Controversial Boston Church of Christ
Continues to Flourish, Expands Overseas

Officials at Washington University in St. Louis have ordered campus police to arrest St. Louis Church of Christ recruiters as trespassers if they enter the campus again.

The action came after university officials determined that the group’s recruiting practices violated campus regulations, according to the September 21, 1990 St. Louis Post-Dispatch. University officials said that the St. Louis Church, which is affiliated with the Boston Church of Christ/Crossroads/Multiplying Ministries Movement, failed to comply with a university rule requiring groups to register annually with the student affairs office if their members are primarily non-students.

The action was among the latest to affect the Boston movement on college campuses nationwide. According to the December 1990 Cult Awareness Network (CAN) News, the sect is banned at Harvard and Boston universities, and media reports from across the U.S. indicate the church has faced controversy (including allegations that it exercises mind control and encourages members to sever ties with their families) at many other colleges as well.

“They’ve infuriated chaplains nationwide,” according to Steve Hassan, a cult “exit counselor” and author from Boston who has followed the church. “This group destroys people’s relationships with spouses, families, and friends. It interferes with education. It has caused people great despair. It’s a group that believes no other church is Christian and that no one can be saved other than people in their church.”

Many involved in cult evangelism have received inquiries concerning the Boston movement for some time. Bill Kellogg of the Spiritual Counterfeits Project of Berkeley, California said they have received more inquiries (some of them complaints) “by far” about the Boston movement in the past year than any other religious movement.

The CAN report, which included several testimonies of former members who were recruited while in college, states that officials at Harvard and Boston University were upset with the church because “an inordinately high number of its students drop out of school before graduating” after meeting up with the sect.

Despite the ongoing controversy, the sect continues to flourish. It posted a 36 percent increase from 1989 to 1990, placing the number of “disciples” at 28,724, according to its Winter 1991 Discipleship Magazine. What’s more, it is continuing to expand rapidly throughout the world. Leaders say Kip McKean, the Director of World Mission (and the self-proclaimed apostle-like leader of the church), now based in Los Angeles, is gearing up to try to start a congregation in Moscow.
According to *Discipleship Magazine*, besides having many congregations in major metropolitan areas of the U.S., the church also maintains congregations (several of them thriving) in London, New Zealand, Australia, India, Singapore, Sweden, Germany, South Africa, Jamaica, Kenya, Haiti, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and elsewhere.

Although the church is not now affiliated with the traditional churches of Christ, it was from within that denomination — at the Crossroads Church of Christ in Gainesville, Florida — that the group began in 1971. Also, the movement is not affiliated with the mainline United Church of Christ or the Disciples of Christ denominations.

The Boston movement’s literature, however, claims that the movement is the “reconstructed” Church of Christ, “God’s...modern day movement [which is] restoring original Christianity” (Roger Lamb, “Back to Square One,” *Discipleship Magazine*, Winter 1991, 4). And because of these claims of exclusivity, many churches of Christ have been at odds with the Boston church due mostly to their efforts to get various churches and leaders to join their movement.

According to documentation letters reproduced in *What Does the Boston Movement Teach?*, a two-volume set by former Boston leader Jerry Jones, a number of church splits have occurred within the churches of Christ as some of its leaders have joined the Boston movement and have attempted to persuade their congregations to come with them.

Jones’s book also contains statements from leaders of various churches of Christ in Alabama, Tampa, and elsewhere condemning the movement. Perhaps the most interesting statement was issued in August 1990 by the Crossroads Church (where it began) that charged the Boston movement with abuses including “one Christian trying to control another Christian or one congregation exercising control over another congregation. We do not believe that any Christian has the right to control another Christian (Eph. 5:21).” The statement issued by the Crossroads leaders also asked for “forgiveness” for its role in the abuses of the Boston movement.

“There certainly have been abuses,” said Al Beird, an elder and evangelist with the Boston Church of Christ in a telephone interview. “But never is abuse advocated or taught by the leadership.” Beird added that the church is “open to the charges of exclusivism” due to its teachings on baptism, “but we feel like we’re following the Bible.... We’re continually examining our teachings.”

Doctrinally the Boston movement is a lot like other churches of Christ. They hold that water baptism by immersion is essential for salvation, teaching that when one is baptized he or she is “baptized into Christ.” Like the churches of Christ, they don’t use musical instruments during services.

But they differ from the churches of Christ in other ways. They usually meet in rented facilities such as hotels and sports arenas when moving into a new area. (The Boston Church, for example, which is considered the mother church of the movement, at last report was still meeting in the Boston Garden arena, drawing a Sunday attendance of about 4,500.) And unlike the churches of Christ which have a strong tradition of autonomous congregations, Boston movement leaders demand churches to be submitted to a hierarchical structure of authority. Members seeking to join the Boston movement from the traditional churches of Christ almost always have to become rebaptized when joining, according to Jones.