

By Stephany Reyes

On Sunday mornings, New Hope Church in Salisbury comes to life with music and prayer, but the church founder, the Rev. Dan Olson, said the prayers were a little different last Sunday.

“We just celebrated our fifth year in the East Meadow and Salisbury communities,” Olson said with a wide grin.

Olson, who is originally from Chicago, founded the Christian, nondenominational church in 2012 with one goal in mind: to provide a house of worship that mattered to the community.

“My wife and I fell in love with the East Meadow and Westbury area,” Olson, 47, said. Although his family settled in North Bellmore in 2000 to pursue opportunities in pastoral ministry, it was Temple Shalom of Westbury that welcomed the Olsons with open arms. New Hope Church now rents the lower portion of the temple.

“You know about the Salisbury and Westbury lines?” Olson asked. “We’re technically in Salisbury, but we use a Westbury address. No matter. We serve whoever wants to worship Christ and his teachings.”

Olson said that five years ago, he sought an open space to bring New Hope Church to the community. When he visited Temple Shalom, at 675 Brookside Court, he grasped the interfaith opportunity. “Not only was it a chance for people to go to a church that they love and learn from,” he said, “but it was a chance for two religions to come together and try to understand one another’s views.”

Through the years, Olson said, he and Rabbi Simcha Zamir have hosted workshops at which congregants from the two houses of worship discuss their beliefs, fostering religious tolerance. “We try to understand why we believe the things we do,” Olson said, “and why they believe the things they do.”

Because the church aims to serve the community, Olson said, it reaches out each month to assisted-living centers in East Meadow, Salisbury, Westbury and surrounding communities, offering donated food. Olson, who is also a member of the Kiwanis Club of East Meadow, often partners with the club to host holiday food and clothing drives and charitable fundraisers.

“I think he’s very passionate,” Ross Schiller, the Kiwanis Club president, said. “He’s really trying to build a church that surrounds itself with community, in terms of what it can provide to the community.”

The church hosts Hope Day on the first Saturday of June, Olson said. Hope Day, a project of Convoy of Hope — an organization that provides food for children and disaster response across the country — is a large block party for families on tight budgets. Nearly 20 churches and organizations across Long Island, New York City and New Jersey will take part in Hope Day this spring.

“I always tell the kids to wear out the bouncy castles as much as they can,” Olson said with a smile. “It’s a day where parents who struggle financially can enjoy food, music and entertainment for free.”

Anyone is welcome, he said. In fact, he added, at the church’s Hope Day at a local park in East Meadow last year, a homeless man slept under the slides. A town of Hempstead employee offered to shoo the man away, but Olson would have none of it. “He’s our guest of honor,” he said.

The homeless man even got a free haircut from Olson’s hairdresser, who donated her time. “He looked like a brand-new man,” Olson said.

“I think that New Hope Church has done a lot for the community,” Schiller said. “The church has given out clothing, food and books, which is really important for kids.”

The congregation meets on Sundays at 10:30 a.m. for services, while Temple Shalom meets for Kabbalat Shabbat on Fridays at 7:45 p.m., at 9:30 a.m. for Shabbat, and at 7:45 p.m. on Mondays.