 to create an edifice that would be accessible to all, open to the community, and a welcoming presence to both passers-by and people entering the building.

### HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

In the 1890s, a small group studying the teachings of Christian Science met informally in Barrington. The group soon incorporated as a Christian Science Society, meeting in the basement of a building which some referred to as the ‘Sheep Shed on Wool Street’. It sat at the corner of Wool and Main Streets. In 1910 Ella Calkins, who lived on Main Street, became interested in Christian Science when she was healed of a serious illness by reading “Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures” written by the movement’s founder, Mary Baker Eddy. Ella became active in the Society, sending her younger children to the Sunday School.

Mary Baker Eddy, who lived in the Boston area, discovered Christian Science in 1866 following a remarkable healing by reading the Holy Bible, and word quickly spread throughout the United States of her teachings. She is recognized as one of the most influential women of the 20th century. The Bible and “Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures” are the cornerstones of Christian Science.

### A GRATEFUL DONOR

In the 1920s, a family which had heard of Christian Science appealed to a church member for healing for their young daughter who had a life-threatening illness. The girl was healed through Christian Science treatment. Her parents were so grateful that they donated a large sum of money, enabling the Society to start building a church edifice on the current site. The members, with the leadership of Ella Calkins, soon reorganized as the First Church of Christ, Scientist in Barrington. The church building was completed and officially dedicated, free of debt, in 1937. A Sunday School wing was added in the early 1960s.

### LOCAL CHURCH LEGACIES

Nancy Bachmann started attending Sunday School in 1951. During that time, she was acquainted with Ella Calkins. “There are a handful of families that go back that far as members,” Bachman said. “My family moved from Barrington when I went to high school, and then I moved back after I was married; so I came back to this church.” Bachman is a listed Christian Science practitioner, a person dedicated to the full-time practice of healing work.

Another member, Jamie Ruggles, has been a member since 1982 when her family relocated from Wilton, Connecticut to Barrington. She was a member of the Christian Science Church in Wilton prior to relocating. Like Bachmann, her children grew up in the Barrington Sunday School.



The Reading Room welcomes all from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday. There, literature is available for purchase or borrowing.

## CHANGES AHEAD

Over time, dealing with an 80-year-old building exposed some structural issues. Typical of that era, the building contained significant asbestos, lead paint, and experienced flooding issues in the basement that housed the nursery and several offices. This led to many attempts at remediation. However, none were successful, and those areas became unusable. At that point, the members decided they needed to explore other options.

In 2017, a five-person Ad Hoc Committee was formed to investigate opportunities. Bachmann and Ruggles were members of this Committee. The first thing they considered was an extensive remodel of the existing facility which would include making the building ADA compliant by adding an elevator, among other things, since the current building included three flights of stairs. This proved to be prohibitively expensive, not sustainable over the long run, and didn't address the current building issues.

Next, the Committee looked at the possibility of leasing space somewhere within the Village and selling the existing property. After investigating all available properties, they realized that this was not a viable option, either. In early 2018, the Committee added five more members who brought significant building, design, and organizational skills to the team. They renamed it the Building Committee.

The Building Committee began seriously investigating remodeling/building a new church on the current site. A deciding factor was Barrington itself. "We really wanted to stay here," Bachmann said. "We love this location. We're identified with this location," Ruggles added.

## A HELPFUL TRANSACTION

It became apparent that building a new church was going to be very expensive, so the members started looking at options for funding the project. They realized that they had attractive real estate with the back parking lot which they owned along with the land that the church sat on. So, they engaged a commercial realtor to test the waters.



Roger W. Gates is the Reading Room Librarian.

Several developers expressed interest in the property; however, it became apparent in meetings with the Village that they weren't interested in additional multi-level housing downtown.

The Village did offer an interesting proposal to the church, however. They needed additional METRA parking for commuters and, since the church lot is adjacent to the METRA lot, this would certainly meet their needs. In the Spring of 2019, with the members' approval, the church sold the parking lot for \$625,000 to the Village. The purchase agreement included the Church's use of the parking lot on Sundays and Wednesday evenings for their services.



Stana Grim (left) is the Chair of the Executive Board. Kim Schmidt is the Executive Board Clerk.



Above: The foyer's tall cabinets open up into a kitchenette for fellowship gatherings.



Left: The auditorium offers comfortable space for the Readings.

The Building Committee moved forward with pursuing a design for the new church. “We interviewed five architecture firms and made a recommendation to the members to hire Evanston-based Studio Talo,” according to Ruggles. Following members’ approval, the Committee then interviewed several builders and selected Efraim Carlson and Sons from Libertyville. Again, the members accepted the Committee’s recommendation.

Studio Talo came up with a design which was modified over time to include members’ input along with that of the Village Architectural Review Committee. “It was really important that we picked partners who understood what we were looking for and the importance of the spiritual nature to the final design. The building needed to reflect that and who we are, what we represented to the community,” said Ruggles.

The final design included removing the original church building, modifying the Sunday School from the ‘60s to become the new church auditorium, and adding a new Sunday School, nursery, and connector hallway to the new Reading Room.

All Christian Science churches maintain a Reading Room for the community where various Bible editions, Science and Health, and other uplifting and topical literature can be read or purchased. This includes publications in multiple languages, music CDs, children’s books, and various pamphlets and articles.

Per Ruggles, it was very important that the Reading Room, though adjacent to the church, maintain its own identity as the downtown Reading Room at 125 E. Main Street did for many years before the building was sold in 2021.

### GREATER COMMUNITY VISIBILITY

A large part of the vision for the church’s remodel was to make it more accessible, visible, and welcoming to the community. Per Ruggles, who was eventually named Building Project Manager, “One of the things that directed our thinking in designing a new church was that we must be accessible to everyone in this community, which meant being ADA compliant, something that the old church was not.” The new church is accessible to all,



A bright and cheery glass corridor connects the Reading Room with the main building.

Ye shall know the truth,  
and the truth shall make you free.

Christ Jesus



First Reader Peggy Elms and Second Reader Lorie Donnelly in the auditorium.

including a smaller parking lot off the back main entrance and a Reading Room entrance to complement the front entry off Main Street.

“There’s activity going on here from Bible Study Groups in the Reading Room to a Sunday School that welcomes all children up to the age of 20, regardless of experience or denomination. A nursery is lovingly provided for the younger children as well,” says Ruggles.

### OUTREACH


Church members today are involved in many community outreach activities such as Meals with Wheels, the Barrington Area Ministerial Association (BAMA), the Barrington Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Barrington Area Council on Aging (BACOA). The church has also participated in the monthly Community Meal and Barrington Giving Days. They also sponsor a lecture for the community that has been held in various Barrington venues over the years. The church hopes that the community will see the church as another venue choice for their activities.

### RENOVATIONS AND CHURCH SERVICES IN A PANDEMIC

Building during a pandemic provided some interesting opportunities. Fortunately, since construction was listed as ‘essential services,’ the project was able to move forward and was

completed on time. However, the church realized that they needed to adapt to today’s technology to make their services accessible to all, though initially remotely. They offered their services on Zoom and eventually were able to stream their services, through Zoom, to those unable to attend in person once the doors opened in early 2021. Their Wednesday service which meets at 7:30 p.m. includes brief readings on a specific topic, hymns, and comments and testimonials from attendees about how Christian Science has impacted their lives. People from across the country have participated in these meetings and offered their comments through Zoom.

This beautiful and welcoming new church is open to all in the community. Sunday Services are held at 10 a.m. with Sunday School meeting at the same time. Childcare is provided at all services.

The church has certainly evolved from services held in the Sheep Shed on Wool Street more than 100 years ago, but the intent remains the same: an open invitation for all to experience, rejoice, and grow spiritually in their relationship with God in a welcoming environment. 



Church member Claire Wally painted this lovely representation of the church before renovations in 2021.

## October 9 Open House for All

The church will be hosting an Open House for the community on Saturday, October 9, from 1–4 p.m. There is no planned service or solicitation. It's an opportunity for the community to see this newly imagined addition to the community. For additional information, contact the Reading Room, which is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday or call 847-381-0939.



Cathy Bayer (back left) is a Church member. With her are Marjorie MacKay (in back, right) who is the Sunday School pianist. Claire Wally (seated) is a member who helps with Church décor.



The Sunday School room has plenty of seating, books, and a piano.

## Sunday School Lessons

Wendy Paulson, who currently serves as superintendent of the Sunday School and has taught there for many years, says, "All who work in the Sunday School are thrilled to be in our new space. It's spacious, colorful, full of light, and filled with all sorts of reference books for Sunday School classes. We aim for a high level of Bible literacy in Sunday School. To that end, we make regular use of maps, Bible story books, teaching guides, as well as the Holy Bible which we want students to think of as a trusted friend. We welcome children of any faith or of no professed faith to visit and learn in our Sunday School."

Paulson's husband, Hank Paulson, who served as 74th United States Secretary of the Treasury, attended the Sunday School in childhood and has taught there as well.