

Colorado Pastor and Wife Indicted for Fraud

John and Linda Harris, pastors of First

Assembly of God in Canon City, Colo., from 1991 to 1998, pleaded innocent in October to 19 counts of defrauding banks and other lending companies of almost \$650,000.

The Harrises were charged in September following an FBI investigation that focused on their financial dealings between November 1993 and April 1997. The indictment alleges the couple falsely claimed the loans were for the church but instead funneled the money into a secret bank account under the name Johlind Inc. The FBI claims that the Harrises defrauded lending institutions of \$641,968.

John Harris is charged with fraud and making false statements to Canon National Bank and Fremont Bank, both in Colorado, as well as to church lending institutions in Waxahachie, Texas; Anaheim, Calif.; and Salem, Ore. Linda Harris is charged with aiding and abetting.

Loren Smith, associate pastor and a deacon in the church while the Harrises were pastors, said no one in the church knew there was a problem until officials from the Assemblies of God's Rocky Mountain District Council informed the congregation it was in default on the loans.

Bob Smith—no relation to Loren—is senior interim pastor of the church, which now averages about 75 to 100 in attendance. The church formerly averaged about 125 in the small tourist and

prison town.

The Harrises have started another church—Canon City Worship Center. They did not return Charisma's phone calls for comment. John Harris was disciplined and dismissed from the Rocky Mountain District in 1998, according to superintendent Bob Cook.

The indictment alleges that John Harris set up an account in his name at Pueblo (Colo.) Bank & Trust without the authorization or knowledge of the church and that it was doing business as First Assembly of God of Canon City. The couple allegedly forged authorization letters and falsified corporate resolutions and minutes of board meetings. In addition, authorities allege that Linda Harris signed documents as secretary and treasurer of the church—duties she did not have.

Appearing in U.S. District Court in Pueblo, Colo., the couple received court-appointed attorneys. A trial is pending. The Harrises could face up to 30 years in prison and a \$1 million fine.