

# REPORTER

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**SALUTE:** Navy recruits give a charismatic response during a service at the Naval Training Center, Orlando, Fla. — NC

## Charismatics II

*This is the second in a series of articles on the charismatic movement in the United States.*

By Rick Casey  
Special to the National Catholic Reporter

**SOUTH BEND, Ind.** — In the beginning True House was an exciting manifestation of the growth of the charismatic renewal. In the spring of 1968, Notre Dame graduating seniors and roommates Jim Byrne and Peter Edwards, who were leaders among pentecostal students, decided to stay after graduation to continue a ministry among students.

No funds existed for such a project.

Byrne and Edwards needed a place to live. As it happened, a Dr. Robert True owned a house which he had decided to donate to the work of God. Provisionally, as Byrne and Edwards saw it, a priest brought them together with True, who gave them rent-free use of the house as their residence and a charismatic center.

The name came shortly after, when Edwards ended a debate on the topic by opening his Bible and coming upon John 8, 12 ff.: "If I do bear witness to myself, my testimony is true... even if I do judge, my judgment is true...."

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court  
theater:

## trial Joan Little

Epilogue

By J. Carl Cook  
National Catholic Reporter

**N.C.** — It was all there. A courtroom, 90 degrees heat, a woman accused of murdering a guard, city-slicker defense attorneys and molasses lawyers, a trial out of central casting, sex, — To Kill a Mockingbird had

Miss Joan Little is over. But the questions continue to spread.

Little walked out of Wake County Superior Court here a free woman after the state was unable to prove to six black and six white jurors that the 21-year-old black woman had enticed her 62-year-old jailer to her cell during the early hours of Aug. 27, 1974, and killed him by stabbing him 11 times with an ice pick in order to escape.

Little's high-powered and high-priced attorney, Jerry Paul, did convince the jury that Joan Little was attacked, forced to

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## NAWR: Power in church sisters' aim

By Albert de Zutter  
NCR National Affairs Writer

**SAN FRANCISCO** — Women intend to be a major power in the Roman Catholic church. The effects of their efforts will be far-reaching and profound.

The unmistakable message from the National Assembly of Women Religious' (NAWR) fifth annual convention is that women are assuming full responsibility as equal members and ministers in the church. And, they are firmly demanding institutional recognition of their equality.

Among the 780 sisters (the word "nuns" is in disfavor as projecting an outmoded image) attending the convention on the campus of the Jesuit-run University of San Francisco, the ordination of women was not an issue; it was a foregone conclusion.

The question was no longer whether, but how and when.

The purpose of seeking ordination: justice — equality for women in the church so that the church in turn can effectively champion the cause of the oppressed everywhere.

Not that all sisters want to be ordained priests. Far from it. But, as Sister of St. Joseph Kathleen Keating, president of NAWR for the next two years, told the National Assembly of Religious Brothers (meeting nearby), women should have the same option as men have to become priests or to make a conscious decision not to seek ordination.

And Sister of St. Joseph Catherine Pinkerton, outgoing NAWR president, asked in her keynote to NAWR, "How valid are the decisions made in a church in which one-half the membership is treated like adolescents, in some places ignored, in some manipulated, in some oppressed?"

Sisterhood took on multiple meanings at the convention as the religious women used the term to describe their ties to one another and to women universally.

Pinkerton told NCR: "The women's movement is one of the most powerful things we'll face in the next few years."

In her talk, Pinkerton asked, "What can sisters and sisters' councils do together nationally and internationally to strengthen

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**LISTEN:** Bishop Michael Begley of Charlotte, N.C., and other bishops went to rural Georgia and to Atlanta to hear testimony about family life. page 2. — Jason Pelosa photo

# True House gained prominence

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A charismatic prayer group in Ann Arbor, Mich., previously had formed itself into a "covenanted community," and by late 1971 True House became a similar venture for students at Notre Dame and St. Mary's.

At first only 22 made a covenant, or commitment, to form a community. That number grew to more than 50 by the summer of 1972. The members lived in "households" with from two to 10 members each. These households were either actual houses bought by the community, by then a non-profit corporation, or sections of dormitories where members lived in proximity.

Members of each household prayed together twice daily, and shared meals. The entire community attended daily mass, providing a Roman Catholic focus unlike more ecumenical communities found elsewhere. In addition, members ran a weekly prayer meeting open to anyone who wanted to come and designed to attract new members, and another weekly prayer meeting only for True House members.

As the community grew, leadership structures were set up and task forces were formed to perform such jobs as running prayer meetings, instructing potential new members and evangelizing. Members were kept busy. "One of the signs of the charismatic renewal," quipped Byrne once in a talk, "is meetings."

Joining the community often had a clearly beneficial affect on troubled students.

"True House was extremely attractive to a lot of young people who found that it liberated them and left them free to live a joyful, committed Christian life," said Father Edward O'Connor, a Notre Dame theologian who was a sort of unofficial chaplain to the community, in a recent interview. "I saw several examples of people who had not been able to put their lives on a stable basis, but were able to do this with True House."

Jim Burke, now news editor at the Peoria, Ill., *Catholic Post*, joined True House as a junior at Notre Dame and became a leader. While his comments in a lengthy phone interview last week supported many of the harsh criticisms made of True House, he said, "For me the good outweighed the bad."

"Some of the greatest things it did were not necessarily these personal things," he added. "It taught a responsibility that young people don't encounter today. Young people at colleges are left totally alone as though being free from all commitments is the ideal thing."

True House attained a prominent position in the leadership of the charismatic renewal by operating the Charismatic Renewal Communications Center, which developed into the central distributor of books and tapes to prayer groups around the country, and by running the annual international conference, which in 1973 brought an estimated 25,000 to Notre Dame. In addition Jim Byrne and other True House leaders traveled frequently to give seminars on Christian community.

Meanwhile life at the community changed as more teachings were developed and more discipline was imposed. And one man, Jim Byrne, became the undisputed leader of the community.

Byrne, still in his mid-20s, was intelligent, energetic and charismatic with a small "c." His followers, which community members came to be, regarded him as a holy man who unselfishly was giving his life to them and to the Lord. He worked often to the point of exhaustion, organizing, speaking, running meetings and running True House.

Perhaps the best way to see what happened at True House is to look at some of Byrne's ideas and how they were applied. Now attending law school in Florida, Byrne declined to talk to NCR, but a tape recording of a talk he gave at the 1972 International Conference at Notre Dame is still sold by the Communications Center in South Bend.

It is called "Intense Christian Communi-



**COVENANTED COMMUNITY:** Ralph Martin, holding his two children's hands, heads a leading covenanted community in Ann Arbor, Mich. In NCR's next issue, Rick Casey will describe this community, which has avoided the pattern of excesses attributed to True House. — NCR photo by Rick Casey

ties." The following quotes are from that talk.

Byrne said it is God's will that there be "headship" in the church, in families and in "intense Christian communities." He said this is a "spiritual principle" which "will not work as a source of grace and growth unless you believe that God will work through this agency."

Like the pope, bishops and husbands, said Byrne, "in a very real way in intense communities, those who are heads of that community stand in the place of God."

Each household had a head. Young people, many still undergraduates, were put in positions of authority requiring them to continually guide and correct those in their charge. The heads were appointed by a group of four "coordinators" — a term charismatic leaders say means the same as "elders," but avoids the implication of a new ecclesial structure.

"I believe in my heart that (headship) ought to be collective, not just exercised by an individual," said Byrne. But in fact his domination grew nearly total. Burke described one retreat where a member persistently challenged Byrne on an issue. The meeting grew tense, and eventually the individual asked forgiveness not only from Byrne, but from the whole group as well.

"Teaching is at the very heart of our life together and we control it rigidly," said Byrne. "We're very, very careful about who forms our life together, about whether the truth is being taught. We don't let just anybody come in and teach. We screen very carefully what we read, and the ideas and values that are sought."

He said that of the 400 to 500 "pastoral man-hours" of work performed each week by members of the community, about 200 were spent "forming new people" and another 150 hours spent "forming people who are already in the community."

There was a saying that it was possible to live a Christian life at Notre Dame outside of True House, but then it was also possible to live at the South Pole.

Especially suspect were the religion and philosophy departments. John Hettinger, a philosophy major, said he often was asked, "Why do you want to spend your energies on second-hand material when you can experience it first-hand?"

"Through this vehicle I had been gripped by the powers of Darkness. I was told that by Jim Byrne," he said. "The ambience was that those who speculate in philosophy and theology compromise their faith."

Submitting himself, he changed his major to sociology.

Byrne said he believed that "most

Americans are completely unable to deal with other people in living situations," and that parish life and family life were "disintegrating." "The real family, at least in most cities, is almost nonexistent," he said.

Given this view of the wasteland from which members were drawn, it seemed clear that radical correctives were needed. But how was that to be done? One answer was to submit to the authority of someone close by.

"How can you die for yourself with 50 people?" Byrne asked. "They don't know enough about you to know all the nasty things that can be hidden. We're so clever

in hiding those things."

Helping members "die to ourselves" not left to chance. Household heads met weekly with the coordinators and Byrne at these meetings, according to Burke. As a household head, the problems individual members would be discussing and specific goals set in resolving those problems. Byrne would suggest strategies, sometimes centering on confrontation techniques between a household head and a member. The members were largely unaware of the planned and coordinating nature of these techniques.

It was not a long step from these techniques to what became known as "breakthrough ministry."

From the fall of 1972 to the spring of 1973, an estimated 10 to 20 members underwent breakthrough ministry. Designed by Byrne, the sessions were tailored to the individual. Not all elements were always present, but the ministry might last several hours per late-night session over a period of up to three nights. It could include lengthy and detailed recitation of a member's faults and "sins" by leaders and household members until the person "broke" and admitted he needed help. Long and detailed confession by the member of problems and sins during his entire life, sometimes with special focus on relationships with his parents; prayers for "healing of memories" to defuse the problems; and exorcism.

Laura Tolosko is now a junior at Notre Dame studying religion. She plans to study in a Catholic high school.

"I was the youngest in my household and very exuberant," she said in a recent interview. "I would go running around the house singing. I was told my spirit needed to be calmed down. To them to be so totally tranquil as to languid."

Eighteen-year-old Laura had

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# True House staggered, closed

(Continued from page 4)

"problems." She kept a notebook of daily reflections and carried on correspondence with old friends to the extent that the 24-year-old woman who was her head felt it distracted her from the community. Her playing of a musical instrument was "prideful." She would mention to others in her household that particular boys were "cute" or "neat." Later, she said, these remarks were brought up "almost as though they were violations of chastity."

Meanwhile her household head and other leaders kept detailed notes on incidents involving her which were seen as problems. Copies were made and circulated among the leaders. (Later, before leaving the community, Tolosko secretly took as many of the files on her as she could find, though she doesn't think she got all of them.)

After she had been in the community six months, she said, "Maria (her head) told me that the Lord had revealed to them a new vehicle for healing and that this was a special time of grace for me."

She was taken to Byrne's house for breakthrough ministry under Byrne, her head and a few others. It lasted several hours a night for three nights. Reading from notebooks, they "presented me with what they felt were the wounds, the sins and the patterns of darkness they felt I was participating in."

Later, she said, "they drew crazy diagrams on the board about my journey from the world of darkness to the world of light. It was a very calculated procedure, as though they knew how to construct a soul. They had me talk about my family and my past. What they wanted to do was to make me understand that they were going to call me on my 'patterns of darkness inflicted by my past.'

"I was to tell about such things as my previous sexual experience," she chuckled. "I didn't have much to tell."

"The coordinators felt so close to God that they felt they could do anything and God would give them the tools they needed," she said.

At the end of the sessions, Tolosko was restricted in her correspondence, friendship and responsibilities and was given busy work, she said. "I didn't go home for three months because I couldn't face my parents. I was convinced they had really made a mess of me."

Other breakthrough sessions were different, some more bizarre. Many within the community never knew they were happening. Whether participants were pledged to secrecy, as some who received the ministry say, or not as others say, no one did talk about it.

The breakthrough sessions ended in February 1973. Reasons given differ from a recognition of problems with the ministry to a growing preoccupation with preparing for that summer's international conference.

National charismatic leaders now say breakthrough ministry was not typical either of True House or of covenantal communities as a whole. This may be correct. But breakthrough ministry was enough in line with the spirit of True House that its exercise was accepted within the community. And when outside charismatic leaders intervened in the running of True House, it was not over such things as the breakthrough ministry, but over what they have referred to as the "moral problem" within the group."

Detail concerning the "moral problem" is not necessary, except to say that aside from its implications regarding the authority structure at True House, it was not particularly serious.

In the summer of 1973 as national leaders were gathered in South Bend for a seminar they investigated the "moral problem." Russ and John Hettinger, True House members who were questioned by outside leaders, said they focused only on the "moral problem" and showed little interest in the problems outlined above.

What happened after that is in dispute. Jim Byrne was asked to leave, and did. The head of the diocese, Bishop Leo Pursley, was not informed of the events at True House. Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Crowley, who lives in South Bend, was informed by O'Connor of the "moral problem," but only after it had been cleared up and in such a way that the bishop felt it was confidential. He said in a recent interview that he would have been much more concerned to hear about the other problems.

In a statement on behalf of the national Catholic Charismatic Service Committee, Kevin Ranaghan of South Bend said the national leaders did not inform the bishop because a local priest "insisted" that it was "his prerogative" to tell the bishop. O'Connor, the local priest mentioned, told NCR Ranaghan's statement was "baloney."

One of the national leaders who undertook the investigation and who asked not to be identified told NCR the bishop "was not told about the other thing, the breakthrough ministry. It didn't have the implication of scandal. I'm sure you understand."

Ranaghan said the leaders did inform their episcopal moderator, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph McKinney of Grand Rapids, a strong supporter of the service committee. McKinney did not return NCR's phone

calls, so what he was told could not be determined.

With Byrne gone, True House staggered on for a year. But it had become so dependent upon him that it could not survive, and closed about a year ago. A large minority of members joined People of Praise, South Bend's other covenantal community. Others scattered.

National charismatic leaders now talk about the breakthrough ministry at True House as a serious problem and a mistake. They cite as the major problem Byrne's unchecked and solitary authority.

O'Connor sees it from a different perspective: "The most serious weakness of True House was the leaders' overconfidence in their own gifts. Encouraged by early successes, they entered rashly into areas requiring psychological, theological or pastoral competence which they did not have. They experimented with techniques psychologically dangerous and ethically unacceptable, and they neglected to consult people who could have cautioned them against these things."

What remains to be determined is how much the abuses at True House were the fruits of notions on community and authority which still may guide some top charismatic renewal leaders.



WILLIAM STOREY: Notre Dame theologian and a founder of the Catholic charismatic movement, Storey is seeking a national investigation of the movement and experiences that True House are similar to those of the movement as a whole. Storey said such experiences demand the kind of canonical and theological investigation that can bear fruit before more serious harm is accomplished.



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