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Equal rights for children under the law



The Inquirers

by Burow Photography, Sergeant Bluff, Iowa

Methodist Church opposes corporal punishment

At its 2004 General Conference in Pittsburgh, the United Methodist Church passed two resolutions opposing corporal punishment of children. In one the church encouraged parents to use other disciplinary methods. In the second, the church called upon states to enact laws prohibiting corporal punishment in schools, day cares, and residential childcare facilities.

The resolutions were prepared by two groups within Grace United Methodist Church in Sioux City, Iowa: the Inquirers Sunday School class and the Church and Society Ministry Team.

CHILD founders Rita and Doug Swan presented materials to them from historian Philip Greven's book *Spare the Child: the Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse*. Greven has quotes from the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, and his mother Susanna that make striking children a religious imperative.

In 1732 Susanna wrote to John bragging that she taught her babies "to fear the rod" at an early age so that the "most odious noise of the crying of children was rarely heard in the house." She said that "subjecting" the child's will had to be done almost at birth and "when a child is corrected, it *must be conquered*."

"Heaven or hell depends on this alone," she continued.

"Break their wills that you may save their souls," echoed John Wesley. He also said parents need "incredible firmness and resolution" to break the will of a child "for after you have once begun, you must never more give way."

Greven shows that the Wesleys' determination to conquer and subjugate the child's will and their

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belief that personal salvation depends on it are identical to teachings of some contemporary fundamentalist leaders.

The Sioux City church groups discussing this issue felt it was important for the Methodist Church to separate itself from those ideas and not provide, even passively, a justification for them. Methodists honor John Wesley as a brilliant evangelist, administrator, teacher, and reformer with many good insights on social policy for today, but he also gave Methodists a way to respond to the advance of knowledge. His Wesleyan quadrilateral sets forth four bases for analysis and decision-making: scripture, tradition, experience, and reason.

The Methodist Church is the first Christian denomination to take a stand against corporal punishment. It is the second largest Protestant denomination in the U.S. Its General Conference, held every four years, is the only body authorized to set social and political policy for the church. Resolutions are voted on by the hundreds of delegates who come from around the world.

Petitions adopted at the United Methodist Church General Conference 2004

Petition Number 41037

Title: Corporal Punishment in Schools and Child Care Facilities (41037-CS-R9999)

Whereas, schools and child care facilities are the only institutions in America in which striking another person for the purpose of causing physical pain is legal,

Whereas, corporal punishment is humiliating and degrading to children and sometimes causes physical injury,

Whereas, it is difficult to imagine Jesus of Nazareth condoning any action that is intended to hurt children physically or psychologically,

Whereas, corporal punishment sends a message that hitting smaller and weaker people is acceptable,

Whereas, corporal punishment is used most often on poor children, minorities, children with disabilities, and boys,

Whereas, there are effective alternatives to corporal punishment that teach children to be self-disciplined rather than to submit out of fear,

Whereas, schools and child care centers should inspire children to enjoy learning and school and child care personnel should be able to encourage positive behavior without hitting children,

Therefore, be it resolved that The United Methodist Church calls upon all states to enact laws prohibiting corporal punishment in schools and day and residential child care facilities.

Petition Number 41038

Title: Corporal Punishment by Parents and Caretakers (41038-CS-R9999)

Whereas, corporal punishment models aggressive behavior as a solution to conflict,

Whereas, some research has associated corporal punishment with increased aggression in children and adults, increased substance abuse, increased risk of crime and violence, low self-esteem, and chronic depression,

Whereas it is difficult to imagine Jesus of Nazareth condoning any action that is intended to hurt children physically or psychologically,

Whereas, time-outs and deprivation of privileges are as effective as corporal punishment in stopping undesirable behavior,

Whereas, the effectiveness of corporal punishment decreases with subsequent use and therefore leads caretakers to hit children more severely,

Whereas, children must eventually develop their own conscience and self-discipline, which are fostered by a home environment of love, respect and trust,

Therefore, be it resolved that the United Methodist Church encourages its members to adopt discipline methods that do not include corporal punishment of their children. And be it further resolved that the United Methodist Church encourages congregations to offer opportunities for dialogue and education on effective discipline of children.

Ancient Wisdom on Childrearing

“Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child’s character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse.”

From the Baha’i scriptures by ‘Abdu’l-Baha. According to some opponents of corporal punishment, Baha’i was the first religion to oppose corporal punishment.

Corporal punishment: the Christian connection

The respected Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance (see www.religioustolerance.org) report that the only statements they could find endorsing corporal punishment are by evangelical Christian groups. While adherents of many religions use corporal punishment on children, it seems that the only groups who put out written statements promoting corporal punishment as required by their religious belief system are fundamentalist Christians. Interestingly, all the verses used by these fundamentalists are in the Old Testament book of Proverbs.

Corporal punishment in parochial schools

The political power of fundamentalists in the U.S. is great. While 28 states have laws banning corporal punishment in public schools, the Center for Effective Discipline reports that only New Jersey bans it in private and parochial schools as well. Many states prohibit corporal punishment in state-licensed day cares and residential institutions for children, but some states allow church-run day care centers, boarding schools, and reformatories to operate without licensure and to hit children. Missouri has virtually no state regulation of church-run child care facilities, and many sadistic punishments have been reported in them.

The Ontario Consultants found that the main reason fundamentalists argue for corporal punishment is their belief that the entire Bible must be accepted as literally true. Other reasons are their concept of God as punitive and their strong fear of “rebellion.” For them, a father must be established as the head of the family to mirror God’s control of the universe. Challenges to a human father are like Satan’s rebellion against God.

Fundamentalist webpages endorsing corporal punishment, as cited by the Ontario Consultants, include www.christian-parents.net/children/C_TOC_Children_Articles.htm, www.christian-parents.net/children/letters/Q&A_hm.htm, www.christian-parents.net/children/C112_righteous_rod.htm, www.christiananswers.net/q-flc/flc-f001, and <http://wayoflife.org/~dcloud/fbns/study.htm>.

On the wayoflife.org webpage the Fundamental Baptists warn that any nation which abandons spanking “will reap a whirlwind” because “spanking is absolutely what God’s Word requires parents to do in disciplining rebellion in children.”

Kids need foretaste of terror

According to the Christian Parents Network, a parent has a moral obligation to do battle against a child and win because the stakes are apocalyptic. “The battle for a child’s heart is won or lost early, when the child is quite young,” they say. And the point of discipline is “to change the child’s attitude by giving them a foretaste of the potential terror and pain of eternal separation from God, which naturally result from rebellion and disobedience.”

Charles Gleason complains on the Christian Parents Network that many parents are afraid to strike their children because of state child protective services, which are “hostile to Biblical parenting” and “mock the values of the traditional family unit. . . . The man of the house has been reduced to. . . the ‘mouse’ of the house.”

Gleason argues that Christians are to fear God and obey Him, rather than cower before state agents. If you have to spend time in jail for hitting your children, he says, “use the time to make plans to defeat the evil system which was used to usurp your parental rights.”

A more cautious writer on the network advises, "Avoid leaving welts, if only to avoid potential trouble with our confused, and often over-aggressive social authorities. It is really sad and unfortunate in this day of undisciplined children that the positive act of spanking is subject to being misinterpreted, by the ignorant and misinformed, to be child abuse."

Cause pain, but don't leave marks

The same writer recommends that parents hit with a switch that is several feet long and "flexible so it will not bruise or injure the child," but he also wants it to cause pain. "A switch should be no more than 1/4" thick so it will still sting," he says.

This advice appalls CHILD's medical consultant, Dr. Seth Asser of Providence, Rhode Island, who writes that such a switch can "unequivocally cause severe welts, break the skin with cuts and abrasions, and cause bruises. However, even if one found a technique that would spare serious overt signs of external skin injury, the process can only be described as sadistic. If it were used on a prisoner, it would clearly fall under torture."

Robert Deffinbaugh's essay, "Why the Rod is Righteous and Should Be Used by All Parents" says hitting a child is essential to "demonstrate the character of the child."

Deffinbaugh quotes Proverbs 12:1, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge: but he who hates reproof is stupid."

"A child who accepts discipline and responds to it by repentance and right conduct is on the path of the wise," Deffinbaugh says. "A child who is embittered by correction (even though rightly carried out by the parents) has rejected the way of the wise."

He offers no suggestions on what to do next if you have a stupid child who does not love such discipline.

Parents must ignore their concerns about hurting their children

Especially insidious is Deffinbaugh's argument that God requires the rod as a test of the parents' loyalty to Him:

Proverbs assumes the sinfulness of the parent as well as that of the child. Proverbs commands parents to use the rod for correction sim-

ply because we would not otherwise be inclined to do so. . . . The major reason why I don't spank as much as I should is because I am too lazy to put forth to the effort to do something I don't really enjoy.

Another reason many parents do not spank their children is due to misdirected sympathy. There is nothing more heart-rending than the wailing of a child during a spanking. In fact the wailing often starts before the paddling begins. The child is desperately attempting to soften or shorten the blows by his pathetic sobs and tears. In order to give the parent courage and diligence at such times Proverbs tells us: "Do not hold back discipline from the child. Although you beat him with the rod, he will not die (23:13)."

Taken in its usual sense this proverb assures faint-hearted parents that their child is not really ready for the intensive care unit at the hospital—it only sounds that way. In spite of such appearances, we are counseled, keep it up.

Such teaching orders parents to disregard their instincts and observations. It clothes them with righteousness for hitting their children even when they do not want to and censures them as lazy, faint-hearted, and sinful if they don't. And while King Solomon, the author of Proverbs, was reputedly wise, it is a fact that children will die if beaten hard enough.

Ironically, Deffinbaugh, who is so determined that the Bible must be taken literally on beating children, says "the rod" is just a metaphor or symbol for discipline when the Bible talks about using it on adults.

Fundamentalism is not monolithic. Several who advise conservative Christians on discipline place careful limitations on use of corporal punishment. The Ontario Consultants give credit where it is due.

Organizations opposed to corporal punishment

Many organizations speak out against corporal punishment. They include Parents and Teachers Against Violence in Education (PTAVE), Center for Effective Discipline, National Coalition to Abolish Corporal Punishment in Schools (NCACPS), and End Physical Punishment of Children (EPOCH). Internet resources giving the case against corporal punishment include www.stop hitting.com,

<http://nospank.net>, www.nopaddle.com, www.nopunish.net, www.neverhitachild.org, and www.parentinginjesusfootsteps.org.

Nadine Block's Center for Effective Discipline (see www.stophitting.com) in Columbus, Ohio, has compilations of state laws on corporal punishment and statements against it from clergy of several different religious traditions.

Jordan Riak's PTAVE, now based in California, has won legislation outlawing corporal punishment at public schools in most states of Australia and some in the United States. He also has a wealth of newspaper and magazine articles about corporal punishment in public and church-run institutions on his webpage at <http://nospank.net>. He distributes red stickers promising a "kids' safe zone" for educators and others to post on their doors.



Norm Lee of Arizona has written the book *Parenting Without Punishing*, which is available on his webpage at <http://nopunish.net>. He also circulates a pledge in which people promise to "interrupt and interfere" whenever they see a child being hit.

Jeff Charles of Roseville, Michigan, maintains the webpage www.nopaddle.com, which discusses sexual abuse as an aspect of corporal punishment. He also has exhibits called "Old Testawhackalists" showing that the Old Testament endorses several brutal practices that are today outlawed. For example, Exodus 21 allowed masters to beat servants and maids to death as long as they did not die the same day they were beaten, while Numbers 15 describes a man who was stoned to death on Moses' order because he worked on the Sabbath.

Randy Cox monitors corporal punishment in Arkansas schools and homes and the public policy supporting it at www.neverhitachild.org.

One or two whips should be in every room

Susan and Steve Lawrence of Massachusetts (www.parentinginjesusfootsteps.org) present the idea that Christians should follow Jesus as a gentle role model for attitudes on raising children. As home schoolers, they speak out against endorsements for corporal punishment in homeschooling literature. Their website has a petition to Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry urging him to stop the Slide Company from selling whips. The company has an ad in the *Home School Digest*, which calls their whips "the means prescribed by God" and "the ideal tool for child training."

"Hands are for loving, ☺ RODS are for chastening," Slide says.

The company also brags that the whips have a "cushioned vinyl grip" for the parents' comfort and recommends that parents buy "one or two" for each room of the house.

Damages awarded against Mountain Park; school closes

In April, Jordan Blair, 19, of Alma, Arkansas, won a \$20,000 jury award from Mountain Park Baptist Boarding Academy for abuse suffered while a student there.

Blair alleged many barbaric abuses at the Patterson, Missouri, reform school (see the CHILD newsletter 2002 #3). Many students developed urinary infections because they were allowed to use the toilet only three times a day and were physically and verbally abused if they took more than 45 seconds in the restroom. To cope, Blair drank almost no water, but then became dehydrated and disoriented. The staff would not allow Blair to have anti-depression medication he had been prescribed before he arrived. Other students guarded new arrivals and kept them within "slapping distance" at all times. Both staff and student guards administered beatings "without any specified limits as to humanity or reasonableness," the complaint said.

Only battery claim allowed to go to jury

The suit charged that these abuses were civil rights violations subject to redress under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 because Blair had been brought to Mountain Park under court order.

Blair also sought compensation under the Fair Labor Standards Act for the 30-40 hours of work per week he was forced to do at Mountain Park's cattle ranch. Additionally, Blair made claims of battery and false imprisonment.

U.S. District Court Judge Charles Shaw absolved the government of responsibility by dismissing the allegations of civil rights violations. The judge also rejected the claims of labor law violations and false imprisonment, holding that the labor was for the benefit of the students, not the school, and that parents have a right to commit a minor to a reform school.

That left only the battery claim for the jury to consider. Jordan testified that a school employee shoved him against a sink. Two school employees denied that it happened.

Mountain Park says it will appeal Blair's award.

Survivors meet on internet

Many other former students are now willing to speak about the abuses they suffered there. One is Angela Collier of Oklahoma City, who maintains the website www.mountainparksurvivors.com. Survivors have found each other on websites and come to occasional support group meetings.

Medical needs neglected

Collier's observations about health care there are consistent with what Jordan Blair experienced. While Mountain Park owners did not have theological objections to all medical care, they opposed medical treatment for mental health problems and were also reluctant to take students to a doctor for fear of the doctor finding out about the child abuse at the school. Angela writes,

We were denied medical attention unless the student had a pre-existing medical condition that the parents had already made arrangements to have treated upon the student's arrival. Illness and most injuries were usually overlooked by staff or simply medicated with Tylenol or ice



Angela, Jeff, and Baby Jaden Collier

packs, no matter the severity. Over-the-counter medication required permission from Mrs. Wills or Gerhardt, and the permission was usually granted, unless a girl seemed to have an ongoing problem. In those cases, the student was called a hypochondriac and told she didn't need anything, it was all in her head. Mood and emotionally altering medications, even those prescribed by physicians, were not allowed. The owners of MP firmly believe that psychological disorders and chemical imbalances are all "made up" by worldly people who need an excuse for their actions. They believe God will cure whatever ails you, and you do not need medication to correct the problem. If a girl was allowed to go to the doctor, [she was] warned ahead of time not to tell the doctor about the abuse they were receiving, because the doctor had been told already that the students would make up lies about their treatment.

National magnet for abusive schools

Rev. Bob Wills, who founded Mountain Park, previously ran Redemption Ranch and Bethesda Home for Girls in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The schools were sued for allegedly paddling pregnant teens and detaining a 19-year-old against her will. A settlement required changes at the schools, but

instead of complying, Wills closed them and relocated to Missouri in 1987.

Missouri is a national magnet for church-run lockdown reform schools because it has absolutely no state regulation of them. The press has reported that at least seven operate in the state, but since there are no reporting requirements, the actual number may be much higher.

Mountain Park and sister school close

The lawsuit and the survivors' websites, plus competition, however, have taken their toll. Enrollment at Mountain Park plummeted from about 150 at its peak to 40 this year. In May, Mountain Park and its sister school, Palm Lane Academy in DeSoto County, Florida, were permanently closed.

Jordan Blair's attorney, Oscar Stilley of Fort Smith, Arkansas, had asked the court for injunctive relief to stop the abuses at these schools. Stilley is filing more lawsuits on behalf of former Mountain Park students. "I intend to pursue them to the ends of the earth," he said.

Blair said the operators of Missouri's religious reform schools need "to be held accountable for what they do, not only by some 19-year-old kid, but hopefully by the State of Missouri."

Taken in part from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 13, April 15, and May 29, 2004; KY3 TV in Springfield, Missouri, a May 2, 2004 report; and www.mountainparksurvivors.com.

Thanks to Calvary faces charges

In August, 2003, civil and criminal charges for abuse of a child were filed against Rev. Nathan Day, owner and operator of Thanks to Calvary Boarding Academy near Devil's Elbow, Missouri.

Deborah Stedman of Marseilles, Illinois, alleges in her complaint that her son Christopher Jensen was abused and neglected at the school. Day, she charges, used excessive corporal punishment that left Christopher bruised from his buttocks to his knees, continued the punishment while bruising still existed, caused intense pain and traumatic psychological injury, deprived him of food, and did not seek medical attention for the boy.

Weeks of hospitalization needed

Jensen remained in a catatonic, non-responsive state in an Illinois hospital for weeks after the abuse, the petition states. Stedman claims she was not aware of the mistreatment promptly because of the isolation the school imposes on students. She is represented by the Smith Turley Long law firm in St. Robert, Missouri.

Boy forced to run while tied to ATV

After Stedman filed her civil complaint, Pulaski County Prosecuting Attorney Laura Kriebs filed four counts of felony child abuse against Day for his treatment of Jensen. According to Missouri Highway Patrol investigators, Day tied the boy to the back of a lawn mower and an all-terrain vehicle and made him run behind it. Each time Jensen fell, he was dragged a few feet before Day would stop.

Day's attorneys called the charges "ridiculous" and a great exaggeration of the boy's injuries.

Rev. Nathan Day is an ex-Marine and a former employee at Mountain Park Baptist Boarding Academy, another of Missouri's unregulated reform schools (see previous article). His Thanks to Calvary boarding school, founded in 1998, has 68 students preschool through grade 12.

Parents must agree to 15 swats a day

All parents must sign an enrollment agreement letting Thanks to Calvary administer "a maximum of fifteen swats of any kind" in a 24-hour period. Students are not allowed to talk with relatives during their first six months at the school and can communicate only under staff supervision after that.

Journalist Matthew Franck, who visited the school in 2002, reported that instruction consisted of boys studying "at their own pace" in rows of cubicles. The boys slept in a single room with two rows of bunk beds. The constant "yes sir" and "amens" in their conversation showed the school's "marriage of religion and the military," Franck said.

Students confess sins, say more hitting needed

Selected students who met with Franck said they were "slaves" to sin before they arrived and were not paddled "as often as we should be."

Day said he would move Thanks to Calvary out of the state if Missouri required even “mild” regulations. His school is a ministry that should answer only to biblical truths, he said.

Risk of lawsuits forces policy change

Another of Missouri’s church-run reform schools, Agape Boarding School near Stockton, has recently said that it will no longer use corporal punishment on students. It has strict rules and strong religious beliefs, and its owner, Jim Clemenson, brought his school to Missouri specifically because of its lack of regulation. His school in Othello, Washington, was closed after regulators cited it for fire code violations and lack of certified teachers. Clemenson says he still believes in corporal punishment, but has decided against using it because of the risk of lawsuits.

Taken in part from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* Nov. 18, 2002; KY3 TV, Springfield MO, May 2, 2004; and *Missouri Daily Guide* May 5, 2004.

Judge rules in favor of Heartland Academy

In May, a U.S. district judge ruled in favor of Heartland Christian Academy of Ewing, Missouri, in its lawsuit against local law enforcement authorities over forcible removal of 115 children from the boarding school for four days in 2001.

Because they had substantiated cases of child abuse occurring at the school, juvenile officers in the Second Judicial Circuit and Lewis and Shelby County law enforcement removed all the children and interviewed them. No further child abuse was uncovered.

In court, Heartland presented a videotape they made during the removal. It was edited and had music added. Staff testified that the original videotape was lost.

Judge Richard Webber of the U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Missouri, called the mass removal of the students a “crudely executed loading of the children like criminals on buses, in a fashion reminiscent of horror of earlier world events.”

Court: conspiracy violated constitutional rights

Webber ruled that state officials violated Heartland’s constitutional rights to be free of unreasonable searches and seizures under the Fourth Amendment, to family integrity and familial relations under the Fourteenth Amendment due process clause, and to freedom of association under the First Amendment. He further ruled that a conspiracy existed between the judicial officers to violate Heartland’s constitutional rights. He cited the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Doe v. Heck*, 327 F.3d at 518, that private schools have the right to bring a claim against the state for interfering with their patrons’ liberty interest in familial relations.

Imminent danger or sexual abuse

Webber entered a permanent injunction against juvenile officers in the Second Judicial Circuit barring them from taking Heartland children into protective custody without a hearing, unless the child is “in imminent danger” of death from abuse or neglect, serious physical harm, or sexual abuse or has been sexually abused.

Although Webber described the cases of abuse and neglect that state child protection services had investigated (and in several cases substantiated), he found that “the kids at Heartland are loved at all costs” and that Heartland serves the public interest in providing “safe care” for troubled youth, some of whom, he claimed, could not function in any other program.

Judge calls court officer a “predator”

Webber was extremely harsh in his comments about juvenile officer Michael Waddle, charging that his real motive was to close Heartland. As evidence, he cited Waddle’s testimony that, while Heartland had “the potential” to do good things, its staff did not, in his view, have the training or maturity to work with emotionally disturbed youths. Waddle pointed out the Missouri Division of Family Services had probable cause findings against 19 Heartland staff members for abuse or neglect. (The majority of the findings are being appealed.)

Webber held that Waddle displayed “single-minded, uninformed serious abuse of power in the mass removal of these children” and called him one

of those “conspiratorial governmental predators” who “scheme” to put Heartland out of business.

Many more suits to come

While Heartland asked for no monetary damages in the suit, it intends to ask the court to order the state to pay its legal costs. Its lawyers also said that many parents of Heartland students would now be suing the state for monetary damages from the removal.

Webber’s 162-page ruling describes many actions by state officials that he considered wrong. CHILD is not qualified to say whether they were correct or not. But Webber’s extreme, derogatory censure of Waddle (far more extensive than we have quoted) is startling. Also, it seems that the judge used Waddle’s testimony about the seriousness of the problems at the school as evidence that Waddle was prejudiced against a faith-based school, was plotting to close it down, and had to be stopped by court injunction. The concerns about abuse and neglect made no impression on the judge.

Abuse registry ruled unconstitutional

The ruling is the latest in a series of victories for the church-run boarding school. Criminal charges were filed against several Heartland workers for forcing deviant teenagers to stand in deep manure pits, but only one defendant went to trial and a Lewis County jury acquitted him. Other Heartland staff sued the state for putting their names on the child abuse registry before giving them an opportunity to prove their innocence. Names are put on after findings of probable cause by the Division of Family Services, and the list is used by employers at child care facilities and schools to screen out potential child abusers. In January, 2004, Cole County Circuit Court Judge Richard Callahan ruled the state law creating the registry unconstitutional as a violation of due process rights.

The state is appealing the rulings in both of Heartland’s civil suits.

Taken in part from Heartland Academy Community Church, et al., Plaintiff(s), vs. Michael Waddle, et al., Defendant(s), Case No. 2:01CV00060 ERW in U.S. Dist. Court for the Eastern Dist. of Missouri, Northern Div., decided

May 11, 2004; the *Hannibal Courier-Post*, May 13, 2004; and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 23, 2004.

Why parents put children in religious reform schools

Many parents believe Missouri’s unlicensed reform schools will turn around their children’s behavior because the schools’ staff and programs are purportedly guided by the Bible. The parents are exhausted by fighting defiant teenagers and believe the schools’ strict discipline is the answer.

Other parents, however, simply cannot afford a state-licensed institution, which can charge \$5,000 a month. Missouri’s religious reform schools charge in the range of \$10,000 to \$14,000 per year. They save money by hiring staff without advanced degrees or even any education beyond an unaccredited high school and by educating students exclusively through self-paced workbooks in cubicles. Former students report “graduating” from Mountain Park Baptist Boarding Academy without ever writing a term paper or participating in a class discussion.

Father searches for help

The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported on one Kansas City-area family’s heartrending experience. In 2000 Dale Knowlton’s 16-year-old son Corey began disobeying his rules and twice attempted suicide. Knowlton got Corey both inpatient and outpatient counseling through his health insurance, but his benefits ran out and Corey still needed help. Knowlton asked for help from the family courts and state mental health programs, but was turned down because Corey had not committed crimes and was not in state custody.

Then the father heard of Hope Baptist Church and Boarding School in St. James, Missouri. The pastor, Rev. Joseph Intagliata, offered to help. Knowlton, a public school teacher for 25 years, opposes corporal punishment, but he was willing to overlook that part of the pastor’s approach. “You hit dead end after dead end, and then there’s this little beacon of hope, so you take it,” he said.

In what he called “the most horrendous decision of my life,” Knowlton finally paid \$2,500 to an

“escort service” from California to come to his home at 4 a.m., abduct Corey, and take him to the Hope Boarding School.

Boy hospitalized after beating

In 2001, Corey flew into a rage after Intagliata hit him with a paddle. The boy smashed a window with a chair and then jumped through it. He was hospitalized and needed dozens of stitches. State records cite deep bruising on his backside.

Intagliata has been charged with felony child abuse, and his case is set for trial in September. He has been ordered not to have contact with children, so he has closed his school.

Knowlton is inclined to forgive Intagliata and to place the real blame on the lack of competent mental health services for children.

Behavior modification industry booming

In 2002, the *American Journal of Psychiatry* reported that over three-fourths of children who need mental health services do not receive them. Hundreds of Missouri parents have relinquished custody of their children to get services for them.

The “teen behavior modification industry” is booming, the *Post-Dispatch* reports. An estimated 35,000 teens are now enrolled in reformatory-type boarding schools, wilderness programs, and boot camps. The secular World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools, headquartered in LaVerkin, Utah, has a dozen campuses. Critics charge that its offshore campuses in West Samoa, Jamaica, and Mexico were set up to evade U.S. regulations against abuse and neglect. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WWASPS>.

Taken in part from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Nov. 17, 2002.

Will Missouri regulate religious reform schools?

Comment by Rita Swan

In CHILD’s view state oversight of church-run boarding schools is essential. Missouri currently has no records on these facilities. It does not know their names, locations, how many there are, the names of

their students, or how many students there are. It cannot set standards for staff training. It does not even require the schools to meet fire, health, sanitation, or safety standards.

Abuses are predictable

These schools are dealing with teenagers who have mental illnesses, addictions, and other serious behavior problems. Reportedly, however, many of the staff do not have college training. Some are still teenagers themselves who have just graduated from the boarding schools.

Combine those factors with a religious belief that the world is depraved and minors must be beaten into submission to save society from going to hell. Surely the abuses are predictable. Undoubtedly, these schools have some success stories, but there will also be abuse and psychic damage. State standards and oversight are a good way to minimize the dangers.

Legislature ignores danger

The Missouri legislature is in no hurry to provide those protections. Again this year Representative Barbara Fraser, D-St. Louis, introduced her bill to require licensing, but it went nowhere. The House Children and Families Committee has never even held a hearing on her licensing bills.

Religious exemptions bring three measles cases to Iowa

In March, three young people in Iowa contracted rubeola measles because of religious exemptions from immunization. Theirs were the first measles cases in Iowa since 1996.

A group of about 28 students and two supervisors from Maharishi University in Fairfield, Iowa, went to India during spring break. A large number of students at Maharishi have religious exemptions from immunizations.

Student travels while infected

Six of the students contracted measles in India. The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) recommended that they stay in India for at least four

days after rash onset and that all unvaccinated students remain there for 18 days after the last possible exposure.

Nevertheless, one unvaccinated student returned to Iowa many days earlier than that. During his travel, he had a cough and conjunctivitis and within 24 hours of his arrival in Iowa, he had a rash.

An Iowa City high school student who flew from Detroit to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on the same plane with the infected Maharishi student became infected with measles, even though he had had two doses of measles vaccine.

Later a younger Fairfield student on the same flights developed measles. The Health Department would not say whether s/he had a religious exemption from immunizations, but did inform the public that the person had been at the Ladies Dome at Maharishi University in an infectious stage of the disease.

Many Fairfield families who had claimed religious exemptions from immunizations changed their minds and got immunizations when the threat became clear to them.

Great effort required to contain outbreak

About 1,000 people were exposed to the measles virus. The IDPH expended great effort to contain the outbreak. Public health clinics extended their hours and offered free treatment. Hotlines were set up to answer questions. The media carried many reports explaining the danger and urging all people who might have been exposed to be sure they were adequately immunized against measles.

The Iowa media did not, however, mention the religious exemptions from immunizations. We learned of them through a CHILD member who forwarded a dispatch from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Maharishi community's approach to health is described on its webpage as using "the complete knowledge of Natural Law" in "the 40 aspects of Veda and the Vedic literature" that were recently discovered by a medical doctor "as the basis of the 40 aspects of human physiology."

In the sect's "global campaign to create a disease-free society," the Maharishi Vedic programs "re-establish balance between the body and its own



Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

inner intelligence through Vedic knowledge. . . ." The webpage recommends consultations "seasonally or at least twice a year" with physicians relying on the Maharishi Vedic Approach to Health.

In 2000, CHILD lobbied unsuccessfully for repeal of Iowa's religious exemptions from immunizations and prophylactic eyedrops. The Maharishis were then represented by Rep. Rebecca Reynolds, a registered nurse. She told us privately that she had miscarried in her first pregnancy because she was exposed to measles. Nevertheless, she voted to retain the religious exemptions with verbal fanfare and even brought a psychic to the Statehouse as her special guest. The psychic claimed that vaccines are developed with genetic engineering and sometimes with genes taken from different species, which causes monsters and other disasters.

Since then Iowa has had large outbreaks of pertussis in counties with a high concentration of Amish, as well as the measles outbreak this year.

Religious exemptions increase risk to public

The Iowa experience indicates that religious exemptions increase risks both to unimmunized and vaccinated persons. Daniel Feikin *et al.* reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 284 (Dec. 27, 2000):3145-50, that not only were



Hamm Family Leaves the Courthouse

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exemptors 22 times more likely to acquire measles than vaccinated children, but at least 11% of the vaccinated children who got measles acquired the infection through contact with a child claiming a religious or philosophical exemption from immunization. The actual percentage is likely much higher because the source of infection was unknown in 67% of the cases.

Measles is now a rare disease in the U.S. because of high vaccination rates. However, an estimated 745,000 measles deaths occur annually worldwide.

Taken in part from *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* dispatch March 19, 2004, *The Des Moines Register* May 7, www.idph.state.ia.us, and www.maharishi-medical.com.

Firstborn parents sentenced in third child's death

Wesley and LaRonda Hamm of Tulare, California, were sentenced in May for felony child neglect in the death of their 10-year-old daughter Jessica after pleading no contest to the charge. They provided no medical care because of their allegiance to Church of the Firstborn teachings.

Jessica died in March, 2003, of "cardio-respiratory arrest due to acute pneumatitis and tracheo-bronchitis with sepsis" according to the autopsy report. Her death would have been preventable with routine antibiotic therapy.

Father: medical care violates God's will

Her parents admitted knowing she was seriously ill for the last three days of her life. They called in church elders to pray for her.

Wesley Hamm told police he knew Jessica was going to die hours before she gasped for her last

breath, but did nothing physical to save her life because he had to let God's will be done. He also denied making a mistake.

A Florida relative told investigators that she believed Jessica had actually been ill since Christmas, but had not seen the girl herself.

Sons also died of treatable illnesses

The Hamms have let two other children die without medical care. In 1995, their son Tyler died at age 11 in Arkansas. 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 1999, their son Bradley died at age 12 in their Morgan County, Indiana, home after suffering from pneumonia for two weeks. Mr. Hamm told police that his son had a congenital heart defect.

No charges were filed in the boys' deaths.

Preventive and therapeutic medical care required

For Jessica's death, Tulare County District Court Judge Elizabeth Krant sentenced them to four years' probation with many requirements for the care of their surviving three children, all girls. They must get the girls medical examinations, immunizations, dental care, and vision tests. They must notify a county social worker whenever one of the children is sick. They must also take a weekly class in parenting for a year.

Tulare County Deputy District Attorney William Yoshimoto, who prosecuted the case, expressed satisfaction with the sentence. "I was really looking to protect the other children," he said. "I think the terms of the probation are pretty strict."

Their daughters are currently in foster care by juvenile court order with some parental visitation allowed.

At sentencing, an observer said, Mrs. Hamm appeared to be in deep grief over her daughter's death while Mr. Hamm, a church elder, presented as someone whose religious convictions were unaffected by the tragedy. Neither expressed remorse, but both were willing to cooperate with the probation agreement.

Taken in part from *The Fresno Bee*, April 2 and May 20.

Indiana Firstborn parents charged in baby's death

On July 1 an Indiana grand jury indicted Church of the Firstborn parents for reckless homicide in their baby's death.

Last August Rhiana Rose Schmidt was born breech without medical attention at her home near Franklin. Her umbilical cord was wrapped around her arm and neck; it was later cut by a family member.

She had difficulty breathing. Her parents, DeWayne and Maleta Schmidt, called church elders to pray and gave mouth to mouth resuscitation, but did not call a doctor. The next day she had trouble breathing again and again elders were called to the home to pray for her.

Baby's illness treatable

She died at two days old of puerperal sepsis, often caused by unsanitary conditions and treatable with antibiotics.

The Schmidts told investigators they knew the baby was ill but believed it was wrong to rely on medicine over God's will, sheriff's deputies said.

Other medical neglect in Firstborn church

They also had a medical emergency with the birth of their first baby in 1999. Maleta 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.

The Schmidts are members of the Church of the Firstborn in Morgantown. Rhiana is the third child in the Morgantown church whose death, without medical care, has come to press attention in recent years. In 1998, 6-day-old Aspen Daniel died of dehydration and underdevelopment. In 1999, Bradley Hamm, age 12, died of untreated pneumonia (see previous article).

No criminal charges were filed in the boys' deaths, but during the 1980s prosecutors in northern Indiana won convictions in many deaths of children whose Faith Assembly parents would not get them medical care.

Johnson County Prosecutor Lance Hamner will prosecute the Schmidts.

Taken from *The Indiana Daily Journal*, July 2, 2004; and from *The Indianapolis Star*, Feb. 1 and Sept. 10, 1999; and Aug. 24, 2003.

Student wins Iowa contest for essay on CHILD founder

Kathryn Skilton, an eighth-grade student in Nashua, Iowa, won first prize this year in a state essay contest for an essay about CHILD co-founder Rita Swan.

Called *Write Women Back Into History*, the competition for 6th through 9th graders is sponsored by the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, Iowa Department of Education, and the State Historical Society of Iowa. This year's theme was Women Inspiring Hope and Freedom.

Among 2250 entries in two divisions, Skilton took first place in the 8th and 9th grade division with her essay "Rita Swan: Advocate for Children."

The winners were honored at a Capitol ceremony in Des Moines on March 11, which Rita and Doug Swan attended. The writers and the subjects present were recognized in the Iowa House and Senate and by Lieutenant Governor Sally Pederson.

The goal of the contest is to "incorporate both women from history, who led and won struggles for equality and civil rights, created and advanced educational and professional opportunities, and made great contributions to the arts, sciences, and humanistic causes, and innovative women of today who further these efforts and continue to expand the frontiers of possibility for generations to come. Students are encouraged to write about the accomplishments in the life of a woman who has made a difference to them and to society. (Essays about Iowa women are encouraged.)"

Last year Skilton won in the Iowa History Day competition with her essay about CHILD's work and advanced to the National History Day finals.



Skilton Honored at Capitol

About CHILD Inc.

CHILD is a tax-exempt membership organization dedicated to protecting children from abuse and neglect related to religious belief or cultural traditions. CHILD provides research and public education, amicus briefs, and a support group for ex-Christian Scientists. CHILD lobbies for equal protection of children under the allowable limits for tax-exempt organizations.

CHILD has members in 42 states and 4 foreign countries. Membership in CHILD is by application. Dues are \$35 a year or \$15 for full-time students. Dues-paying members receive the newsletter. A membership application form may be obtained on CHILD's webpage at www.childrenshealthcare.org or by contacting CHILD. See the contact information on page 1 of this newsletter.