

## Post-Mass yoga provides time for reflection



Yoga for Seniors instructor Elizabeth Cote, far right, leads her students in the recitation of "namaste" in the basement of St. Christopher Parish in Nashua. SIMÓN RÍOS/Union Leader Correspondent

**The ladies of St. Christopher Parish have something to energize them Wednesday mornings: Yoga for Seniors with instructor Elizabeth Cote.**  
By SIMÓN RÍOS

Union Leader Correspondent

NASHUA — The ladies of St. Christopher Parish have something to energize them Wednesday mornings: Yoga for Seniors with instructor Elizabeth Cote.

“For everyone it's a chance to stretch, to get together,” Cote said after a session in the church basement. “There's always a little chat before and after class. It brings internal focus and kind of quiets the outside world.”

Cote, who works full time as a consultant, teaches yoga on a volunteer basis. She also teaches at the Merrimack YMCA at 6 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Yoga began to take off in the Western world in the 1960s. It takes many forms, from heat yoga to medicinal yoga to yoga for seniors.

All the women who attend sessions in the church basement are members of the church and attend yoga after morning Mass. Though the class is open to men, the one male participant quit because he was the only guy.

Annette Godwin came because she was having trouble sleeping and was experiencing a lot of stress.

“I was 20 pounds heavier and my blood pressure was 195 over 80,” Godwin said. After doing yoga, she said, her blood pressure declined and she began to sleep normally again.

She had also been having trouble with her knee and was facing surgery.

“I had chronic pain, 24/7. That type of stress plus the daily stress. Losing the weight, and the blood pressure, made all the difference,” she said.

Since they weren't doing strenuous exercise, Godwin thought the results were miraculous.

“I'd never tried yoga before, and I couldn't have done it without Elizabeth,” she said. “She was so welcoming and makes us all feel at ease, and before we know it, we're feeling better.”

The instructor took a specialized approach to dealing with Godwin's issues.

“When Annette was having trouble with her knee, instead of having her do some of our standing poses, I showed her how she could do them seated, without challenging her, without hurting her knee,” Cote said.

The class began two years ago. To complete her instructor's certification, Cote was required to bring yoga to a group that normally wasn't exposed to it. An announcement went out in the church bulletin and before long the yoga sessions were all the rage among the ladies of the parish.

Although Cote was originally slated to teach for eight hours, Yoga for Seniors has been a mainstay at the church ever since.

Participants say the transition from the Christian tradition of Mass to the Hindu tradition of yoga is an organic one.

“I don't normally take time to pray every morning,” said participant Bonnie Whalen. “But when we have that peaceful quiet time, I do. Your mind just could go any which way.”

“Elizabeth's class is a great motivator to get you going during the week,” she added.

Connie McNulty said she had to go in for an MRI and was highly claustrophobic.

“Although the doctor gave me medication, when I got in the machine, I just remembered the breathing and how (Elizabeth) told us to relax,” Whalen said. “The breathing really, really helped.”

Each class ends with the Hindi phrase “namaste,” which traditionally means “the divine in me honors the divine in you,” Cote explained.

“The way we end class is acknowledging what we do for ourselves, but also endeavoring to bring that thought out into the world,” she said.

The class is free and open to all seniors, parishioners and non-parishioners alike, on Wednesdays at 8 a.m. Contact Elizabeth Cote at [emcote@msn.com](mailto:emcote@msn.com) for more information.

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