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Spiritualist minister, church founder Carl Hewitt dies

BY DANIEL CONOVER
Of The Post and Courier Staff

The Rev. Carl Hewitt, an ordained spiritualist minister and psychic medium, came to Charleston 10 months ago on the instructions of spirit.

Now, following his death Wednesday at age 76, it falls to the members of the church he founded in Connecticut to figure out what comes next.

"That's the big question, isn't it?" said Sidney Schwartz, a Hackensack, N.J., librarian and ordained minister who now finds himself as Hewitt's successor in the Gifts of the Spirit Church.

Schwartz came down from New Jersey recently when Hewitt's health took a turn for the worse. The mood at Hewitt's West Ashley home was subdued but not somber Friday, the day his newspaper obituary announced that the

trance-medium and healer had "transitioned from the physical to the Spirit body."

Hewitt was a North Carolina native who said his clairvoyant experiences reached back to early childhood. He became a medium at 23, was ordained in 1974 and opened his church in 1978 outside Norwich, Conn.

Though it was never a large group — Schwartz estimated the church had no more than 120 active members at any given time — Hewitt also spread his ideas through private psychic readings, seminars, two books co-authored by Schwartz and a local cable-access television program. Seventy episodes were aired, but Hewitt was not a household name in Connecticut. The local newspaper's 1998-2005 archives included just one article in which Hewitt was mentioned: a Y2K feature on what psychics thought about the coming

century. "In the long run, people come to realize that God is within themselves, not outside themselves," Hewitt told *The Norwich Bulletin*.

In the months since his 2004 decision to move to Charleston, where Hewitt had given lectures in the 1980s, about 10 of his church members from Connecticut also chose to relocate here. But Hewitt's poor health, beginning in 2000 with a brain tumor and a series of stroke-related problems, kept his Charleston footprint small: He offered only one seminar, never opened a church building (the church's mailing address is a post office box), and made few local connections.

Kathleen Parker, owner of Jumping Water Metaphysical Books & Gifts on Savannah Highway, said she met Hewitt only once. He came to the store in the summer with two other people,

left behind some books for her to sell on consignment and said he would return to talk about holding classes at the store. He left no information and never contacted her again, Parker said. "If I had sold anything of his, I wouldn't have known where to send the money."

The Gifts of the Spirit Church teaches that the psychic and healing gifts St. Paul wrote about in 1st Corinthians are available to all people. Consequently, church member Tina Tarryk of West Ashley was not entirely surprised when Hewitt contacted his friends in Charleston via a medium in Connecticut within an hour of his death.

"He told us not to be sad," Schwartz said.

But he did not tell them what to do next.

Funeral services will be held 1 p.m. Monday at Stuhr's Mount Pleasant Chapel.