

Children's Healthcare Is a Legal Duty, Inc.

Box 2604, Sioux City IA 51106
Phone 712-948-3500, FAX 712-948-3704
Web page: www.childrenshealthcare.org

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E-mail: childinc@netins.net
Written by Rita Swan

Equal rights for children under the law



Hamm Family Leaves the Courthouse

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Religious objectors let three children die; charges filed in third death

In September, Church of the Firstborn parents Wesley and LaRonda Hamm of Tulare, California, were charged with involuntary manslaughter and felony child abuse in their daughter's death.

Their 10-year-old daughter Jessica died in March, 2003, of sepsis and cardiorespiratory failure due to inflammation of her lungs and trachea. Instead of medical treatment, she was prayed over by family and church members in her home. Tulare County prosecutors have said medical treatment could have saved her life.

Wesley Hamm, a church elder, told police he knew Jessica was going to die hours before she gasped for her last breath. He said no CPR or other type of resuscitation was performed because he and his wife felt they had to let God's will be done.

A police detective asked him if he felt he had made a mistake; he said, "No," she reported.

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Local church elder Vernal Dukes told police investigators that members consider death the will of God and never get medical treatment voluntarily.

Sons also died of treatable illnesses

The Hamms have also let two other children die without medical care. In January, 1995, their son Tyler Blake Hamm died at age 11 in Springdale, Arkansas, where the family was then living. The coroner reported that the boy had been sick for about two weeks and probably died from chronic diabetes complicated by flu and dehydration.

In January, 1999, their son Bradley Glenn Hamm died at age 12 in their Morgan County, Indiana, home after suffering from pneumonia for two weeks. He may also have had a congenital heart defect. The coroner described the boy as small for his age, measuring only 4 feet 5 inches tall and weighing between 50 and 60 pounds.

Neither of the boys' deaths was prosecuted. Morgan County Prosecutor Steven Sonnega said he preferred to reason with the parents. "We try to be open-minded about their beliefs, but we want this to stop," he said. "We want [their kids] to grow up and make their own decisions."

Before Mr. Sonnega got enough reasoning done, however, the Hamms moved to Tulare, California, joined the local Church of the Firstborn, and then let Jessica die.

Firstborn teenager stops taking insulin

Two members of the Tulare congregation, Harold and Carol Stevens, had been convicted for their daughter's death years earlier. Their daughter Carrie developed Type 1 diabetes when she was eleven years old. Someone alerted Child Welfare Services, which intervened and got the girl diagnosed and treated. CWS told the family they would lose custody of Carrie if she was not given daily insulin. Mr. Stevens promised to see that she took it. At age sixteen, however, Carrie was baptized at a church retreat and decided not to take any more medicine. Her parents supported her choice; she died in 1993.

The Stevenses were charged with child endangerment, convicted of a misdemeanor by agreement, and sentenced to three years probation. The Tulare County District Attorney's office stated publicly at that time that parents in California have a legal obligation to provide their children with necessities of life until they are eighteen, regardless of the parents' or the children's religious beliefs.

The Hamms have three other children, all daughters, ages 13, 6, and 3. While California's child welfare offices are not allowed to discuss their cases, other sources indicate that Tulare County is trying to get a court order for medical examinations or long-term monitoring of the surviving children.

Court must decide whether prayer will heal

CHILD believes religious exemptions in California's civil code pose unacceptable difficulties in protecting children of religious objectors. One states:

Whenever it is alleged that a child comes within the jurisdiction of the court on the basis of the parent's or guardian's willful failure to provide adequate medical treatment or specific decision to provide spiritual treatment through prayer, the court shall give deference to the parent's or guardian's medical treatment, nontreatment, or spiritual treatment through prayer alone in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination, by an accredited practitioner thereof, and shall not assume jurisdiction unless necessary to protect the child from suffering serious physical harm or illness. In making its determination, the court shall consider (1) the nature of the treatment proposed by the parent or guardian, (2) the risks to the child posed by the course of treatment or nontreatment proposed by the parent or guardian, (3) the risk, if any, of the course of treatment being proposed by the petitioning agency, and (4) the likely success of the courses of treatment or nontreatment proposed by the parent or guardian and agency. The child shall continue to be a dependent child pursuant to this subdivision only so long as is necessary to protect the child from risk of suffering serious physical harm or illness.

Calif. Welfare and Institutions Code 300(b)

This law puts the court in the position of having to evaluate whether prayer will heal an illness (which may not even be diagnosed), of giving "deference" to prayers by an "accredited" faith healer, and of acting only when the child is suffering "serious" physical harm or illness without explaining how the court will know what the illness is. The court is expected to determine "the likely success" and the "risks" of prayers by an "accredited practitioner" of a "recognized church" though no such data exists.

Christian Science code words

This statutory language was reportedly prepared by the Mayer, Brown, and Platt law firm in Chicago at the request of the Christian Science church. Michael

McConnell, then with that firm, has handled several cases for the church. The law certainly looks like a special privilege for the Christian Science church since it is the only church we know of that calls its prayers “treatments,” its faith healers “practitioners,” and its rules “tenets.” The law may avoid Establishment Clause problems by giving the same privilege to “non-treatment,” but there are several other religious exemptions in California’s child abuse and neglect laws that privilege only parents whose child gets Christian Science prayer as described in the familiar code words. See for example Calif. Welfare and Inst. Code 300.5, 16509.1, and 18950.5.

No religious exemption when siblings die

In the Hamm case, the county has another statute it can use in its effort to monitor the health of the surviving children. The Calif. Welfare and Inst. Code 300(f) states that a court may adjudicate a child to be in need of county welfare services if “the child’s parent or guardian caused the death of another child through abuse or neglect.”

Taken in part from *The Fresno Bee*, Oct. 2, 3, and 8, 2003, and *The Indianapolis Star*, Feb. 1, 1999.

Prosecutor weighs charges in Indiana Firstborn death

In August, a Church of the Firstborn baby died in southern Indiana without medical care. Her mother, Maleta Schmidt, got no prenatal care and had no medically-trained attention during delivery.

Rhiana Rose Schmidt was born breech on August 17 at her home near Franklin. Her umbilical cord was wrapped around her arm and neck; it was later cut by a family member.

Elders pray for baby’s breathing problems

She had difficulty breathing. The Schmidts called church elders to pray and gave mouth to mouth resuscitation, but they did not call a doctor.

The next afternoon the infant again had respiratory problems and again elders were called to the home to pray for her. She died early on August 19. When the deputy coroner came to the home, the mother was in bed with her baby surrounded by several church members.

A preliminary autopsy report said the 7-pound baby died of puerperal sepsis and a staph infection. They are often caused by unsanitary conditions during delivery and can be treated with antibiotics.

Medical care interferes with God’s will

The Schmidts are members of the Church of the Firstborn in Morgantown, Indiana. Tom Nation, a church elder, told the press that church doctrine opposes all medical care as interference with God’s will.

“How many babies die in the hospital every day? I don’t feel like doctors ever save a person’s life. They think they do, but how do they know?” Nation said.

“If it comes a person’s time, they’re going to go, no matter what’s done,” his wife added.

Two other children died

Rhiana is the third child in the Morgantown church whose death has come to press attention in recent years. In 1998, 6-day-old Aspen Daniel died of dehydration and underdevelopment. He was born prematurely without medical attention. In 1999, Bradley Hamm, age 12, died of untreated pneumonia (see page 2).

Johnson County Prosecutor Lance Hamner is considering filing criminal charges in Rhiana’s death.

Mom hospitalized for first birth

The Schmidts also had a medical emergency with the birth of their first baby in 1999. Maleta Schmidt became ill and lost consciousness. Acting on an anonymous tip, the police went to the home and found Maleta unable to talk. She was taken to a hospital and her daughter was born about three months prematurely.

Hamner publicly said then that if she took the critically ill baby home, she might be criminally liable. “That could be neglect of a dependent,” he said. “It was clear the person knew there was something wrong and didn’t do anything about it.”

Taken from *The Indianapolis Star*, Feb. 1 and Sep. 10, 1999, and Aug. 24, 2003; *The Indiana Daily-Journal*, Aug. 23-24, 2003; and WISH-TV, Aug. 22, 2003.

Oregon Followers of Christ child dies; first medical neglect death since exemption repeal

Early in 2003 Tyler Shaw became the first child in the Oregon City Followers of Christ church to die of medical neglect since Oregon repealed five religious exemptions in 1999. Journalists found 78 children buried in the Followers of Christ cemetery between 1955 and 1998, and many had died of easily treatable illnesses.

Public outrage and the hard work of many organizations, including CHILD, led to Oregon's repeal of five religious exemption laws in 1999. It was then clear that parents had a legal duty to get needed medical care for their children regardless of their religious beliefs, and law enforcement officials subsequently observed that Followers' behavior and attitudes changed to take better care of their children.

Necrotizing throat infections

Tyler died without medical attention on January 31, 2003, a few days before his second birthday. Health officials at first suspected diphtheria and asked the family to accept throat cultures, antibiotics, and immunizations. The parents, Gary and Maria Shaw of Oregon City, cooperated.

The state medical examiner's office ultimately determined the cause of death to be "necrotizing epiglottitis, laryngitis, and tracheitis," but did not determine the bacteria that had caused the infection. The office placed its tissue samples into a preservative, which made it impossible to grow a culture

from them. A local hospital and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta attempted to do so, but failed. According to law enforcement, the boy's body had been released and disposed of before officials realized that they could not grow a culture from the samples.

Pediatricians consulted by CHILD stated that the infection was most likely *Hemophilus influenzae* bacteria and could have been prevented with the HIB vaccine. They also agreed that the infection was readily treatable with antibiotics.

Were symptoms of serious illness apparent?

The tough question was whether the parents would have had notice that the child needed medical care. Oregon deputy state medical examiners said that the symptoms might have appeared to be just those of a cold. They also said children can die very suddenly with epiglottitis and tracheitis. The child will have a sore throat and other symptoms of a cold. As his epiglottis swells, it gets so heavy that it suddenly flops over and closes the airway and the child dies, they said.

Some pediatricians thought it was more likely that Tyler Shaw manifested alarming symptoms that would have prompted any reasonable parent to seek medical care.

"the child would have sounded terrible"

Dr. Jim Lace, a Salem pediatrician and honorary CHILD member, wrote, "I suspect that if the parents were honest about how their child sounded and was breathing, one would find that this child was actually quite short of breath, sounded terrible when trying to breathe, was gasping and struggling to just get air in and out and was totally petrified of dying."

"These children," Lace continued, "have to sit up and lean forward to try to keep their airway open, cannot swallow their own secretions, drool incessantly, and have their eyes wide open knowing that each breath could be their last one. They make a terrible sound as their airway gets smaller and smaller and they work harder and harder to get each breath in. They die of acute asphyxiation because they lose their airway. . . . In this situation, the child would have sounded terrible to any reasonable parent and would have been brought into an ER somewhere because the parents would have been petrified that their child was going to die."

Lace also wrote that "acute epiglottitis [and] acute bacterial tracheitis are rare causes of death



*Followers of Christ Church
in Oregon City, Oregon*

now since we have a wonderful vaccine, the *Hemophilus influenzae* Type b or HIB vaccine that will prevent more than 99% of these deaths. I have not seen a case of invasive HIB disease since the use of the vaccine in the late 80's."

Sister also died of treatable illness

Tyler's parents also let his sister die without medical care. Valerie Shaw died at age 5 ½ months of an untreated kidney infection in 1998. She had been sickly since birth because of a congenital defect that blocked a kidney.

Criminal charges were not filed in either death. The Shaws have a surviving child.

Deaths decreased after repeal

Valerie and two other children in the Oregon City Followers of Christ died without medical care in the eighteen months before five religious exemption laws were repealed. Church members openly stated that their religion prohibited going to a doctor. Many of us hoped that the new laws requiring medical care without religious exemption would put a stop to these deaths. The years from 1999 to 2003 without a neglect death among the church children indicate partial success, but Tyler's death is an ominous warning that continued vigilance is necessary.

Philadelphia child's death shows need for reform

The death of a Philadelphia boy on New Year's Eve, 2002, illustrates the harm done by religious exemption laws. Nothing has yet been done about it.

In August, 2002, the boy's mother, Joyce Reiert, died of an untreated infection after a miscarriage. As members of the Faith Tabernacle, friends and family gathered around her bed to pray, but did not get medical help.

Social worker missed fatal illness

Her oldest child, Benjamin, was devastated and sank into a deep depression, his aunt said. In December, Child Protection Services received a report on him. A worker who visited the next day reported that the boy had a pain in his foot and trouble walking, but the foot did not appear swollen or bruised.

She advised the father to seek medical care. He told her that his religious beliefs prohibited him from

taking his son to a doctor. She informed him that the agency would seek a court order for medical treatment if the boy got worse.

"do what you need to do"

"You do what you need to do," the father replied.

Another worker visited him December 30th, and Ben "seemed to be about the same." The next day the 9-year-old died at home.

His aunt Lorraine Troutman told the press Ben did not look sick to her. "He couldn't walk, but he was talking and eating" until the last day of his life when he told her he was too tired to talk, she said.

Troutman also explained their Faith Tabernacle beliefs. Seeking medical help is turning "your heart against God" and "serv[ing] Satan," she said.

Boy died of leukemia

"We are completely dependent on God for everything we need, financially, spiritually and physically. We trust God to heal us and . . . nine times out of ten he does. [When someone dies], "God wants that person. He takes life. He gives life," she said.

She didn't want to discuss the deaths of her sister and nephew. "It's nobody's business why they died. That part of our life is over."

It was, however, the medical examiner's business. His office found that the boy was severely anemic, his brain was swollen, and the cause of death was acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

Religious exemption from child abuse

Despite many deaths of Pennsylvania children in faith-healing sects, Pennsylvania has a religious exemption law stating that if "a child has not been provided needed medical or surgical care because of seriously held religious beliefs of the child's parents, guardian, or person responsible for the child's welfare, which beliefs are consistent with those of a bona fide religion, the child shall not be deemed to be physically or mentally abused." Penn. Consolidated Statutes, Title 23, Section 6303(B)(3).

Court orders only when social workers observe life-threatening illness

Instead, "the county agency shall closely monitor the child and shall seek court-ordered medical intervention when the lack of medical or surgical

care threatens the child's life or long-term health." *Loc. cit.*

The Philadelphia Department of Human Services was quick to use the words of the statute to justify their actions on the case. Commissioner Alba Martinez said the DHS had "closely monitor[ed] the situation, but could not obtain a court order because the boy's injuries did not appear life-threatening."

Doctor: sore ankle caused by cancer

While they did not appear life-threatening to the social workers, the symptoms would have concerned many others. Dr. Bruce Bostrom, a pediatric oncologist at the University of Minnesota, said that the pain in the ankle was likely "bone pain from the leukemia in the bone marrow causing inflammation of the surrounding bone."

"The anemia was due to lack of red blood cell production," while "the brain swelling was likely due to infiltration of the meninges" with leukemia or a meningitis infection "due to low infection-fighting white cells," Bostrom said.

A pale face, pain so severe that the boy could not walk, a boy who lay in bed too "tired" even to talk, a boy who probably had a fever—most reasonable parents would, we think, at least call a health care professional for advice about those symptoms.

Social workers not trained to diagnose

The Pennsylvania law, however, exempts the faith-healing parents from civil abuse charges when they refuse to get medical help. Instead, it directs county social workers to "closely monitor" the sick child and to intervene only if long-term damage is threatened. But social workers cannot monitor a child's condition as closely as parents can and should.

Furthermore, social workers are not competent to diagnose. They do not have the training to know when a child has a life-threatening illness. In the Faith Tabernacle cases, they are dealing with children whose religion prohibits immunizations, well-child checkups, medication, medical diagnosis, and even home monitoring of illness as with a fever thermometer. In CHILD's opinion, the state ought to seek a court order immediately for at least a medical diagnosis, so officials would know whether the child was at risk of permanent harm.

Exemption stops social worker from seeking court order

A tragedy similar to the Ben Reinert case occurred in Colorado in 1990. A Montrose County school informed state child protection services that seven-year-old Angela Sweet was home sick and her parents had religious objections to medical care. A social worker visited the child's home three times over a five-week period. The mother claimed the child just had the flu.

Colorado then had a religious exemption law prohibiting state action in religious objector cases unless the child's illness was life-threatening. The social worker should have realized that the flu does not usually last for five weeks, but he did not think he had enough evidence to show in court that the girl's illness was life-threatening, so he did not seek a court order. Angela died of peritonitis that had set in after her appendix ruptured.

The next year Colorado enacted a law giving the state authority to seek a court order for a medical diagnosis in all cases of sick and injured children without medical care.

Medical diagnosis necessary to determine risk

CHILD opposes all religious exemptions from child health and safety laws. We think all parents should have the same obligation under the law to obtain necessary medical care for their children. If the state, however, expects child protection services rather than parents to get medical care for sick children, the law should at least authorize the courts to order a medical diagnosis to determine whether the child is at risk of serious harm.

The intervention provided by Pennsylvania's current religious exemption law could be worse than no state action at all. To have a social worker come in, look at the child, and then leave gives the parent the impression that the child's illness is not serious. When Mr. Reinert told the social worker, "You do what you need to do," he could have been expressing the hope that the state would get a court order and save him the responsibility of making a decision against his religion.

21 deaths of Faith Tabernacle children in state

Seth Asser and Rita Swan reported on fourteen deaths of Pennsylvania Faith Tabernacle children between 1975 and 1995 in "Child Fatalities from Religion-Motivated Medical Neglect," *Pediatrics* (April, 1998): 625-9. Later they learned of seven

more deaths of Faith Tabernacle children in Pennsylvania.

CHILD has twice written the Philadelphia Dept. of Human Services to ask if Ben Reinert's death has led to any change in procedures or effort for reform legislation, but has received no response.

Taken in part from *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 21, 2003; *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Feb. 1 and 5, 2003; and *Newsday*, Feb. 4, 2003.

California parents given jail time in daughter's death; pastor not charged for failure to report

In September, a couple who let their daughter die of meningitis without medical care were sentenced to one year in the San Bernardino County jail, plus five years of probation, and ordered to attend parenting classes. They pled no contest to charges of involuntary manslaughter and child endangerment, which includes cruelty to a child and letting a child suffer.

Agnes and Richard Wiebe of Rancho Cucamonga, California, are members of the Church of God Restoration in Upland, California, which believed in relying only on God to heal disease.

Only prayer offered for baby's pain

Their baby Julia died at eleven months old after suffering for five days with fevers of up to 104°, seizures, and pain when touched or moved. On July 4, 2001, her parents phoned congregations in the U.S. and Canada asking for prayer because Julia was screaming in pain. On July 5, she was gripped by the first of two two-hour-long seizures that made her arms go stiff, her fists clench, and her body shake, Wiebe told a detective. Several church members came to the home, praying nearly all night, and, he said, the baby showed signs of improvement, but the next morning she died after one last gasp for air.

Her death was unexpected and shocking to them, but, Wiebe added, "Faith is not a guarantee we will be healed."

He also said their choice to trust the Lord was not dictated by their pastor, Rev. Danny Layne. He even told a second detective that he might consider getting medical care for himself if he had a life-threatening illness.

Two stillbirths

The Wiebes did not consider it for their first three children. In 1996 and 1999, Agnes delivered stillborn baby boys at home with no medical attention or prenatal care. She told authorities she felt the first baby stop moving three days before he was delivered. The coroner's office ruled that compromised blood flow and two knots in the umbilical cord caused the second baby's death. The state took temporary custody of their fourth child born at home in 2002.

Pastor's control over members

Layne founded the church in the 1980s after years as a heroin abuser. Since then, he has controlled many facets of the lives of his followers, from their jobs and choices of spouse to the kind of underwear they choose, according to former members. The wife of a former pastor said Layne threatened her for going to a doctor. He denied making the threat, but did tell the press that he expected a pastor's wife to set "an example among us."

New doctrine on medical care and punishment

In 2002, after criminal charges were filed against the Wiebes and after Canadian members lost custody of their children because of the church's corporal punishment practices, church elders prepared a statement that changed church doctrine. It says:

Having the best interest of our children in mind, in cases of perceived serious illness of one of our minor children, the ministry shall advise the parents/guardians of their legal requirement and allow seeking of medical means for the child according to the law of the land. . . .

The church shall advise the people that they are to continue to use and explore methods other than "spanking" as forms of discipline, and that if, as a last resort, spanking is called for, it is to be administered in a loving way, without anger, in a way that will not abuse the child physically, psychologically or spiritually.

Religious exemption in California reporting law

Knowing that Reverend Layne was fully aware that Julia was seriously ill for days, an investigator for the prosecutor hoped that Layne could be charged with failure to report child abuse. It didn't happen, and California's reporting law would have made it difficult to do so. It includes the provision

that “a child receiving treatment by spiritual means . . . or not receiving specified medical treatment for religious reasons, shall not for that reason alone be considered a neglected child.” Calif. Penal Code 11165.2(b)

HHS tries to limit harms from exemptions

In the early 1990s, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) made modest efforts to rectify the damage done by their policy from 1974 to 1983 of requiring states to pass religious exemption laws. HHS tried to limit the scope of the law so that it did not provide a religious exemption from a duty to report a sick child to state child protection services, to investigate the case, or to order medical care for the child.

In 1992, HHS ruled the state of California out of compliance with federal standards for child protection grant money because of its religious exemption law, its reporting law, and other issues.

Judge finds federal policy capricious

Instead of trying to have the state legislature change the problematic laws, the state sued the federal government for its money. Federal district court Judge Vaughn Walker ruled in favor of California and found the federal government’s shifting policies on religious exemptions over the years arbitrary and capricious.

HHS appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals, 9th Circuit. CHILD and the California Medical Association filed amicus briefs urging the court to consider whether the religious exemptions were constitutional.

Church gets moratorium on HHS policy

In 1994, however, the Christian Science church persuaded Congress to impose a temporary moratorium on HHS efforts to limit the scope of state religious exemption laws. HHS then decided it was pointless to pursue a judicial ruling on its religious exemption policies and withdrew its appeal in *People v. Shalala*, U.S. Ct. of Appeals, 9th Circuit, case #93-15700 & -15936, a few days before oral arguments were to be held.

Taken in part from *The Inland Empire Press-Enterprise*, Feb. 11, March 8, March 12, & June 6, 2002; and Aug. 13, 2003; *The Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 14 & 15 and March 12, 2002; *London Free Press*, Aug. 24, 2001.

Officials probe death of Christian Science boy, 7

Massachusetts prosecutors and the state Department of Social Services (DSS) are investigating the death of Christian Science child Eben Tryon, a second-grader at the Oldham Elementary School in Norwood, Massachusetts.

School officials said Eben Tryon complained of stomach pains on Friday, November 7, 2003. His mother picked him up early from school. On Sunday morning, November 9, at about 4 a.m., his parents, Marilyn and Bruce Tryon, rushed him to the hospital, where he was pronounced dead shortly after his arrival.

High blood sugar

A DSS spokeswoman said she was told that the preliminary autopsy report showed Eben had extremely high blood sugar levels indicating he probably suffered from diabetes.

The Tryons are practicing Christian Scientists, but said they would “seek medical attention” in “cases of extreme illness.”

They said their son had not been diagnosed with diabetes, and they thought his illness was just flu.

“The child didn’t seem that bad, a little slow, didn’t seem to have any problems. Just a little stomach pains, but nothing unusual,” his father said.

The Tryons’ only other child is a five-year-old girl with Down syndrome. The DSS is allowing them to retain custody of her.

School superintendent Edward Quigley said Eben was “a very kind, compassionate little boy” not only to his sister, but to other children in her special needs classroom.

Counselors were made available to help classmates cope with the boy’s sudden death.

Common symptoms of juvenile-onset diabetes are usually apparent for weeks, including extreme thirst, increased frequency of urination, lethargy, sudden weight loss, a fruity odor on the breath, and retarded healing of sores.

The Christian Science church put out a statement reading in part, “Our thoughts and prayers are with the family. While our knowledge of events is limited, we can say this Church remains committed to the very best health care available for children.”

Taken from *The Boston Channel*, Nov. 19; *Boston Globe*, Nov. 19; and *Boston Herald*, Nov. 20, 2003.

“Committed to the very best health care available for children”

In response to a Christian Science child’s recent death (likely from untreated diabetes), the Christian Science church released a statement that the church “remains committed to the very best health care available for children.” (See above.)



Christian Science Mother Church in Boston

How does this solemn commitment play out in action? To start with, church founder Mary Baker Eddy has scathing attacks on medical science in her published writings. She says it is actually “impotent,” but attempts to delude reason, deny revelation, and dethrone Deity. *Miscellaneous Writings*:3. She says doctors “are flooding the world with diseases, because they are ignorant that the human mind and body are myths.” *Science and Health*:150. She calls medical science “anti-Christian” and drugs “poisonous.” *Science and Health*:169-70.

While many religions have ways to evolve beyond their founders, it is much more difficult to do that in Christian Science. Eddy prohibited preachers because she did not want her “revelation” diluted by human interpretation, so Sunday services consist only of readings from the Bible and *Science and Health* selected by the Mother Church in Boston. She decreed that no bylaw could be changed without

her personal signature. She did not provide for a successor, so power struggles in the church are squelched by insistence that Eddy has the only answers and every word in her published writings is divinely inspired, absolute truth.

Numerous statements in the church’s current periodicals claim that their “spiritual treatment” is the best health care. As one example, Linda Jo Beckers writes that no matter how serious her illness was, she “never doubted” that prayers by Christian Science practitioners were “the finest treatment on the face of the earth.” *Christian Science Sentinel*, May 6, 2002:22.

Policies show little concern for children

If the church was really committed to “the very best health care available for children,” wouldn’t it at least investigate what medical science has to offer? Wouldn’t it gather and provide information enabling scientific comparison of medical science and Christian Science in treating diseases? Wouldn’t it be just a little curious?

The only formal training required of Christian Science practitioners is a two-week theology course. The church sets no limits on what diseases they may “treat” nor gives them any duty to refer cases to other providers. Church officials have sworn under oath that the church has no “supervisory control” over its practitioners, that it does not “ever evaluate a practitioner’s judgment about the condition of sick children,” that it has no training, workshops, or meetings for practitioners that “include any discussion on how to evaluate the seriousness of a child’s condition,” that it has never “named the death of a child as a grounds for revoking a practitioner’s listing,” and that it keeps no records on children who die while receiving Christian Science treatments. See depositions of Hal Friesen: 51, 74, 77; Ruth Jenks: 39, 59, 60, 80; and A. Dean Joki: 79, 80 in case #80 004 605 NI, Wayne Cty. Circ. Ct. MI.

This does not sound like a commitment to health care for children—or even interest in the subject.

ODK chapter honors Swan



On April 27, the Omicron Delta Kappa chapter of Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa, inducted CHILD President Rita Swan as “*honoris causa*” in “recognition of conspicuous attainments and service.”

Omicron Delta Kappa is a national leadership honorary society which “recognizes and encourages superior scholarship, leadership, and exemplary character.”

About CHILD Inc.

CHILD is a national membership organization dedicated to ending child abuse and neglect related to religion or cultural traditions.

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