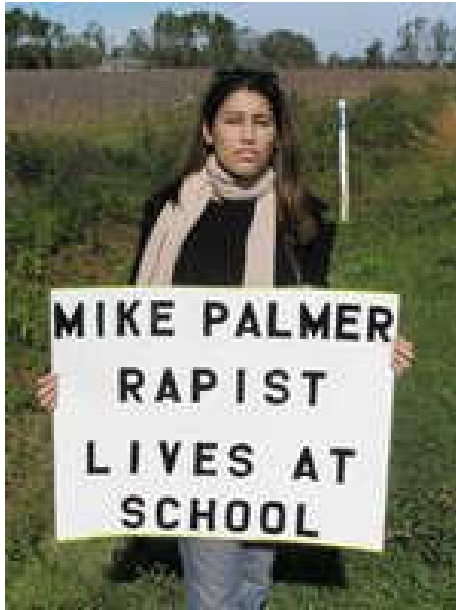


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Equal rights for children under the law



*Rebecca Ramirez at Victory Christian Academy
Photo by Duane Escobedo of Independent News*

More warning bells ignored by Florida lawmakers

Abuses at Florida's unregulated boarding schools have been reported for decades, but the pace of revelations is quickening in the internet age when survivors can find each other and publicize their experiences.

Florida lawmakers have taken no interest in the injuries. After toddler Zaniyah Hinson died at an unlicensed church-run daycare in Daytona Beach, Senator Evelyn Lynn introduced a bill to tighten regulation of the parochial daycares. Zaniyah's mother gave impassioned testimony to no avail. Lynn later reduced the scope of her bills, but there was still opposition from several mainline churches and those bills were also defeated.

No Florida lawmaker has even introduced a bill to regulate the church-run boarding schools that take in disturbed teenagers. Florida and Missouri are national magnets for these schools because of their lack of regulation.

Camp Tracey

As long ago as 1987 a grand jury issued a report on abuse and negligence at Camp Tracey Children's Home operated by Harvest Baptist Church north of Glen Saint Mary, Florida. The grand jury complained that the camp did not keep records of injuries or abuse, did not report suspected abuse to the state, had no staff trained in health or nutrition, was not inspected for compliance with health, building and fire codes; had no certified teachers, scheduled a grossly substandard amount of time for instruction, had a convicted felon on staff, censored students' mail, severely limited contact of students with their parents, used corporal punishment frequently, restrained students with ropes and handcuffs, and forced them to do uncompensated work for private citizens.

Camp Tracey management and staff must depart from their "clandestine attitudes of operation," the grand jury declared. They called for their report to be made public and for another grand jury to meet six months later to determine if the camp management and staff had corrected the problems described and complied with its recommendations.

"If not," they concluded, "it would be our

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recommendation that criminal charges, injunctive relief, and any legal and equitable process be employed to externally address the internal neglect by those in positions of responsibility at Camp Tracey.”

No follow-up

Despite the broad scope and seriousness of those complaints, public officials did no follow-up.

In 2003 Camp Tracey was in the news again when two men sued Harvest Baptist Church and its pastor Wilford McCormick for sexual and physical abuse at the camp in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s.

Kirk Griffin’s complaint stated that he was sexually abused by camp counselors for four years, which caused long-term psychological and substance abuse problems.

Jason Berglund was at Camp Tracey for six years beginning when he was 12. He alleges that he was “continuously subjected to extreme physical abuse” and “forced to engage in anal and oral sex by those placed in charge of him.”

Abuse not disclosed to mom

When his mother called him at the camp, however, he told her everything was fine. He now says he was too afraid to tell her the truth because the abusers threatened to harm his family.

At the end of Berglund’s first year, camp administrators said he would have to stay until his academics improved. They threatened legal action if he left early. Berglund says he endured the abuse passively as a way of getting out.

Parents who send their children to Camp Tracey have to sign a contract that limits the children’s contact with the outside world and requires them to stay at the camp for at least a year, according to camp rules obtained by the *Florida Times-Union*.

No psychological counseling, no calls out

No medical or dental attention is allowed except in emergencies or when requested by camp staff. Children cannot make phone calls from the camp. Parents can call their child only on his birthday or designated Saturdays and then only for five minutes.

The rules also say that “no child will be permitted to undergo required state. . . counseling” while he is at Camp Tracey,” the newspaper reported.

In its response to Griffin’s and Berglund’s complaints, Harvest Baptist Church alleges that the boys were “negligent in failing to take sufficient protections” for their own safety and their parents were negligent in their supervision of them. They also claimed the statute of limitations required dismissal of the suits.

Others have also spoken out publicly about abuses at the camp since the suits were filed. Nevertheless, the Baker County Sheriff says no one has complained to him.

Some are helped, complaints discredited

The camp also has its defenders. Parent Todd Oakes says Camp Tracey saved his son’s life and questioned the credibility of the accusers. Oakes said children are sent to Camp Tracey because of behavioral problems and “mind games.”

But a mother who says her daughter was sexually molested there said the camp officials want parents to disbelieve their children. Parents were told the children would tell lies to get parents to take them home and parents should therefore ignore their child’s complaints.

Teen Transformation Ministries

Abuses have also been alleged at Teen Transformation Ministries in Oveido, Florida, an unlicensed Christian group home for troubled boys. In 2003, a 13-year-old boy suffered a broken shoulder and fire ant bites there. The Seminole County sheriff reported that he complained of the shoulder injury, but was not given medical attention. The boy was made to pull down his pants and sit on a fire ant mound at the group home, the sheriff said.

Fire ant torture reported

The boy also told the sheriff’s investigators that he was dropped into a septic tank. The other boys would not let him out for about 10 minutes and poured fire ants into the tank, he said.

The sheriff’s office returned all the boys to their parents while the abuse allegations were investigated, but the school had five boys enrolled again the

next year. The state does not have the authority to close the school.

Our Father's House

In 2004 former Ku Klux Klansman John Burt was convicted of sexually molesting a 15-year-old girl at Our Father's House, a group home for pregnant teenagers, which he ran in Milton, Florida. Santa Rosa County Circuit Judge Ron Swanson sentenced him to 18 years in prison, but he has been released on bond while his appeal is pending. He had to register as a sex offender and is not allowed to be alone with children.

Burt has a long history of violent action against abortion. He was associated with the men who murdered two Florida doctors.

The police had investigated complaints of sexual abuse at the shelter in the past, but did not get enough evidence to arrest before the 15-year-old came forward, they said.

Because of those complaints, the Florida Association of Christian Child Caring Agencies (FACCCA) had told Burt he could not be alone with any of the girls nor live there. When FACCCA said that or whether it monitored or enforced its directives is unclear.

The phone is still answered at Our Father's House, but the person answering said they no longer take in girls. Instead, they do referrals and help families in crisis, she said.

New Beginnings Rebekah Home

New Beginnings Rebekah Home in Pace, Florida, was run by Wiley and Faye Cameron, the successors of the notorious Lester Roloff whose "Bible discipline" in his unlicensed reformatories included beatings with paddles and straps, kneeling for hours on hardwood floors, handcuffing, and lockup in isolation rooms where his sermons were played non-stop for days, weeks, or longer.

Abusive directors move from state to state

The Camerons have opened and closed their lockdown residential facilities in Texas, Missouri, and Mississippi before bringing them to Florida in 2001. Texas has permanently banned Mrs. Cameron from working with children or being present at a juvenile facility.

A local television station reported in December, 2004, that Florida state officials had investigated two allegations of abuse at the school, one for requiring "extreme physical exertion" of a student and an accusation that Mrs. Cameron hit a girl with a curtain rod.

Soon afterwards the school changed its name to New Beginnings Girls Academy and the Camerons' names were removed from its literature.

Like the Camerons, however, the new director, Bill McNamara, strongly emphasizes the girls' sinfulness and prohibits contact with their siblings, according to the sister of one student.

Victory Christian Academy

About 80 girls are enrolled at Victory Christian Academy in Jay, Florida. Some former students have posted accounts on the internet of the abuses there, staged a protest demonstration at the school gates, and gotten media coverage.

The former students speaking out have remarkably consistent stories about the school for troubled girls run by Michael Palmer. When they first arrived, they were strip-searched and all their clothes and personal possessions were taken away. They had to wear ugly dresses worn by previous students instead.

Little contact with outside world

Other girls were designated as their "helpers" and followed them constantly. The girls cannot make phone calls. Parents could not have any contact with them for the first three months. All mail was censored. If girls wrote about abuses at the school in letters to their parents, the staff would black out the information or write in the margin that the girl was a liar and a manipulator.

Food used as weapon and control

The staff insisted that students eat everything served. If students did not, they were branded as rebels and manipulators. The remaining food was served to them on following days or pureed and forced to them with staff holding their heads back. Some students were forced to eat their own vomit. They were sometimes forced to eat moldy food. Vegetarians were forced to eat meat.

One former student told CHILD she weighed 90 pounds when she was sent to Palmer's school as a 14-year-old. Four months later she weighed 135 pounds from being forced to eat so much food. Another former student told us she has had an eating disorder since being at the school.

Students belittled and degraded

Emotional abuse was relentless, massive, and systemic. Students were constantly told they would go to hell unless they were saved according to Palmer's type of Christianity. They were sent letters purportedly from Satan (see following document). Individual students were publicly condemned as whores and drug addicts. Rape victims were pointed out, and the preachers claimed the girls were to blame for it. Students who tried to tell their parents about abuses were ridiculed in chapel; other girls were encouraged to participate in humiliating them. Students were repeatedly told that their parents would not rescue them from VCA and indeed that their parents had abandoned them and didn't care about them anymore.

Homophobia

Some girls were sent to VCA to be "cured" of homosexuality. In chapel Palmer singled out these girls as "queers" and "dykes" and an abomination to the Lord. Racial slurs were directed at others.

Girls were allowed to touch each other only when holding hands in a prayer circle. Any other touch, even accidental, would be punished, often by making the toucher write a bible verse about homosexuality hundreds of times.

Friendships were punished and broken up. If two girls became good friends, they were put on "separation" in which they were not allowed to communicate with or about each other or even look at each other.

Parents were ordered to destroy contact information and communications from friends the girls had before they came to VCA.

Palmer has told the press that corporal punishment is not used at Victory Christian Academy. Former students do not report beatings either with the hand or with implements at the Florida school. They do, however, tell of students being held down,

sat on by older students, force-fed, and having bibles thrown at their heads.

"Writing lines"

The most common punishment was "writing lines." Students were ordered to write a sentence 1000 or more times for breaking any of a myriad of constantly changing rules. If they didn't get that done within 24 hours, the requirement would be doubled.

There was also a "get-right room," a pantry-like space, where delinquent students were confined for as long as a month. Tapes of sermons threatening hellfire and damnation are broadcast into the room non-stop.

"Mindors" monitor ill students

Former student Jennifer Connolly recently spoke on Reality News, an internet channel. When a girl gets sick at the school, she said, she had to stay in bed all day with nothing to eat or drink. A "minder" stayed in the room with her and made sure she read her bible and did nothing else. When Jennifer became so ill that she was taken to a doctor, she noticed that her medical chart said she was a manipulator and a liar.

She says she was sexually molested by a VCA preacher, who blamed her for seducing him. She wanted to die and drank half a bottle of Windex in a suicide attempt, she said.

New student confined to "get-right room"

Rebecca Ramirez was first placed at Palmer's Victory Christian Academy in Ramona, California, in 1989. When she arrived, Palmer put her in a headlock and dragged her off. She saw her brothers and father passively watching what was happening to her. Then she fainted. She awoke in the closet-sized "get-right room" with preaching tapes playing constantly. She cried, screamed, kicked, and pounded the walls for help, but instead staff members came to the dead-bolted door, looked through a peephole, laughed, and insulted her. One slammed her head against the wall. She slept on the cement floor with only a pillow. She was locked in the get-right room for three days until she promised to obey all the rules, she reports.

She also remembers the staff shoving food down her throat while holding her head back. “I was choking and gagged and threw up,” she recalls, “but they still held my head back until I finally stopped fighting and swallowed food along with my vomit. After several months of agony, I developed a health problem so I got sent home early to recover.”

That same year California convicted Palmer of operating an unlicensed childcare facility. Charging that a state license would infringe on his religious freedom, Palmer closed the school and promptly opened another Victory Christian Academy in Florida.

Rape alleged

In 1992, Ramirez was sent to the Florida school. She tried very hard to be docile and obedient so she would have an easier time and get out sooner. Within a few months, however, Palmer became sexually obsessed with her, she and other former students say. He raped her twice, she charges. After his wife became suspicious, Palmer let Ramirez go home, but told her it was God’s plan for them to marry and go to Mexico where he would open a new school.

Palmer did come out to California and contacted the Ramirez family. He offered them \$25,000 to let him marry Rebecca. He sent many love letters and gifts, which the family has kept as evidence. Rebecca’s parents told him not to contact her.

Protest demonstration against school

Ramirez is now a music teacher and pre-med student. She, her mother, and Jennifer Connolly staged a protest demonstration against VCA in November, 2004 (see page 1).

Shortly afterwards, VCA’s name was changed to Lighthouse of Northwest Florida and Palmer’s name was removed as executive director, although he reportedly still owns it.

Student afraid to disclose abuses

Candice Freed, now a law student at the University of Hawaii, was at VCA for three years. She remembers the police coming to VCA to interview students after Ramirez reported the sexual abuse and being warned by VCA staff not to “manipulate”

them. Freed said she was so afraid of the staff and wanted so badly to get out of VCA that she told the authorities everything was fine at the school.

Mexico closes Palmer school

No criminal charges for the rapes were filed. In 1997 Palmer opened Genesis by the Sea in Rosarito, Mexico, another all-girls lockdown reformatory. In September, 2004, Mexican authorities closed it because of abuse of students, dispensing of expired and unmarked medications, its electric fence, and operation without state and municipal permits. Russel Cookston, who was implicated in the abuses at Genesis by the Sea, is now listed as the executive director of Victory Christian Academy.

Christian accreditation in lieu of state license

Florida allows residential lockdown reformatories to operate with approval from the Florida Association of Christian Child-Caring Agencies (FACCCA) in lieu of state licensure and oversight. FACCCA is required to publish its standards, require compliance with them, and file a copy of them with the Florida Department of Children and Families. The officers of FACCCA operate unlicensed Christian boarding schools themselves. Michael Palmer, for example, is the vice-president of FACCCA.

Florida law requires that FACCCA’s “standards shall be **in substantial compliance** with published minimum standards that similar licensed child-caring agencies or family foster homes are required to meet, as determined by the department, with the exception of those standards of a curricular or religious nature and those relating to staffing or financial stability.” (emphasis added) But once Florida’s Division of Child Welfare and Community-Based Care determines that the standards submitted by FACCCA are in substantial compliance, the state takes FACCCA at its word that it requires the boarding schools to abide by them. FACCCA does not have to give the state any more information except a list of the facilities it accredits and any changes in its standards.

Child welfare officials cannot observe

The state used to send Child Welfare Division officials out to inspect and observe the unlicensed

church-run boarding schools, but in the 1990's the legislature changed the law and prohibited the state from doing that.

At least one of FACCCA's schools, Gabriel's House, claims on its webpage that it is "accredited by the state of Florida." That is a serious misrepresentation, which was a factor in the death of Zaniyah Hinson. Her church-run daycare also advertised itself as state approved, which led her mother to believe it was a safe place for her daughter.

A contract between parents and one FACCCA school, West Florida Teen Challenge Boys' Ranch, does not indicate that the school meets standards that might be roughly equivalent to state requirements. The contract states that FACCCA's "intent" is to "insure the physical and spiritual health, safety, and well being" of the children and therefore that the boy's ranch must meet FACCCA's "minimum standards," but the only one described in the contract is allowing access to public officials who inspect for fire, health, safety, and sanitation codes.

Biblically-based mediation required

Parents have to agree to hold the ranch and its employees harmless from "any and all liability" for injury to the child "even injury resulting in death." Parents must agree "that God desires that they resolve their dispute with one another within the church and that they be reconciled in their relationships in accordance with the principles stated in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, Matthew 5:23-24 and Matthew 18:15-20." If they cannot resolve their disagreement privately within the church, parents must accept resolution through "biblically based mediation" by rules of the Association of Christian Conciliation Services.

There is no refund of tuition or deposits if the boy leaves the ranch before 15 months even if the ranch has expelled him.

Lax background checks

Florida law requires that all employees of residential facilities be fingerprinted and have employment history, criminal, and juvenile record checks. It requires facilities to ensure that no employee has a confirmed report of abuse, neglect, or exploitation which has been uncontested or upheld in any juris-

diction. Again, however, the state trusts that FACCCA carries out these obligations.

If FACCCA had done proper security background investigations on the Camerons and Palmers, they would have found their sordid records in other states and would have been required to prohibit their employment.

Discipline standards very different

FACCCA's standards on discipline cannot possibly be "in substantial compliance" with the standards for state-licensed residential facilities. State standards say that discipline policies should emphasize positive, instead of punitive methods and forbid facility staff to "use physical punishment, inflicted in any manner on the body; ridicule, intimidate or verbally abuse children; use chemical or mechanical restraints unless used under a physician's order. . . ; employ cruel or humiliating treatment or other emotionally abusive behavior; assign excessive exercise or work duties which are inappropriate to the child's age or development; deny food, clothing, shelter, medical care or prescribed therapeutic activities, or contacts with family, counselors or legal representatives as a form of punishment."

Several former students say that staff at the unlicensed facilities engaged in such practices, and FACCCA standards say only that disciplinary practices must be in writing and parents must agree in writing to them. In 2000, however, FACCCA did pass a resolution against mechanical restraints.

Isolation policies differ sharply

The two accrediting bodies also differ sharply on isolation policy. State licensure requires that if the facility uses separation from others as a control measure, it must "provide an unlocked, lighted, well-ventilated room of at least 50 square feet and within hearing distance of a staff member. The time limit for isolation shall not exceed 60 minutes."

FACCCA standards have no time limit for isolation and no requirements for the type of room used. They do say that there must be continuing supervision within hearing of the staff.

Are staff qualified to treat troubled youth?

Florida law requires the unlicensed church-run boarding schools to “notify the department immediately if it has in its care a child with serious developmental disabilities or a physical, emotional, or mental handicap for which the facility is not qualified or able to provide treatment.” By definition, the youths sent to these schools have severe emotional or behavioral problems at least in their parents’ minds. Yet they are sent thousands of miles away to the custody of people who bombard them with condemnation of their sinfulness and who cut them off from friends and family.

Given the reports we’ve received of virtually sadistic emotional abuse at these schools, it is difficult to conclude that their staffs are qualified to “provide treatment.”

Getting Florida lawmakers to regulate the church-run boarding schools will be an uphill battle. Several schools point out on their web pages that they have saved the taxpayers “millions” of dollars because they receive no federal or state funds. [They do, however, take social security payments and other funds which a child is entitled to receive from a governmental agency.]

Taken in part from the Baker County grand jury’s report on Camp Tracey, June 4, 1987; *Texas Monthly*, December 2001; *Florida Times-Union*, May 10 and July 13, 2003; International Survivors Action Committee webpage at www.isaccorp.org; *Independent News* and WEAR TV (Pensacola), Nov. 30 and Dec. 2, 2004; Bylaws & Minimum Standards of the Florida Association of Christian Child Caring Agencies, Inc.; and statements by former students.

A letter from “Satan”

WE WRESTLE NOT AGAINST FLESH & BLOOD

I saw you yesterday as you began your daily chores. You awoke without kneeling to pray. As a matter of fact, you didn’t even bless your meals, or pray before going to bed last night. You are SO unthankful. I like that about you.

I cannot tell you how glad I am that you have not changed your way of living. FOOL! You are mine. Remember, you and I have been going steady for years, and I still don’t love you yet. As a matter of fact, I hate you, why? Because I hate God! I am only using you to get even with God. You see He kicked me out of heaven, and I’m going to use you as long as possible in order to pay him back.

You see, FOOL, GOD LOVES YOU and HE has great plans in store for you. But you have yielded your life to me and I’m going to make your life a living hell. That way we’ll be together twice. This will really hurt God: thanks to you. I’m really showing Him who is boss in your life. Why, all of the good times we’ve had. . . we have been watching dirty movies, cursing people out, partying, stealing, lying, doing drugs, sleeping around, telling dirty jokes, gossiping, back stabbing people, disrespecting adults and those in leadership positions, being hypocrites (*sic*), NO respect for the church, bad attitudes. Hey, you name it, we’ve done it! SURELY you don’t want to give all this up. . . .

Come on FOOL, let’s burn together forever. I’ve got some hot plans for us.

Sin is beginning to take its toll on your life. You look older than you really are. I need new blood. So go ahead and teach some children how to sin. All you have to do is smoke, drink alcoholic beverages, cheat, gamble, gossip, do drugs, sleep around, and listen to and dance to the “top 10 jams,” do all of this in the presence of children and THEY WILL DO IT TOO! I’ll be back in a couple of seconds to tempt you again. “IF” you were smart, YOU WOULD RUN SOMEWHERE. . . , ANYWHERE and confess your sins, live for God with what little bit of life that you have left. . . .

From: Satan

Resources on abuse and fraud in “therapeutic” boarding schools and camps—2010 Update

[We are not posting the 2004 version of this article because serious doubts have been raised as to the integrity of two organizations we praised then.

Both may be getting commissions for referring parents to certain schools without disclosing this fact to parents. While exposing abuses at some schools, they may be suppressing evidence of abuses at other schools giving them commissions.]

Maia Szalavitz's book, *Help at any Cost: How the Troubled-Teen Industry Cons Parents and Hurts Kids*, and her online posts are an excellent expose of this lucrative business.

Jordan Riak, director of Parents and Teachers Against Violence in Education (PTAVE), has many articles in his section on "Boot Camps for Kids: Torturing Teenagers for Fun and Profit" at www.nospank.net.

Remnant parents arrested in son's death

Sonya and Joseph Smith of Mableton, Georgia, were arrested in 2003 for murder, cruelty to a child, and deprivation of a minor. Their son Josef, age 8, died in October, 2003, from beatings. The Cobb County District Attorney has not yet presented the case to a grand jury for an indictment.

Abuse reported to child protection services

In Henry County, Georgia, Smith's daughter by a previous marriage had filed a report of suspected abuse in May, 2003. She described Josef as "demon-possessed" with "his eyes rolling in the back of his head as if he were going through some transformation." The boy called himself Legion, which means "many demons." He wrote on the walls that he was going to kill everyone. He heated a fork and stuck it down the pants of one of his siblings, causing a permanent scar. She reported that the parents also had placed video cameras around the house to observe their son, claimed he was demon-possessed, and were providing no mental health services.

The Henry County Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) relayed the report to Cobb County DFCS and requested a visit to the Smith home. Weeks later Henry County repeated its request.

County did not investigate "demon-possession"

After Josef's death, Cobb County DFCS said the request had gotten misplaced. The Department also claimed, however, that the Henry County memo contained no allegations of abuse or neglect. "There's nothing in that memo that says the parents might beat a child to death," Cobb County DFCS Director Catherine Anderson said.

Another teenager who babysat for the Smiths' church, Remnant Fellowship in Brentwood, Tennessee, reported that Smith ordered her to hit Josef "hard" because he was crying. The girl refused, so the father took him to another room and then she heard the boy wailing more loudly.

She quit her babysitting job the next day. She and her parents reported the incident to Tennessee Department of Children's Services, which declined to investigate saying there wasn't enough information to suspect abuse.

Toddler dies without medical care

In July, 2003, the Smiths' son Milek, age 17 months, died. Initially, the cause of death was reported as untreated pneumonia. The parents claimed that he was not sick and had never been sick.

The death did get Cobb County DFCS out to the home. Mrs. Smith would not allow the workers to talk to her children. They noted that the home and the surviving children, all home-schooled, were clean and orderly. They found no reason to suspect child abuse or neglect and closed the case.

Later, the medical examiner reported that the boy's "heart stopped for unknown reasons." A source indicated to CHILD that he did not die of a disease.

Severe beatings fatal

After Josef's death, the state found much to be alarmed about. One official reported that the boy was "beaten so severely that his brain swelled and bruises covered much of his body."

Mrs. Smith told him she "normally" gave the children their whippings in increments of 10 each and that Josef had gotten several of those whipping sessions on the day of his death.

"No remorse"

The parents “showed no remorse” and were “very defensive about their religion” and its recommended discipline methods, he wrote. Expressing the attitude common among those who believe in demon-possession, Smith claimed his 8-year-old son was so strong that he could knock a person out.

Detective David Schweizer testified that the Smiths tied up their son, beat him with belts and sticks, and locked him in his room for days to pray to a picture of Jesus on the ceiling. An older son sometimes held Josef down while the parents beat him.

Their surviving children were placed in foster care.

Remnant Fellowship

Remnant Fellowship was founded by Gwen Shamblin, who wrote *The Weigh Down Diet*. The book, which claims obesity is caused by self-centeredness, has sold more than a million copies. Headquartered in Brentwood, Tennessee, her church claims about 1,000 members in some 130 cities.

Remnant’s materials emphasize obedience above all else. Its webpage had a testimony by a woman who was first hesitant to hit her kids, but now she does it “in order to save their souls from hell rather than being concerned about their flesh.”

A recording of a conference call between Shamblin and her staff and “the scattered saints” on February 3, 2003 is also chilling evidence of the danger the Smith boys were in.

Shamblin holds up her own children as models of obedience. More than twenty years old, these children still cling to her and beg her for advice on how they can serve the Lord better. They are “afraid” to disobey her, she bragged. She has told her adult son that she can “get on a chair and knock him in the head.”

Disobedient children will burn in hell

Remnant children can sit through a 2 ½ hour service without making a sound, Shamblin brags. If children open their eyes during prayers or hymn singing or break any other rules, Remnant staff come to the parents during the service and whisper that the child must be removed from the sanctuary and spanked enough to make them too sorry to break the rules again.

If children do not obey their parents the first time or if they’re slow to obey, they will live for only a few years on earth and have a horrible afterlife in eternal damnation, Shamblin claimed. Parents have only a small window of time to get their families in order because the refiner’s fire is coming through, she added.

After children are one year old, parents cannot allow them to whine or pout. “You’re raising kids who will never be on Prozac, never be depressed, never feel sorry for themselves,” Shamblin claimed.

Shamblin’s associate David Martin told about his three-year-old daughter Avery’s willfulness. “We had a real showdown with her. We had to give her leg spankings over and over and over again for three weeks,” he said, but now they “hardly ever have to spank her.”

Spankings atone for parents’ sins

“We are making little vessels for God to be King. Love God more than you love these children. Then you will get a chance to correct all the sins you have struggled with. . . . God will rule and you will get to correct everything you did wrong in your own life and break the power of sin,” Martin said.

Shamblin chimed in that hitting your kids is a way to “cancel out your past sins,” to “break the curse of sin through the generations of your own family.”

“You don’t have to do ‘these little pats,’” she added. “We want a real showdown with the child.”

Violent child now obedient

Sonya Smith then spoke. Her son Josef had destroyed everything of hers that he could, tried to strangle her baby and burn the house down, but a Shamblin associate gave her such good advice. “We spanked him on the back of his thighs. We took everything out of his room and locked him in his room with only his bible from Friday to Monday,” Smith said.

Now he’s a model child and always obedient, Smith claimed. He comes to her three or four times a day to ask how he can help his mother.

If it weren’t for Shamblin, Smith said, “I probably would have had to go to the world—like the police.”

Shamblin then called for everyone to praise God because Josef had gone from “bizarre” to “in control.”

Children must not have “expectations”

“Kids can’t be allowed to think about themselves,” Shamblin said. They must orbit around God and His children. The world is spoiling these kids, ruining them, by letting them think about themselves at all. The world says we’ll ruin these kids’ self-esteem by this tough love. But really we are giving them self-esteem by turning them to honor God, she claimed.

Another caller listed the “Remnant rules for kids,” which included giving thanks in all things and no interrupting, grumbling, or “expectations.”

Psychotropic drugs rejected as “idols”

Terri Phillips joined the conversation with her testimony. She was on anti-depressants beginning in 1995. The drugs numb your feelings and harden your heart, she said. But the Bible tells us not to take anything that defiles body or spirit.

Because of Remnant, Phillips “laid down all [her] idols” and weaned herself off of the drugs. Now she’s so full of emotion that she cries through all the church services, she reported.

Remnant also helped her get her son off of autism and ADHD medications, which he had been on for several years.

Also, her marriage was saved by Remnant. She was in submission to her husband and her mother, but still her husband was about to leave her because she was self-centered and not submissive enough.

All unpleasant thoughts in depression come from self-pity, Phillips claimed. Through Remnant, she quit feeling sorry for herself and gave up drugs. Now whenever she starts to think about herself, she thinks instead of someone she can encourage and is “just so joyful about helping other people.”

“Satan has really got a hold of the world right now with these medicines,” Shamblin said. While self-help groups teach self-centeredness and resignation, she advises her members to think about “poor God and His needs.”

Five months after this conference call, Milek had died without medical care and three months later his brother Josef was beaten to death.

Remnant orders drugs thrown out

A few months after that, Terri Phillips was telling a very different story to a Nashville television station. She said that soon after she quit taking her anti-depressants she “began spinning out of control.”

She started “sneaking behind” the church’s back and taking the drugs again “because I was desperate for my life. I wanted to feel better again.”

When Remnant leaders found out, they told her husband to take the drugs away from her and flush them down the toilet.

She couldn’t stop crying because she felt too weak to “knock the demons” out of her mind and thought God hated her. Members told her to stop feeling sorry for herself. Near suicide, Phillips ran to a hospital instead and got medical treatment for depression.

She and her husband now believe depression can be caused by chemical imbalances and is not “a sin.”

Kids should be “really hurt” without leaving marks

She also told the press that church members had pressured her to keep spanking her 5-year-old daughter for an hour to try to make her quit crying and that members recommended using long glue sticks for hitting because they “really hurt,” but “don’t leave marks.”

CHILD contacted Georgia officials with our concern about DFCS publicly stating that the report on demon-possession did not contain “accusations of abuse or neglect.”

Is demon-possession a danger sign?

“Newspaper articles state,” we wrote, “that your office received reports that 8-year-old Josef Smith claimed he was possessed by demons, that his parents were also saying he was demon-possessed, that he planned to kill people, and that he was not receiving mental health services.

“Hindsight is 20/20, of course, but as general policy for the future, we would like to know if your office considers a family’s belief that a child is

demon-possessed a danger sign of abuse or neglect that warrants DFCS investigation,” we said.

The Cobb County DCFS refused to answer our questions. The state child advocate, Dee Simms, did call us, though, and told us she “would hope” a report that a child is demon-possessed would trigger a DCFS investigation in the future. She also said several mistakes were made in handling the Smith case and policy changes have been made to prevent them from happening again.

Taken in part from *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Dec. 11 and 19, 2003; *Nashville Tennessean*, June 30, 2004; a CD of a conference call between Gwen Shamblin and her followers, Feb. 3, 2003; and WTVF TV (Nashville) reports.

Baby’s death from herpes virus sparks investigation of mohel

In November, 2004, a baby died in a New York City suburb of herpes ten days after his circumcision. His twin brother also tested positive for herpes. They were circumcised by Rabbi Yitzchok Fischer. Another baby he circumcised tested positive for herpes a year earlier.

If parents request it, Fischer sucks the blood from the newly circumcised penis with his mouth, a procedure called *metzizah b’peh*, which the most fervent Orthodox Jews still maintain is the only ritually-acceptable way to draw off residual blood. “The saliva cleans wounds. God gave us saliva in our mouth to clean things,” said another rabbi in Fischer’s defense.

New York City’s Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has filed a civil suit against Rabbi Fischer, requiring him to give blood samples for testing and enjoining him from suctioning blood by mouth. A court order also requires him to wear rubber gloves and take other steps to prevent infection.

Rockland County health officials say that they are planning to review the rabbi’s circumcisions.

Religious exemption for circumcision surgery

Several states have passed religious exemptions allowing mohelim, or Jewish ritual circumcisers, to

perform their surgical operation without medical licensure. See, for example, 24 Delaware Code § 1703(e)(4), Montana Code § 37-3-103(h), and Wisconsin Stat. § 448.03(g).

Furthermore, the mohelim are not required to belong to any professional organization that would hold them to standards.

Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, vice-president of the New York Board of Rabbis, called for the creation of a certification board. “There needs to be strict oversight in these matters,” he said. “People rely upon some kind of verification that the mohel is fully suitable to perform the rite. That means also that there’s a malpractice policy in place. If we’re going to recommend someone for something so sacred that has this physical component, we need to be very clear we’ll only recommend someone who fulfills all of our requirements.”

State regulation opposed

He also opposed state regulation, however. “It’s always dangerous to have the state involved in a religious procedure. We in the Jewish community are the more appropriate place to define what the criteria should be and monitor to see that they are fulfilled,” he said.

A spokesman for Agudath Israel of America, which represents the fervently Orthodox, said, “Word of mouth is the best regulatory system, and the system has worked very well,” he said. “There should be no ban on *metzizah b’peh*, and no required testing of mohelim.”

Rabbi Heller said that good mohelim test themselves every three months for diseases, including HIV, hepatitis and herpes. “We check ourselves more than surgeons check themselves,” he said.

Taken in part from *Jewish Week*, Feb. 9, 2005.

Abuse in the Amish community

The internet has even intruded upon the insular Amish communities. Victims of abuse and neglect describe their experiences at www.amishabuse.com, which in turn has emboldened more survivors to come forward and aroused media attention as well.

Though the popular image of the Amish is of a gentle, innocent, rural people frozen in the 19th century, some aspects of their belief system and culture encourage abuses and discourage reporting of abuse to civil authority.

Humility and submission required

Basic to Amish social structure is the concept of *Gelassenheit* or submission. Wives must submit to husbands, sisters to brothers, children to fathers, and all to clergy. Divorce and remarriage after divorce are forbidden.

Gelassenheit places a premium on humility. Some parents do not affirm their children because they want them to be humble. The children's low self-esteem makes them more vulnerable to sexual advances.

Community must solve problems internally

Forgiveness is another high moral demand. If an Amish person repents and asks for forgiveness, the entire Amish community is obligated to forgive him and no-one should mention the wrong again.

The religion interprets Jesus' directive in Matthew 5:24, "Agree with your adversary quickly," to mean that disputes should be resolved within the community and not involve judicial or social service systems. In conservative Amish and Mennonite communities members are often severely stigmatized for reporting abuse to secular authorities.

The Amish do not believe in having health insurance or receiving social security. The community has an obligation to pay for each other's health care and take care of all members in their old age, which is a strong social control.

Quack remedies

Another factor is the Amish attraction to quackery and their ignorance of modern medicine and psychology. When one Amish mother learned that her sons were repeatedly raping her daughter, her only response was to give the boys an herbal potion supposed to reduce their sex drive and tell the girl to forgive.

Believing that secular education corrupts their religious values, the Amish won the right to withdraw their children from school after the eighth grade in *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205 (1972).

But discouraging even high school education means that there are few Amish therapists or other professionals whom church members would be naturally inclined to trust.

High rates of genetic disease

Finally, several Amish communities have elevated rates of genetic diseases because of their limited gene pool. High rates of bi-polar disorder have been found among the Amish. The Amish community in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, has had an essentially closed genetic population for more than twelve generations. They all descended from about 200 Swiss citizens and do not marry outsiders. The Amish have been cooperative with genetic studies and have come for genetic counseling when it is available near their communities.

The horrific sexual abuse of Amish child Mary Byler has been the focus of much recent media coverage of spousal and child abuse among the Amish.

Taken in part from the *Lancaster Intelligencer Journal*, Aug. 4, 2004; *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, Aug. 19, 2004; and *Legal Affairs*, Jan.-Feb., 2005.

About CHILD Inc.

CHILD is a national membership organization dedicated to stopping child abuse and neglect related to religion or cultural traditions. CHILD provides research, public education, amicus briefs, and a support group for ex-Christian Scientists. CHILD lobbies for equal protection of children within its tax-exempt limits. CHILD is a member of the National Child Abuse Coalition.

For more information on CHILD and a membership application form, visit our web page at www.childrenshealthcare.org. To reach CHILD by mail, phone, fax, or e-mail, see the contact information on page 1.