

News Updates

MISSING-PERSON REPORT FILED ON MADALYN MURRAY O'HAIR

Over a year after her disappearance, a missing-person report has been filed on well-known atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair. The investigation by Texas police was precipitated by her son, William Murray. In August 1995, O'Hair left her American Atheists Inc. headquarters in Austin saying she was going to New York to picket Pope John Paul II during his visit to America.

Also disappearing with the famed atheist was her younger son, Jon Murray, and granddaughter, Robin Murray O'Hair. According to a Religious News Service report, William Murray has said that police told him "that they had located his daughter Robin's 1985 Porsche in a long-term parking lot at the Austin, Texas, airport." Austin police spokesman Mike Burgess said "the car has been processed and there is nothing suspicious." The automobile had been at the airport for several months.

The RNS article also indicated that on the day of her disappearance, O'Hair left a note on the door of atheist group's headquarters telling the staff that they had been laid off. Another report said that the memorandum stated that O'Hair and her family had been called out of town on an emergency.

Several rumors, including one that O'Hair is gravely ill or dead, have surfaced since her disappearance. Other theories are that O'Hair is living off secretly channeled funds from her organization or that she and her son and granddaughter were the victims of foul play.

O'Hair is best known for her 1963 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision that outlawed organized prayer in American public schools. She has also received notoriety from a hard-to-quash rumor that she is soliciting the Federal Communications Commission to have religious programming barred from the public airwaves. Since the rumor first circulated more than two decades ago, the FCC has been inundated with petitions opposing the reported request.

—MKG

HOLLYWOOD STREET NAMED AFTER HUBBARD

The late science fiction writer and founder of the Church of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, will have a street renamed after him. The Los Angeles City Council voted early last October to rename a one-block stretch of Berendo Street in Hollywood after the controversial religious leader.

In spite of objections voiced by local citizens, the council approved the name change by an 8-3 vote. According to the Religious News Service, the residents accused Hubbard of "being a bigot, a charlatan, and a cult leader who was biased against homosexuals."

The church owns more than half the property on the one-block section, and is the site of its international headquarters. The Rev. John Woodruff, executive director of the church's Los Angeles branch, told the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper that the renaming of the "250 yards of street" was a "fantastic victory."

Hubbard, who died of a stroke in 1986, founded the Church of Scientology in the 1950s.

—MKG

THE WAY PURGES RANKS

The Way International has worked hard to purge all followers not completely committed to obeying president L. Craig Martindale by expelling them from twigs (small, home-based fellowships) or leadership positions or by restricting access to some of the group's activities.

The Way's late founder, Victor Paul Wierwille, named Martindale president in 1981 after placing his son, Donald Wierwille, and his closest associate, Howard Allen, on the three-member board of trustees. These three officers, who alone are technically members of The Way, control all aspects of The Way's policy, operations, finances and teachings.

After Wierwille died of cancer in 1985, the

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group went through a power struggle among top leaders. That period is called "the fog years." Since then, perhaps 25,000 of The Way's 35,000 peak active followers abandoned the group for various splinter organizations.

In recent years, Martindale has tried to solidify his position as president with complete power over The Way's followers, using purging as his primary weapon. TWI claims that this puts them out of the household of God, not just out of TWI.

Martindale has selected several types of people to "purge, mark and avoid." After 10 percent of W.O.W. Ambassadors (volunteers who served as TWI missionaries for yearlong terms) in 1994 were suspected to be homosexual, Martindale spearheaded an effort to expose and expel all "homos" and "homo sympathizers" from the group, beginning with its leadership. Rev. Ed Horney bragged that "163 sodomites" had been purged in a nine-month period (*Highlights of The Way Corps Graduation* tape, June 1995).

The group since has sought to discipline (by withholding communion) or purge all who do not tithe their income to The Way. The Way has long taught the importance of tithing and "abundant sharing" (giving above the tithe). Now Martindale is emphasizing "plurality giving," in which followers determine their needs and then give all income over that amount to The Way.

Martindale also has taught the past three years that believers should not go into debt, even to buy a house. This means that nearly all devoted followers have sold their homes (if they owned them but could not pay off the debt) and now rent. Martindale also expects husbands to have complete control over their wives. He also promotes big families.

Martindale demands that all followers accept his teachings and follow his instructions without question. When he teaches, he expects people to accept his words as God's own direction.

The Way Magazine repeatedly lauds those who show "tremendous support for our man of God." Followers should come to classes "ready to receive the present truth taught by Rev. L. Craig Martindale," who is "the man for this day and hour." Graduating Corps share the salt covenant with him, "sealing their full commitment to stand with him" (Sept.-Oct. 1996, pp. 19, 16, 21).

Martindale is especially angry at anyone who listens to the group's defectors and critics. For instance, many followers heard that Way researcher John Schoenheit had written a paper that prompted Martindale to fire him. However, Way leadership utterly forbade everyone from reading it or even listening to someone who knew any details about it. Contact with ex-Way splinter groups and leaders like Christian Educational Services and Chris Geer is prohibited.

These are all common elements of mind control. Group pressure, public condemnations, shunning, prohibiting outside contacts, positive believing (filtering out all negative thoughts about TWI and its leadership), fear and guilt all exert tremendous pressure on Way followers. Publicly, Way leaders encourage followers to think for themselves, but everything they do and say is designed to control what their followers hear, accept and do.

Martindale is in the process of replacing V.P. Wierwille as the focus of his followers' faith. He has been replacing Wierwille's lessons with his own on the same topics. The core of Way teaching had been Wierwille's Foundational, Intermediate and Advanced classes on *Power for Abundant Living*. Martindale recently replaced them with the Foundational, Intermediate and Advanced classes on *The Way of Abundance and Power*. He also produced classes on "The Believer's Family" and "Defeating the Adversary" to replace Wierwille's classes with similar titles.

The "Abundance and Power" classes already have been taught to Way leadership. The Foundational class was first made generally available in October 1996, but only to those who faithfully attend a twig fellowship and who pay the \$100 fee.

Martindale's new Foundational class reportedly does not include much material on biblical research principles, which dominated the first half of V.P. Wierwille's class. Actually, all this material can be found in Wierwille's book *Power for Abundant Living*, which is nearly an edited transcript of the first part of the class. Martindale goes into more detail on the evil of homosexuality, the benefits of holy spirit, the manifestations (such as speaking in tongues), Jesus Christ is not God, "the deep," "the flooding" and other new topics.

TWI reports that 770 new students graduated from the Advanced classes in the last year.

Martindale prides himself in "redefining" The Way's ministry. This included replacing the

W.O.W. Ambassadors with The Way Disciples and terminating the annual "Rock of Ages" national gathering. He has systematically removed people from staff positions and replaced them with recent Corps graduates who have been trained in his "redefined" ways.

Followers are sometimes asked to answer questionnaires which list classes they have taken, and are pressured to take the new ones. They are also told to subscribe to Martindale's newest teachings in *The Way Magazine* and on Sunday night service tapes.

They were also told to burn books, music, pictures and other materials which were published by TWI, but written by people who no longer "stand" with Martindale, including former Way leaders such as Walter Cummins and John Lynn.

This "house cleaning" has further reduced The Way's numbers, leaving what they call a "remnant." It also has prompted The Way to class Way Corps as Active, Emeritus, Alumni (in the ministry but without Corps privileges), and Dropped. Probably more than 80 percent of Corps graduates are no longer with The Way.

Rev. Rosalie Rivenbark replaced Donald Wierwille as Vice President of TWI at the group's annual anniversary observance last October. Donald, the founder's son, had been a trustee for 19 years. His father and the trustees who served with him only left office when they were aged and ready to retire. Since Wierwille is not yet that old and apparently not ill, this change has raised questions in many followers' minds.

Rivenbark was a graduate of Family Corps II (in about 1978), was ordained by TWI in 1981 and has worked on Way publications for many years. Most of all, she has complete commitment to Martindale and TWI.

—JPJ

CLERGY INVITED TO FAMILY VALUES CONFERENCES

Pastors from across the country were invited to be a "guest for an expense-paid trip to one of the most successful conferences for clergy and church leaders in the nation today." The "Empowering Christianity Through True Family Values" seminars are the product of True Family Values Ministry and are co-sponsored by the Washington Times Foundation and the International Religious

Foundation. The conferences began last June and continued weekly throughout the rest of the year. They were held at the Sheraton National Hotel in the nation's capital.

A flyer, describing the meetings, called the program "A series of ecumenical conferences in Washington, D.C., uniting Baptists, COGICs [Church of God in Christ], Apostolics, Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Unificationists, Episcopalians, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Mormons, Adventists, Evangelicals and Muslims in joint effort to revive the God-centered family." Another brochure said the forum was "Acclaimed by Clergy throughout the Nation."

The founder of True Family Values Ministry is the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church.

Highlights of the four-day events included a video presentation by Moon of "a unique view of the principle of the providential history of salvation," other "multimedia presentations" and a tour of the Unification Church-owned *Washington Times* newspaper.

Moon claims that on Easter Sunday in 1936, Jesus appeared to him telling him that he had been selected to finish the work of the Messiah. He further teaches that Jesus failed in his role as the Messiah when he died on the cross.

—MKG

LDS LEADER ADMITS SEXUAL ABUSE CHARGES

A spokesman for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has admitted molesting a 14-year-old girl. Lloyd Gerald Pond, 51, host of the Mormon church's "Times and Seasons" radio program and director of the church's radio news services, was originally charged with two counts of forced sodomy, but pleaded guilty to a less serious charge of sexual abuse.

A number of radio stations reported dropping the nationally syndicated broadcast after Pond was charged. The LDS church announced Nov. 22 that Pond had resigned and that it would recall its programs featuring him.

Pond will be sentenced Feb. 3 and could receive up to 15 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

—KAM