

Arizona Teen Ministry Faces Abuse Allegations Over Spanking Policy

Child protective services is investigating Teen Reach, which recently filed a \$10 million lawsuit against the state

Despite orders to shut its doors, an Arizona ministry known for transforming the lives of troubled teens remains open and has filed a \$10 million lawsuit against the state.

In its legal action, Teen Reach claims its freedom of speech rights were violated during an April raid of a Bible study. Seven adults were removed from the Teen Reach facility, held for three hours and not permitted proper legal representation, the suit claims.

The Rutherford Institute, which provides free legal services to people whose constitutional and human rights have been threatened or violated, has agreed to represent Teen Reach in the 68-count lawsuit. The action names the Arizona Department of Child Protective Services, the Phoenix Police Department, the Arizona Department of Economic Security and 16 individuals as defendants.

The lawsuit comes in the wake of charges that two minors were abused at Teen Reach during supervised spankings. In March, the Arizona Department of Child Protective Services suspended Teen Reach's license to operate as a child welfare agency. When the faith-based group continued to house youth in its 18 homes in the Scottsdale area and did not appeal the suspension, the state issued a cease-and-desist order, agency spokeswoman Liz Barker said.

A teen had told staff at a psychiatric care facility that he had been spanked and abused at Teen Reach. A second youth was interviewed and inspected by police. "The allegations are proposed for substantiation, which in layman's terms means that there was sufficient evidence that the allegations were true—a child was beaten at Teen Reach and beaten to the extent that [Child Protective Services] removed him," Barker told Charisma.

Bobby Torres, Teen Reach founder and president, denied all abuse charges, claiming specifically that no teen has been injured during supervised spankings. He said police told him they found no problem with the youth they interviewed and inspected. The other boy recanted his accusation, Torres added. A letter to Charisma from the parents of the second boy substantiates Torres' claim.

Teen Reach's discipline policy calls for youth to be spanked only when all other disciplinary measures have been exhausted and the youth's actions warrant it. "Teenagers do not generally need to be spanked; they have an ability to reason," Torres said. "Spanking is only needed when they are not convinced you are serious and they throw temper tantrums like a child, or when they are a danger to others—threatening to kill people. Spanking is biblical, and it is one of the most powerful tools we have as parents."

Torres said he remembers only five teens being spanked in the last two years at Teen Reach. Ministry staff members never spank children themselves, Torres said. Rather, parents come to Scottsdale to administer the punishment. "Usually the kid hugs the parent afterward, and we all go out for Jamba juice," Torres said.

Teen Reach has been accused of using handcuffs to restrain teens. Torres said two teens had been handcuffed while in transit to the Arizona facility—an action taken because airports have beefed up security after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks.

When state officials asked about the practice, Torres said, Teen Reach stopped using handcuffs and sent its chaplains to “de-escalation” training. He said the ministry has never used handcuffs to restrain a teen during a spanking.

Charisma visited Teen Reach in 2003. At the time, two teens who had had their parents called in to spank them said they fully supported the discipline they had received. “It hurt, but praise God she did it,” James Thomason, then 17, said of his mother. “If she hadn’t, I would probably be doing drugs or killing people or killing myself.”

Torres said child protective services took such action because non-Christians don’t understand how the power of Jesus Christ transforms a life. “It barely makes sense to me, but there is power, and God does change lives,” Torres said.

Defending the lawsuit, Torres added: “We do not want to lose the parental right to spank. If we do, the state will spank [the teen] later, and when they spank, they abuse.”

Torres said that since the abuse charges, only one family has pulled its children out of the program. He said the number of inquiries from parents of troubled children has increased since then.

Charisma received half a dozen unsolicited letters from

parents who say their children's lives have been transformed at Teen Reach. Only one parent had complaints. Torres said he has since talked through the issues with that parent; she did not respond to Charisma's interview requests.

Steven Lawson

An Egyptian Christian who was brutally tortured for his faith by Egypt's military police is now a political refugee living in Canada who has used his freedom to start an international organization for persecuted Christians.

Maged El Shafie, a 27-year-old law student who fled his native land in 1999, endured horrific physical abuse after the police discovered he started an underground Christian organization that eventually grew to thousands of people.

"I was physically tortured for seven days because I wouldn't give the police the names of my Christian friends," El Shafie told Charisma. "I had my hair shaved and was hung upside down with my head submerged in boiling hot and then ice cold water. I was threatened with killer dogs. I was tied to a cross for three days, had my back slashed with a knife and then had lemon juice and salt rubbed in the wound until I finally fell unconscious from the pain."

He later woke up in a hospital and, after recovering, was declared mentally ill by the government and placed under house arrest for eight months. One of his house guards then confided that a military court had secretly sentenced him to death on charges of trying to change Egypt's national religion to Christianity from Islam. That night, El Shafie fled the country, crossing the Red Sea on a jet ski while dodging military ships and bullets.

When he reached Israel, he was jailed for 16 months until the United Nations declared him a political refugee. With the help of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ), El Shafie changed his name to Mack Smith, was given a passport

and a disguise, and immigrated to Toronto in February 2002.

Although El Shafie's relatives have disowned him for converting to Christianity, he says the church in North America has rallied around him like a family. He credits the ICEJ with saving his life and is now a spokesman for the organization.

"Maged is a terrific young man with a passion for the Lord, said Donna Holbrook, the ICEJ's Canadian director. "He's an eloquent ICEJ spokesman who is well-received when he accompanies me into synagogues and to other Jewish gatherings. That's quite unusual considering he's an Egyptian ex-Muslim, but Maged has a knack for bringing diverse groups together beautifully."

El Shafie started One Free World International, a human-rights organization for persecuted Christians, in July 2003 and began broadcasting River of Love, a weekly Arabic-language radio show, the following October. He said 425 Egyptian Muslims have come to the Lord through the River of Love program.

With offices in Toronto and Washington, D.C., One Free World is currently raising funds to buy farm machinery and other practical tools to send to persecuted Christians in Egypt, China, North Korea, Sudan and Saudi Arabia. El Shafie also speaks frequently at churches, schools and human-rights organizations about the plight of persecuted Christians.

One of 67,000 Egyptian Christians to be jailed and tortured for their faith, El Shafie plans to sue the Egyptian government for the torture he endured. "The U.N.'s resolution on freedom of religion states everyone in the world has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and freedom to practice that religion in public," he said. "Suing the government sends a clear message that Christians won't tolerate abuse of their basic human rights."

Roughly 20 percent of Egypt's 79 million citizens are said to

be Christians, but El Shafie says most of them practice their religion by just going to church on Sunday. He said construction of churches, publication of Christian materials or public declaration of the gospel are all grounds for imprisonment and torture.

He suspects that secret government agents may one day catch up to him, but he said his love for his fellow countrymen is stronger than his fear of death. After a recent TV appearance where he discussed a book he co-wrote that lists names of Egyptian government officials involved in the torture of Christians, he said he received several threatening phone calls and e-mails.

But he says Christians who will take a stand can make a difference, and he urges the Western church to intercede for persecuted Christians, as well as send e-mails to politicians and ambassadors of countries that violate Christians' rights.

"Persecutors like the Egyptian government need to get the message that persecuted Christians will not give up their faith," he said. "They are dying, but they are still smiling. You can kill the dreamer, but you can never kill the dream."

—Josie Newman in Toronto

Egyptian Christian Escapes Death, Seeks to Aid Persecuted Church

Maged El Shafie hopes to raise awareness about religious liberty abuses in his homeland and other parts of the world

COURTESY OF ONE FREE WORLD INTERNATIONAL

Maged El Shafie urges Christians across North America to remember the persecuted church.

For more information on One Free World International, contact riveroflove001@.

Hundreds of intercessors are expected to gather in northern Spain Aug. 14 for a "concert of praise" aimed at unseating a demonic spirit that has been dubbed the "queen of heaven."

Organized by charismatic theologian C. Peter Wagner, the praise event in Santiago de Compostela is part of an ongoing effort to mobilize prayer for the "40/70 Window," in hopes that the region will become more receptive to the

gospel. The territory extends from Iceland to Hokkaido, Japan, encompassing parts of Europe and Russia.

"On that day, hundreds of intercessors, prophets, and apostles from nations throughout the world will gather together in the huge plaza facing the magnificent 1,000-year-old Cathedral of Santiago to exalt Jesus in worship and prayer for two hours," wrote Wagner, president of Global Harvest Ministries in Colorado Springs, Colo., in a letter to supporters.

As part of his Target 40/70 Window initiative, which ends in 2005, Wagner has taken teams to Germany, Turkey, Bulgaria and Kazakhstan since 1999. This year's focus, Santiago de Compostela, is where some Catholics believe the apostle James is buried. It became a favorite pilgrimage site of Europeans in the 1980s, rivaling Rome and drawing 7 million people in 1999.

Despite the terror bombing in March, frequent pilgrims to the site doubt there will be a decline in turnout. Marion Marples of the Confraternity of St. James, an England-based association of former pilgrims, said people journey to Santiago de Compostela for many reasons—because of personal crisis, to reflect on their relationship with God or just for the adventure. "As far as I can tell the bombings have made no difference," Marples said. "This year is a holy year [because James' July 25 birthday falls on a Sunday], and the numbers are as high as ever."

Wagner said the devotion to James at Santiago de Compostela is

under the control of the queen of heaven, a demonic goddess spoken of in Jeremiah 7 and 44. Citing Acts 19, Wagner said the goddess was worshiped as Diana, or Artemis, in the apostle Paul's day. Today, he said, it is worshiped as Cali in Calcutta, the sun goddess in Japan, and the moon god or goddess in Muslim nations.

He added that the queen also usurps the worship of Christ by posing as Mary, the mother of Jesus, in nations where Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion. He said the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico, the Black Madonna in Poland and the Virgin del Pilar in Spain are manifestations of the queen.

However, charismatic Catholic leader Ralph Martin, head of Renewal Ministries in Ann Arbor, Mich., has expressed concern about Wagner's associating the veneration of Mary with idolatry. At the launch of Wagner's 40/70 Window campaign, the two began a written dialogue that spanned more than six months.

Author of *The Catholic Church at the End of an Age: What is the Spirit Saying*, Martin claims Catholics give Mary special honor, but do not worship her. While Wagner says there are born-again Christians within the Catholic Church, he argues that bowing to a statue, seeking to communicate with the dead and offering gifts to a dead person are idolatrous forms of worship.

Martin disagrees. "Confusing the true Queen of Heaven (of Revelation 12:1-5), with the satanic counterfeit (of Jeremiah 7) is a catastrophic error, and is profoundly offensive to Jesus, I believe," Martin wrote in 2000. Much of the respect paid to the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Black Madonna "is not idol worship, but the kind of effusive veneration shown in the Bible itself and many non-American cultures to this day," he said.

Wagner has continued his prayer campaign despite such

concerns. The concert of praise in Spain has the potential to crack open “the spiritual iceberg that the Queen of Heaven has succeeded in establishing over Europe,” Wagner wrote.

Cindy Jacobs, founder of Generals of Intercession in Colorado Springs, agrees, saying the event will “break open the heavens” through worship in Santiago.

“I believe God is issuing a Macedonian call to intercessors and worshipers to gather in Spain so the anointing can break the yoke for a nation to be saved,” Jacobs told Charisma.

But Wagner said the meeting is not meant to be confrontational, and he forbids exorcism of the queen during the event, which he said is being welcomed by Spanish officials. He said the emphasis will be on praise “because Christ has already given us the victory.”

Wagner believes there was a spiritual breakthrough in 1999 when 5,000 Christians gathered in Ephesus, Turkey, for a four-hour concert of praise. He predicts that event in Spain will have similar ramifications. —John M. Lindner

Prayer Campaign in Spain Seeks to Open Europe to the Gospel

C. Peter Wagner's Concert of Praise on Aug. 14 is part of his ongoing effort to evangelize what he calls the '40/70 Window'

C. Peter Wagner

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Nearly 8,000 women convened in Daytona Beach, Fla., April 22-24 for what turned out to be the final Charisma Women's Conference in the city's 10,000-seat Ocean Center arena.

Conference host Joy Strang announced on the last day of the event that she believes God is initiating a change of seasons that will shift her focus from inspiring spiritual hunger in women and urging them to embrace their freedom in Christ, to training and equipping them for more effective service.

"God has a role for women to play in the harvest, but so many feel inadequate," said Strang, co-owner of Strang Communications, publisher of Charisma and SpiritLed Woman, the magazines that sponsored the conference. "We want to see them rise up in power to fulfill His strategy for this hour."

For the last 10 years, the Charisma Women's Conference has offered extended periods of worship, personal ministry and teaching from a diverse gallery of speakers, including Cindy

Jacobs, Apostle John Eckhardt, Betty Freidzon and the late Fuchsia Pickett.

The conference began in 1995 at the Sheraton World Resort in Orlando, Fla., with about 1,200 registrants but doubled in attendance the second and third years. In 1998, the conference was moved to the 10,000-seat Ocean Center in Daytona Beach, where it was held the final seven years.

The 2004 event boasted nearly 8,000 attendees of diverse ethnic and denominational backgrounds. Main sessions were translated into Spanish for the more than 2,000 women who participated in the Spanish-language track.

After each conference, Strang received numerous testimonies, many from women who claim they will never be the same. "The description we have heard most often is 'life-changing,'" Strang said.

Laurie Melton of Charlotte, N.C., wrote in a Strang Communications online forum that she had been in constant pain on her left side as a result of a car accident five years ago. "I was totally healed from pain on Friday, April 23, 2004," she said.

Kay Nelson wrote in the same forum that she was healed of fibromyalgia and migraine headaches at this year's event. "I have not taken any pain medicine since I have come home," she said.

Mary Jo Clouse, conference prayer team coordinator for all 10 years, said miracles have marked the events since the beginning. "I've seen more miracles than I could even think about—people coming out of wheelchairs, blind eyes being opened, marriages healed and women who had had abortions [released] from guilt and shame," she told Charisma.

Yet to Strang, the most significant result of the conferences is that "thousands ... have been saved, healed, baptized in the

Holy Spirit, set free and [have] received new vision for their lives," she said. "Many ministries have been established as the women put into effect what God showed them He had for [them]."

One example is the ministry of Roxana Perez of El Salvador. During the 2000 event, Perez heard minister Nola Warren say that God was prompting someone to publish a magazine similar to Spirit-

Led Woman in Spanish. Perez said she understood God wanted her to do it, and within a year, she had launched a women's magazine in her own country.

Florida pastor Shirley Arnold, a 10-time minister at the Charisma Women's Conference, said testimonies such as Perez's reflect the primary purpose of the event. "These 10 years have been about raising women to the place that God has called them," she told Charisma.

Evangelist Joyce Rodgers, who spoke at the conference for three years, agrees. "I've seen the Charisma conference serve as a vehicle to empower women ... to do what God has called them to do."

More than one of the 2004 conference speakers confirmed Strang's new focus by declaring that now is the season for women to move into their God-given purposes. In one session prophetic minister Chuck Pierce declared: "God is doing a new thing among women. ... It is time for them to come out and find their place of influence."

Charisma editor J. Lee Grady told the women God was commissioning them to take what they had received—salvation, empowering, healing, deliverance and refreshing—to those who don't have it.

Strang said she will host a smaller women's event sometime in 2005. Many Charisma Women's Conference veterans have already told her they plan to attend. One of them, Doris Huff of

Deltona, Fla., declared in a letter to Strang: "Wherever Charisma goes next, I will be there." —Maureen D. Eha

Charisma Event to Shift Focus to Equipping Women for Ministry

The most recent Charisma Women's Conference drew almost 8,000, but organizer Joy Strang says it's time for a change

MARK POULALION/STRANG COMMUNICATIONS

An army of women: The arena events will be replaced by training sessions to help women become effective in ministry.

After fielding questions about his controversial "gospel of inclusion," Bishop Carlton Pearson has been officially denounced as a heretic by a group of African-American Pentecostal bishops.

In a 17-page paper released in March and written by the group's doctrinal commission chairman, Bishop Clifford L. Frazier, the Joint College of African-American Pentecostal Bishops' Congress said it "will no longer offer to Bishop Pearson our hand of fellowship. We will strongly urge all of our

fe

llows to refuse Bishop Carlton Pearson access to their pulpits."

Headed by Bishop J. Delano Ellis, senior pastor of Pentecostal Church of Christ in Cleveland, the Joint College was founded in 1995 to provide training for ministry leaders within the African-American Pentecostal-charismatic community. Today it has more than 700 affiliated ministers and represents more than 100 independent black churches.

The group invited Pearson to its annual meeting in 2003 to present his doctrine, which promotes the idea that confession of Jesus as Savior is not a requirement to go to heaven. "Our

hope was to appeal to him to abandon his teaching," Frazier told Charisma. "We tried to respect his position as a bishop and ... as a child of God."

But when Pearson didn't recant his position, "we felt that it was important for us to say something

in light of the fact that this young man is of tremendous influence in the Pentecostal-charismatic community," Ellis said. "We felt that if we were to keep quiet it would be like tacit approval of his error. And since so many of our people have been subscribers of his ministry, as good stewards of God's mysteries and shepherds of the flock, we felt to say nothing would be like turning our people over to error."

In a response posted on his ministry Web site, Pearson reiterated his views that all people, not just Christians, are saved, and he cast himself as a prophet ahead of his time. He added that he plans to soon release a book titled God Is Not a Chris

tian.

"I happen to believe in the God who is big enough to save an entire world from perceived, ultimate destruction and spiritual death and that, in fact, He has done so," Pearson wrote. "All that's needed now, is for people to be informed—to know and enjoy this powerful and liberating Truth. Therefore I am committed to the proclamation of the 'Gospel of Inclusion.'"

Since Pearson began teaching universalism, attendance at his Azusa Conference has declined, and insiders say his Tulsa, Higher Dimensions Family Church now hosts just one Sunday morning service instead of two and has roughly 600 people attending. Though several Christian leaders, including the members of the Joint College, say they are praying for Pearson and do not want to disparage him as a person, many have distanced themselves from him.

"I grieve over Carlton Pearson's drift toward shipwrecking his faith and endangering others," said Foursquare leader Jack W. Hayford, chancellor of The King's College and Seminary in Los Angeles. "The danger of isolation from accountability and from interaction that can adjust any of us from vain suppositions is the reason I have implored greater accountability among all leaders—especially in these last days so filled with deception, delusion and departure from God's Word."

Ted Haggard, pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colo., and president of the National Asso

ciation of Evangelicals, described Pearson's teaching as "inaccurate and counterproductive to the cause of Christ."

He said because Pearson has rejected calls from Christian leaders to return to orthodox teaching, "the body of Christ at large should now ignore him. Don't support him, don't acknowledge him, don't attend his events and don't dignify his position with time and attention. And, where necessary, protect the unaware from his teaching."

—Adrienne S. Gaines

Black Pentecostal Group Denounces

Carlton Pearson as a Heretic

The Oklahoma-based pastor said he will continue teaching his gospel of inclusion and plans to write a related book

J. Delano Ellis (right) says Carlton Pearson (left) is spreading heresy.

Ted Haggard

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Sujo John's

miraculous survival from the Sept. 11, 2001, World Trade Center disaster has catapulted him into an evangelistic ministry that he claims has resulted in more than 30,000 decisions for Christ.

A native of Calcutta, India, John, now 29, was faxing a document from his office on the 81st floor of the north tower when American Airlines Flight 11 struck several floors above him. Fleeing down the emergency stairs he heard the second plane crash into the south tower. He tried frantically to call

his wife, Mary, by cell phone. Four months pregnant, she planned to arrive early at her job in the south tower.

Upon reaching the mezzanine level, John said he was overcome by the incredible chaos. People sobbed uncontrollably. Mutilated bodies, chunks of debris and a mangled plane engine were scattered across the outdoor courtyard.

Directed to the

underground shopping mall by a fireman, he searched for an exit. He heard a frightening roar. Seconds later warning clouds of debris from the imploding south tower engulfed the mall area. He rushed to a wall and huddled next to about 20 fleeing workers. He said he thought: "God, this is it. You gave me this opportunity to come down 81 floors, but death has finally caught up with me."

In a move that he says was prompted by the Holy Spirit, John shouted "Jesus!" and exhorted the others to call upon Christ and claim Him as Savior. "I heard them cry, 'Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!'" he said, "and then there was a deafening noise of the building going down."

Moving away from the wall he hit the ground. Buried in white soot and debris, he said he lay there for about 20 minutes before struggling to rise. Coughing up dust, he said he felt his way back to where the others had huddled together.

Despite the hazy smoke and ashes he saw their bodies scattered like rag dolls, crushed and smashed. He said he felt the Lord saying, "They made their peace with Me in their dying moments, and they are resting

with Me in My presence."

Escaping before the north tower imploded, he learned that his wife was alive too. The next day he e-mailed about 20 friends and family that he and Mary were safe and warned them about

the fragility of life. They forwarded the message to their friends, who did the same, and eventually it reached thousands.

“People were calling from all time zones,” John said. “There were so many stories of people over the phone giving their hearts to the Lord.”

The media bombarded him for interviews. His appearance on The 700 Club generated a firestorm of interest, with 426 viewers calling in to accept Christ. “There was a tremendous response to salvations because Sujo is proclaiming the ultimate truth of life, which is Jesus,” said Cheryl Wilcox, senior features producer for The 700 Club. “He has a very profound simplicity of faith.”

John was invited to appear on The Oprah Winfrey Show along with his co-workers, all of whom survived. But he backed out when Winfrey’s staff barred him from sharing his faith. The next week he was invited to speak at a large church in Kansas. The New York Times sent a reporter there to cover his story. Speaking requests poured in from all over the nation. He traveled every weekend, returning to his job on Mondays.

He says it was tough juggling speaking engagements with a career and family. In April 2002 he resigned his executive position to become a full-time evangelist (). “God started speaking to us, and when God says go, you go,” he said.

When John was a teenager in Calcutta, he says a missionary once prophesied: “God has a plan for your life. He will one day use you to touch millions of people around the world.” He sees that prophecy happening now; he has traveled to more than 270 cities in the United States, Canada, England, Ireland, Norway and India.

During a recent service at Lakeview Christian Center, an Assemblies of God church in Indianapolis, John stirred the congregation. “They were glued to him for an hour,” said

Lakeview senior pastor Ron Bontrager. "The story is so compelling. He puts us in the story and asks, 'Where are you?' About 40 people gave their hearts to Christ."

"There are people slipping into eternity without Jesus," John said. "Somehow my story connects with them because it was a national tragedy so I believe God has given me a key."

—Peter K. Johnson in Teaneck, N.J.

Testimony Launches 9/11 Survivor Into Worldwide Evangelistic Ministry

Sujo John says some 30,000 people have accepted Christ after hearing him tell of his escape from the World Trade Center

COURTESY OF SUJO JOHN MINISTRIES

John, shown ministering in his native India, said he is fulfilling a prophecy he received as a teen.

Survivors: the John family

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Christian observers in Indonesia fear that a recent outbreak of violence in Ambon, one of the South Moluccan islands, may herald a return to the conflict that from 1999 to 2002 left more than 9,000 dead and 500,000 displaced.

On April 25, a small pro-separatism rally in Ambon city quickly turned ugly when marchers clashed with pro-unity demonstrators. The violence rapidly escalated, leaving more than 30 dead and 200 homes and other property destroyed, including two churches, a Protestant university and a United Nations office. By early May the intense fighting had subsided, replaced by terror tactics including kidnapping, torture and sniper attacks.

Sources within the government and media blame the latest violence on the small Moluccan separatist movement seeking independence from Indonesia. However, longtime observers of Indonesian affairs suspect that, like the original bloody conflict, this latest violence was caused by outside influences.

“[In] 1999, sectarian conflict was provoked in Ambon by

outsiders and was used to oust President Wahid and elevate the military,” said journalist Elizabeth Kendall, a longtime observer of Indonesia with the World Evangelical Alliance.

Indonesia is currently on the cusp of another presidential election. On July 5 Indonesia will elect its president by popular vote for the first time in history. Observers say the current violence in Maluku could weaken President Megawati Sukarnoputri’s re-election campaign by showing her unable to maintain peace and stability.

Likewise, Kendall said the fighting seems to undermine two other contenders, presidential candidate Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and vice

presidential candidate Jusuf Kalla. Both had key roles in forming the 2002 Malino Peace Accord that ended the original conflict.

Standing to gain is retired General Wiranto, who was once indicted for war crimes in East Timor and whose platform takes a hard line on security issues, Kendall noted. The Indonesian army, diminished by its loss of police powers in 1999, also benefits politically from the conflict and instability, she said.

As the violence dies down, human-rights activists fear the provocateurs may again use religion to up the ante. The original conflict, first portrayed as a tribal clash, began to fade rather quickly until it was recast as a religious conflict between Muslims and Christians.

“The issue may shift again because we know that the aim of the provocateurs is to make the Christians and Muslims fight one another like in 1999-2002,” said Semmy Littik of the Maluku Shield Foundation, a Christian humanitarian organization based in Ambon. “This is a very sensitive issue given the majority of Indonesians are Muslims. So the issue may shift [from separatism] to religious solidarity, which justifies outsiders

fighting in Maluku.”

When it was characterized as a religious battle, the 1999 conflict increased exponentially as Muslim and Christian militias from abroad, including terrorist groups such as the Laskar Jihad, began infiltrating Maluku. Though the current violence has been condemned by both faiths, area Christians are concerned about rumors of the Laskar Jihad’s return. Though the separatists identify themselves as Christians, the broader Christian community rejects the association. Still, Christians in the region already are being targeted by the provocateurs.

“Prayer succeeded where police power failed,” said Charles Cole, a Southern Baptist representative working in Indonesia. On April 30, Cole sent an urgent update reporting that the Laskar Jihad had allegedly landed in Ambon and were marching on Kuda Mati, a predominantly Christian area, when a sudden, heavy rain dispersed the attackers.

Thirty homes were burned, Cole reported, but the church at the bottom of Kuda Mati Hill was saved, thanks to a vigorous defense by the church youth. He said security forces had withdrawn rather than face the large mob.

In May two units of the BRIMOB, or police Mobile Brigade, and two army battalions were dispatched to Ambon, nearly tripling the number of security personnel previously on hand.

But the presence of the army and the BRIMOB is little comfort to some. Father Cornelius Bohm, a priest at the Crisis Centre Diocese of Ambonia, said many Christians witnessed the recent destruction of the Nazareth Church at the hand of the military, not the mobs, and are calling for the withdrawal of outside forces.

Littik said neither the local Muslim nor Christian communities are involved in the recent violence. “In certain villages, Muslims are looking after Christians’ houses and visa versa,”

he said. Absent outside interference, Littik claims, the current violence would never have taken place, as the local citizens "are not interested in this bloody political game. They are merely victims of the political games of the elites."
—David Mundy

Christians Fear Violence in Ambon May Spur Another Religious Conflict

Observers say the violence in Indonesia's South Moluccas Islands could revive the hostility that led to 9,000 deaths

COURTESY OF MALUKU SHIELD FOUNDATION

Evan Talanita, age 4, was injured when the ship he was traveling on was attacked by a mob in Ambon.

After 25 years of public service, an influential Christian Parliamentarian is stepping down from politics.

A native of Northern Ireland, Sir Brian Mawhinney served as the Conservative Member of Parliament for Cambridgeshire North West from 1979 to 1997. Once a professor at medical schools in London and Michigan, Mawhinney also served as head of the Conservative Party, Transport Secretary and Minister of State for the health department and in the Northern Ireland office.

While in Northern Ireland, Mawhinney helped begin the peace process when tension between Protestants and Catholics began to escalate. "We tried to find areas of common ground and build on it," he said. "It was difficult because they made attempts to kill us."

He said the experience taught him that no democratic nation should cower in the face of terrorism. "Democracies have to stand firm; they can't be pushed around," he told a TV audience during a visit to Orlando, Fla., in March. "You cannot accomplish by

violence what should be accomplished through the political

process.”

Mawhinney said his party supported the British government’s decision to go to war in Iraq, and he regrets Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero’s decision to pull troops from Iraq in the wake of the Madrid terror bombing. Still, he said, “I think the cause on which we are embarked [in Iraq] will prevail.”

Looking back on his career, Mawhinney said he marvels at how far God has brought him. He said he remembers sitting in an 800-year-old cathedral in Peterborough, later named Cambridgeshire North West, telling God he didn’t know why He had brought him there. It was 1979, and he was one of more than 90 people to apply to be the Parliamentary candidate for the region.

He said while sitting on the pew, he heard a voice tell him, “This is where I want you to be.” Though

the people of Peterborough knew little about him, they chose Mawhinney as their representative, launching his political career.

Perhaps because he had such a dramatic experience, Mawhinney said he has had a keen sense of calling to public life. “God calls individuals to do what He calls them to do,” Mawhinney said. “God has not called all people to be politicians, but He has given us the privilege of living in a democracy.”

He says that privilege breeds a responsibility among Christians to get involved on some level, whether simply by voting, participating in school boards or city councils, or seeking state or national office.

He said if Christians believe this is the Father’s world, “then we have the opportunity, and I would say the responsibility within certain limits, to try to engage in that process to try to shift the values of the systems to which we

attach importance.”

He said being known as a committed Christian has been an advantage for him. “People like to know their elected representatives believe in things, even if they don’t share the beliefs,” Mawhinney said.

However, he said he has received criticism from Christians who believed he had no business in politics. “There is still a ... stream within particularly the evangelical wings of the church, and I would guess the charismatic wings of the church too, there is still a strong sense of, ‘Come out from among them and be ye separate.’”

He says many Christians are concerned that politics requires compromise. “If we didn’t compromise with each other, there’d never be a church program,” he said. “If you mean compromise in the sense of calling into question the fundamentals of my faith, I don’t do that. In our system, we don’t have to do that.”

The 63-year-old plans to stay active in his retirement. Married with three adult children, Mawhinney is president of England’s football league and serves on the board of World Relief, a Christian humanitarian organization. He said he may write another book; his autobiography, *In the Firing Line*, released in 1999.

Although he says Christians need more teaching about how they can fuse their faith with political activity, he is encouraged. “Twenty-five years ago I was a serious oddball,” Mawhinney said. “Now, I’m just an oddball.”

—Adrienne S. Gaines

Influential Christian Parliamentarian Stepping Down From Office

Sir Brian Mawhinney says Christians have a responsibility to

influence the values of their nations' political systems

MARK POULALION/STRANG COMMUNICATIONS

MP Sir Brian Mawhinney says he would not seek re-election.

A leading minister in the Argentina revival movement that saw thousands come to Christ in the mid-1980s and 1990s has launched a new initiative to take the gospel outside the walls of the church.

Calling his effort Operation Blessing, Claudio Freidzon of 15,000-member Iglesia Rey de Reyes in Buenos Aires has been taking teams of volunteers to remote areas throughout Argentina to distribute food, clothing, medicine and other supplies, and to host evangelistic meetings. The pastor said the effort is an attempt to preach the gospel not only in word, but also in deed by combining evangelism with practical assistance.

Freidzon said he felt God calling him to "bless" his country after an economic crisis rocked Argentina in late 2001. Thousands were suddenly without jobs, banks

froze savings accounts, and the peso lost 70 percent of its value.

Burdened by the difficult conditions many Argentines faced, Freidzon and his wife, Betty, launched Operation Blessing last year. The first Operation Blessing event was held in the province of Tucumán in April 2003, with more than 35,000 people in attendance and thousands reporting decisions for Christ.

In July of the same year, the second Operation Blessing took place in the province of Chubut, with the customary hospital visitations and distribution of food and medical help. The third outreach event was held in the province of Misiones in November, with 20,000 people in attendance.

This year, Freidzon decided to travel to the marginal barrios within the interior of the country. Accompanied by a group of volunteers, he visited the provinces of Tucumán, Chubut, Misiones and Chaco, thus impacting Argentina's northern, central and southern regions.

Though many made decisions for Christ at previous events, the volunteer team was surprised at the response in Chaco, the final destination in the tour, when they visited in April. The Chaco Forever stadium was filled to capacity, with thousands waiting outside. Operation Blessing said more than 9,000 reported decisions for Christ during the outreach.

As Freidzon had done in previous cities, he collected a special offering to benefit two hospitals in the

city of Resistencia, located in Chaco province. As a result of the meeting, the local newspaper ran a front-page article with the headline: "Chaco: This Is Your Time."

The crusade also drew participation from local official Aida Ayala and other high-ranking government leaders. The governor even granted worship leader Danilo Montero the use of his plane to transport him to the event.

Some 450 volunteers distributed 20 tons of goods, including medicine and 500 books destined for Argentina's rural libraries. The team also visited the Clorindo Omar Blanco School in Resistencia and Barrio Honda Chico School in nearby Sáenz Peña, where they donated books, school equipment, treats and even a television.

In an effort to touch every social class, Operation Blessing developed a conference geared toward professionals and businessmen, as well as a seminar for pastors and leaders that had approximately 1,700 ministers in attendance.

Volunteers also visited health centers, where they prayed for the sick and distributed diapers and baby clothing. A

volunteer group of doctors, dentists and public assistants tended to the residents at the Villa Don Alberto health center.

Afterward, pastors from Resistencia reported that some local churches had doubled their membership at the end of the week. Some even said they had a renewed evangelistic zeal.

“There isn’t enough seating to seat the new believers,” one local pastor said. “Operation Blessing’s wide-reaching effect has caused our church to overflow.” Another pastor acknowledged, “This has never happened before, not seen in this way, the streets being invaded by the gospel.”

—Gisela Sawin in Chaco, Argentina

Argentine Church Offers Food,
Clothing Through Outreach Events

Pastor Claudio Freidzon began the Operation Blessing
campaign in response to his nation’s economic crisis

Claudio Freidzon

GISELA SAWIN

Doctors and nurses provided free health care at the April
outreach.

Jailed Christian Students Released in Egypt

Four Christian college students arrested in January for possessing faith-based materials have been released amid international pressure for their freedom. According to the Barnabas Fund, Peter Kamel, Ishak Yessa, John Fokha and Andrew Saeed were freed on April 3. Police in the Naweeba district jailed them after raiding their rooms at a resort hotel in the Sinai Desert. Their Bibles and various Christian tapes were confiscated. “None of these materials were illegal, and there

was nothing found in their possession which would have justified their arrest,” Barnabus Fund said. The students were initially charged with “disturbing the national unity and threatening the social peace.”

Pakistani Christian Dies After Torture by Muslims

A Christian who refused to convert to Islam died in early May after being tortured by Islamic militants. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reported that Javed Anjum, a 23-year-old resident of Toba Tek Singh District, was tortured for five days and nights by extremists from an Islamic school in the area. He was hospitalized for 11 days and died in a Faisalabad hospital on May 2. In a statement to police before he died, Anjum said he was searching for water near the school, but was accused by Muslim leaders of trying to steal a water pump. CSW urged Pakistani authorities to bring the militants to justice. “This is ... an example of the threat that Christians continue to face in Pakistan,” said Stuart Windsor, national director of the United Kingdom-based CSW. “We urge our supporters to pray for Javed’s family.”

Jailed Chinese Church Leader Beaten in Prison

South China Church (SCC) pastor Gong Shengliang, who is currently serving a life sentence in the Hong Shan Prison, located in Hubei Province, has begged to be transferred. According to China Aid Association (CAA), the SCC leader recently told his sisters who visited him in prison: “If you are able in any way, please transfer me to another prison—otherwise just come and pick up my corpse.” CAA sources said Shengliang was unable to walk into the visiting hall and had to be carried in by four other inmates.

California’s ‘Punching Pastor’ Views Boxing as a Ministry Tool

The lightweight champion and youth pastor from Tulare, Calif., says he’s able to reach people who wouldn’t visit a church

James Kindell's reputation precedes him.

He's known as the "punching pastor"—and it's not because of his forceful delivery from the pulpit.

It's because the youth pastor from Tulare, Calif., is an amateur boxer, winning a Northwest Golden Gloves championship last year and advancing to a national tournament. He even competed in the Olympic Boxing Trials, though he was disqualified after the third match.

"I encouraged him to get back into boxing," said Dennis Sunderland, the senior pastor at Bethel Assembly of God in Tulare. "It's a great contact with a segment of our community that doesn't come to church."

Kindell started boxing at age 10 while growing up in Seattle, winning a silver medal at the Junior Olympics at age 15 and five years later ranking seventh nationally in his weight division in an amateur boxing career that included 75 bouts.

A year ago, at the age of 29,

Kindell returned to the ring after a seven-year layoff, winning the Golden Gloves title in Tacoma, Wash., earning top honors at a regional tournament and later advancing to nationals at the legendary Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas—placing second in the 152-pound weight class.

Nearly every day before heading to church, Kindell wakes at 5:45 a.m. and runs six miles. He trains in the ring on Tuesday nights.

"Young guys at the gym come up to me and ask, "'You're a pastor?'" Kindell said. "They see I'm not cussing. They see I'm different."

Now, the 5-foot-7 Kindell mixes preaching and boxing, befriending street-tough kids who know nothing about the forgiveness of Christ.

"It's part of my ministry," Kindell said. "Most pastors aren't able to reach these people. It's a way of meeting some guys you won't find in church."

Win or lose, Kindell said his return to boxing has been a success because he gets an opportunity to share Jesus. Each Tuesday night at an aging boxing club, there are 20 to 30 boxers gathered, ranging in age from 15 to 25. It's a vastly different group from those who come to Kindell's Wednesday night Bible study at church.

"I wanted to be around street kids," Kindell said. "Not preaching to them, just loving them, being Jesus with skin on."

Married with three daughters, Kindell understands that he's a role model. Tattooed above a crown of thorns on Kindell's right shoulder is "John 14:6."

"It's just another tool," Kindell said.

Ten years ago, Kindell burned his boxing shoes after becoming a Christian. It was an expression of commitment, showing that boxing would not interfere with his faith. Now Kindell doesn't see the two passions contradicting.

"They complement each other," he said. "I've been able to pray with people to receive Christ. If that wasn't there, I'd be questioning my motives."

Sunderland wasn't reluctant to let Kindell climb back into the ring. He encouraged him. "He said go for it," said Kindell, who Sunderland hired as youth pastor in 1997. "I've got one of the greatest pastors around."

Kindell isn't the first one to go from pulpit to pugilist. Former world heavyweight champion George Foreman is a pastor and is now talking about boxing again. "I listen to George, and the effectiveness he's had for the gospel is tremendous,"

Sunderland said.

As with Foreman, Kindell doesn't consider boxing the priority in his life. He sees the sport as an opportunity to knock on the door of someone's life. "James has a lot of passion," Sunderland said. "He has a lot of passion about life in general. So his boxing is seen as a way of building relationships."

Sunderland said he understands concerns about the image of a pastor trying to deck someone. "The only question people have is they think boxing is brutal," he said. "But it's a contact sport, no different than hockey or football."

Kindell said he doesn't box out of anger. He called boxing "an art," saying it's a sport of strategy. But Kindell admits he looks for the knockout. "I'm a puncher as opposed to a boxer," Kindell said. "I'm a heavy hitter."

With his fists as well as his words.

—Gail Wood

JOHANNA VOSSLER/VISALIA TIMES-DELTA

A heavy hitter: Kindell says boxing helps him reach the unchurched.

STEVE R. FUJIMOTO/VISALIA TIMES-DELTA

Kindell at home with his wife, Misty, and their daughters, Jasmin, 7; Maniah, 4; and Mercedes, 2

A Miami couple who professed to be born-again Christians have been charged with running a \$5 million scam selling gold coins at two or three times their actual value, federal prosecutors said April 28.

New York native Armand DeAngelis has been charged in a 38-count mail and wire fraud indictment that may have cost

investors \$10 million since 2000, the Associated Press (AP) reported. He and his wife, Marcela Ospina Cardona, ran ads in Christian magazines, including Charisma, and made millions from the operations of U.S. Coin Exchange Inc., Coin and Currency Clearing Corp. and Twenty-First Century Grading Service Inc. The federal indictment said DeAngelis, who was previously convicted of securities fraud in New Jersey, controlled all three companies.

Using a Christian fish symbol and Bible quotes on its letterhead, U.S. Coin Exchange claimed to be the leading Christian coin dealer. But federal prosecutors said DeAngelis and his wife purchased low-grade gold coins and had them graded at a higher grade by Twenty-First Century Grading Service. "These inflated coins were then sold to unsuspecting investors at prices two to three times their value," said a statement released from the office of Marcos Daniel Jiménez, U.S. attorney for the southern district of Florida.

DeAngelis' attorney, Steven Chaykin, said his client is innocent of all charges, the AP said. Ospina's attorney, Sam Rabin, said she "should not have been included in the indictment," the AP reported. A citizen of Colombia, Ospina faces a conspiracy charge as president of the clearinghouse.

Federal prosecutors froze the couple's assets, and planned to go after the \$3.5 million Miami home where they live with their 3-year-old daughter, the AP said. If convicted, DeAngelis faces up to 20 years, as well as another three to 10 years for a probation violation. Ospina faces up to five years. *

Miami Couple Accused of Bilking Christians in Coin Scam

Professing to be born again, the pair allegedly swindled investors out of \$5 million since 2000