Children's Healthcare Is a Legal Duty, Inc.

Box 2604, Sioux City IA 51106
Phone or fax 712-948-3500
e-mail: childinc@netins.net

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Writer and editor Rita Swan
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Equal rights for children under the law

Harrison and Megan

Florida boy likely suffered for hours

Stung 432 times by yellow jackets, 2-year-old Harrison Johnson of Melbourne, Florida, likely died what child abuse expert Dr. John Tilelli called "an exquisitely painful death."

Yellow jackets attacked the toddler about 5 p.m., but his parents did not call for medical help until 12:30 a.m. after the boy was unconscious. He died about an hour later on September 29.

His parents, Kelly and Wylie Johnson, belong to a group of about five families calling themselves the Bible Believers Fellowship, which opposes both the government and the medical profession. Members refuse to get birth and death certificates and have called doctors "sorcerors."

The attack on Harrison occurred in a mobile home park near Tampa where the family was visiting the park manager and her family. The manager belongs to their fellowship and assists in home delivery of babies.

One of Harrison's playmates, 8-year-old Megan, and her grandmother said on national television that the Johnsons asked the children to form a circle in the living room and pray for his recovery. Megan and other children did this for about an hour and then went home, assuming Harrison would get well. But the next morning Megan's grandmother had to tell her that her little friend had died.

Medical examiners found 432 purplish welts, many the size of pencil erasers, covering almost all of the boy's body. Dr. John Tilelli, a critical-care pediatrician at Arnold Palmer Hospital for Women and Children in Orlando, said Harrison would likely have displayed alarming symptoms. The toddler would have been crying and in intense pain until he slipped into shock, Tilelli said. He also might have

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have felt as though he were drowning while his lungs filled with fluid caused by his body's reaction to the insect venom. The fluid buildup would have caused excessive thirst.

Wylie Johnson reported that his son was thirsty, but basically appeared fine until he stopped breathing.

Two physicians have told the press that the toddler might have died even with prompt medical attention. No anti-venom serum for yellow jackets is available, and a two-year-old's body might not have been able to fight the venom from so many stings.

Nevertheless, his chances would have been much better with intravenous fluids, assistance in breathing, and other medical care.

Parents charged in previous sect death

The Johnsons were charged with failure to report child abuse in the death of another sect child, Alexus Aitcheson. Her parents, Rachael and Robert Aitcheson, of Palm Bay told police she choked to death on regurgitated milk in October, 1996, and that their religious beliefs prevented them from seeking medical care for her. She was apparently cremated during a private ceremony at a relative's farm; her remains have not been found.

Neither her birth nor death was recorded. Police learned of the baby only because of a flier the family sent to friends in memory of their daughter.

The Aitchesons were charged with felony child abuse, abuse of a dead body, and failure to report a death. They are still awaiting trial.

The Johnsons were in the Aitcheson home praying for Alexus when she was dying. After her death, they reportedly wrapped her in a bundle, placed the bundle between themselves and her parents, and prayed for God to bring her back.

Johnson later told Palm Bay detective Jeff Kraynik, "Jesus Christ always, when people came to him, he healed them. He never sent them to anyone, let alone a doctor."

Kraynik asked Johnson whether he would call 911 if his own child were dying. Johnson replied that he didn't know what he would do.

In March, 1998, the Johnsons were acquitted of failure to report abuse of Alexus because, as Brevard County Judge Harry Stein said, "It sounds like there was a death, but no one is sure when it occurred."

Contacted by the press after Harrison Johnson's death, Kraynik recalled his 1996 interview of the boy's father, Wylie Johnson. "I had one impression," he said. "I knew it was gonna happen again."

Taken in part from *The Orlando Sentinel*, Sept. 30 and Oct. 4, 1998.

Florida religious exemption laws criticized again

Harrison Johnson's death (see above) has reopened attention to Florida's religious exemptions from child abuse and neglect charges at Florida Statutes 415.503 and 39.01(37). Florida allows courts to order either medical care or "treatment by a duly accredited practitioner who relies solely on spiritual means for healing in accordance with the tenets and practices of a well-recognized church or religious denomination."

End Time, CS convictions overturned

In 1992 the Florida Supreme Court overturned the conviction of William and Christine Hermanson, Christian Scientists who let their 7-year-old daughter Amy die without medical care. The Court criticized the state's child abuse statutes, calling them so incomprehensible that no reasonably intelligent person could tell when his actions regarding his children cross the line into criminal behavior. With the religious exemption, the Court ruled, "The statutes have created a trap that the legislature should address." *Hermanson v. State*, 604 So.2d 775 (Fla. 1992).

In 1994 a Florida Court of Appeals overturned a conviction of parents in End Time Ministries who let their daughter die without medical care because of their religious beliefs. *Hernandez v. Florida*, 645 So. 2d 1112 (Fla. 1994). The Court did not explain its reasoning, but presumably the Supreme Court's ruling in *Hermanson* was the significant factor.

Today, more than six years after the Hermanson ruling, the old statutory language remains.

The impact, experts say, is chilling: making a case against a parent—even an abusive parent—whose child dies for lack of medical attention is nearly impossible if the parent can show ties to a religion, even a tiny circle of like-minded friends, that disdains modern medicine.

Candidate criticizes legislature's apathy

"You would think when the Supreme Court says your work product is defective, you would go back and fix it, but most of our legislators feel like they have better things to do than protect children," said Karen Gievers, a South Florida lawyer and child advocate who successfully sued the state on behalf of foster children.

"Children can't go to Tallahassee to lobby for themselves, so they don't get attention," added Gievers. "But what do you expect? These are the same legislators who dealt with school crowding by changing the definition of crowding."

Gievers ran for Secretary of State in 1998, but did not win.

"Florida statutes are replete with inconsistencies when it comes to child neglect and religious exemptions," said Jack Levine, director of the Florida Center for Children. "We are blinded to the fact that Florida is a magnet for any individual or group, sect or cult that wants to set its own rules of conduct. Questions of religious exemptions where the treatment of children is concerned are worthy of scrutiny and, we think, reform."

Some legislators have said the religious exemption should not carry over to the criminal code. "Someone found guilty of . . . third-degree murder shouldn't have access to the religious exemption defense," said Stephanie Olin, staff director for the House Family Law and Children Committee.

"That might be true, but the courts still consider [the religious exemption] as a criminal defense," said Chris Zawisza, director of the Children First program at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale. "What the court is saying is the statutes are too vague to be enforceable against a parent who claims a religious exemption."

Christian Science ethicist defends exemptions

Peggy DesAutels, a medical ethics professor at the University of South Florida and herself a Christian Scientist, argued against repeal of religious exemption laws. "I'm not sure if that's the way we want to go as a society," she said. "Do we want to say medicine is the only alternative for health care when we know that prayer does help some people in some situations? And we need to be fair. When a doctor makes a horrendous mistake, and they do, they aren't charged with murder.

"If we had an infallible medical system, maybe we could depend on that alone. But we don't."

CHILD's view

Florida law takes a religious exemption to its logical absurd conclusion. If prayer is a legal substitute for the medical care needed by a sick child, then why shouldn't the courts be able to order any child in the state to have spiritual "treatment" from a "practitioner" who is "duly accredited" by "a well-recognized church"? What if the judge decides that the Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, or atheist child down the street needs a Christian Science treatment?

The references to prayer as treatment and accrediting faith healers as practitioners suggest the law was written for Christian Scientists, and former state senator Jack Gordon admitted that it was.

As for DesAusels' comments, we all agree that physicians are not infallible, but parents should not be allowed to deprive a child of all the resources of modern medicine. The claims for faith healing are never supported by scientific data comparable to that on which medical treatments are based. Parents are free to pray whenever and wherever they wish,

but the only health care the state should require them to get for a sick child is state-licensed secular health care.

Finally, we salute Karen Gievers, the first Florida politician we know of with some courage on religious exemptions. Since 1992, three Florida legislators have promised to sponsor a bill to repeal the religious exemption law, but never followed through.

Taken in part from the *St. Petersburg Times*, Oct. 3, 1998.

Philly parents ordered to get medical care; they regain custody

A family court has given Daniel and Anne Foster of Philadelphia custody of their son Patrick after a jury convicted them of endangerment and criminal conspiracy in a criminal court.

Members of Faith Tabernacle Church, they do not believe in going to doctors. In May, 1997, a neighbor saw their son Patrick fall on the sidewalk. His head fell over, and he could not lift it. The boy was lethargic and losing weight. He had a swollen eye, a rash, and a large lump protruding from his abdomen. The neighbor reported the case to the child abuse hotline.

Cancer put in remission

The state intervened and got him to a hospital. Two-year-old Patrick had a Wilms tumor that had spread from his kidneys to his liver and heart and was starving his body. He had months of chemotherapy to shrink the tumor until it could be removed surgically. More chemotherapy and radiation followed.

The state placed him in the care of his aunt and uncle, Diane and Timothy Foster. Timothy left Faith Tabernacle fifteen years ago, and Diane was never a member.

At trial, Dan Foster acknowledged that he and his wife first felt a lump in Patrick's belly three months before the state intervened.

The boy's chances for survival would almost certainly have been greater with timely medical care. Long-term survival rates of 60-80% are common with early detection and treatment of Wilms tumor

Two weeks before the sentencing hearing on September 24, 1998, cancer was found in Patrick's lungs. He is undergoing nine more months of chemotherapy plus radiation and may have to have bone marrow extracted for a transplant. He was not vaccinated for any childhood illness before he got cancer and now cannot be vaccinated. His immune system will be extremely fragile during cancer treatment.

Grieving relatives speak out

Family members who do not belong to Faith Tabernacle spoke at sentencing of their anguish, frustration, and fear for Patrick. Anne's stepmother Kathy Demas accused the Fosters of selfishness and hypocrisy:

> They have a choice. They can take their car to a mechanic, a doctor of cars, to have it fixed.... They can take their animals to a vet, a doctor of animals, when they need help. They can be a carpenter, a doctor of wood, when a house is in need. They can have their teeth fixed by a dentist, a doctor of teeth. . . . They can be their own doctors of their body. They can dress nice to feel and look well. They can perm their hair to look better. More chemicals to the body. . . . But they cannot call for a doctor of medicine for their son or other children in such horrible shape of the body and suffering.

Anne's stepsister Tina Mahserejian said,

> When I saw my sister's child lying in the hospital for the first time I could not believe it. That was her child. Because we were not raised that way. [Anne is an adult convert to Faith Tabernacle.] Even worse, I could not believe it was a two-year-old little boy. Just thinking about it tears me up inside to this day. To watch him heal slowly and help him as much as I could has brought my son, my husband and myself very close to him.

His parents are good people. I know this. But as far as Patrick goes they are dangerous. He can become sick at any given moment from any common illness or from his cancer. Daniel Foster stated right on the stand that if Patrick became sick again Anne and himself will not seek medical treatment for him or any of their other children. That terrifies me.

Finally, Tim and Diane Foster spoke about the little boy who lived with them for over a year. Though Tim left Faith Tabernacle fifteen years ago, he said the controls of its belief system still impact him. Making decisions and taking personal responsibility for them is still difficult.

Denial of symptoms

Furthermore, Tim said, the religion teaches you not to look for symptoms of illness and to ignore pain. But Patrick's pain tolerance can't "get that high" because his immune system is so poor and illnesses are "a lot more serious" for him than for a normal child.

"What's real important," Diane said, "is that we all have to remember him, okay. And he's a happy, fun-loving, bouncing baby boy right now. He gets into trouble, he laughs, he plays."

"He has a love inside of him that has the right—it should be able to grow. It should be able to live. It should be able to be everywhere," Diane concluded. She implored the judge to try to assure "that that little boy gets to live his life to the fullest."

No member of Faith Tabernacle testified.

Parents must learn about disease, get insurance and medical care for 14 years

Judge William Mazzola sentenced the parents to 14 years probation. He ordered them to place all their children, including any children they may have in the future, under the care of a physician during their probation. He also ordered them to purchase medical insurance for their children, to notify the state and their physician whenever their children are sick, to take health classes at a hospital to learn about children's illnesses, and to acquire and use a fever thermometer and other "standard household instruments" for detecting illness.

Judge cites Pediatrics study

Mazzola also spoke about the *Pediatrics* study by CHILD officers Seth Asser and Rita Swan, which reviewed 172 child fatalities when parents withheld medical care on religious grounds and found that 140 of the children would have had at least a 90% probability of survival with prompt medical care. Mazzola said the study reinforced both the state's and the court's concern about the Fosters' children and was a reason the court imposed a 14-year probation sentence.

Mazzola did not have authority to rule on custody. A few weeks after the sentencing hearing in his court, a family court returned Patrick to the custody of his parents despite a lengthy study by a psychiatrist who recommended that Patrick remain with his aunt and uncle. Mazzola's probation terms remain binding on the parents.

Two faith deaths in Oklahoma

A young mother and her baby died in Tulsa, Oklahoma, after the mother refused medical help on religious grounds. Bryan Sanders was born dead on July 13, attended only by an unlicensed Church of the First Born midwife. The medical examiner listed the death as an "undetermined" stillbirth and did no autopsy.

His sixteen-year-old mother, Brandy, was seriously ill after his birth and died August 6th.

Brandy's cousin, Mechelle Rivera, reported the deaths to the press because, she said, "I don't want her to have died in vain."

Rivera remembered Brandy as a wiry tomboy who loved to go fishing. She met her husband Bryan through the Church of the First Born. Rivera said it is common for First Born teenagers to marry before they are eighteen.

Rivera said she asked Sanders repeatedly if she wanted to go to a doctor both before and after her

delivery. Her answer was always no. Sanders knew, Rivera said, that she might have a difficult labor because of her age, but she was ready. They also discussed the possibility of losing the baby and Sanders said if that happened, she wanted to try to have more children, Rivera reported.

Her labor was indeed prolonged, Rivera heard, and was attended only by an unlicensed church midwife.

In the weeks after her son was born dead, Sanders was ill, but her cousin thought she was recovering. She collapsed and died on August 6th.

Married teenagers are adults

The medical examiner ruled that the cause of her death was severe anemia brought on by prolonged postpartum bleeding.

"She believed in God's healing," Mechelle said. "He did not heal her the way we thought he would."

The Creek County Sheriff's office reported that no criminal charges would be filed in the 16-year-old's death because she was married and therefore legally an adult with a right to refuse medical treatment.

Taken from *The Tulsa World*, Aug. 15, 1998.

Another First Born death in Colorado

The Church of the First Born, which objects to medical care and advocates complete reliance on religious rituals for healing disease, lost another baby in Colorado in 1998.

Keenan Littlefield was born at home on June 19, 1998, in Montezuma County and died ten days later. He suffered dehydration and malnutrition because of a congenital small bowel obstruction.

Keenan was likely in great pain for days, vomiting repeatedly, exhibiting abdomenal distention, and becoming progressively moribund. But his parents—members of Church of the First Born—provided no medical attention either for his birth or during his illness.

In 1997, Kyra Wright, another First Born baby in Montezuma County, died of viral pneumonia at ten months old with no medical care.

Montezuma County District Attorney Mike Green in Cortez, Colorado, has decided not to prosecute either death.

No treatment of congenital defects: reasonable?

Green said the doctors he consulted told him that if baby Keenan had a congenital bowel obstruction, he probably had other congenital defects as well. Green feels reasonable people could make a decision not to treat the baby because of the congenital defects, and therefore the parents should not be prosecuted.

Green also feels that Colorado's religious exemption laws add greatly to the difficulties of prosecution, that prosecutions of other Colorado faith deaths have expended enormous resources, and the results have not been worth it.

When told of the pending trial in Brighton, Colorado, of a mother who withheld insulin from her 8-year-old son on religious grounds, Green said it was easier to prosecute the death of an 8-year-old than that of a baby.

CHILD's view

We agree with Mr. Green that Colorado religious exemption laws are unfortunate. He and the Colorado prosecutors' association should work for their repeal.

Green's views on care of babies, though, are horrifying in their implications.

While acknowledging that they needed a medical diagnosis to draw definite conclusions, the pediatricians consulted by CHILD said a congenital small bowel obstruction could be corrected by routine surgery.

One said it was hard to believe that Green found any doctors in Colorado who thought it was reasonable to let such a baby die without any medical treatment.

"It seems," wrote one pediatrician, "that the prosecutor is arguing that no infant with any congenital defect or anomaly is worth any medical

care, even diagnostic, because the infant must have other defects. What a stone-age philosophy."

Children die in fire at religious compound

In November, four children under the age of four died in a fire at a religious compound near Emelle, Alabama. A wooden dormitory housing 54 children and 20 adults was burned to the ground at Holyland, founded by Luke Edwards, a 71-year-old preacher, who is accused of child labor and other violations.

The isolated compound of sheds, plain wooden buildings, and mobile homes is part of a multimillion-dollar operation called Reach. Most residents come from his church in Meridian, Mississippi, but some troubled youths are brought by relatives. Courts once referred children to Edwards, but stopped doing so when questions arose about his methods.

The building that was destroyed housed teen-age girls who cared for preschoolers and babies. The mothers of the babies and toddlers stayed elsewhere in the compound. Boys lived in a separate dormitory. Children sleep as many as three to a bed and are wakened at 4 a.m. for chores and then breakfast in the cafeteria.

Religious exemption from licensing

Alabama law exempts church-run childcare facilities from state licensing. They must, however, be inspected regularly by state fire and health departments. Parents who place their children in such a facility must sign an affidavit acknowledging their awareness that it is not licensed.

In 1997 the press reported that the children attend a one-room school called Christ Temple Academy. They sit at long tables completing photocopied sheets, their work areas separated by partitions. There is no discussion or laughter. Most children keep their heads bowed over their work sheets even when strangers come in.

Children placed in public schools after leaving the compound were about three years behind, according to notes from a 1993 meeting of state officials over concerns about the Holyland.

Child labor violations found

A state probe found 129 child-labor violations with children as young as 14 doing construction work and slaughtering cattle. In 1990, the U.S. Labor Department levied $43,500 in fines for 82 illegal child workers at Holyland businesses. The government allowed the penalty to go unpaid after Reach Inc.—a tax-exempt arm of Holyland—filed for bankruptcy in 1991. Edwards said he was unaware of the child labor laws and has stopped the practice of having underage children perform illegal work.

Begging on "The Route"

Holyland residents receive only room and board for their work. Holyland earns money not only from its businesses, but also its panhandling system known as "The Route." Vanloads of adults and children are sent on the road for weeks at a time to ask for money outside stores nationwide. A former resident tells of soliciting in different states at age 13 from dawn until after dark.

Gail Walker, who left Holyland with her three children in 1994, said the begging always is in the name of helping abused children. She once collected $1,800 in a week. Former residents estimate revenues from panhandling of more than $300,000 a month though Reach Inc. claimed less than $157,000 in annual income in 1991.

Phillip Williams, a founding member of Reach and its first president, left after a year. Though still professing respect for "the bishop," he said he was tired of seeing people work like slaves for nothing but a place to live.

Edwards defends the panhandling. All proceeds, he says, go to youths living at the compound.

Although he expects his followers to lead an ascetic Christian life, his holdings by 1997 included several limousines only a few years after his businesses filed for bankruptcy.

To his flock, Edwards is an awesome presence, one calling him the nation's only true black leader and another claiming that living with Edwards makes it easier to get to heaven.

Holyland has been hit with repeated lawsuits, $1.3 million in court judgments, child-labor fines and claims by Edwards' estranged daughter and some former members of sexual improprieties.

Edwards denies the group is a cult of personality, as some former members claim. "All people are doing is lying on me," Edwards said. He said critics are jealous and feel threatened by black economic power.

Taken from AP wires of Nov. 18, 1998, and June 21, 1997.

Teen released from fundamentalist "private jail"

In December a 15-year-old Colorado honor student was released from a controversial children's home in Louisiana. Arriving at the airport in Grand Junction, Colorado, Matt Grise was near tears as he thanked the crowd of well-wishers.

New Bethany Home for Girls and Boys in Arcadia, Louisiana, is run by fundamentalist Baptist preacher Mack Ford and houses youths behind 10-foot-high fences topped with barbed wire. A frustrated law enforcement officer calls it a "private jail."

Only father allowed to visit

Matt's grandmother, Joan Grise, who helped raise him, charged he was being abused there and campaigned in the press for his freedom. U. S. Congressman Scott McInnis, R-Colo., obtained a court order for his release on condition that the family not talk about what is happening at the home.

After the boy's mother died, he moved in with his father, Vincent Russo. When the relationship between father and son deteriorated, Russo sent Grise to New Bethany. His other relatives and his friends were not allowed to visit or contact him. On Thanksgiving Day, Joan Grise met Ford and asked to see her grandson, but was turned away.

Allegations of child abuse have been raised against the group home many times since it opened nearly 30 years ago. Four complaints of abuse have been ruled valid by the Department of Social Services, but many others have not been proven, in part because Rev. Ford has a pattern of closing the school when authorities begin investigating and later reopening it without notice.

State requires no info on New Bethany kids

Louisiana does not require licensing of homes for day or residential care of children if fees are not charged. Ford claims that his operation is financed entirely by voluntary donations. Therefore, he does not even have to give notice to the state that children are being housed and instructed at New Bethany. He does not have to file with the state the names of the children, their home addresses, or who their parents are. He does not have to tell the state that his school is open or closed.

In 1996 Louisiana Social Services got a court order to interview 85 of the 200 children at the home. Ford told the state to load all the children in buses and take them home.

The state was investigating reports that a child received severe whippings to the extent that it bruised his eye. The child "had puncture wounds that resulted in impetigo and head injuries from having his head beat against the wall," court records say.

After repeatedly refusing to allow the state to talk to the children, Ford announced that the school was closed.

No fire inspections for 12 years

State fire marshalls have not inspected the home for twelve years although state regulation requires annual inspections of all buildings where people regularly gather. Ford has repeatedly refused to let them in.

After the 1996 closure, Ford filed suit against the state fire marshal and Department of Social Services accusing them of a conspiracy to harass the

school and force its closure. He said he was having to turn 25 to 30 children away every day and let them go "back on the streets."

The state "has raped my church and destroyed my ministry," he charged.

A federal court dismissed his suit in November, 1998. Ford has appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit.

Taken in part from the *Shreveport Times*, June 25, 1996 and Dec. 9 and 13, 1998.

Religious beatings are recalled

Though Matt Grise is not allowed to talk about what happened at New Bethany Home (see above), two Denver women report witnessing severe abuse while confined to the compound run by a Baptist minister according to what he says the Bible requires.

"Mama whoopings"

Julie Gertz, 25, and Tracy Zwickle, 35, both spent time as teen-agers behind the barbed wire of the Arcadia, Louisiana, group home. The detention facility is unlicensed, and the youths are not under court supervision.

"There were beatings of 80 to 100 licks," Gertz said. "I mean, you basically stopped counting after 80, and the girls stopped crying.

"They were called 'mama whoopings.' Up your legs, to your back and all the way back down."

Runaway girls put on "the heel"

Girls who tried to escape often were tracked down by the Rev. Mack Ford. They then were placed on "the heel"—forced to wear high heels "for weeks, constantly," Gertz said. "You could never take them off. And then you are put on pots, which is where you stand in your heels while your helper reads you the Bible and you scrub pots all day for weeks."

The compound was raided by sheriff's deputies in 1988, and beatings came less frequently, Gertz said. But they didn't stop.

"The kids basically have no rights there," Zwickle said. "You become programmed."

When she was released to visit her parents, they noticed a sharp change in her and did not return her to New Bethany. "I was terrified of everything. The TVs. The radio. Those things don't exist there."

Ford's charisma

But she and Gertz blame the people Ford hired to supervise the dormitories, not him. "Part of my admiration was I felt he was my protector," Zwickle said. "I felt that if something went wrong, I could go to him and he would take care of us. It's hard to explain this man. He's a very powerful man. . . . If you sat in his church and heard him preach, he would move you like you've never been moved in your life."

Taken from the *Rocky Mountain News*, Nov. 3, 1998.

Hare Krishna details abuse at boarding schools

In October, 1998, the Hare Krishna movement acknowledged in its own publication, *ISKON Communications Journal*, that sexual, physical and emotional abuse was once prevalent at its boarding schools for children.

Middlebury College professor Burke Rochford's *ISKON* article details the abuse of children in the care of Hare Krishna monks and young followers at schools in the United States and India during the 1970s and 1980s. Often away soliciting support for Krishna, parents were unaware of the abuse.

Ten former Krishna pupils first confronted movement leaders at a meeting in May 1996, saying they had been regularly beaten and caned at school, denied medical care and molested homosexually at knife point.

"I remember being made to sleep naked in a cold bathtub for a month," said Jahnavi Dasi, 26, who was sent to a Krishna boarding school in Los Angeles at age 4. "I had wet my bed, and it was easier for them to make me sleep in the tub than to change my sheets."

She also told the leadership meeting that she went into a diabetic coma after her teachers insisted that her illness was a ruse to avoid cleaning the school and chanting in the temple. "They neglected to take me to a doctor, so I ended up in a coma," at which time she was taken to a hospital, she said.

"We need to get to the bottom of this, and to the best of our ability do whatever we can to try to repair the damage to the kids and show them we do care as a religious society," said Anuttama Dasa, a North American spokesperson for the International Society of Krishna Consciousness.

Theology denigrates family

Rochford said the reasons for the abuse lay in the culture and structure of the early Krishna movement, which drew young devotees. Those who were unsuccessful at converting new followers and collecting contributions were put to work in the schools and often resented the task, his report said. Krishna theology extols celibacy as the ideal and denigrated sexuality and family as something for the spiritually weak. The boarding schools, modeled on the gurukulas, or Hindu schools in India, were a concession to that "weakness," and were designed to cut the "ropes of affection" between parent and child.

Children were sent to the gurukulas as early as age 3 or 4, and visited with their parents as seldom as once a month, or even once a semester. From 1975 to 1978, eleven Krishna schools opened in the United States and Canada. The highest levels of abuse in American gurukalas were reported in Dallas, Seattle, and New Vrindaban, West Virginia.

Krishna no longer has boarding schools in the United States, but some Krishna temples do run day schools for students.

The Hindu sect was brought to America by the Indian guru A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami in the 1960s. It claims an international membership of about 1 million and a U.S. membership of 90,000. The number of those living in spiritual communities called ashrams across the U.S. has dwindled from 10,000 in the 1970s to about 800 today.

Rochford praised the Krishnas for inviting him to publish his research on the abuse and pointed out that many clergy in mainstream churches have been accused of child sexual and physical abuse.

Taken from *The New York Times*, Oct. 9, 1998.

CHILD members give workshop at national conference

CHILD honorary members Jetta Bernier and Ellen Mugmon presented a workshop at the Twelfth National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect held in Cincinnati in November and cosponsored by the federal government.

Jetta is executive director of the Massachusetts Committee for Children and Youth. Ellen has lobbied for children's issues at the Maryland Statehouse for fifteen years. Both played leading roles in their states' repeals of religious exemption laws.

Their workshop was entitled "Raising Voices for Children in the Political Process" and discussed lobbying for several children's issues as well as repeal of religious exemptions. Jetta discussed her Massachusetts Campaign for Children.

When CHILD president Rita Swan spoke at such conferences in the 1980s, the Christian Science church complained to federal officials that Swan was using "taxpayers' money to carry out her personal campaign." Christian Science spokesmen attended the Mugmon/Bernier workshop and defended religious exemptions. Also the church purchased exhibit space at the conference and distributed literature.

For more information on CHILD Inc., visit our web page at http://www.childrenshealthcare.org.