

# Saints and sinners: The phenomenon of kidnapping

Kidnapping is a rather recent phenomenon in the modern world. The word first appears in the 17th century in America when children were snatched off the streets and forced to work on colonial plantations. "Kid" was a slang word of the times, referring to young persons. "Nap" was originally "nab," meaning (as it does today) to seize or arrest.

Kidnapping hit the headlines big-time in 1932 when the infant son of aviation hero Charles Lindbergh and his wife Anne was taken from the upstairs bedroom of the couple's New Jersey home in the middle of the night. A carpenter by the name of Bruno Hauptman was later convicted of the crime and sent to the electric chair.

Today, kidnapping makes news regularly throughout the world. Abductors are usually seeking ransom money but, as is the case of

kidnapped journalist Daniel Pearl in Afghanistan, there are often political motives involved.

The leading character in one of the more bizarre kidnappings on record was a woman preacher - Aimee Semple McPherson.

Or was it a kidnapping?

Ferenc Morton Szasz tells the story in his recent book, "Religion in the Modern American West" (University of Arizona Press, 2000). Aimee, says Szasz, probably ranked as the best-known American woman before Eleanor Roosevelt. In 1923, she founded her Angelus Temple in Los Angeles, a Pentecostal church that differed little from other Pentecostal churches, except, says Szasz, "in the acknowledged charisma of its leader."

"She merged her techniques as an evangelist with vaudeville routines," writes Szasz, "as well as with the acting styles of the first generation



**george plagenz**

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of Hollywood icons such as Mary Pickford and Clara Bow."

She once came on stage riding a motorcycle and posing as a traffic cop - to "pull sinners over to the curb and put them back on the right road."

Whenever a situation called for a scene, Aimee provided one. But the scene that the lady evangelist played best of all was her vanishing act in 1926. In May of that year, as Szasz tells the story, Aimee went swimming, disappeared

and was presumed drowned. In June, however, she appeared in a little Mexican town, looking quite haggard but otherwise unharmed.

"She spoke of being kidnapped by three crooks - 'Steve, Jake and Mexicali Rose.' She told an exciting tale of being transported, blindfolded, to a shack in the desert. She escaped from her abductors, she said, by using the ragged edge of a tin can to cut the ropes that bound her hands and feet."

Few believed this tale. Scoffers said it was a hoax and a publicity stunt. Others whispered that Aimee had been off on a rendezvous with Ken Ormiston, the engineer of the church's radio station.

The city of Los Angeles threatened to bring her up on charges (although, as Szasz points out, she had committed no crime). The national press covered the event "in a manner reminis-

cent of the 1995 trial of O.J. Simpson," Szasz observes in his book.

Eventually, the city's district attorney declared there was insufficient evidence for an indictment and the case faded from the public eye.

Szasz concludes, "It is not clear whether such adverse publicity helped or hurt her movement, but it forever cemented Sister Aimee in the public eye."

When, at age 54, she died of an overdose of sleeping pills in her hotel room in 1944 (the coroner ruled her death accidental), the London Daily Mail - reduced by wartime newsprint scarcity to four pages - ran a 1,000-word obituary.

The curtain had fallen on what one historian called "the last giddy spasm" of revivalism in America.

# Priest's slaying stirs up bad memories for retreat that recovered from scandal

By Mary Perea

Associated Press Writer

JEMEZ SPRINGS, N.M. — The shock of a Roman Catholic priest's slaying at an isolated spiritual retreat has brought back memories of a disturbing period when the center was involved in sex abuse allegations.

As bad as the death of the Rev. Michael Mack was, however, leaders of the Father Fitzgerald Renewal and Retreat Center have tried to use discussions about the case to promote the retreat's changed mission and broader reach since the mid-1990s.

Nestled in the red-rock peaks of New Mexico's Jemez Mountains, the center served for many years as a support network for troubled priests.

More than a decade ago, it was hit with numerous pedophilia lawsuits because some priests who were coun-

seled at the center had "unresolved sexual conflicts" when they returned to parishes, said the Rev. Ray Gunzel, center director. The lawsuits have been settled, and the retreat no longer handles such counseling.

In December, police arrested Steven A. Degraff in Mack's slaying. A 33-year-old short-order cook with no apparent connection to the retreat, Degraff claimed in court that the priest tried to rape him.

Retreat leaders dismissed the allegation.

"It's ludicrous that a 60-year-old man would attempt a sexual advance on a younger man who just broke into his house," Gunzel said.

Mack, a visiting priest who was just starting a year of reflection and study, was beaten and fatally stabbed on Dec. 8. His pajama-clad body was found at

his isolated cottage; his car and wallet were missing.

Gunzel said Mack had never before been accused of any sexual impropriety. He was a Dominican priest and a former associate director of the University of Arizona's Catholic Newman Center.

Degraff has pleaded innocent to first-degree murder and armed robbery charges. Gunzel said he didn't believe Degraff had any prior contact with anyone at the center, including Mack. And police have backed up Gunzel's contention the rape allegation was groundless.

"Yes, the detectives have looked at that aspect and they have tried to look at it objectively," Sandoval County Undersheriff Karl Wiese said. "The detectives have not discovered any evidence that supported the allegation."

The retreat center was founded 55

years ago and is run by the Servants of the Paraclete, an order founded by the Rev. Gerald Michael Cushing Fitzgerald to assist priests with personal difficulties. But the center had problems treating sex abusers.

One of the worst cases involved the Rev. James Porter of Massachusetts, who was accused of molesting 99 people while they were children in the 1950s and 1960s. He was alleged to have assaulted others when he was at the center.

Porter left the priesthood in the early 1970s and pleaded guilty in 1993 to molesting 28 children. He was sentenced to 18 to 20 years in prison.

"Their only form of treatment back in that time frame was prayer and forgiveness and that really didn't solve the problem for a pedophile," said attorney Stephen Tinkler, whose firm handled

about 100 sex-abuse lawsuits against Catholic priests, many of them naming the Servants of the Paraclete as defendants. All of those cases were settled, he said.

"We represented the victims of these priests so we felt the Servants, certainly in the '60s and '70s, didn't properly address the issues of pedophilia," Tinkler said.

Gunzel admitted the center was not properly staffed to handle such cases in those years. Professional counseling was available between 1982 and 1995, but the center stopped providing treatment altogether in 1995 because of the pedophilia publicity.

Today, the retreat offers a quiet place for prayer and reflection to people of all religions. Personal guidance is limited to spiritual advice and support.

On any given week, between five and

30 people may use the center's modest facilities. Small houses divided into four separate living areas are provided to those who stay at the center. Each room includes a couple of chairs, a desk, a twin-sized bed, a small closet and bathroom.

Guests can expect a very relaxed atmosphere and plenty of time for solitude. There is no schedule of activities except a Mass is celebrated "around noon" for those who wish to attend, Gunzel said.

The Rev. Christine Robinson, who has led groups to the retreat and also made solo trips, is aware of its past.

"It's not easy for an institution to completely change its focus of what it's doing and I admire them for what they are doing," said the 49-year-old senior minister at the First Unitarian Church in Albuquerque.



## Emmanuel Lutheran Church

### Bible Baptist Church

**Pastor:** Don Crutcher  
Fifth & Broadway  
899-7368  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9 am  
Worship Service: 10 am  
Evening Service: 6:30 pm  
**Wednesday:** Evening Bible Study: 7 pm

### Calvary Gospel Church

**Pastor:** Rev. Steve Rains  
Fourth & College • 899-3605  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:15 am  
Morning Worship: 10:30 am  
Evening Worship: 6:30 pm  
**Wednesday:** Family Night: 7 pm  
Adult Bible Study and Youth Group  
**Saturday:** Prayer Meeting: 5-7 pm  
*If you would like to receive a free newsletter, please call the church office.*

### Church of Christ

401 Caldwell  
899-6185  
**Sunday:** Bible Study: 9:45 am  
Worship Service: 10:45 am  
Evening Service: 6 pm  
**Wednesday:** Bible Study: 7 pm

### Church of the Nazarene

**Pastor:** Matthew Delp  
Third & Caldwell  
899-2080 or 899-3797  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:45 am  
Worship Service: 10:50 am  
Evening Service: 6 pm  
**Wednesday:** Evening Service: 7 pm

### First Baptist Church

**Pastor:** Bud Chester  
Fifth & Center • 899-3450  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:15 am  
Morning Worship: 10:30 am  
Evening Worship: 6:30 pm  
**Tuesday:** Mens' Prayer Group: 6:00 am  
**Thursday:** Night Bible Study: 7:00 pm

### Seventh Day Adventist Church

1160 Cattletrail  
**Pastor:** Arlin Cochran • 785-332-2888  
**Saturday:** Sabbath School: 9:30 am  
Worship Service: 11 am

### First Christian Church

(Disciples of Christ)  
**Pastor:** Loren Strait  
Eighth & Arcade • 899-5233  
**Sunday:** Worship Service: 10:30 am  
**Sunday School:** 9:15 a.m.  
**Activities:** Junior High & High School Youth Groups, Adult Bible Study, Choir, Men's and Women's Groups, Devotions Study, Monthly Fellowship  
**Special Notice:** Handicap Accessible, Hearing Assistance Equipment and Infant and Toddler Nurseries Available

### First United Methodist Church

1116 Sherman  
899-3631  
**Pastor:** Rev. Carol Moore-Ramey  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:15 am  
Worship Service: 10:30 am

### Sonrise Christian Church

Ninth & Caldwell • 899-5398  
**Minister:** Tony Kafka  
**Youth Minister:** Doug Bean  
**Sunday:** Worship Service: 9:30 am  
Sunday School: 10:45 am  
**Wednesday:**  
Junior/Senior High Meeting: 7 pm  
Adult & Children's Classes: 7 pm

### Emmanuel Lutheran Church

13th & Sherman • 899-6161  
**Pastor:** Scott Grimshaw  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 8:45 am  
Worship Service: 10 am  
**Wednesday:** Confirmation: 6 pm

### Kanorado United Methodist Church

**Pastor:** Leonard Cox  
399-2468  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9 am  
Worship Service: 10:15 am

### Goodland Bible Church

109 Willow Road • 899-6400  
**Pastor:**  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:45 am  
Morning Worship: 11 am  
Evening Worship: 6 pm  
**Wednesday:** Call for location

### Grace Fellowship Church

104 E. Hwy 24 • 899-6423  
**Pastor:** Bob Snyder • Residence: 899-0134  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 10 am  
Worship Service: 11 am  
Wednesday 6:30 pm  
"Building on Firm Foundations"

### St. Paul's Episcopal Church

13th & Center  
899-2115 or Rectory 899-2114  
**Priest:** Father Charles Schneider  
**Deacon:** Gretchen Talitha  
**Adult Forum:** Sunday: 8:30 am  
Morning Prayer: 9:30 am 1st & 5th Sundays  
**Holy Eucharist:** 2nd, 3rd, & 4th Sundays: 9:30  
Sr. Warden for emergencies during the week 899-2067

### Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

1200 15th Street • Burlington, CO • (970) 664-2470  
**Sacrament Meeting:** 9:30 am  
**Sunday School:** 10:45 am  
**Priesthood/Relief Society:** 11:30 am

### Word of Life Foursquare Church

223 E. 10th  
899-5250  
**Pastor:** John Coumerilh  
**Sunday:** Worship Celebration & Kids' Church: 10:30 am

### United Methodist Church

**Brewster:**  
**Pastor:**  
Worship Service: 10:45 am CST  
Sunday School: 9:45 am CST  
**Winona:**  
**Minister:** Rev. Bob Winters  
Worship Service: 9 am CST  
Sunday School: 10:15 am CST

### Iglesia Del Dios Vivo

La Luz Del Mundo  
Spanish Speaking Church  
**Minister:** Esteban Ortiz B.  
1601 Texas • 899-5275  
**Daily Prayer:** Sunday thru Saturday: 5 am & 6 pm  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 10 am

### Our Lady of Perpetual Help

**Pastor:** Father Daryl Olmstead  
307 W. 13th • 899-7205  
**Sacrament of Reconciliation:** 4:30-5 pm Saturday or by appointment  
**Mass Schedule:**  
Saturday: 6 pm  
Sunday: 8 am and 10:30 am  
**Spanish Mass:** 1st & 3rd Sunday: 2 pm

### Pleasant Home Church

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Rt. 1, Box 180 • 694-2807 • 3190 Road 70  
**Pastor:** Jim Cress  
899-5784  
**Sunday:** Worship Service: 9 am  
Sunday School: 10 am  
Evening Service: 6 pm

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