



The **Cross and Crown** motif encircled by the words of Jesus Christ is the symbol of the Christian Science movement. The motif is displayed on *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. This work together with the Christian Bible are the key holy books of the movement.

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST (ALSO KNOWN AS CHRISTIAN SCIENCE)

Mary Baker Eddy, an American author, teacher and religious leader, founded the Church of Christ, Scientist. She devoted her life to the practice of healing through prayer, resulting in a system she named Christian Science and described in her book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*.

Christian Science regards itself as a Christian Church, while it indicates that it also has distinct beliefs. The Church subscribes to one God (who is Father and Mother) and to Christ as the Son of God. For Christian Scientists, Jesus Christ demonstrated that disease, sin and death have no ultimate reality in God's spiritual creation and can be healed on that basis.

It is estimated that there are about 400,000 students of Christian Science in over sixty countries worldwide. There is no ordained clergy. Members engaged in the full-time healing ministry are called Christian Science practitioners.

Summary of Essential Practice Points:

Please refer to the full text of the highlighted points related to the following summary points.

1 Beliefs about the treatment of illness:

Christian Scientists do not normally subscribe to medical intervention due to the opposite approaches to the cause and cure of illness. However, there is no church policy mandating members' health care decisions. Members may be in hospital only for childbirth, following accidents or due to family pressure. It is important that healthcare workers discuss with such service users what level of care they are willing to accept.

2 Religious contacts and religious practices:

It will be necessary to source the name of a religious or personal contact from the person who can be contacted for religious support as necessary.

3 Death-related religious rituals:

There is no specific ritual surrounding preparation for death in Christian Science.

4 Cleaning and touching the body:

The normal washing and preparation procedure can be carried out. It is a religious requirement that, wherever possible, female staff should handle females after death. However, there is no similar requirement for male patients.

5 Initiation ritual/infant baptism:

Infant baptism is not necessary even in the case of threat to life.

Profile of First Church of Christ, Scientist (Christian Science) in Ireland

There is no specific data for the number of Christian Science followers in the Irish State. Contributors indicate that members reside mainly in the Dublin, Cork and Limerick areas. There are places of worship in Dublin and Cork. At this time there are no Christian Science practitioners (healing Ministry) in the Irish State.

Care of the ill

Beliefs about the treatment of illness

Essential Practice Point

1

- Christian Scientists believe that prayer will bring about a change in spiritual understanding which will in turn bring healing to the body. Members do not normally subscribe to medical intervention and may be in hospital only for childbirth, following accidents or due to family pressure.
- Medical procedures are not normally congruent with specific Christian Science prayer-based treatment due to the opposite approaches to the cause and cure of illness. At the same time we cannot assume that a person will decline a conventional treatment on the basis of their identity as a Christian Scientist. Overall, it is therefore important that healthcare workers discuss with the person what level of care they are willing to accept.

- The Christian Science movement indicates that it respects the work of the medical profession. There is no policy mandating members' health care decisions and it does not rebuke those who choose to undergo conventional medical treatment.

Religious contacts and religious practices

Essential Practice Point

2

- Christian Science does not have formal ordained clergy. It will be necessary to source the name of a contact from the person who can be contacted for religious support as necessary.
- The religion has a full-time healing ministry referred to as Christian Science practitioners. A Christian Scientist may wish to contact a Christian Science Practitioner for prayerful support or specific treatment through prayer. If such a request is made, a Christian Science Practitioner will need to be sourced from Northern Ireland or the UK. Contact details are given at the end of the section.
- The person may need privacy and a quiet atmosphere for prayer and spiritual practice.

Family dynamics and decision making

Some Christian Scientists may have been raised in other traditions and there may be a divergence of views between the person and family regarding medical treatment. The wishes of the person are always paramount and must be respected.

Blood Transfusion and Organ Transplantation

Generally, blood transfusions, organ transplantation and life support are not congruent with specific Christian Science prayer-based treatment due to the opposite approaches to the cause and cure of illness. The religion respects the person's wishes. With any medical procedure, particularly those of a more serious nature, a period of time for prayer may be requested before any medical intervention takes place.

Care of the Dying

Death-related religious rituals

Essential Practice Point

3

There is no specific ritual surrounding preparation for death in Christian Science. It is important to discern if the person wishes to have their designated religious contact person present if death is imminent.

Cleaning and touching the body

Essential Practice Point

4

- The normal washing and preparation procedure can be carried out.
- It is a religious requirement that, wherever possible, female staff should handle females after death. However, there is no similar requirement for male patients.

Postmortem requirements

Postmortem is usually only agreed to where there are compelling medical or legal reasons.

Interment ritual

Cremation is usually chosen in preference to burial, but it is entirely a matter of family choice.

Religious Icons and Symbols

Personal and religious items

- Members usually do not wear items of religious significance.
- The person may have their own copy of the *Christian Bible* and the book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*.
- Where healthcare settings are compiling resources for various religions this latter publication should be included.

Use of religious symbols

Christian Scientists do not use or display religious icons but would not normally object to icons of other Christian traditions being displayed in a mortuary setting.

Additional Notes on Maternity and Paediatric Care

Approach to child welfare

The health and well-being of the child is always considered paramount among Christian Scientists. Individual decision-making about healthcare needs is always left to families; church authorities indicate

that they have no say in these matters. Christian Scientists will allow medical treatment for children in accordance with the law of the resident country.

Initiation ritual/infant baptism

Essential Practice Point

5

Christian Scientists do not conduct baptism (initiation into the religion); therefore infant baptism is not necessary, even in the case of threat to life.

Foetal, infant and child death

- There are no formal religious requirements or rituals required in relation to stillbirth, miscarriage or death among infants.
- Childrens' bodies should be treated in the same way as adults (see above).

Memento of a deceased child

There are no restrictions on giving mementos for a deceased child and this will be an individual choice.

Developing a Christian Science Contact

At the time of writing the Christian Science movement was hoping to develop a specific contact point in the Irish State. In the meantime, representatives indicate that queries can be directed to the London-based District Manager for the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland who will source assistance as appropriate. The contact details are:

Mr Tony Lobl, District Manager, Christian Science Committees on Publication, 10 Tideway Yard, 125 Mortlake High Street, London SW14 8SN.
Tel: 0044 20 8150 0245
(weekday office hours only)

There is a Directory of Christian Science Practitioners based in Northern Ireland and the UK at the back of the monthly magazine *The Christian Science Journal*. These practitioners are available on a round-the-clock basis and the magazine is available from the Christian Science Reading Room in Dublin ((01) 679 3524).

Contributors

Mr Tony Lobl, District Manager, and Ms. Rosemary Castle, Editorial Associate, Christian Science Committees on Publication for the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland contributed to this section and approved the finalised content.