

# Scientologists Try to Ease Concern on Altadena Plans

By MARK ARAX, Times Staff Writer

ALTADENA—Incorporation papers filed by the Church of Spiritual Technology seemingly contradict public assurances by church officials that their planned training center here will not be used as a base to espouse the tenets of Scientology.

Officials of the Church of Spiritual Technology, an affiliate of the Church of Scientology, tried to allay community concerns Tuesday over their plans to buy a 198-acre complex in the Altadena foothills, which was occupied until last year by the La Vina Hospital.

During a two-hour public hearing called by the Altadena Town Council, church officials told residents and council members that the Church of Spiritual Technology is an affiliate of the Church of Scientology but is interested only in training ministers and safeguarding the writings and taped lectures of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard.

## 'We Are Scientologists'

"We are Scientologists, but we have a different function than the Church of Scientology," Leo Johnson, a minister and spokesman for the Church of Spiritual Technology, told the crowd of 200. "We won't have people knocking on your doors or handing out leaflets."

"It will not promulgate. It will not disseminate. It will not go outside the walls of La Vina," Johnson said.

But articles of incorporation papers filed with the state of California in May, 1982, show that the Church of Spiritual Technology was formed for a different purpose.

Under the heading "Purpose of Corporation," a church attorney listed several functions at the time of incorporation. "Specifically its purpose is to espouse, present, propagate, practice, ensure and maintain the purity and integrity of the religion of Scientology."

The incorporation articles further state that the Church of Spiritual Technology was formed to "serve as a means of promulgating, preserving and administering the religious faith of Scientology throughout the world."

## Claims No Contradiction

Johnson acknowledged in an interview that the church has not filed an updated incorporation paper, but he disagreed that the document contradicted the group's public statements. "Let's see how I can put this. The promulgation would come in our ministers, at various stages of their careers, going to our 600 churches and promulgating the religion. The espousing would also be to members of our church only.

"We will definitely and irrevocably not be disseminating to the public."

Frank Bridal, chairman of the Altadena Town Council, said the incorporation papers, which were not introduced at the public hearing, raise questions about the church's intentions. "There are a number of questions that were not answered at the public hearing and that is one of them," Bridal said. "It does seem as though that is a contradiction of their public statements."

The Church of Spiritual Technology has entered escrow to buy the property from Huntington Memorial Hospital of Pasadena, which acquired the complex through a merger. Completion of the sale depends on the church's ability to obtain a conditional-use permit from the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission. The commission will weigh the recommendations of the Altadena Town Council, an advisory body, when making its final decision.

Much of the community concerns center on the controversial practices of Scientology and the suspicion that the Church of Spiritual Technology is nothing more than a sham corporation set up in anticipation of a federal ruling last year that denied the Church of Scientology nonprofit, tax-exempt religious status.

Scientology was founded in the mid-1950s by Hubbard, a reclusive science fiction writer who has not been seen in public since 1980. Its counseling procedures, for which thousands of dollars may be charged, are based on the theory that the human mind can be cleared of negative influences through a process called "auditing."

A crude lie detector device known as an "E-meter" is used to identify psychological problems. Some former members say auditing sessions often degenerate into interrogations in which a trained auditor exacts secrets from members that are later used to silence dissent.

Johnson compared auditing to a confessional in the Catholic Church. "That information is sacred and would never be used in such a manner. Our ethics and our code prevent us from utilizing information from an auditing session."

Last September, the U.S. Tax Court in Washington ruled that the California branch of the Church of

Scientology had to pay \$1.4 million in back taxes and penalties because it "has made a business of selling religion." The ruling stated that the group had conspired to impede the Internal Revenue Service from collecting taxes by maintaining large cash reserves in what the court called a sham corporation and in a bogus trust controlled by Hubbard and other high church officials.

Former church members and some Altadena residents expressed concern that the Church of Spiritual Technology was incorporated three years ago as a similar guise to circumvent federal tax laws.

They say the Church of Spiritual Technology, which is listed as a tax-exempt religious group in California and is now petitioning the federal government for similar status, will provide the Church of Scientology with huge tax write-offs through the donation of church assets and the transfer of funds.

"This allows the church to operate in another form, another name," the former member said in an interview. "This is one more way to move assets and confuse the IRS."

But Johnson said the mother church decided to establish the Church of Spiritual Technology out of a need to preserve "priceless" church archives and to train and house ministers. If the sale is completed, the former hospital will be remodeled into living quarters for more than 100 ministers and their family members.

"The formation of the Church of Spiritual Technology has nothing to do with the IRS decision," Johnson said in an interview. "We have experienced a lot of growth recently so there is now the need to concentrate solely on training ministers and finding a place to store Mr. Hubbard's writings and teachings."

"Two hundred and fifty people will live and work here but we will not be reaching out to the public like the Church of Scientology."

At the public hearing, residents of this unincorporated community north of Pasadena asked questions ranging from what chemicals the church will use in preserving church documents at the former hospital site near Angeles National Forest to its intentions of proselytizing its neighbors.

"They say they want to be a part of the larger community and then they tell us that their religious services are not open to the public," said one resident, who asked not to be identified. "They seem to be talking out of both sides of their mouth."

The Town Council will discuss the plans at its regular meeting next Tuesday. It could decide to support or oppose the church's request for a conditional use permit or it may delay a decision until more public opinion is heard.