

Covenant House leaders resign

NEW YORK (CNS) — Franciscan Father Bruce Ritter resigned amid numerous but unproven charges of financial and sexual impropriety, but Covenant House — the home for runaways he founded in 1968 — remained the subject of investigations.

In a week of rapid developments:

- Father Ritter turned in his resignation Feb. 27 to Covenant House's board of directors, ending 22 years as head of what has become the nation's largest public or private program for street-children. He said the controversy surrounding him for the past three months "has made it impossible for me to lead Covenant House effectively."

- Frank J. Macchiarola, acting Covenant House president since Feb. 8, when Father Ritter was told by his religious order to take a leave of absence pending the order's investigation of alleged sexual activity by the priest, also resigned the same day. He afterward accused the board of refusing to accept his recommendations to bring "more sunlight" into Covenant House operations.

- The board named James J. Harnett, chief executive of Covenant House under

both Father Ritter and Macchiarola, as its new acting head.

- Manhattan District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau announced Feb. 28 that his office was closing its investigation of Father Ritter without bringing charges. He said Father Ritter engaged in some "questionable" financial transactions, but there was not enough evidence to prosecute.

Some Covenant House officials may have violated the law in helping a troubled youth obtain false identity papers, he said, but after consulting with the family of the dead child whose identity was used he had decided not to prosecute.

- The same day Father Conall McHugh, a New Jersey-based superior of the Conventual Franciscan province to which Father Ritter belongs, said that the order's investigation of alleged sexual activity by Father Ritter "will continue its course."

The order was looking into claims by Darryl J. Bassile of Ithaca, N.Y., that he and Father Ritter had a sexual relationship when he was a teen-age resident of Covenant House.

In separate statements shortly after Morgenthau's announcement, Harnett and

Covenant House board chairman Ralph A. Pfeiffer Jr. described the district attorney's decision as confirmation that the allegations against Father Ritter were "baseless" and "totally without merit."

In an interview with Catholic News Service March 1, Harnett said that contributions to Covenant House have leveled off since sexual allegations against Father Ritter first surfaced in December. Plans to expand operations into other cities have had to be put on hold, but contributors "haven't run for the hills" and the agency can continue to serve street kids in its existing programs, he said.

A spokesman for New York State Attorney General Robert Abrams said March 2 that Abrams had "stepped up" his office's investigation of alleged Covenant House financial improprieties following Morgenthau's decision to drop his investigation.

The state attorney general, whose office is responsible for overseeing laws concerning charitable organizations, was focusing especially on allegations that Father Ritter and other Covenant House officials received personal loans from Covenant House funds.

It is a violation of New York state law



AP/Wide World Photos
Father Bruce Ritter resigned Tuesday, Feb. 27.

for any officer or director of a charitable organization to receive a loan from the institution.

Covenant House has acknowledged that Father Ritter received a Covenant House loan but has declined to reveal its amount or purpose. Harnett said the priest repaid the loan Feb. 26.

News reports indicated that as much as \$100,000 may have been loaned by Covenant House to officials of the organization.

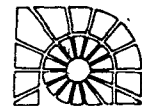
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Nazareth Academy

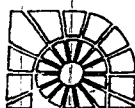
Registration for Fall 1990

Wednesday, March 14

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Wednesday, March 14, is Registration Day for new students planning on attending Nazareth Academy in the fall.

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Thousands sign ad advocating expanded priesthood, freedom

By Jerry Filteau

Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — More than 4,500 Catholics, including 170 Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester and several diocesan clergy and lay people, took out a joint ad in *The New York Times* Feb. 28 to call for ordination of women, married priests, more personal freedom and local church autonomy, and a variety of other reforms to make the church less "authoritarian and hypocritical."

The ad endorsed the consultative style of the U.S. bishops' conference but objected to many forms of centralized authority in Rome. It argued for married priests and women priests in the name of the right of Catholics to have access to the Eucharist, saying this is threatened by the growing

shortage of priests.

It urged that church authorities consult with lay people in selection of bishops and in "developing church teaching on human sexuality."

The message and names of signatories took up one-and-one-third pages in the *Times*. Several well-known theologians were on the list, as was one bishop, Auxiliary Bishop Emerson J. Moore of New York.

Father Kenneth J. Doyle, a spokesman for the U.S. Catholic Conference, said the ad expresses opinions "on 24 separate issues," some of which "I would identify with strongly" and others "I would have some difficulty with."

Theologians who endorsed the message included Father Charles E. Curran of Rochester, Dominican Father Matthew Fox and Immaculate Heart of Mary Sister Sandra Schneiders. Fathers Curran and Fox have been disciplined by the Vatican for their writings.

The message, described as a lay "pastoral letter" and titled "A Call for Reform in the Catholic Church," was written by a Chicago-based Catholic lay group, Call to Action. Joining Call to Action in sponsoring a nationwide campaign for signatures on the letter were five other groups seeking changes in the church: Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church, Catholics Speak Out, Friends of Creation Spirituality, Women's Ordination Conference and CORPUS: The National Association for a Married Priesthood.

At least two lay groups immediately criticized the ad and the signature campaign.

The Chicago-based National Center for
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