

# Choir's ties to religious group worry Episcopal diocese

By Ann Rodgers-Melnick  
The Pittsburgh Press

Pittsburgh's Episcopal diocese warned its clergy that an acclaimed choir scheduled for a concert at St. Paul Catholic Cathedral today is "a front for... a cult."

Please warn your parishioners immediately," said the note in its 20 weekly bulletin for clergy.

Gloriae Dei Cantores — Latin for "Angels to the Glory of God" — is considered among the world's finest interpreters of Gregorian chant. It is affiliated with the Community of Jesus, an independent Christian community based in a waterfront area on Cape Cod, Mass.

The Rev. George Werner, dean of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Downtown, said the local Episcopal diocese's warning stems from reports he's had from Episcopal officials.

He issued the warning because the diocesan newspaper had promoted the concert before he learned of its connection to the community.

"I've been telling people who call me to definitely go hear them, but if they invite you to a reception, you might want to run," Werner said. "I have heard no problems specifically about the choir, but I wanted people to know that it was connected with the Community of Jesus and that the Community of Jesus was looked on as a dangerous group by people I respect."

The community, which has 800 members, primarily in the Cape Cod area, has been a source of controversy since at least the early 1980s, when newspapers in Massachusetts began publishing profiles of the group.

Worship at the Community of Jesus follows a traditional Episcopal liturgy. But former members and several Presbyteries that have looked into the group say it stresses some teachings that are on the fringes of Christian doctrine.

The Presbytery of the Genesee Valley in New York, for instance, said there is an overemphasis on the purging of sin through public confession and mutual criticism.

The community has some notable supporters who cite its emphasis on families.

Several years ago, then-U.S. Interior Secretary Donald Hodel was impressed enough with the Community of Jesus to videotape an endorsement.

"What's special to me about the community is the sense of peace and serenity that I have experienced here," Hodel said. "I think in this society today the family is the cornerstone, and the family becomes the key component of the community."

But members who have left in the past 15 years said normal affection between family members was deemed "idolatry," and was "cured" by sending children to live away from parents. Spiritual correction, they said, often amounted to severe verbal and psychological batterings. Its directors routinely warned that God would punish disobedience with death, illness or addiction, they said.

The community's leaders have previously said the group teaches a love of God, nurtures Christian humility and uproots sin from members.

A call to the community's headquarters was transferred to Richard Laraja, an attorney who is also a community member. Laraja refused to answer questions about the community. The Pittsburgh Press then sent him written questions, which Laraja said community leaders would not answer.

Several former members said they had believed the Episcopal Church had sanctioned the community. And a current member of the choir's board of directors, the Rev. John Randall, a Catholic priest from Providence, R.I., urged a reporter to contact the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts.

"The bishop's office would give them a good report," he said.

But Jay Cormier, communications director for that diocese, said, "The thing I can tell you definitely is that they are not an Episcopal organization affiliated with the Diocese of Massachusetts and they do not have the approval of the bishop. For them to say or pretend otherwise is not true. I mean, they're a cult."

The community's chapel is home for Glorae Dei Cantores, although the non-profit choir incorporated separately in 1988. That year, when the choir lost money touring Eastern Europe, the Community of Jesus gave it an \$85,000 loan, according to tax records on file with the Massachusetts attorney general's office.

Even the community's harshest critics concede the choir's music is breathtaking. Music critics from Bratislava to Boston have hailed its recordings and concerts, saying it breathes new life into the most ancient music of the Christian faith.

All choir members belong to the Community of Jesus, but they promote only Jesus, said Blair Manuel, choir public relations coordinator.

In Europe, "we said we represent America. ... We want to share our love for Jesus with you," she said.

Gloriae Dei Cantores is an outgrowth of the community's long-standing choir and is directed by Betty Pugsley under the professional name of Elizabeth Patterson. She is considered an expert on Gregorian chant.

The choir's income for 1988-89 primarily came from gifts and donations, according to tax records, and only a small portion was raised by ticket sales for concerts, which were primarily in Europe.

Choir spokeswomen said they hoped ticket sales would pay for all expenses of the current American tour. The members are not paid for singing.

Before booking Pittsburgh's Catholic cathedral, choir representatives had approached Trinity Episcopal Cathedral. The staff thought it odd the choir lacked a local invitation or



**Bonnie Lacross**  
Says letter used against her



**Shawn DeLude**  
Lived 3 years in community

sponsor. Its representatives never said they belonged to any religious community, said Anne Marie Griffin, administrative assistant to Bishop Alden Hathaway.

For months afterward, choir representatives continued to call and visit Trinity, unsuccessfully lobbying for its mailing list and a list of clergy and for the bishop to attend the concert, she said.

The choir, which is selling tickets for \$12.50, booked St. Paul on the strength of its reviews, said the Rev. Ronald Lengwin, spokesman for the Catholic Diocese.

"The cathedral itself has nothing to do with the appearance in that it isn't selling tickets," he said. The diocese's view at this point is that "it's just a choir," he said.

However, "If they were to come through again, it would be my rec-

ommendation to the pastor of the cathedral that he rethink this in light of what appears to be a consistent pattern of allegations. Those allegations may be totally wrong, but it's something that needs to be considered," he said.

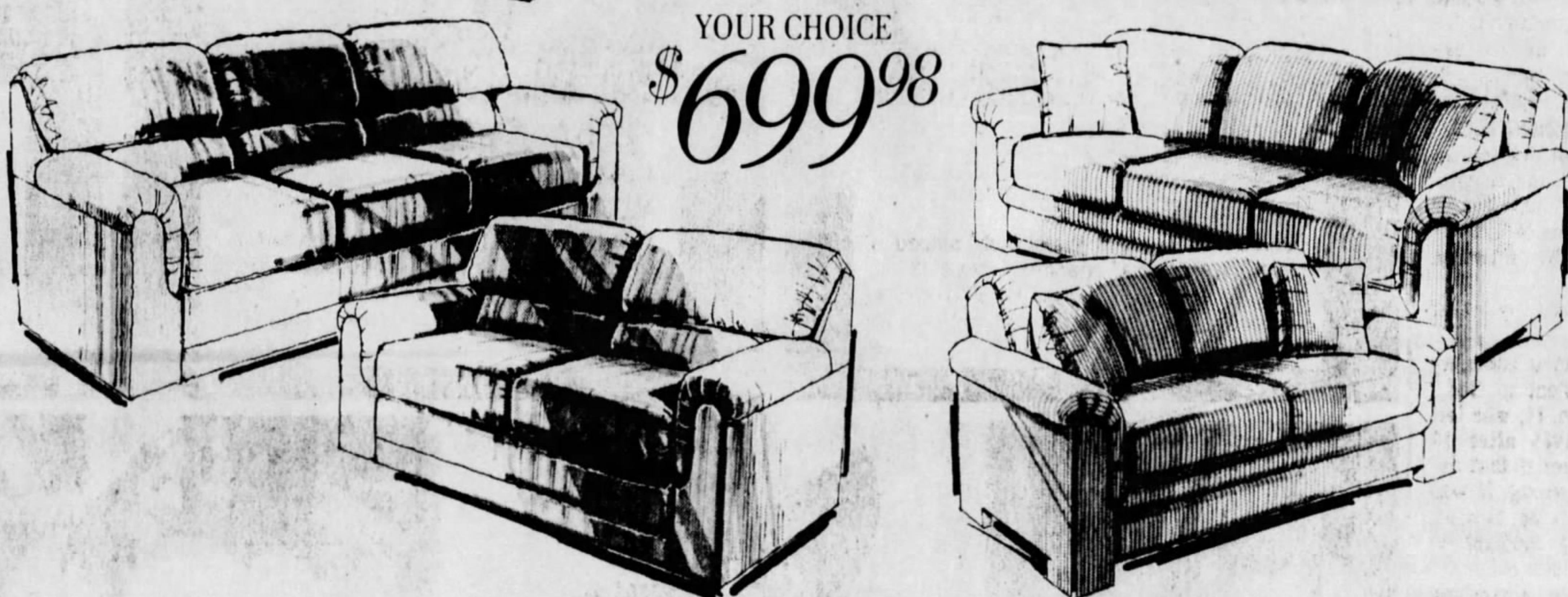
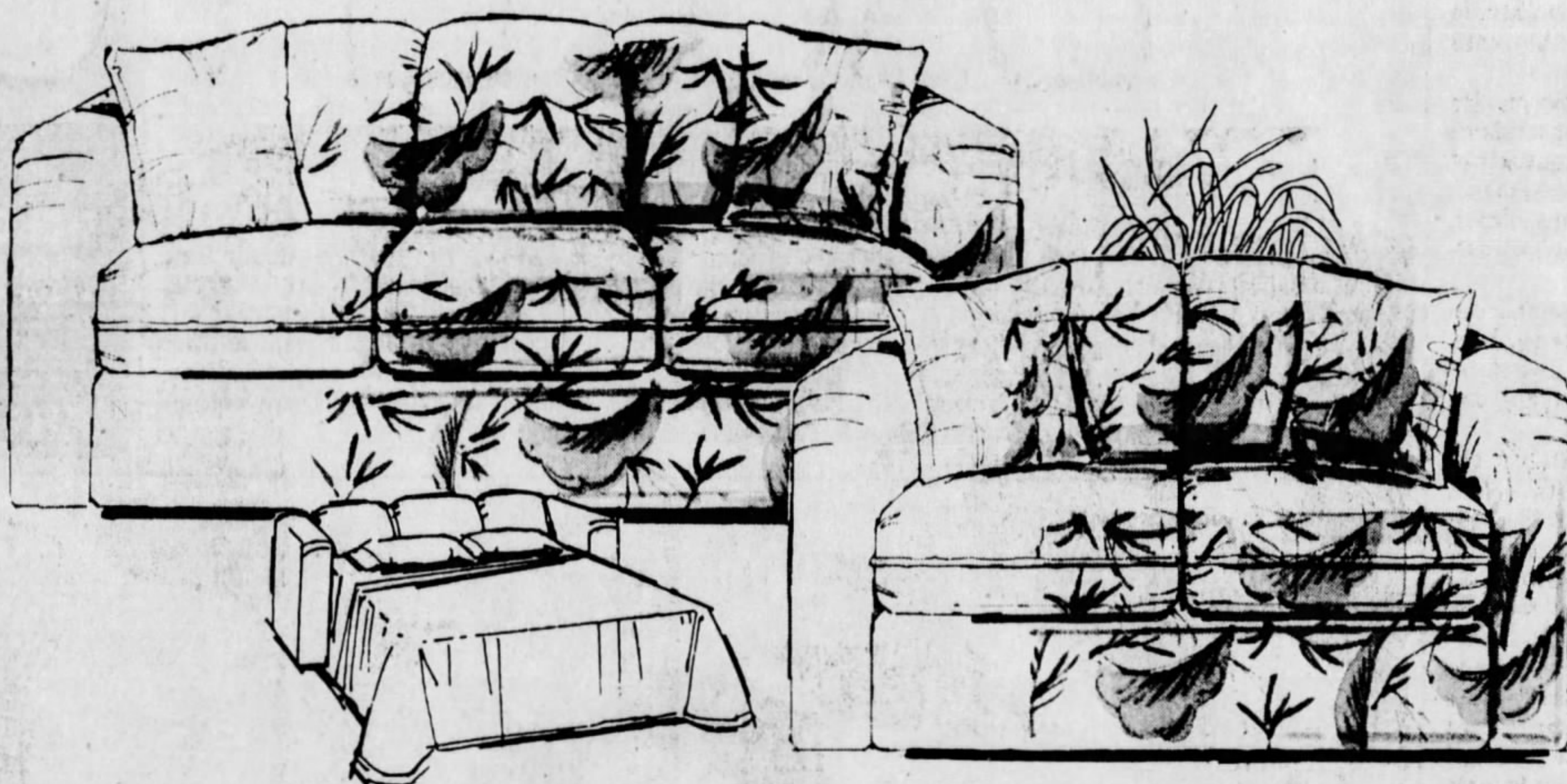
The community began in 1958 when Cape Cod housewives Cay Andersen and Judy Sorenson began Bible teaching, counseling and faith healing. Soon they were known as Mother Cay and Mother Judy, or simply "the mothers."

Mother Cay died in 1989 at age 75. Mrs. Pugsley is now listed alongside Mother Judy, 64, as associate director of the Community of Jesus.

Its headquarters is a colonia revival retreat house and chapel in Orleans, Mass. About 300 resident members occupy about 30 privately

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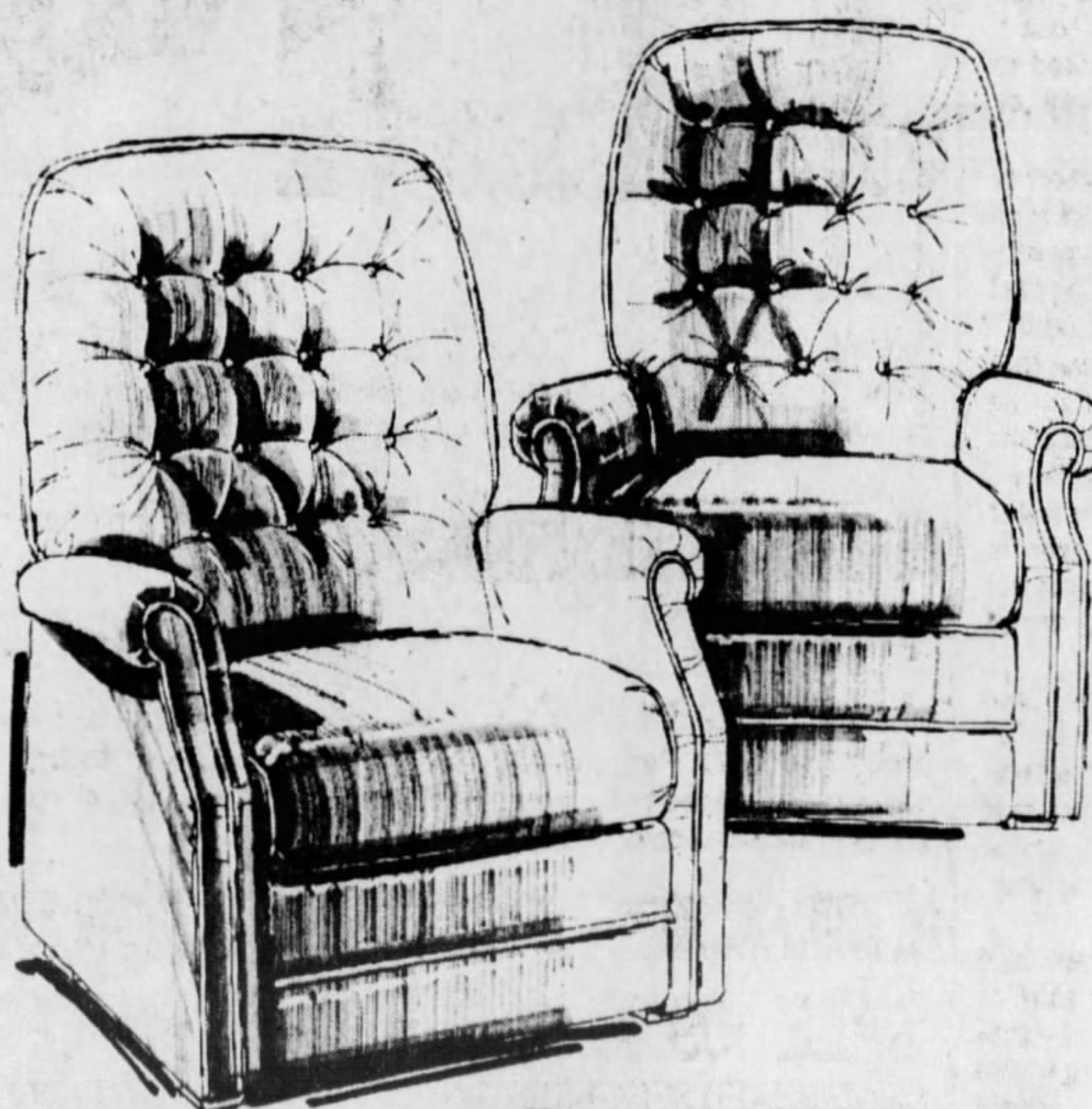
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# Choir

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owned homes in an adjacent development. About 500 non-resident members are scattered across the U.S. and several foreign nations.

The community has attracted some notable members. Among them is Gloriae Dei Cantores Foundation President William Kanaga, retired chairman of Arthur Young & Co. and former chairman of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Donald Burnham of Mt. Lebanon, retired chief executive of Westinghouse Electric, has a son, daughter-in-law and three grandchildren who are long-time residents of the community. He has never heard a bad word about it.

"I've been out there several times and stayed there for a couple of days myself. It's a wonderful place," he said. "This is a group of people who are just good Christians. They treat people the way Christians are taught to treat people."

Outsiders might think it odd that two families share each house and that "sometimes some of the children will stay with another family for a few months," he said. "I don't think it is bad at all. It lets them get acquainted with other people. We had three grandchildren who grew up in that community and they have all turned out to be awfully nice people."

In past years, when former members accused the community of abuses, Jill Elmer, Mother Judy's daughter, led the defense. Sour grapes by those who couldn't handle spiritual discipline, she told reporters.

But after leaving the community in 1987, Mrs. Elmer filed an affidavit to seek a divorce and gain custody of her children. She and her husband, Rockefeller heir Dr. David Elmer, have since reconciled and live outside the community.

In March 1987, when her children were ages 7, 4 and 7 months, Mrs. Elmer became seriously ill and required risky intestinal surgery, she stated in the affidavit.

She told community members she wanted to see her children before surgery. Instead, they sent the children to live with someone else for two months, telling them their mother did not want to see them, she said.

During her nine-day hospitalization, a community member "would continuously attempt to instill in me the belief that I was ill because I had been a bad person, because I had sinned and because of my inadequate contributions to the community."

The same person also told her husband "that I had become ill because he had not sufficiently contributed to the community."

Mrs. Elmer will not discuss the community publicly. "She has nothing to do with the Community of Jesus. She simply wants to live her life in privacy," said her attorney, Robert Lawless.

Her story is echoed by other former members.

"By coming under their authority you were being obedient to God," said Christine Johnson, 44, who left the community in 1985 after 13 years. "It didn't matter if that authority was right or wrong. It was obedience that was being blessed. You ended up being obedient to things you didn't believe in."

Mrs. Johnson, Bonnie Lacross and Barbara Tamasi, all of Cape Cod, say they attended a members-only retreat in which participants were told to write detailed confessions of every sexual sin they had ever committed and give them to the mothers and Chaplain Arthur Lane. The sins were to include all non-procreative sexual acts with spouses.

Mrs. Lacross wrote her letter sobbing because she suddenly recalled that a neighborhood boy had molested her when she was about 5 years old. "Nobody was supposed to read these but Cay and Judy or Father Lane," she said.

But after the retreat, another community resident summoned Mrs. Lacross, now 44. Two community women spent three hours yelling that the molestation "was all my fault."

"I remember them telling me that there was a very devious sin in me that desired that boy to do what he did to me. (They said) that unless I dealt with that devious nature I was going to have the worst children in the world and my husband would not stay with me and my sin would get so sick," she said.

In a formal statement to the Cape Codder, a weekly newspaper in Orleans, in 1985, the mothers' executive secretary, Barbara Manuel, said the mothers did not wield undue authority or influence over community members:

"The role of Cay Andersen and Judy Sorensen is similar to that of the founders and abbesses of (monastic) communities through the centuries. While members respect them and value their advice, they certainly do not regard them as infallible or surrogates for God."

Community teaching on idolatry of children is drawn from the Gospel of Matthew, 10:35-37, in which Jesus says, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

"It is true that they have a lot of teaching about parents being idolatrous of children," Randall said. "Sometimes when they try to put a broken family together they will separate the parents from the children or the husband from the wife for a month or two. Some people have resisted it and fought it. But I have seen a lot of families put back together that were very shaky, and put back together in a very solid way too."

"They separate a family in the community and make it weak," said Shawn DeLude, 19, who moved to the community from Connecticut with his family when he was 13.

community, he lived with his parents three months and was discouraged from visiting them except on Thursday nights and Sunday mornings, he said.

In 1987, his houseparents discovered three books on cults and brainwashing, which he took from the library of a Presbyterian minister who lived at the community, he said. His houseparents and three community ministers screamed at him for stealing and told his parents they had caused his sin through their idolatry of him, he said.

The next morning his father told him to pack for a private school in Canada, he said.

After three months, he ran away, hitchhiking to Cape Cod.

But his father told him he could either get in the car for a drive back to the school or leave the community, Shawn DeLude said.

Shawn walked away. Now, "I see them (my parents) in the store and they turn and walk the other way," he said.

After living with a friend's family for a time, Shawn is working and attending junior college.

"I think the community is good as a religious place, but I think they use the religion to undermine people. I don't blame my parents for living there. I still love them very much. They have good intentions and they want to serve God and live his way. But they happened to fall into the wrong group of people."

"I look at it more as a family matter between Shawn and his mother and I," said Shawn's father, Donald DeLude, who would not discuss his son's allegations. "We obviously have different opinions as to what went on. I don't feel it has anything to do with the community."



Stephen Rose/For The Pittsburgh Press

The Community of Jesus waterfront retreat on Cape Cod, Mass.

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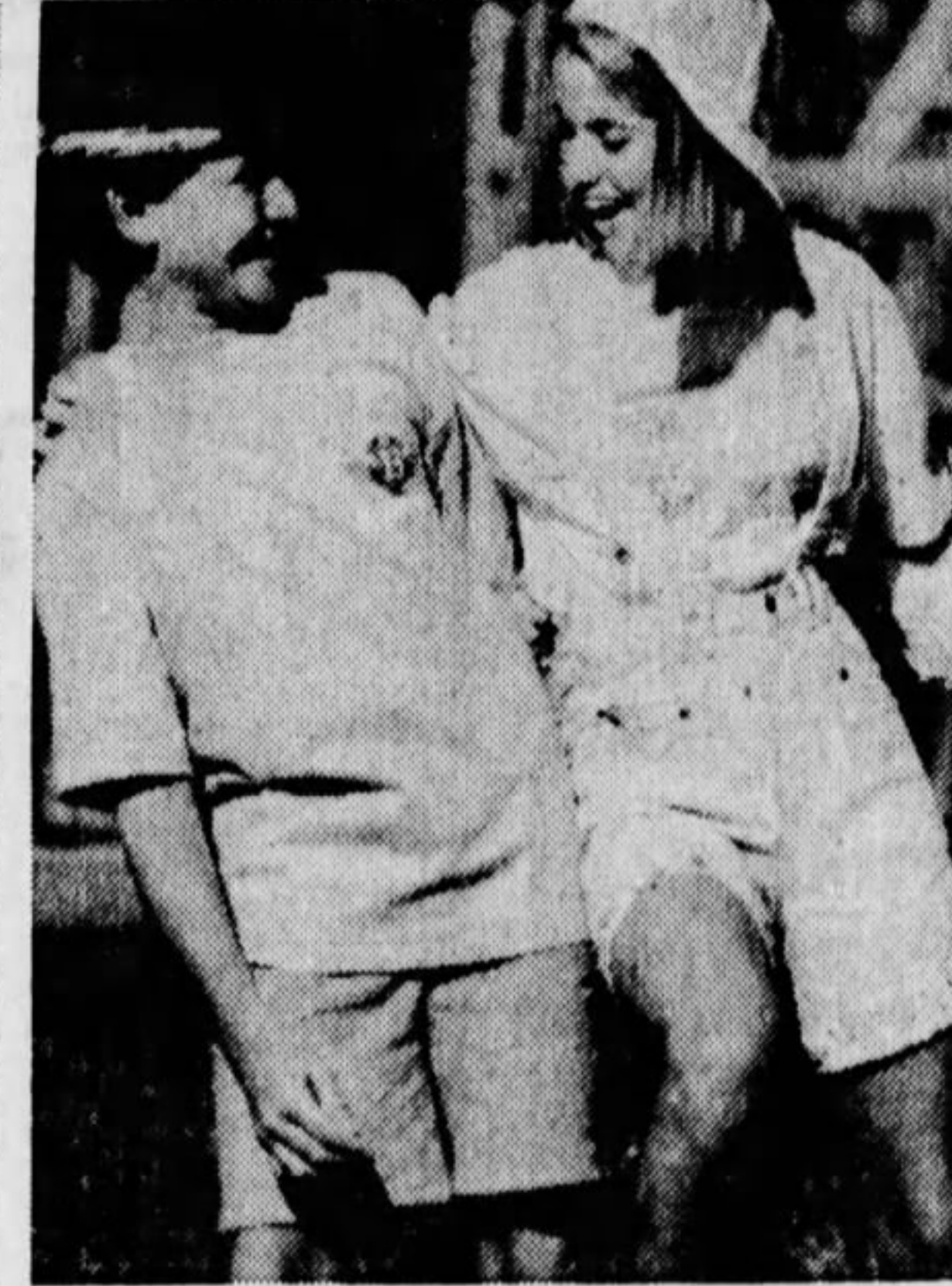
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