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Multiplying Ministries

The opinions in this public service packet, which consists largely of magazine and newspaper reports, do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Cult Awareness Network, its staff, directors, or advisors. The compilation of a packet on a particular group does not necessarily mean that it is a cult or is destructive, only that CAN receives inquiries about it.



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BY DANIEL TERRIS

In 1979 the Boston Church of Christ had 30 members. Today it holds services in the Boston Garden. Why is it so popular—and so controversial?

COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL

The parquet floor is gleaming. The Celtics and Bruins banners hang solemnly from the rafters. The illuminated signs advertise light beer and soft drinks.

But the scoreboard is dark. No basketballs are clanging off the rims. No cameras flash on the sidelines. Indeed, there is no one on the court at all. Instead, there is a lectern facing away from the court, and congregated in one end of the arena, 2,200 people are raising their voices in a resonant hymn.

It is Sunday morning in the Boston Garden, and this is a weekly service of the Boston Church of Christ. A year ago the church was conducting services in the Boston Opera House. From 1980 to 1983, services were held in the Baptist church in Arlington. And as recently as 1979 it was a struggling church in Lexington with just 30 members.

Under the leadership of a 32-year-old evangelist named Kip McKean, the Boston Church of Christ has embarked on a mission of aggressive recruiting that began on college campuses and has spread into the high-tech marketplace, attracting young professionals in the metropolitan area. Five years ago the Boston Church of Christ was 80 percent college students; today the largest single group is unmarried young professionals.

Claiming that they are "laying aside the traditions of men" and "restoring New Testament Christianity," the leaders of the Boston Church of Christ have urged upon members an ambitious program of "discipleship." As one church bulletin puts it, "Whether we are a teen, college student, single adult, single parent, married adult, or senior adult; we must realize that we can effect *great numbers* for the cause of Christ."

The church has achieved its large membership at a price. Many young people who have turned to it in search of structure and community have left the church emotionally spent. The Boston church, they claim, demands total commitment and obedience and fosters an abject dependence on the group. "What they say is that if you're not converting people, there must be sin in your life," says Robert Ludlum of Boston, who was a member for four years before leaving the church in

1984. "It got to the point in my life that I felt guilty for everything that I did." Robert Thornburg, the university chaplain at Marsh Chapel at Boston University, calls the Boston Church of Christ a "destructive religious group," claiming that "the church seems to have concern only for reduplication of its own kind."

At the Boston Garden, shortly after the hymn, neatly dressed young men walk up and down the aisles, passing gold-colored collection plates. Bills and checks pile up on the platters. (Later in the week, a church bulletin will reveal that the amount surpassed \$35,000.)

After the platters are whisked away, McKean steps to the lectern. A mesmerizing speaker, he alternates between casual Southern humor and old-fashioned New England hellfire. He speaks this morning on the "fires of revival," recalling with admiration the evangelizing fervor of the apostles. "We like to think our congregation is big," McKean proclaims. "We had 3,000 people here on Bring-a-Neighbor Day, and we thought that was great. But 3,000 was the *smallest* that the Jerusalem church ever was. Peter and the apostles converted 3,000 people in *one day*."

Many of the congregants jot down McKean's phrases in well-worn notebooks. The diversity of the group is striking: There are few large public gatherings in Boston at which one can find so many people of so many races gathered in a common purpose.

"*Three thousand people*," McKean reiterates. "Wouldn't it have been great to be in Jerusalem on that day?"

DANIEL TERRIS IS CODIRECTOR OF MOSAIC, A COMMUNITY STUDIES PROGRAM AT SOUTH BOSTON HIGH SCHOOL. HIS ARTICLE ABOUT COLLEGE CHAPLAINS APPEARED IN THE MARCH 23 *GLIBCE* 116:1215

Each Church of Christ is completely autonomous. An indigenous American church that evolved during the 19th century, the Church of Christ has no denominational hierarchy. The 1.2 million people in Church of Christ congregations across the country are concentrated mostly in the South, and their theological bent tends to be conservative, though there has been widening diversity in the last four decades. Besides the Boston congregation, there are several Churches of Christ in the Boston area, each entirely independent and none with more than 200 members. (The Church of Christ should not be confused with the United Church of Christ, an inheritor of the New England Congregational tradition.)

Kip McKean was a student at the University of Florida in Gainesville in the early 1970s when he was recruited for the ministry by a charismatic preacher named Chuck Lucas. The Crossroads Church of Christ, where Lucas was the minister, was already known for its rapid growth and for a controversy that arose at the nearby University of Florida. Lucas taught strict adherence to the Bible, but his special emphasis was on the concept of "discipleship," or one-on-one conversion. Many churches, including Churches of Christ, embrace this idea, but Lucas developed a particularly intense version. He drew on such texts as Robert Coleman's *Master Plan of Evangelism*, which teaches that Jesus controlled the lives of the apostles, that Jesus taught the apostles to "disciple" by controlling the lives of others, and that Christians should imitate this process when bringing people to Christ.

More than 30 of Lucas' young recruits fanned out across the country in the mid-1970s, attaching themselves to existing Church of Christ congregations, usually near college campuses. In places as far apart as California, Colorado, and Florida, the adherents of the

Crossroads Movement, as it came to be called, were involved in controversy in the church and in the communities where Lucas' recruits worked.

A publication from a mainstream Church of Christ organization in Alabama attacked the Crossroads techniques for going beyond commonly accepted discipleship practices. Organizations that monitor what they call "destructive religious groups" began to keep files on the spreading movement.

In 1976 McKean became the campus minister for the Heritage Chapel Church of Christ, near Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, Illinois. Within three years, student membership at the church jumped from 20 to 180. A series of articles in the local newspaper in April 1979 explored charges that "tactics of manipulation and control were being used in the church program." Church leaders responded by saying they did not "apologize for wanting to share Christ with people." In June of the same year, McKean came east to Lexington, Massachusetts.

The young preacher found the many colleges in the Boston area fertile ground for converts — the "fruit" that the Crossroads philosophy sought to produce. In the three years before McKean arrived, there were two baptisms at the Lexington Church of Christ. In his first three years at the church, there were 750. By 1983, the Lexington Church of Christ (as the Boston church was called before it moved into the Opera House later that year) had grown from 30 members to more than 1,000. In 1986 the Boston Church of Christ boasts more than 1,800 members. Members meet on Wednesday nights in local "house churches," and the church sponsors nearly 300 Bible talks weekly within Route 495. Sixty full-time employees collect paychecks from church headquarters, still located in Lexington.

The Boston Church of Christ calls for a return to

"first-century Christianity," and its members look to the New Testament as the divine revelation of God and the ultimate reference text in any moral question. While liberal church groups have recently begun to look back to the first century for the roots of Christian pacifism, equality between the sexes, and the philosophy of challenging authority, the Boston Church of Christ looks primarily to the dramatic conversion experiences described in the book of Acts. The theological underpinnings of the Boston church are similar to those of other Churches of Christ; it is in its methods, particularly its emphasis on discipleship, that it parts ways with mainstream Church of Christ congregations. These methods have made the Boston church by far the fastest-growing Church of Christ in the country.

Although "first-century Christianity" suggests a return to a simple church structure, the Boston church depends on an intricate pattern of leadership. Older Christians serve as one-on-one instructors to younger members; more experienced members aspire to serve as Bible-talk leaders and leaders of "house church" sessions, held in neighborhood homes.

Women and men rise along separate tracks, though only men may serve as the deacons, evangelists, and elders, who set the tone for the church as a whole. The church requires no formal ordination for its ministers.

McKean has encountered much the same controversy in Boston that other Crossroads-trained ministers have experienced around the country. Longtime members of the original Lexington church claimed they were pushed out by the new regime. *Nutshell*, a national magazine for college students, published an article in 1983 linking the Lexington church with other "hard-sell religions." In 1985 the television news magazine *Chronicle* broadcast a story on allegations that the Boston church was using high-pressure recruiting tactics at Boston University.

The Boston church has recently tried to put some distance between itself and the Crossroads Movement, especially since the abrupt resignation of Chuck Lucas from the Crossroads Church of Christ last summer. Perhaps as part of this distancing, the Boston church has billed itself as the "Boston School for World Missions," and it is actively formi-

Janet Knott, *The Boston G.*



Kip McKean, 32, leader of the Boston Church of Christ.

ing similarly oriented churches around the country and the world. It has sponsored the establishment of congregations in New York, Chicago, Toronto, and London, with "plantings" planned for this year in Johannesburg, Stockholm, Paris, and Bombay. The Boston Church of Christ appears to be becoming the unofficial headquarters of a worldwide sect.

Gerry Fernandez was working as a proctor at a dormitory at Northeastern University in 1980 when he was approached by a fellow student who introduced himself as Jerry Chan.

Fernandez says that Chan was pleased to discover they had the same name. Big deal, Fernandez remembers thinking. There must be around a million Jerrys and Gerrys in the world. He tried to look busy with his books.

But Chan persisted and found out that Fernandez, like Chan, was an engineering student at Northeastern. Chan asked Fernandez whether he had ever read the Bible. Fernandez had to admit he was not terribly familiar with the Scriptures. He had grown up in a liberal Catholic family in Venezuela, and in the year and a half that he had been studying in Boston he had not really had any formal ties with religion. Fernandez remembers that Chan convinced him to have an open mind, to take a closer look at the Word, as Chan put it. When Fernandez hesitated, Chan agreed to work with him one-on-one.

"Why do you think they started their work on college campuses?" Fernandez asks today. "People are away from their families, and the younger generation is the most susceptible. We have that trend toward finding the truth, so we're the most susceptible to mind control and behavior modification."

Fernandez recalls that the first time he attended the services of the Lexington Church of Christ, he was "smothered in love." He began to attend more services and more Bible studies, and developed "a nice social life" in the church.

Fernandez felt comfortable with this group of people, but he recalls that after a few weeks he began to get the feeling that he was slightly left out. He remembers learning in Bible studies, led by Jim Lloyd, a Boston Church of Christ minister working on the Northeastern campus, that people could not be saved without having a conscious baptism in a community of true Christians. Fernandez remembers Lloyd's saying that an earlier baptism in a church that did not follow the Bible did not count. Fernandez was hesitant. Lloyd applied no direct pressure, but the message was unmistakable, Fernandez says. "One day Jim came over and gave me a big hug and made a big show of calling me 'brother' in front of all these other people. Then he stopped short, as though he'd made a big mistake, and said, 'I'm sorry, Gerry. I forgot you're not a brother. You've been around for so long that I forget that you have not been baptized yet.'"

"Eventually," Fernandez says, "I had no choice. I felt like I had to join. They were so nice all the time and never seemed to have any problems. After a while you feel like if you're not involved in this kind of thing, you're no good."

One conversation in the days leading up to his baptism shook Fernandez deeply. He remembers that Lloyd sat him down and took him through the Bible, passage by passage, telling him that the structures and rituals of the Catholic church contradict God's will as expressed in the New Testament. "At the end of two paragraphs," Fernandez remembers, "I was so sad and depressed I started to cry. I didn't have my mother to talk to. I didn't have my father to talk to. And religion — you want to talk about that kind of thing with your family."

Six months after he became involved, Fernandez was, as he puts it, "eating, sleeping, and living" with other members of the Boston Church of Christ. Called a "baby Christian" in the period immediately after his baptism, Fernandez was encouraged to move in with other church members, and he continued to spend all his time with his new church friends.

Within a few weeks of his baptism, Fernandez's Bible-study friends and the campus minister began to drop hints that Fernandez should go out and spread the Word. He was taught how to strike up conversations, how to use different approaches with different people. Bearing fruit for the church, Fernandez was told again and again, is the only way to continue to serve Jesus, the only way to be a Christian.

Before he had been baptized, Fernandez had gotten to know a church member named Nancy, and he asked her out. After their first date, church protocol required that he speak with Nancy's Bible-talk leader, since a second date was considered an indication of some involvement, and the teachings of the church are quite strict and precise regarding appropriate behavior between men and women. ("Imagine a 20-year-old man asking a 24-year-old woman for permission to take out a 21-year-old woman," Fernandez says today.) The Bible-talk leader was not very enthusiastic. "Nancy's been doing 'C' work lately," she told Fernandez, meaning that Nancy had been lax about the requirements and evangelizing. Fernandez himself was considered an "A" worker.

Fernandez managed to get permission to date Nancy anyway, but it turned out that the counselor was right: Nancy left the church before she and Fernandez could go out on a second date. "Once she left, I wasn't even supposed to talk to her, much less go out with her," Fernandez recalls. He used the excuse of trying to win her back to the church to visit her, but when his efforts did not pay off, the leaders put pressure on him to drop her and spend his time with more active prospects.

Fernandez remained a member of the Boston Church of Christ on and off for 2½ years. His

gregarious nature and his success at bringing people to the church made him an excellent prospect for rising in the unofficial hierarchy. He believed passionately in the Bible, and he cheerfully devoted himself to doing God's work. For a time he was an assistant Bible leader, though he felt himself unworthy of the post. But he discovered that when he did things that church members did not encourage — such as visiting his family in South America — his church friends subtly withdrew. Although he left his address and phone number, he heard from none of his church friends while he was away. And at a time when the church had become nearly his whole world, such a withdrawal was devastating.

The world of the church became increasingly confining, and Fernandez found himself exploring other options. He attended the Burlington Church of Christ for a time and found its less intense approach more to his liking. But he continued to spend time around the Boston church, for there were still many people he liked and cared about there. It was not until he stopped attending altogether that he began to resent the strictures that church membership had placed upon him. "They talk about love and care," he says now. "When I was away they didn't have the decency to call me or drop a line. Not one of them were really my friends. They'll say it's my own selfish reaction, but all they care about is the number of baptisms and what the contribution is every week."

Since he left the Boston Church of Christ in 1983, Gerry Fernandez has become an outspoken critic of the church, and he has been active in keeping potential converts from joining the group. "Now I use the same techniques to get people out of the church that I used to get them in. I try to win their friendship first." But the difference, he says, is that he is using these techniques to enhance freedom of thought, not restrict it.

To Steve Hassan, the testimonies of people such as Gerry Fernandez indicate that the Boston Church of Christ uses a form of mind control to keep its members in line. As a young man Hassan spent two years in Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, and he has spent most of the decade since he left the Unification Church developing a noncoercive approach to helping people readjust after they leave "destructive religious groups."

Hassan, who has never been a member of the Boston Church of Christ but who has talked with many former members, claims that every part of the Boston Church of Christ program is designed to restrict freedom of thought and encourage so much dependence on the group that the individual feels there is no life outside the church itself. The warm reception given to Fernandez, says Hassan, is "love-bombing," a technique used by many groups, including the Unification Church. The frenetic pace of church activity and the insistence upon socializing within the group make independence almost impossible and render reluc-

tant members extremely vulnerable to isolation and depression if they do choose to leave, he says. The Boston Church of Christ is part of a nationwide "shepherding movement," Hassan says, and he claims that this phenomenon, which also includes Maranatha Campus Ministries and The Way, is the fastest-growing type of destructive group in the country.

Other former members of the Boston Church of Christ echo Fernandez's complaints about the rigidity of the church. Susan Grundy, who left the church in 1984, recalls the all-consuming nature of church activities. "I don't remember having a good nourishing meal," she says. "We weren't supposed to be spending enough time in the apartment to fix a full dinner." Grundy's church work kept her busy until well after midnight, and she found herself falling asleep at her daytime secretarial job. "They watched us very closely," she says of church members. "When they didn't know where I was, they'd ask other people to check up on me." Grundy eventually began to act the part of a conscientious member, turning in fictitious lists of potential converts and slipping away to go out for dinner when church members thought she was evangelizing. When she finally left the church, Grundy had nightmares. "I remember waking up in a cold sweat and thinking I have to go back." It took her nearly a year to work up the courage to speak with an Episcopal priest about her fears.

Kecia Henderson, who rose quickly in the ranks of the Boston Church of Christ while an undergraduate at Northeastern, claims that the pressures the church puts on its members are seldom direct. Once she was heavily involved in the church, Henderson let her studies go, dropping courses after several weeks and using the tuition refunds to help support church activities. While she says that no church leader would have specifically condoned this practice, she says the leaders encouraged such an intense relationship to the church that she felt that this was the right thing to do. When she herself became a Bible-talk leader, she exercised such a powerful sway over the "sisters" in her study group that they would call her to report on one another's "sinful activities." Henderson did not suggest this practice, but she played on the reliance of her students on her approval. Her own questioning of the rigidity of the doctrine eventually led her away from the church, she says, and members were shocked that a leader so devoted and committed would leave the group.

Robert Ludlum says he began slipping away from the church after he was discovered kissing another man, a particularly grievous sin in a church that explicitly condemns homosexuality. But Ludlum found it nearly impossible to break away, even after Kip McKean ordered him to stay away from his lover, Ludlum says. When Ludlum finally worked up the courage to leave, he says, "I had to start my life all over again. My whole life revolved around the church. There was a big void."

vices merely prepares "young Christians" to accept the rigidity of the law when laid down in one-on-one sessions with Bible-talk leaders and other "older Christians."

It is, in any case, church doctrine that being a Christian is tough work. "In the movie *Rocky*," reads a recent church bulletin, "the hero was always being punched in the head. The manager in *Rocky IV* coined a phrase: 'No pain.' As a Christian, you must have this mental attitude. God allows Satan to cause you pain because He is testing your faith and dependence on him. Adversity often makes you want to quit. You must resist this discouragement by having the attitude that there is no pain you will not endure for spiritual victory. No pain!"

In some ways, the criticisms of former members and the appreciations of current members sound similar. Church members vigorously deny charges of mind control, yet they are eager to explain that a Christian life demands sacrifice and structure, and they freely acknowledge their "aggressive" approach to evangelism. The conflict lies in differing conceptions of freedom and morality.

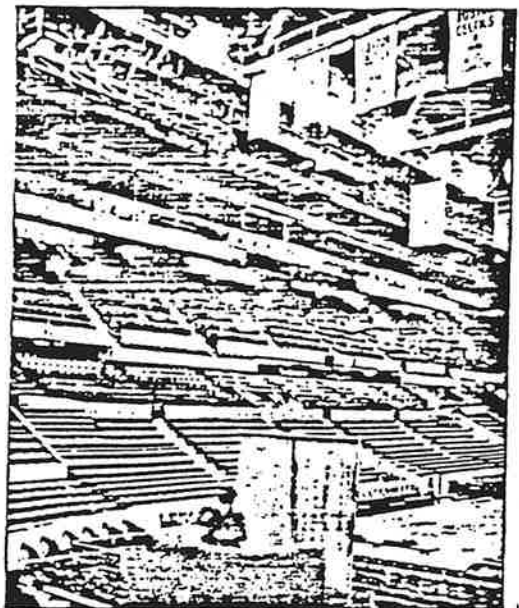
The Boston Church of Christ's teachings are clearly conservative for the Boston of the 1980s. Rev. Frank Fairbairn of St. Ann's University Parish in the Fenway, a Catholic parish that serves several Boston-area colleges and universities, considers himself a conservative on moral issues. Still, he is concerned that the quick conversions make young people vulnerable to the damaging effects of a rigidly imposed morality. Fairbairn has answered frantic calls from roommates and parents of students who are going through a radical change and distancing themselves from those around them. The beauty of mainstream churches, Fairbairn says, "is that they hold things in tension — sin and righteousness. The Boston Church of Christ's system is intolerant." Fairbairn distinguishes between the Boston Church of Christ and other fundamentalist groups, which

he says have the "virtue of tolerance" that allows them to co-exist with mainline groups.

Many campus ministers believe that the Boston Church of Christ's practices violate American and academic principles of freedom of thought. "Their campus procedures follow almost identically the techniques of other destructive religious groups," says Robert Thornburg, the dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University, comparing their recruiting practices with those of Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church. Although convinced that the Boston Church of Christ is "potentially destructive to all and actually destructive to many," Thornburg recommended four years ago that the group be recognized as an official organization on campus. Thornburg points out that "the university is the last place where we can afford to suppress ideas," and he believes that campus recognition enables the administration to keep closer tabs on the church's activities.

The Boston Church of Christ has become experienced in responding to its religious and secular critics. "Cultlike groups tend to be deceptive and manipulative, whereas we're up front with people," says Al Baird, one of the elders of the Boston church and its principal spokesman. Eager to maintain a positive public image, the church has tended to act quickly on specific complaints. When Thornburg expressed concern that the burden of church activities was having a detrimental effect on the grades of BU students, Baird asked his ministers to have students report their grades to the church. The next Sunday, Kip McKean preached on the importance of academic achievement, and a tape of the sermon was sent to the dean.

In responding to those who suggest the Boston church has cultlike aspects, church leaders acknowledge mistakes and pin them on "overzealous members." "Some idealistic youth try to ram ideas down people's throats," says Baird. "We try to encourage youth to be gentle."



Kip McKean at Boston Garden: "Not everybody is going to appreciate your Christianity."

It is hard to imagine, however, that any church member could be more zealous in expounding church philosophy than McKean himself. In his "fires of revival" sermon, McKean accused his congregants of lacking intensity because in the first two months of this year the Boston church was baptizing new members at the same rate for the year (703) as it was in 1985. Since there are more Christians now, McKean said, the rate should be higher. "As we get older, we should, like Paul, be getting more and more and more intense."

Former members such as Susan Grundy charge that the pressure to evangelize came as a surprise in the weeks after baptism, but Baird says that if baptized members did not understand that they were expected to evangelize, they either willfully misunderstood or were taught poorly before their baptisms. It is a clear expectation of the church that those who join will disciple. "We try to get away from a clergy-laity thing," he explains.

The expectation that every member will disciple has led one mainstream Church of Christ scholar to question the emphasis on conformity in the Boston church. Flavil Yeakley is director of the Church Growth Institute at Abilene Christian University, a

church-affiliated school in Abilene, Texas, and as such is sympathetic to the process of rapid church expansion. In the spring of 1985 Yeakley conducted a series of psychological tests on recent converts to the Boston church, and from those tests he concluded that there was an alarming movement among these members toward a similar personality type — with an emphasis on extroversion, judgment, and sensory rather than intuitive perception. This type mirrored in many respects the profiles of the church leaders, to whom Yeakley also administered the tests. Those results, he told church leaders, indicated a dangerous emphasis on conformity which could potentially lead to severe psychological damage.

The church leaders' first response was to dismiss the substance of some of Yeakley's findings and claim that the church leaders were making improvements. They told Yeakley they believed that the personality profile he was finding was a byproduct of the conversion experience. (Yeakley claims he has not found this to be true in other churches.) The leaders explained that they expected 100 percent of their members to be involved in evangelism, and these traits suited the evangelical profile. But after further discussion, they moderated their statements and agreed to

“I try to interest myself in all aspects of the student,” says Bob Tranchell, the Boston Church of Christ minister at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. “A lot of religions are out of touch with real life.” For Tranchell, the church’s all-encompassing approach is one of its strengths. When he was first attracted to the group as a college student, he was intrigued because “for the first time, I saw people who tried to live out their faith — not just on Sunday mornings, but through the whole week.”

Tranchell and his wife, Laurie, lead half a dozen weekly Bible talks for UMass-Boston students. (The church is recognized simply as a student activity on campus.) Bob leads the coeducational groups. Laurie leads two separate women’s groups. In the Boston Church of Christ, men generally disciple and counsel men, and women disciple women. Only men, however, can preach or speak out in church, and only men can aspire to leadership positions within the church as a whole.

At a recent Wednesday afternoon Bible talk, a dozen UMass students meet with Bob and Laurie Tranchell in a windowless classroom at the Harbor campus. Bob sports a red-white-and-blue T-shirt, jeans, and black sneakers. He speaks with the hint of a casual Southern accent, clipping the “g’s” off the end of his gerunds. He was raised in Buffalo; like other longtime church members raised in the North, he seems to have absorbed traces of Kip McKean’s manner of speaking. A specific church vocabulary informs the discussion. Bob and Laurie talk a lot about having “a relationship with God,” and students speak of themselves as “convicted” by the Word.

“Name the one thing you would most like to have in your dream house,” Bob asks the group at the beginning of his talk. Students talk about stereos and fireplaces and windows. Bob himself suggests that he wouldn’t mind a full sports arena. But calling their attention to Matthew 7, he points out that all of them have eschewed the practical in favor of luxuries. “What good is it to have an Olympic-size swimming pool,” he asks, “if the first good rain is going to wash it down the hill?”

Drawing on several texts, Bob stresses the importance of building on a “good foundation. That foundation is the Bible itself.” Students contribute their thoughts about the various “storms” in their lives — financial crises, family problems, career decisions — and Bob consistently guides the conversation back to the Bible. “You don’t cram different concepts and philosophies into Christianity,” he tells students, when speaking of academic studies. “You don’t take a little Freud and a little Jung and try to mix it in. The only foundation is Jesus Christ. That way, when you’re tested, the foundation will remain.”

The content of Boston Church of Christ Bible talks is relatively uniform. Each discussion, rigid-

ly orchestrated, drives toward an uncomplicated concluding question. At the Wednesday session, it was “Will you lay a foundation on the rock, or on the sand that shifts?” These talks do not include disagreements on interpretations of the Scriptures, nor do they attempt to explore the intricacies of the Gospel. Church members say there is a consensus on interpretation of the Word. “We read it as it’s written,” says Laurie Tranchell. “If I find a gray area, a lot of times it’s just my own ignorance. It just takes more study or talk with people who know the Scriptures a lot better than I do.”

Bob and Laurie Tranchell’s students are eager to share what they have found in the Boston Church of Christ, though they are skeptical about talking to the press. But their leaders have prepared them for criticism from the outside world. By calling themselves “first-century Christians,” members of the Boston Church of Christ can point to contemporary criticism as an analogue to the persecution of the apostles. “Not everybody is going to appreciate your Christianity,” Kip McKean told them in the Sunday sermon. “You can’t count on positive feedback from people; you have to count on that feedback from God.”

Kevin Vance credits the Boston Church of Christ with helping him put behind him a life of drinking, drugs, and partying. Raised in the Baptist church, Vance had become disillusioned with religion by the time he was a college student. “All I knew was: If it’s Baptist, it’s okay. But it was superficial. There was no warmth, no love, no anything.” He started attending Bible studies with members of his college track team, and he was soon baptized in the Boston Church of Christ. “Once I became a Christian,” he says, “I saw that I had a purpose in life.” He is impressed by the “sincerity of the people” in the Boston church, and he says that this spirit rubs off on him. “I struggle to read my Bible. I struggle to pray. I want to do what’s

right, and I do it because I want to do it.” Vance acknowledges that sometimes evangelism is “not fun. It’s not easy talking to people with bad attitudes. But in the long run, if I can just reach one more person, it’s one more person going to heaven.”

The UMass students generally attend four formal church activities each week: Sunday services, Wednesday-night house churches, a Friday-night college student “devotional,” and at least one Bible talk. Most live with other church members and juggle academic work, jobs, and church functions. For Martine Bissainthe, who lives with her family in Dorchester, the fullness of her commitment to the church has created a strain with relatives who find her “too holy” and too seldom at home, but she says that ultimately they respect her zeal.

Donna Martell, who is studying education at UMass-Boston, calls the role of women in the Boston church “really good” and says she looks forward to leading Bible studies for women and to a “Christian marriage, where the husband is the leader.” She denies that there are formal dating arrangements in the church, but she says, “I would never consider dating anyone outside the church. What would be the point?” The Bible, she says, is clear on women leaders: “I have no problems having women lead classes, but I’ve seen women preachers [in other churches], and it just seems unnatural to me.”

These students acknowledge that there are tremendous challenges in their faith, but they say the pressures they feel to work at their Christianity and share it with others come from the Bible, not from the Boston Church of Christ hierarchy. On this point, there is a virtual impasse between the church and its critics. Gerry Fernandez and Steve Hassan claim that the human controls on members’ environments are so strong that the members can no longer separate internal pressures from those of the group. Fernandez claims that the relatively innocuous tone of the public Bible talks and ser-

implement some changes. As they did with Thornburg, church leaders sent Yeakley a tape of a sermon, this one extolling the virtues of a church member who was not primarily a successful evangelist. Yeakley believes that the Boston Church of Christ has made significant improvements in its methods in the last year, but he has not yet returned to Boston to do follow-up studies to document these changes.

Jim Woodroof, the minister of the Burlington Church of Christ and the author of a book on the Crossroads Movement, believes, as does Yeakley, that while the Boston church is still "machinery-heavy," it has come "a step away from the rigidity of Gainesville." Woodroof concedes, "Some people say it's cultish, but any time someone believes something strongly, they'll almost run over you." Woodroof points to the lack of growth of his own Burlington church and says that his church and the Boston church have much to learn from each other. "None of us are balanced," he says. "We're all lopsided. We can put up with imperfection, if they're committed to maturing."

But Shaun Casey, the minister of the Brookline Church of Christ, is not convinced by reports of moderation. Casey says he has been hearing reports about improvement in Crossroads churches for 10 years, but he still has to devote "a tremendous amount of time and energy" as a pastor in dealing with the problems of those who have left the Boston church. "I have seen the human wreckage," he says. "The pressure that is brought to bear is true." He questions whether a group that discourages free-flowing discussion and diversity can achieve real change. The Brookline minister's deepest concern is that the church is ultimately turning off huge numbers of people to faith altogether. "I worry about the tremendous number of refugees who seemingly reject religion out of hand, people who are walking the streets saying, 'If that is the church, if that is Christ, if that is God, then I don't want any part of it.'"

The Boston church's limited contact with the outside world seems to argue against the possibility of moderation. It has next to no relationship with other churches, and at colleges in the Boston area its ministers maintain the bare minimum of contact with other campus ministers. The church takes no positions on questions of politics, and its institutional involvement in community service is limited to its own membership and to evangelism.

Church members do not apologize for their apolitical stance. "You can't apply God's standards to people who don't live by them," says Bob Tranchell. He cites the church's new mission in South Africa, where he hopes that "the power and example of a church where blacks and whites get along" will help society. The South African government, eager to attract white professionals, offered to pay 80 percent of the plane fare for the white church members who were relocating

in Johannesburg, but refused to pay anything for the black members of the mission team. The Boston church had no qualms about accepting this support.

"The only way ultimately to help people is to help them become Christians," says church member Donna Martell. To church members, the act of giving is meaningless without passing on God's word. "What good will it do to patch people up but not help them spiritually?" asks Kevin Vance. "What good does it do to give food to a starving man and not say anything, thinking, 'I know I'm going to heaven, but this guy over here will use up the food and money I give him and still be lost?'"

The Boston church thrives on numbers. It counts and publishes how many people attend its weekly services, how many attend house churches, how many are baptized, how many churches it can establish. Former members Gerry Fernandez and Susan Grundy claim this counting pervades every part of daily life: How many church functions do you attend? How many hours do you spend in Bible study? How many people have you brought to Christ? How much have you given to the church this week? When the numbers are not increasing quickly enough, Kip McKean preaches on "the fires of revival."

By the church's own estimates, one-fifth of its baptized members fall away from the congregation, but leaders expect that not everyone will be able to live up to the church's strict standards. Although proud of attracting diversity ("from surgeons to streetcleaners," as Baird, the elder, puts it), church leaders place great emphasis on the Ivy League background of many of its ministers, and on the appeal of its teachings to doctors, physicists, and workers in the computer industry.

"It's the American dream of equating success and growth," says Shaun Casey, the minister of the Brookline Church of Christ. Calling its leaders "pragmatists first, Biblicists second," Casey says that the Boston church represents "the secularization of evangelical churches." Its technique is "a thinly veiled form of a business motif. The best corporation is a fastly growing corporation. With some of the flesh stripped away, the ideology of the Boston Church of Christ would pass for Amway or Mary Kay."

The Boston Church of Christ is flourishing in the America of the 1980s, perhaps because it offers a return to simple, clear-cut approaches to complex problems. It believes in structure, discipline, unwavering morality. And it looks forward to continued "exponential growth."

The Boston Church of Christ speaks to the current national mood, and it is becoming, in the words of Kip McKean, "more and more and more intense." •