

Newspaper Articles-1980-83

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About

The Church Without a Name, The Truth, Two By Twos, *Two by Twos*

October 29, 1981, **Impartial Reporter** (Enniskillen, N. Ireland)

When "the Dippers" had Their First Baptisms

RE: Eddie Cooney

June 11, 1982, **Union Bulletin** (Walla Walla, Washington)

RE: Convention at Walla Walla, WA

#1 Gospel Tent Meeting Draws 800 Participants for Spiritual Fellowship; By Steve Maynard

#2 Fellowship Holds to Traditional Christian Beliefs, but its Practices Differ

August 5, 1982, Milford (N.H.) Cabinet and Wilton Journal, (Milford, New Hampshire)

RE: Convention at Milford

#1 Multitude of faithful flocks to Milford every year

#2 Sampling the Convention

"The origin of the Church, if there ever was an identifiable time, place or person has been lost to time. There hasnt been any time of founding. There's no year or names of founders." Stephen said, "The only foundation is the teaching of Christ. The message is the foundation and that has always been to get back to Christ." *spoken by Charles Steffen (deceased Overseer of New York & New England States) The Milford (N.H.) Cabinet and Wilton Journal, Milford, New Hampshire, 8/5/1982.*

June 5, 1983, Pg 1 – **Spokesman Review** (Spokane, Washington)

RE: Convention at Post Falls, ID

Two by Twos: Victims of Anonymous Cult? By Bart Preecs

June 5, 1983 – Nameless Congregation Holds Strong Grip on Faithful; By Bart Preecs

Skagit Valley Herald (Mt. Vernon, Washington)

RE: Convention at Milltown, WA

By Kathleen Hosfeld

Aug 30, 1982, Pg 1 – No-Name Church Meets for Convention

Aug 17, 1983, Pg 1 – Criticism Clouds Church's Gathering

Aug 18, 1983, Pg 1-2 – Former Members of No-Name Church Continue Quiet Protest

Bellingham Herald (Bellingham, Washington)

RE: Convention at Milltown, WA

By Kathie Anderson

Aug 20, 1983, Pg 1 – Religious Sect Follows Different Path

Aug 20, 1983, Pg 4A – Church Without a Name Meets Again Amid Controversy

Sept 13, 1983, Pg 3 – **Los Angeles Times** (Los Angeles, California)

RE: Convention at Santee, California – Norman and Kathy Tinklepaugh

Obscure, Silent Nameless Sect Travels 'Secret' Path; By Russell Chandler

Sept 17, 1983, Pg 2CS – **Sarasota Herald-Tribune** (Sarasota, Florida)

'Nameless Church' Members Gather For Meeting

Same article as LA Times listed above by Russell Chandler (LA Times – Washington Post News Service)

RE: Santee, California Convention – Norman and Kathy Tinklepaugh

When “the Dippers” had Their First Baptisms in Ballycassidy River Is this a Revival of “The Dippers”

By Mervyn Dane

The remarkable activities of “The Dippers” or “The Cooneyites” as they were generally called after their founder, the controversial Eddie Cooney, errant son of a wealthy Enniskillen businessman, have been revived by the appearance of a new group in Co. Roscommon who are practicing total immersion.

Like Cooney’s followers, many of whom had broken away from the Church of Ireland, and the Methodist Church, and other congregations, the group at Ballaghaderreen have broken away from the Roman Catholic church in which they grew up.

The birth of the movement is causing concern among the hierarchy of the RC church and efforts are being made to stem its growth.

At one stage in the early 1900’s the Cooneyite conventions at Crocknacrieve, home of the late John West, attracted thousands and many who were “born again” and joined the ranks of Cooney’s followers were baptized in the Ballinamallard river, just as members of the new group, rejecting the Catholic religion, have been baptized in Lough Gara.

BISHOP’S APPEAL

The Bishop of Achonry, Dr. Flynn, has issued an appeal to the dissidents to return to their church. But the appeal has been rejected so far.

A leading role in the ne group has been taken by Tom Mahon, a 49-year old businessman in Ballaghaderreen. He and his wife, Marion, and a number of others in the area, have adopted a fundamentalist form of Christianity based solely on the Bible and personal revelation from Christ. This is similar in many ways to the teachings of Eddie Cooney and his “Disciples” who at first set out to live and preach exactly as Jesus Christ and his disciples. Cooney turned his back on great family wealth and never wavered in his faith until his death almost 20 years ago in Australia. However, there are still some of his followers to be found in Fermanagh, various parts of Ireland, and even in Australia and the United States.

CONTROVERSY

There is still intense interest in the founding of the Cooneyite faith and researchers have travelled from distant parts of Australia and the United States on numerous occasions to study reports of the early conventions at Crocknacrieve and the controversy which surrounded Eddie Cooney and his followers as recorded in the files of the “Impartial Reporter.”

Just as Eddie Cooney stopped attending St. Macartin’s Cathedral in Enniskillen with his family, Mr. Mahon in Ballaghaderreen and his wife are reported to have given up attending their local Mass. They and their friends have a prayer fellowship which arose from meetings of the charismatic movement which began about six years earlier in the village.

In an interview in the “Irish Times” Mr. Mahon is quoted in saying that he was never a religious person.

INVOLVED WITH I.R.A.

“My wife was in the charismatic movement before I was and I thought it was crazy. Then after a while, seeing her and the others in it I knew my life was wrong. I was involved with the IRA but the Lord convinced me I was wrong.” Mr. Mahon said he was an alcoholic who once had been hospitalized for drink but “the Lord healed me of that.” He had been a member of Alcoholics Anonymous until he joined the charismatics.

In order to embrace fully his next form of religion. Mr. Mahon was baptized by total immersion in Lough Gara, north of Ballaghaderreen, last summer. He felt he had to be baptized as an adult because “Jesus says, “Believe and be baptized and you can’t...(text missing)

BAPTISMS

Mr. Mahon confirmed that a number of total immersion baptisms had been carried out in Lough Gara.

Mr. Mahon revealed that in recent weeks a young Catholic priest had started going to the meetings. He said they would now have to decide where future meetings would be held but, if necessary, he would hold them in his own garage.

BISHOP AWARE

Dr. Flynn said he is aware of the group’s activities and knows most of them personally. “I don’t think we should be too hard on them. They’re not too far gone yet,” he said.

The Co. Roscommon group is known as the Ballyghaderreen Christian Prayer Fellowship and has severed all connections with the Catholic Church.

The group also has members in Charleston, Co. Mayo, and other towns in the surrounding area. The group meets regularly for prayer meetings, using the Bible as a basis for their beliefs, and reads from scriptures.

FAMILIES

Some 50 people, including a number of families, are involved in the group.

“The situation is very much under review and I don’t think we should close the door on them,” said Dr. Flynn. “Although they have broken away, the door is still open for them.”

Eddie Cooney Admonishes the Scoffers and Jesters

The strange religious sect which became known variously as "The Dippers," "the Cooneyites," (after the founder, Edward Cooney) and the "Pilgrim Tramp" preachers had its birth at Ballinamallard, and the first baptisms were in Ballycassidy river.

Here follows an eyewitness account of baptism service at Ballinamallard written by William Copeland Trimble in the Impartial Reporter in 1904, shortly after the sect had been founded. It proceeds:

[Repeat of article dated September 29, 1904, page 8:]

Ballinamallard has become the Jerusalem of Pilgrim Tramps, and the Ballycassidy River their Jordan. Last Sunday witnessed the baptism of about 27 Tramps, male and female, and the unusual scene was witnessed by a crowd of interested spectators.

It is right to mention that for the last few weeks a Conference of the Tramp fraternity has been held at Crocknacrieve, which has been converted into a huge hotel by Mr. John West for his numerous guests, over 120 are said to be accommodated in the house alone.

Hither flocked Tramps from Scotland, England, and Ireland, and so far as the outside world can judge, Mr. Edward Cooney (after whom they are generally called Cooneyites) seems to be the accepted high priest or leader, a post at one time held by Mr. Irwin.

A HIGH CLASS PLAY

On last Saturday night the conclave separated into three parts, the English fraternity speaking on the Diamond of Enniskillen, advocating the denial of self and the effacement of self at the very time that the high class play, 'A Message from Mars' was advocating altruism or 'ortherdom' on the stage of the Townhall. The Scotch band preached in Irvinestown, and the Irish band in Ballinamallard.

One result of the convention was the baptismal ceremony of Sunday. The place first chosen as the scene was the river under the bridge at Ballinamallard, but this place was abandoned for the mill race, and hither a large number of people flocked on Sunday evening, and while they were waiting, to the amusement of the onlookers an unexpected dipping took place, when a young man forcibly pressed a young boy head foremost into the water in imitation of the rite soon to follow.

UNCOMMON CEREMONY

It was found, however, that the water at this place was not deep enough for total immersion, and a place lower down the stream was selected. Hither the whole party of Tramps proceeded and conducted devotional exercises, while all around were a number of spectators anxious to see the uncommon ceremony.

Mr. Edward Cooney delivered an address, in the course of which he spoke of his own experience, how he went out to preach the Gospel, and the commission given at the day of Pentecost. It is but just to say that on this occasion Mr. Cooney made no personal references to his family such as he is unwisely in the habit of indulging.

He proceeded to say that when he became saved he felt constrained to confess Jesus as his Lord. He then referred to the passage, 'Repent, and be baptised and ye shall receive the Holy Ghost,' and pressed upon his hearers, first to repent and then be baptised after the manner of the Scriptures.

Mr. Cooney had no hesitation in affirming his own authority to baptise, his own authority to preach and teach.

I am commissioned, he said, 'By Jesus Christ to declare that you may have your sins remitted.'

REPENT

Having spoken for some time on repentance and having quoted the passage 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,' he gave some of his personal experiences, and related how the death of his elder brother had impressed him seriously, that he resolved to give everything up to the Lord Jesus Christ, not to live in his own strength, but by that given by Him. He then asked them what brought many of them there? Curiosity?

Yes, and he thanked God for that curiosity, as it enabled him to speak to them about the eternal Salvation.

He then referred to John the Baptist baptising our Lord in the river Jordan, and said that in the same way our Lord's disciples must confess His name and be baptised in the same manner as all the baptisms in the scriptures had been carried out.

They were to be baptised, not as the Archbishop of Canterbury said, nor by the manner prescribed by the Moderator of the General Assembly, or the President of the Methodist Conference;

"HE HAS COMMANDED ME"

"But," said Mr. Cooney—"You must follow the example of Jesus of Nazareth, and not only to make disciples of all nations, but to teach them to be baptised in his Name." He then warned scoffers and jesters not to make light of baptism. They should not scoff at what Jesus Christ himself passed through; it would make their hearts harder and deaden them to good influences.

GOOD COMPANY

Perhaps some of them might think he was not good enough company for them, but so long as he followed Jesus Christ he was the best of good company for them, and he would thank them to show him from the Bible where they were not acting up to the Scriptural method of baptism.

Mr. Cooney, at times, dipped into the usual Evangelical method of advising his hearers to repent and to be baptised. Baptism was not necessary for salvation, but just as a wife should live in obedience to her husband, so they should live in obedience to the example of the Lord Himself, and be baptised in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Mr. Cooney, in the course of his remarks, described himself as 'A Tramp Preacher,' and quoted examples of baptism from the Scriptures by adult immersion, from the baptism by John the Baptist of our Lord down to the baptism of Lydia by Paul; and invited any one to show him a proof from the Bible of infant baptism.

DIPPING COMMENCED

Having made an appeal to his hearers to repent in time before it was too late, the dipping ceremony commenced.

The party congregated near the bank of the river and sang a hymn, while those to be immersed undressed themselves in a barn at the mill. As the neophytes approached, the party divided itself into two lines in semi-military fashion, and a Mr. Robert Elliott, formerly of the Dairies, near Derrygonnelly, a strong man of powerful build, clad in woollen shirt and trousers, entered the water up to his waist, while the neophytes came one by one through the living lane made for them.

First came five young men, and Mr. Elliott, repeating the name of the person to be immersed, said—"I baptize thee in the Name of the Father, of the Son, and Holy Ghost."

GIRLS FOLLOW

He then ducked the neophyte completely under the water, neatly, and without splashing; his great strength enabled him to restore the ducked person to an erect position again easily.

Some girls then followed, and the shock of the water was so great to the first girl that it was feared she would faint, but she composed herself sufficiently to go through the ceremony.

Notwithstanding the exhortation not to scoff, some young men were provoked to laughter by the splashing of some of the girls in recovering the erect position, which caused a Scotch Pilgrim subsequently to warn these young men that they would have to answer for it on the Day of Judgment.

ENTHUSIASM

By this time another number of young men had caught the enthusiasm of the moment, and they also decided to be dipped, so that on the whole 27 people received the act of immersion.

The ceremony itself was over half an hour late in starting. Certainly, the manner of clothing of some of them, a coarse shirt and brown jersey, make them anything but clean looking; but it must be said that a few of them did wear the white collars and cuffs at one time discarded by the Tramp community.

It should be said for these Tramps that they have succeeded in influencing several people for good.

EVIL WAYS

Some people who never professed religious views have forsaken their evil ways, and there are many people who would be willing to acknowledge the efforts of these Tramps, and, perhaps, assist them, if they would not be so continually finding fault with the ministers of churches and the churches generally. However, they are not so uncharitable as they used to be, and are continually being reminded of 'Judge not, that ye be not judged,' a saying that they would do well to keep before their eyes.

June 11, 1982

The Walla Walla (WA) Union Bulletin

By Steve Maynard

Gospel Tent Meeting Draws 800 Participants For Spiritual Fellowship

"This Fellowship is not an organization. It's not a sect. It's a Body of Which Christ is the Head."

—Harry Mooradian 83-year-old minister

Uniformity runs deep when 800 souls flock to Ermyl and Annabelle Buell's ranch on Valley Chapel Road for their annual gospel tent meeting. The women—almost without exception—wear long hair wrapped in tight, neat buns on the tops of their heads. Most wear plain clothes. Their faces carry no signs of makeup. Their male counterparts are adorned in polyester shirts and slacks and dark leather shoes. To the man their hair is short – never running over the ears.

Compared to the standards of outsiders, the group's look is conservative—even old-fashioned. Members of the Christian-based fellowship say their teachings and practices are based on the group's only guidepost, the Bible. The Apostle Paul set the standard for men to wear short hair and women long hair in his first letter to the Corinthian church, members of the group say.

Mrs. Buell said the only criticism people levy against the group's adherents is that they "follow the Scripture too close." Singleness of mind went beyond dress at the Buells' annual, four-day tent meeting that concluded last Sunday.

Buell, like others interviewed, attested to the "peace in our hearts" instilled among the fellowship that gathered to hear Bible speakers and to sing songs of salvation. Getting "spiritual bread" or "bread from heaven" – spiritual insight gleaned from speakers and individual study of the Bible – is the main focus of the group, said Buell and other members. For 25 years Buell has hosted the annual convention for the fellowship in southeastern Washington.

The group has no name, because New Testament churches did not take a title, organizers said. Besides the annual convention, the group splits into small groups meeting weekly in homes. There are three such groups – about 75 people meeting in the Walla Walla area.

The annual gathering here attracts people from Yakima, the Tri-Cities, Moses Lake, and even some participants from west of the Cascade Mountains and points further away. Preparation for the event, called a convention, is christened by the onslaught of motor homes, trailers and campers that arrive at the Buells' spacious grounds on Route 1. Most participants stay on the campgrounds, not far from the shadow of the two large tents – one for meeting under and one for eating under.

Randy Erickson, pastor for the Walla Walla area, said the convention is a sound scriptural tradition. "This is something that the Lord's people have enjoyed throughout the ages," he said. "It is not just a social fellowship. It's a spiritual fellowship."

Three times a day the group meets for Bible messages about the meaning of the Christian faith. The evening meeting is called a gospel meeting because it emphasizes evangelizing the lost -those who are not "born again." But the outreach is minimal. Among the first night throng of about 600, local participant, Hal Thompson estimated there would be only 10 to 15 newcomers.

But people who are part of the group are friendly with each other. Eldon Tenniswood, a longtime pastor in the group said, loving others, like Jesus Christ commanded, is the group's main characteristic. "That's how people know our group throughout the world," said Tenniswood, who like other ministers in the fellowship, serves a regional area.

Walking outside the tents, people stop, chat and smile – renewing acquaintances with people they might not have seen since last year's convention in Walla Walla. As the hour of the evening meeting nears, people start heading to the tent. The wooden benches in the 60-by-100 foot tent soon are nearly full. The people spread their blankets over the benches, as a rustling sound signals the tarp being lowered at the edge of the tent to keep out cold air.

Then, unlike most church meetings, the gathering begins with silence, and waiting. For 10 minutes, there is a chilling calm as hardly a noise is made among the group. Mark Huddle, the convention organizer from Tacoma, says the practice is customary at every meeting. Some people pray during the silence, others fix their eyes straight ahead.

One of several ministers at the front then stands and breaks the silence by leading the group in a song. There is no accompaniment – just joining of 600 voices. Despite the large group, the singing is not overly loud. It is a sedate group. "Come unto me, and I will give you rest, I will give you rest, " the congregation sings.

Then, a minister says the opening prayer: "We're grateful that thou hast reached into the depths of our hearts and given us bread to feed upon." He then prays compassionately for those "without hope, without Christ."

Norman Tindall, a minister from southern Oregon, is the first of three ministers to speak. He discusses the notion of the "corruptible seed" of sin in a Christian's life, and the need to latch on to the incorruptible.

The second pastor stands. She is female – a surprising occurrence since many theologically conservative Christian groups do not ordain women as ministers. Organizers say they ordain women because it is scriptural, citing the example of Anna the prophetess in the Bible.

Leota Wilkinson, a minister in the Bellingham area, speaks softly into the public address system. She quotes from the First Epistle of Peter, stressing the importance of turning from one's sinful ways while letting "the precious blood cleanse us from sin."

As the third speaker appears ready to start, children are squirming among the benches. A few mothers sit at the back of the open tent, holding their children.

Harry Mooradian, an 83-year-old veteran among the group's ministers, recounts how the gospel "came to him," at a similar meeting in January 1932. He learned then that Christ was more important than his thirst for money, he said. Mooradian's account of his stubborn response to Christianity drew the first laughter in the meeting, now nearly an hour old. Then he explained how Christ is the leader behind the group. "Now this fellowship is not an organization. It's not a sect. It's a body of which Christ is the head."

The meeting concludes shortly. Participants walk out with their children, visiting quietly among themselves. Shortly, it will be time for bed. Sleep will need to come early so participants will be ready for breakfast at 7, and the three meetings that will follow.

June 11, 1982

The Walla Walla (WA) Union Bulletin

By Steve Maynard

Fellowship Holds to Traditional Christian Beliefs, But its Practices Differ

Claiming to be based only on the Bible, the fellowship group that met at Ermyl Buell's ranch last week holds to traditional Christian beliefs. Yet, its practices differ from those of many Christian churches.

The group believes Jesus was the Son of God who was resurrected from the dead – a main tenet of Christianity. Jesus was both God and man in one body, said convention organizer Mark Huddle, espousing another traditional Christian belief. But Huddle, a Tacoma minister in the group, freely concedes the fellowship – which carries no name – differs from other churches on some points. For example, the fellowship:

- Believes in "secret giving." No offerings are taken at meetings. People are not asked to tithe or give a set amount. Instead, they give voluntarily in a private moment with the minister, Huddle said. One reason for the practice is to avoid special treatment of people who give more than others, Huddle said.

- Ordains men and women as ministers, without requiring any formal theological training. Ministers are "in school" with the group's own ministers, who teach them the Bible. Participants claim they have no written doctrine, and that there is freedom to believe as one chooses.

–Does not own property. Ministers give up having a home to “keep themselves poor,” one pastor said. They live in the homes of participants in the fellowship. Ministers are usually addressed by their first name. They do not use the title reverend.

–Does not admit (at least publicly) to any heritage. When one participant was asked when the fellowship began, he referred to the time of Christ. Likewise, the group claims to have no membership statistics.

Yet, the fellowship carries out traditional church practices, such as baptism by immersion, the belief in personal conversion, and the practice of communion. The group's ministers do not marry participants. That duty is handled by a justice of the peace, Huddle said. Paul Abenroth said that some outsiders have called the group a cult. Abenroth, a Walla Walla participant in the group, said that claim is false. The group does not have a single, domineering leader—a common characteristic of cults. And there is no set doctrine in the group, he said.

Walla Wallan Hal Thompson explained the similarities in dress standards among group members on the basis of the Bible's teachings and the group's closeness. “The group is like a family, and families are oftentimes very much alike,” he said. Thompson likes the emphasis upon the Bible. The black leather-covered, King James version is virtually the only edition used. He said he has been a happier person since becoming involved with the fellowship. “It's my life. It's the thing that means the most to me,” he said.

Ermyl Buell said the fellowship is a close-knit group in which members show concern for each other. In too many church groups, people don't know each other and fail to show love for others. With the fellowship he has taken part in since childhood, Buell said he has found caring concern and “Christ's spirit being in people.”

June 5, 1983

The Spokesman Review

Spokane, Washington

By Bart Preecs, Staff writer

‘Two by Twos:’ Victims of Anonymous Cult?

(PHOTOGRAPH)

“Workers” Bob Anderson (left) and Walter Pollock
stand outside tent at Post Falls convention of nameless church members.

To the 800 men and women assembled under the tent on the C.W. Beck farm, it was a gathering of people who follow “The Truth” or the “Jesus Way.” Their church has no name, no headquarters and no property. Their ministers receive no salary, only cash payments slipped from hand to hand, to show what the group says is fidelity to the early church, the way Jesus left it.

But to former members, the strict conformity of members to the unspoken codes of the nameless church—ruled by a cadre of lay ministers, meeting only in members' homes—has a more sinister explanation. Ex-members and cult researchers call the group “Two by Twos,” and they claim the quiet, sincere people in it are victims of a cult—one of the largest, most secretive religious groups in America today. Membership estimates have ranged from 50,000 to 450,000. “Washington state may have more members per capita than any other state in the country. There may be 16,000 members in the Seattle area alone,” one researcher claims.

Ex-members charge that the sect imposes its will on members—with an intensity that one dropout compares to the tactics of the Rev. Jim Jones, whose followers committed mass suicide in Guyana in 1979.

“We have members all over the world, missionaries in Asia, Europe and Africa. But I wouldn't even try to guess the total number of members we have in this country,” said Walter Pollock, the leading minister at the Beck farm gathering, near Post Falls.

The group is numerous enough to have held simultaneous meetings in Post Falls, Bonners Ferry, Idaho, Walla Walla and Chelan, Wash., late last week. About 850 people were in attendance at Post Falls when the convention opened Thursday, and as many as 200 more might come by the weekend, Pollock said. Another 400 people were at the convention in Bonners Ferry, with cars and recreational vehicles in the parking lot from Idaho, Montana, California, British Columbia and Alberta.

The group claim it has no name; members merely refer to their church as “the fellowship” or “the truth.” There were families at the Post Falls meeting with four generations “raised in the truth.” Others “got the victory” or “professed” into the group as adults.

Meetings observed by reporters had few of the dramatics associated with evangelical or fundamentalist revival meetings. The main gathering at Post Falls was in a large brown canvas tent, supported by a dozen poles with fluorescent light fixtures attached. People sat in rows of folding wooden pews, quietly holding black leather King James Bibles, taking notes as the speakers took turns at the front. Sermons are given calmly, almost in monotones.

"If we keep our side of the new covenant, we need never fear...God will always keep his side of the covenant," an Australian who serves the fellowship in Germany told the Post Falls convention.

In Bonners Ferry, a minister from New Zealand who serves in India told the group it was important for parents not to "foster improper appetites," for drugs or other worldly distractions. The sprinkling of children throughout the group sat quietly. After a hymn, sung without musical accompaniment, members rose and quietly gave testimonies. Most expressed thanks for the fellowship and the meeting. "I am grateful for this convention, to be able to follow the perfect way of God," said one member.

Members dress in contemporary clothes, but all the women wear dresses with long sleeves. Almost all the women have long hair rolled up or in buns. None of the women have short haircuts. There are no cosmetics or jewelry other than wedding rings.

Two by Twos are either "friends" or "workers," ex-members report. Friends have jobs and keep homes and families. Workers never marry, travel in pairs, own no property and are supported by cash donations from friends. Friends and workers meet Sunday mornings in homes of supporting friends, because of the group's position against church buildings and salaried clergy.

Pollock escorted a reporter around the site of the Post Falls convention Thursday, pointing out the extensive preparation the convention required. The meetings were held in one tent, perhaps 300 feet around. Two smaller tents connected to farm buildings house the kitchen and a dining area.

But Pollock also discussed charges raised by ex-members of the group who claim the bland prayer meetings mask the firm control the workers have on the friends who support them. Several ex-members have formed an informal network to support each other in what they say is the difficult task of returning to life outside the fellowship. Because they have family members still involved or wish to continue ministering to doubting members, several former members agreed to be interviewed by The Spokesman Review only if their names or hometowns were not given. They described the strict lifestyle—and the indirect ways workers reportedly persuade members into following the lifestyle. Workers exert considerable influence on friend's lives, by virtue of unannounced comings and goings, ex-members charge. "Workers are supposed to be family, so they never knock at the door. They just open it and walk in," said one man who used to be a worker. "If they find you doing something you're not supposed to, they can make their disapproval real clear."

Pollock denies there is anything sinister or cult-like in the group's apparent conformity in dress and lifestyle. "There's never any rules about things like wearing hair up. The women just do it to identify with the group, to be part of the family," he said. Pollock said ex-members who left the group because they rebelled against the lifestyle had deeper problems. "That's a symptom not a cause," Pollock said. "Usually, if people object to hair or clothes or television, there's something deeper that's wrong. Of course, if a worker senses a problem, he'll want to visit about it. But these people exclude themselves, there's no pressure."

Several former members said they had been led to believe the group went back to the time of Christ. "They said, 'We're the original church. We follow the Jesus Way,'" one ex-member recalled. Several former members report that discovering otherwise was the key blow to their faith in the Two by Twos. [They point to a book that traced the group back only as far as 1897, to a movement founded in Ireland by William Irvine. The book, "The Secret Sect" by Doug and Helen Parker, was published in Australia in 1982.](#) Parker's parents were members of the fellowship.

[Pollock said he doesn't understand why the question of the group's history should be traumatic for ex-members. "I don't know how they could have come up with that," said Pollock, who denied that the fellowship makes unsubstantiated claims about its origins. "We know that it began with a group of men in the British Isles around the turn of the century. That's as far as we've been able to trace it."](#)

Nameless congregation holds strong grip on faithful

Clark said his parents were both devout Two by Twos, but he didn't formally profess the faith until he was in the Navy. And then he left shortly afterwards. "I went to chiropractic college in Iowa," he said, "and the members there were the saddest people, filled with depression and guilt." But Clark said he tried again to be faithful when he moved back West.

Ken Peterson and Dale Clark were both "raised in the truth." But the two men have opposite stories to tell about the religion they grew up with. Peterson said the nameless sect that meets in his home is a source of peace and strength to his family. Clark said the group's exclusive teachings and stringent lifestyle left him with guilt and pain years after he left. Ex-members and devout followers portray the unusual group in very different ways.

The strongest tool workers have over members is their unorthodox view of salvation, according to ex-members. Two by Twos, as members of the group have been called, are taught that only they are saved by Christ—and that only they are saved by Christ—and that the only way to be sure of heaven is to stay in the good graces of the workers.

"They call other churches synagogues, and ministers are all false prophets," one ex-member recalls. Peterson denies that the group is judgmental or dogmatic about other church groups. "We don't worry about other groups. We just worry about what we have to do to be saved."

But Clark and other ex-members claim the group is so effective at instilling its version of salvation that guilt and anxiety sometimes lasts years after they have left the movement. "There was no doubt in my mind, I was totally convinced that the only way you could get to heaven was through this group and everybody else was definitely on a path straight to hell," said Clark, a Kennewick chiropractor. "It took a miracle to get that idea out of me."

But in 1975 Clark's marriage came to an end, and he was told his chance for salvation died when he re-married. "They told me I was lost and committing adultery, and I believed it." Clark found the faith to overcome his Two by Two heritage when he joined the Tri-Cities Christian Center, an Assembly of God church. My wife was diagnosed as having cancer. She was a stage five and stage six was dead, the Md.'s told us. But I took her to our minister, and we laid hands on her and prayed and she was healed. Three doctors couldn't find a trace of cancer. "It was a miracle from God."

Peterson, who owns a remodeling and kitchen design company in Spokane, is an elder in the group, which means that his home is used for a Sunday morning meeting—the group's major activity between conventions. "We let people respond to what God has laid on their hearts. I hope they will see something in my life that will attract them," Peterson said. "Sometimes it's difficult, not having a name, because people want to know what you are – Methodist, Catholic, Mormon or what," he said. "But in a way it's good. Because they ask you what church you go to, and you can't give them a name, you almost have to give a testimony."

August 17, 1983
Skagit Valley Herald
By Kathleen Hosfeld, Family Editor

Criticism clouds church's gathering
First of two parts.

Milltown – The thousand or more people who gather about this time each year on the Harold Silvernail farm in Milltown, near Conway, will arrive once again Thursday. But what is usually an idyllic time for religious refreshment is clouded thus year by controversy over the doctrines of the unnamed church and public criticism of it from ex-members.

The group, which has met here annually since 1910, is part of a network of similar conventions conducted throughout the world. The group takes no name except to call themselves "Christians," and the beliefs they adhere to are called "The Way" or "the Jesus Way. Similar conventions, drawing up to a thousand people to each, have taken place this summer near Olympia, Chelan and Spokane.

Ex-members say the group compares itself to the verse Proverbs 30:28, which describes a spider who lives unnoticed in a king's palace, meaning they are proud that in spite of the size of the following, the group is unknown to the general public.

Their anonymity began to erode last year, however, with a Skagit Valley Herald article (August 30, 1982) that described the Milltown convention. Two articles published this June in The Spokesman Review, Spokane thrust the group further into public view. These articles focused on the Post Falls, Idaho, convention and included interviews with ex-members of the group.

Walter Pollock, a "worker" or minister, said he was disappointed to learn the Spokane articles were published simultaneously with an advertisement for a book by ex-member Doug Parker, "The Secret Sect," a historical account of the group's origins and an exploration of its theological positions that members consider unflattering. Mike Archhowld, The Spokesman Reviews assistant city editor, denied any collaboration between the editorial and advertising departments on the story.

(PHOTOGRAPH)
Therold Sylvester (right) refuses to make an issue of Criticisms against his church by former members.
Mary Hasper (left) and Walter Pollock are church "workers."

In interviews last summer and this week, members of the group described their religious beliefs and practices. "We are easy to detect," said Harold Silvernail, owner of the land where the Milltown convention meets. "Some of the more superficial things are there are no church buildings, no paid ministry. Our ministers are celibate and live amongst us. Our ministers are not trained theologically."

Women in the group are encouraged to grow their hair long according to a literal interpretation of I Corinthians 11:14-15. Men and women are expected to dress modestly, modesty being determined by an individual's culture, they say.

Ministers are trained in "the work" by being paired with an older minister, a companion. The two travel together, living in members' homes, owning little but their clothing and accepting no regular paycheck, he said. "The only credentials Jesus had when he came into the world were the spirit he had and the message he came with," said Sylvester. "Nobody's hired me and no body's going to fire me," he said. Money is slipped to ministers discreetly or anonymously, so that "the right hand doesn't know what the left is doing," say members.

Ministers, they say, get the amount of respect they deserve. "If we don't merit it, we don't get it," said Sylvester. There is a hierarchy of ministers in the network of conventioners. Certain people are regarded as senior ministers in a region or over the convention and others are regarded as "overseers" of a state or collection of states. Workers describe their theological beliefs vaguely. "Jesus Christ is the son of God, our Savior, our example," said Therald Sylvester, overseer for this state. The Holy Spirit is the answer to Christ's promise to send a comforter who would bring to his disciples' remembrance all of his teachings, he said. "He is a living personal contact with his people today," he said. Salvation, said Sylvester, is a revelation by God to people who are searching for spiritual betterment and is usually an answer to prayer.

The role of the worker in salvation, he said, is "all we can do is take them to Jesus and tell them He is their Savior. We're not the saviors. We're just the messengers."

Workers sometimes prefer to make analogies when describing theological beliefs as in describing "salvation," the Christian concept of being saved by God from sin and its consequences. Eldon Tenniswood, overseer for California, described the process of salvation as similar to being born into a family. "When a person hears the word and believes, is based on the spirit of the person telling the word," he said. "The power and seed must be alive to germinate. The Holy Spirit is the life in the seed." "One woman said to me that Christ's word was preached all over the world and everything's getting worse, not better. Do those preaching have the life?" he asked.

Workers are different from ministers in denominational churches, said Sylvester. "Here's a people that love one another—a ministry that cares in a way that works without the financial responsibilities that are put on people," he said. The concept of unpaid ministry is very important to members of the group. Tenniswood told the Skagit Valley Herald last year the conventioners' church was different from other churches because it wasn't based on money. "Their denominational churches) services are based on the dollar. Our services are based on love. It takes love to make a true church," he said. Members of the group meet for Sunday and weekday services in each other's homes, say workers. "Gospel meetings" also are held in public halls and parks to evangelize, said Sylvester.

Sylvester and Pollock refused to comment on the criticisms lodged against them by ex-members, saying it was like doing family laundry in public. "Let them make all the accusations they want," said Pollock. He also said that there are so few people who have left the church, their criticisms are not significant. We leave the other in God's hands. He's the witness. He's the judge," said Sylvester.

What I got comfort out of was reading today about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ," said Sylvester. Do you think he got a fair trial? Yet he was willing to die without making any accusations. Instead he said 'forgive' them Father, for they know not what they do." he said. But forgiveness can't come except from repentance," he said.

Next: Criticisms by ex-members. Second of two parts.

August 18, 1983
Skagit Valley Herald
Serving Northwest Washington state since 1885
By Kathleen Hosfield

Former members of no-name church continue quiet protest **Last of the series**

Milltown — While a group of 1,000 people draw together today at a private farm in Mill town, outside Conway, for a religious convention, those who have left the faith are continuing a quiet protest.

The people who have left the no-name church, which is characterized by its yearly conventions and ministers who travel in pairs, say they recognize a person's right to choose the church they will attend. Nevertheless, they contend this which they call the "Two by Twos," misrepresents itself to potential believers and its members, while the public does not recognize how large the organization is.

Seven ex-members gathered in a Sedro-Woolley home recently to talk about their experiences in the church. They asked that their names not be revealed because if it becomes known they have spoken against the church they will be prevented from communicating with relatives still in "The Way."

One Sedro-Woolley woman said she was "put out" of the church for talking to unbelieving relatives and that after her excommunication she was not allowed to see her grandchildren for several years. "My sons would drive by the house but never come in. I've worked these last 20 years to win my family's love and affection again," she said.

Church leaders said Tuesday they will not make a public debate out of ex-member's criticisms of the church and refused comment on

any of their allegations.

Members and ex-members agree that the church has representatives in almost every country of the world, particularly in the United States and Australia.

According to an article in The Spokesman Review, Spokane, one researcher claims Washington has the most members per capita of any state in this country and it is estimated the Seattle area contains 16,000 members. "And there's 10 to 20 times as many people who've been touched and twisted by it," said one former member. "The rest of the world doesn't even know they are there," she said. They call it the spider in the palace—that's a quote from the Scriptures. They say 'we're like the spider in the palace: We're there but they don't know about it,'" she said.

Ex-members say they do not know how many people have left the church and that many who leave refuse to discuss an association with the church for fear of retribution by church members. Ex-members also claim they have been harassed after leaving the group. Their mail has been tampered with, they have been impersonated on the phone and, they add, rumors have been spread to "blacken" them and destroy their friendships with members of the church.

Ex-members have no criticism against "the saints," the ordinary followers of the group. The ministers, or "workers," however, intentionally give the impression of believing traditional Christian theology when they actually believe in a very different concept of "the Gospel," they said. Traditional Christian theology states that man separated himself from God through sin, and the result of sin is death. Orthodox Christians believe that Jesus Christ was the son of God who was fully man, yet fully God. The Bible says his death by crucifixion was the atoning sacrifice for man's sin, leading to salvation – and everlasting life – by believing in Christ.

Ex-members say Two by Twos base their legalistic theology on the 10th chapter of Matthew, in which Jesus commands the disciples to sell everything they own and travel in pairs preaching that the kingdom of God is at hand.

Becoming a minister—"going into the work"—in the Two by Two church, selling all possessions and traveling in pairs, ex-members say, is the church's concept of following the "Jesus Way" and being "saved." Non-ministers, called "saints," can be saved by hearing "the word of God" from a minister, and believing it, say ex-members. "In the early days they believed that if you didn't go into 'the work' you weren't saved, said one member. But it soon became obvious not everyone could be a minister, they said.

"Saints" then became dependent upon the ministers for salvation, say ex-members, a role the ministers take advantage of. Salvation becomes a matter of staying in the good graces of the, ministers.

"They claim to be servants, but they aren't servants—they are the commanders," she said. "Their word is law. It was years before I saw the iron hand inside the glove. It looks like a soft glove," she said.

Two of the ex-members have made it an avocation to talk to believers and encourage them to question the authority of the workers. "It's not our purpose to blacken them," said one. "It's just to give them a little freedom. They're nice people, they're kind. But they are suffering underneath because their will has been taken away."

Ex-members agree they left when they realized the church professed to believe a literal interpretation of the Bible, but would ignore or deny portions of it. "One of the reasons I left was because they weren't following Scripture the way they professed," said one elderly man. They claim there's no thing as healing people (by spiritual means) who are ill, but the Scriptures are full of that."

The origins of the church are another source of criticism say ex-members. Ex-members contend they were led to believe the church is the continuation of the New Testament church, begun at the time of Christ's death.

An 11-year-old member, David Woods of Saint Helens, Ore., described his church this way during last year's convention: "If you want to get the right way you have to get the oldest...the best church is the oldest church And this is the oldest church because this church began when the first person was born."

However, according to author an ex-member Doug Parker, the church actually was founded in 1897 by William Irvine in Ireland. Irvine was joined in 1901 by Edward Cooney, who assisted in leadership organization until his excommunication in 1928. When Parker's book "The Secret Sect" first appeared, workers denied his historical account of the group's origins, say ex-members. Now they say the ministers are "whitewashing" the revelation, saying it isn't significant. "We, don't deny that," said Therald Sylvester, Washington overseer, when asked if the historical account was true. He refused, however, to discuss why ex-members had a different impression. "I won't go into that detail," he said. (The origin) makes no difference because the Spirit of God can do anything," said Harold member of the church and owner of the Milltown land where the church is meeting this week. Silvernail added he did not speak as an authority for the church.

Ex-members report suicides and depression among believers who try to live up to the legalistic standards of the group. They'll tell you

'if you leave you'll regret it the rest of your life,'" said one woman, who adds she is very happy she has left.

Of other members who leave she said, "Some become atheists, some become alcoholics. Some, happily enough, find they can serve God outside The Way.

August 20 1983
The Bellingham Herald
By Kathie Anderson

Religious sect follows different path

(PHOTOGRAPH)
Therald Sylvester and Walter Pollock
Worshipping God's way

Milltown – Members of a little-known religious sect with no name, no church buildings, no ordained ministers and no membership rolls are meeting again in Skagit County, as they have every summer since 1912. Few local residents even know they're here. Huge tents that serve as meeting halls, dining areas and dormitories are hidden from nearby highways by rolling, wooded hills. Rows of cars and RVs fill one field, campers fill another.

More than 1,000 members of the group, known as "the family," have gathered at the Harold Silvernail farm near Milltown for a week-long convention. Other members will arrive next week for a second segment.

Leaders say they do not know how many members belong to the organization, although Therald Sylvester, Washington state "overseer" says membership is "growing like wildfire." A researcher in 1964 estimated membership at 500,000 worldwide. The group, known as "Two-by-Twos" or "Cooneyites," has no written doctrine, leaders say. Lay ministers, called "workers," attempt to follow Jesus's example of poverty and chastity. Workers sell or give away all possessions when they enter "the work" and give the profits to their "overseers."

But the group this year is under pressure to answer charges by ex-members that leaders have systematically hidden the truth about the origins of the organization from its members and that there is no fiscal accountability for dispersal of members' donations.

Although attempts to answer criticisms have brought more notoriety to the group than ever before, Sylvester says the controversy has been beneficial. "It's been purifying," he said.

For a detailed look of the members' controversy, turn to Page 4A.

August 20 1983
The Bellingham Herald
By Kathie Anderson
Of the Herald Skagit Bureau

Church without a Name

Milltown – More than 1,000 people are gathered this week on a private farm in rural Skagit County, part of a world-wide secretive religious sect whose members, some say, number into the hundreds of thousands.

The organization has no name, no church buildings, no ordained ministers. There are no membership rolls, no official method of communications between groups. It has remained virtually unknown since its turn-of-the-century arrival in the United States. "We don't seek publicity," said Walter Pollock, one of the group's local leaders. "But we don't turn people away."

The group, which its members refer to as "the family," has been called the "Two-by-Twos," after the practice of pairing lay ministers, or "Cooneyites," after an early leader, Edward Cooney.

Hidden from the glare of public scrutiny for a hundred years, the group today is being forced into the open in reaction to charges by ex-members that its leaders have systematically withheld the truth of its origin from its members. "This group is unique in that it has no records to speak of, no printed matter," says Ben Johnson, University of Oregon professor of the sociology of religion. "Their theology is not particularly way-out. They're not dangerous politically. They don't brainwash or kidnap. It's a typical turn-of-the-century

conservative Protestantism. "What is unusual is their low profile and what looks now like a deception the leaders are practicing on the members. A lot of members would be blown away if they really knew the things their leaders were keeping from them."

Ex-members only recently have publicly discussed the reasons they left the group. Most still refuse to be identified, afraid that contact with family members still in the group will be terminated if criticisms are made public. "I just can't talk about it," said one woman, out of the group for 20 years. "It was an intensely personal experience. It almost sent me to Western State (a mental institution). I still just can't talk about it."

The organization is noted for its quiet lifestyle and its unpaid lay ministers who say they seek to follow Jesus' example of poverty and celibacy. These ministers, known simply as "workers," sell their property and belongings when they enter the movement, giving the proceeds to older workers. Then they move among members in pairs, living with families for only a few days before moving on. They are solely dependent on gifts and donations for survival.

"We're trained the way the Lord trained us," says Therald Sylvester, the group's Washington state overseer. "He became homeless and moved from place to place. Let Him live again in us. All the Lord promised us was our food and our raiment. I've never starved to death, and I've been preaching over 50 years. It's the most exciting existence in the world."

Members believe the group has a direct literal continuation through the centuries of God's word as presented by Jesus to his disciples. They believe their workers are a direct continuation of a tradition that remains unbroken since the first century. The only way to receive God's grace, they say, is "from the lips of the workers," and salvation lies only in conversion to the group through a worker.

Little, outside of obscure references in scholarly journals, had been written about the group until the mid-1950s when an Australian ex-member, Doug Parker began to research the group's origins. He grew suspicious, he said, when workers tried to dissuade him from a trip to England. Persisting, he found in England and Ireland a record he says documents the group's true beginnings.

Parker was joined in 1964 by University of Oregon graduate student Keith Crow, who researched the group for his master's thesis which he entitled "The Invisible Church."

Parker last year published his findings in "The Secret Sect," a book available at area bookstores. The book and the publicity about the group that has followed its publication, threatens a crisis within the group that may alter it forever, says Johnson of the University of Oregon, who worked with Parker and Crow before Crow's death. "If Parker is right, there has been a deliberate suppression of the memory of the group's founder, as well as a concealing from the membership of the existence of a highly supervised hierarchical structure and a total lack of financial accountability."

"Usually, groups of this type remember their leaders and revere them, even if they depart from them eventually. Here's a group that systematically got rid of its founder and erased his memory when he began to 'get crazy,' as they call it."

According to Parker, the group was founded in Ireland in the early 1900s by an evangelist named William Irvine. Irvine was driven out of the church in 1914 when he began to preach second adventist and prophetic teachings. Following Irvine's suppression, other early founders were excommunicated as the group convulsed from its early beginnings to its present form.

Parker charges leaders have worked since the early 1930s to conceal the group's origins, substituting a version more to their liking. Sylvester, responding to Parker's charges, says deciding which version is the truth is unimportant. "Jesus himself set us up," he said. "Whether it was planted in the first century, the 10th century or the 20th century, the message is the same, it produces the same thing. They say we're a secret thing. But anyone that has the Bible has the way. People spread wrong reports about us. They spread wrong reports about Jesus. Prejudiced and bitter people will tell you things that are not true."

"Family" members meet informally with workers two or three times a week for Bible study and testimony. Members gather once a year at area conventions, usually held in rural sites out of the public eye. This area's group has been meeting annually since 1912 on the Harold Silvernail farm near Milltown, 15 miles south of Mount Vernon. Four other conventions are being held simultaneously throughout Washington and Oregon.

For two weeks a year, and for the month of preparations preceding the convention, the Silvernails give over their home and farm to the group's use. During this first week of the convention, which began Thursday, campers and RVs crowd the field and forest surrounding the giant tents that serve as meeting places, dining areas and dormitories. The members move quietly from one task to another, greeting each other with a handshake and smile.

They don't talk about the controversy. Questions are discouraged. "It (criticism) has purified us," Sylvester says "We haven't put anyone out. They left us because they are not of us." Mary Hasper, a local worker, says dissenters don't bother members. "I always say, don't criticize unless you have something better to offer," she says, speaking softly but firmly. "I haven't heard that they have anything better to offer."

Many families take their vacations to come to the yearly convention. On Thursday, the first day of the convention, the weather was sunny and warm. Children played quietly or worked with their parents. A large modern kitchen was set up in an outbuilding to serve hundreds of meals a day; a laundry operation efficiently churned out clean laundry; a nursery stood ready for infants. All supplies and labor were voluntarily donated, Hasper says. Members met three times a day to pray, witness, sing hymns and listen to talks by workers. The grounds were deserted as the first assembly of the convention began. Families sat together on long wooden pews. Women workers sat on one side of the dais, men workers on the other. Singing was a cappella, speeches extemporaneous. "We ask God direct," Sylvester says. "That's getting heavenly wisdom. We get it down from above, not out of a book."

Many members took notes as a young woman, a new worker, addressed the group. "Maybe you've been wounded by life, maybe you've been wounded by the world, maybe you've been wounded by Satan and left half-dead," she said in a quiet, nervous voice. "Maybe you've been stripped, like me, of my raiment, my human nature exposed in all its horribleness..."

Membership in the group is "growing like wildfire," Sylvester says, although converts are not actively recruited. Since the organization keeps no written records, leaders say they do not know how many members there are. Crow, in his research, estimated 500,000.

Sylvester denied accusations that older workers accumulate wealth at the expense of doctrine and younger workers and that workers attempt to influence members about where to work, whom to associate with, whom to marry. Such charges, he said, were misconceptions. "We give people the right of free speech and free choice. If I were like Billy Graham and began to collect thousands of dollars, would I be like Jesus? No hirelings (ministers who collect salaries or offerings) can preach the gospel of love." Financial donations are to be made privately, in secret, he said, "so as to not let the right hand know what the left is doing." Donations, as well as profits from the sale of workers' property, go to workers' overseers. Although there is no accounting for the money, Sylvester denies charges that the money often goes no further. "That's not true. Members just don't know what I do with it. I scatter it throughout the world."

He has just returned from an 18-country tour of groups throughout the Far East. The price of his ticket was donated. "There's one member who has put his personal plane at my disposal whenever I want it," he says.

The group has no plans to try to counter criticisms, Sylvester says, although leaders are submitting to more publicity about the group than ever before. All the group wants, he says, is a chance. "All we ask is that you listen to us and give us a fair hearing," he says. "We have the most fascinating and thrilling work in this earth."

Members attending the convention seem to agree. "It's wonderful, just wonderful," says one woman as she prepares to attend the first assembly.

September 13, 1983
Los Angeles Times
By Russell Chandler, Religion writer

Nameless Sect Travels 'Secret' Path

Norman and Kathy Tinklepaugh, and their four children, ages 8 to 18, are sitting quietly on folding wooden benches inside a huge green tent, waiting for the morning gospel meeting to begin. Four ceiling fans with three-toot blades, mounted on, the tent poles, whirl overhead, providing only slight relief from the sweltering summer humidity,

The Tinklepaughs are among nearly 900 conservatively dressed believers assembled under the canvas at a private ranch on the outskirts of San Diego. The faithful are making their annual pilgrimage in campers, trailers and cars from throughout Southern California and Arizona for four days of old-fashioned Bible teaching. The meeting is one of seven in the state, 119 throughout North America and dozens more overseas that are held each summer.

Perhaps 100,000 Members

But this is not the stereotypical, highly emotional, Bible-thumping, sawdust-trail revival. This is a regional assembly of a sedate worldwide church with perhaps 100,000 members, hundreds of ministers and thousands of small congregations.

It is also a fellowship few outsiders have ever heard of. This 80-year-old church has no formal name, no incorporation papers, no tax-exempt status, no headquarters, no elected officials. It owns no property, publishes no literature and operates no schools. It advertises neither its weekly services nor the conventions. Its unmarried ministers, who donate all their possessions to the church, receive no salary—only cash payments slipped quietly from hand to hand

Sometimes called the "Nameless House Sect," "The Way" or the "Two-by-Twos" (because its religious workers travel in pairs), this

church is not only obscure, it is exclusive.

Seen as an Ancient Faith

Its followers believe it is the only religious group on Earth faithful to the early Christian church, the way Jesus left it. And, they say, it has never changed.

Like many families "in the way," the Tinklepaughs have been coming to the church's annual meetings in serene anonymity, ever since they were children brought by their parents. It is their 29th year at the Santee contention, they tell a newcomer.

"Human needs and human nature are the same as they've always been," said Tinklepaugh, an electronics engineer who lives in a rural area three miles by dirt road from the San Diego County town of Alpine. "Spiritual needs are the same, and that's what gets fulfilled here."

Indeed, uniformity runs deep among the faithful. Almost without exception, the women members wear long, uncut hair wrapped tightly in neat buns on the tops of their heads. Their faces bear no traces of makeup. Even clear nail polish "draws disapproving stares," according to a former member, and jewelry other than wedding bands and watches, is frowned upon. Women wear plain, modest dresses. Slacks, shorts and sleeveless blouses-even for young girls-are forbidden in public.

The men tend to wear dark-colored slacks, black leather shoes and long-sleeved shirts. Their hair is short-above the ears-and while there is no rule against beards, they are discouraged. "We like our women to be feminine, and for men, it's a cleaner, more open look to be clean-shaven," explained David Kennedy, 45, a worker who served as a spokesman for the first of two four-day conventions held this month at the Santee ranch of Charles Grant.

Women Cannot Be Elders

Few of the women work-most are what Kennedy calls "keepers at the home." And although the church does ordain female workers as missionaries, women cannot be elders or deacons. "There's no sister workers taking the lead," Kennedy continued. "They know their place. They don't make plans or sit on the platform (at conventions) They're in submission to the men. They value their place. They don't go ahead of us."

There is also strong conformity to other unwritten rules. Television sets, motion pictures and religious books other than the King James Version of the Bible (with a black cover) are frowned upon. Religious symbolism is considered worldly, as is spending too much time on hobbies or sports.

Children of families in the nameless church are discouraged from participating in after-school sports or activities like Scouting. Holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, are not observed in most homes.

As is the custom for many fundamentalist groups, smoking, drinking, dancing and card-playing are out, and abortion and divorce are prohibited. Members whose spouses have died are allowed to remarry,

Members of the sect do serve in the military, but in noncombatant assignments. Some "friends" as members call each other, vote in civil elections, but others do not consider it important. "All pray for the rulers," said Kennedy, who was assigned this month to minister in the Riverside and San Bernardino areas. "We believe prayer is more valuable than a vote."

The Two-by-Twos baptize people who have "professed" belief in Jesus Christ after hearing the gospel message from a worker and proving that they are worthy to walk "in the way." The immersion ceremony takes place in rivers, ponds or the ocean. Marriages are performed by civil authorities only; church workers do not register with state officials.

Bible study meetings are held in members' homes once a week. "House church" meetings of a dozen to perhaps 30 members, where the "Breaking of the Bread," or Communion, takes place are led by elders on Sunday mornings. Children are expected to sit quietly with their parents at every meeting; there are no Sunday-school classes.

Prospective converts are sought out at periodic "gospel meetings," which are often held in rented halls. Though outreach beyond the families of those already won seems minimal, the movement appears to be slowly growing. No statistics or membership records are kept.

Two-hour services three times a day at the annual conventions feature unemotional preaching by both men and women workers who speak with no notes, little humor and almost no references to current events or non-biblical sources.

Hymns stressing obedience and otherworldliness are sung slowly, usually in unison and without musical accompaniment. And scores of very short "testimonies" of piety and devotion given by lay members are spoken so softly they are often inaudible a few rows away.

Separation from the world, a hallmark of the nameless church is especially pronounced in the lives of the workers and their overseers. who control the movement in a highly organized but non-institutional fashion.

At the annual conventions, young people who want to enter the ministry have their qualifications checked. (Submissiveness to established norms seems to be preferred to original thinking.) Those approved are ordained and given a specific field of labor under the tutelage of an older minister of the same sex. Many serve overseas for at least several years.

The idea of homeless preachers who espouse a primitive Christianity is based on passages in Matthew 10 and Luke 10, which tell how Jesus sent out the 12 apostles and the 70 disciples in pairs, carrying "neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes." Expenses of the "work" and the limited financial needs of the ministers (who do not file income tax reports or give an accounting of their gifts) are paid for through "secret donations." No offerings are taken at meetings, and no charges are made for attending the conventions.

No Requests for Money

People are not asked to tithe or give a set amount. Instead, in a private moment, they voluntarily and unobtrusively slip an envelope containing money into the hands of worker. "In 60 years I've never seen a minister ask for a penny. It's all by faith," said Henry Simms, 72, of Ukiah, who has been "in this way since I was 12 years old."

The Two-by-Twos' claim to be based only on the Bible is the reason they will not admit-at least publicly – to any heritage. "We have no name because denominationalism isn't in the New Testament," explained Ron Rudolph, operator of the sound booth at the Santee conventions. We follow Jesus Christ, not man's interpretations or doctrines."

Kennedy, the worker-spokesman, agreed that the "friends would probably tell you this fellowship began with Christ."

Historical information, however, identifies the Two-by-Twos with a Scottish coal miner named William Irvine, who around 1899 founded a movement nicknamed the "Tramp Preachers" or "The Damnation Army" (his followers preached that members of all other churches were going to hell). Irvine was joined a year later by Edward Cooney, who left the church of Ireland and became a prominent "go preacher" until he and Irvine parted company. Cooney and his followers, known derisively as "Cooneyites," were excommunicated, and Irvine himself was later rejected by the overseers under him.

Richard Wulf, 27, a Two-by-Two worker in Mexico for two years, was asked about this apparent suppression of the sect's origins. "Near the turn of the century God raised up godly men in Ireland and Scotland," Wulf acknowledged. "We respect them and what they established. But we don't hold to that history and line of succession." Added Kennedy: "Now we're not following these men but the New Testament. What we have today is the New Testament fellowship."

Inspiration for Members

British sociologist B. R. Wilson notes in the preface to the only modern book about the nameless church, "The Secret Sect" (by Doug and Helen Parker, published in 1982 in Australia): "Their self-conception of being merely the descendants of the apostles undoubtedly serves as an inspiration for members, but it is in itself an attempt to deny being of recent origin, of having experienced a process of socially conditioned growth, of internal fission, and problems in the coordination and transmission of leadership roles...and in the existence of distinctive doctrines. ..."That the Cooneyites, with whatever degree of conscious intention, have managed to conceal their presence and their past, represents a very powerful rejection of this worldly intellectualism."

Some former members of the Two-by-Twos believe it is a cult. Bland prayer meetings, they say, mask firm control. They argue that strict conformity to unspoken codes of a nameless church ruled by an elite corps of celibate and deliberately penniless lay ministers and meeting only in members' homes and at conventions, has deceived thousands of sincere people, and has severely limited their personal freedoms.

"Yes, to me, it's a cult," said a 32-year-old woman who has been a lifelong member and is still active. "It's subtle. . . . It works on peer pressure. The workers (ministers) really have strict control. Everything hangs on the ministry and the church in the home." The Washington woman, who asked that her name not be used because "my husband and I are on the way out and we hope to help others get out, too," added that the leaders who receive no formal theological training, "pick and choose" doctrines. "Anyone who doesn't believe just the way they do isn't saved," the woman said. "And anyone who has fellowship with other Christian groups or drops out is shunned. They say, "We still love you, but we can't be friends anymore."

Photographs:

–Scenes from the gathering of Two-by-Twos: praying before lunch; the long hair of the women wound into buns; preparing bread for a meal; taking notes at a service

–Tharold Sylvester, 79, a "worker" (missionary) for 58 years who reluctantly agreed to be photographed.
