



STATEMENT DM036

Bob Weiner's Plans Unclear a Year after Maranatha Disbands

Charismatic leader Bob Weiner's plans are still unclear almost a year after his announcement that the doors were closing at the international offices of the Maranatha Christian Churches in Gainesville, Florida.

In a move that took many off guard, Maranatha's senior leaders held a board meeting in Florida in November of last year and decided to dissolve its entire corporate structure — a move that would give its 70 Maranatha congregations in 22 nations around the world total autonomy.

A month later in San Antonio, Texas, Weiner publicly broke the news to delegates at Maranatha's annual conference.

Although many reasons were given for the breakup of the confederation of churches, the main one cited by Weiner and other former top leaders came as no surprise to cult researchers. The churches — founded in 1972 by Weiner and his wife, Rose, as a charismatic outreach on university and college campuses — had been guilty of spiritual authority excesses.

According to an article in the March issue of *Charisma* and *Christian Life* magazine, Maranatha leaders decided at a July 1989 board meeting that too much of a "spirit of control" had entered the ministry. The article also noted that four Maranatha elders suggested Weiner take a sabbatical during which time he would evaluate his "personal character."

During the sabbatical, Weiner concluded that "I have been struggling with anger, unkindness, contentiousness and a tendency to control," the article quoted him as saying.

In 1984, however, Weiner steadfastly denied that the ministry engaged in abuses of authority. According to the August 10, 1984 *Christianity Today*, Weiner was responding to the just-released conclusions of an ad hoc committee of cult watchers that charged Maranatha Christian Ministries with having "an authoritarian orientation with potential negative consequences for members." Weiner accused the committee of having an anticharismatic bias.

The *Christianity Today* article, and another article a year later in the *Wall Street Journal*, publicized allegations that Maranatha members were not allowed to date and were required to submit their lives to shepherds who made decisions for them. Marriages of staff members were subject to Maranatha's entire board of elders.

Those participating in the committee were James Bjornstad (chairman), Brian Onken (representing Christian Research Institute), Steve Cannon, Ronald Enroth, Karen Hoyt (representing Spiritual Counterfeits Project), and Gordon Lewis.

In issuing the report, the committee said it "would not recommend this organization [Maranatha] to anyone," and noted that Maranatha was guilty of faulty methods of biblical interpretation, questionable practices, and deficient theology — including an unclear view of the Trinity. Some former Maranatha leaders have said that the organization worked hard at clearing up most of the perceived doctrinal problems the committee cited.

Lee Grady, former editor of Maranatha's publication *The Forerunner*, said there was little chance Maranatha would reform itself into a new organization. Grady added that some of those involved in the church's college campus ministry are now involved in a new autonomous organization based in Austin, Texas, called Campus Ministries International.