

Ex-Christ Circle leader sought

Interpol police have put out an all points bulletin for Arthur J. Hempel, the former cult leader of Christ Circle school in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

U.S. and international police are responding to a former cult member's charge that Hempel has disappeared in Europe with her two sons.

According to the Associated Press, Sandra Elkins of Pasadena enrolled the boys, Jonas McMillen, 11, and Terry Sanders, 6, in Hempel's school when it was located just north of Boulder Creek in the late 1970s.

Hempel's tenure here was stormy — as it has been elsewhere — and his refusal to follow county building regulations and federal grant regulations in running his school caused him to tangle with county, state and federal officials.

Cult members who had wanted to get out also had long and difficult problems in getting their families away.

He moved the school from Santa Cruz County in the fall of 1979 and took it to Elko County, Nev. where he ran into the same series of problems.

Ms. Elkins has been in touch with some former cult members here and also has asked the county counsel's office for help.

A cult member here says Hempel apparently has relocated somewhere in Europe, but is still getting money from a paving firm that works in Santa Clara Valley.

Ms. Elkins told the Associated Press Hempel has put up a Nazi flag and preaches homosexuality at the European site.

A former cult member says Hempel was beginning his teachings on homosexuality in his latter days in Santa Cruz County. He was saying that women "would never evolve" and that in future lives on future planets there would only be males.

Ms. Elkins says it has been a two-year nightmare of court battles here and abroad, bureaucratic frustrations, and several near-misses in finding the boys.

The 39-year-old Arcadia woman says she has even gone to President Reagan for help.

"The file on this case is the biggest I have ever seen," State Department spokesman John Caulfield told the Pasadena Star-News.

Interpol agent Russ Parry told the paper that there are no new leads on the whereabouts of the boys, although Interpol issued an international all-points bulletin. Ms. Elkins said the State Department told her Hempel got a two-year passport extension in Scotland last October.

Ms. Elkins said she met Hempel in mid-1978 when she began attending his

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Western School of Beauty in Temple City on a scholarship. Divorced and short of money, she accepted his offer of a scholarship for her younger sons at Christ Circle.

"I visited the school and it was really nice," she said.

In the fall of 1979, she was notified that the school was moving to Elko County, Nev. And she says she agreed to a request that Hempel's aide, Sarah Marshall, be given legal guardianship of the children in case of a medical emergency.

"They said I could cancel the guardianship any time I wanted to," she said.

She learned later that instead of going straight to Nevada, Hempel's group settled on 1,000 acres of land in the Mendocino County community of Boonville.

Hempel is named in Mendocino County warrants for child abuse, Deputy District Attorney Cliff Harris said. Charges still outstanding against two of his followers include battery, assault with a deadly weapon, enticing away a minor and concealing a child from its parents, Harris said.

The school, operating there under the name of Ben Urim Institute, also ran afoul of county officials for allegedly building without permits, and also was accused by its landlord of owing \$18,500 in rent, the paper said.

Such news prompted Northern California parents to withdraw their children from the school, but word didn't reach Ms. Elkins in Southern California.

The school relocated in Nevada, and in January 1980 she paid another visit, finding only her sons and five other children remaining as students. However, everything seemed all right at the time, she said.

But in June 1980, a federal court ruled that Hempel and Christ Circle had embezzled \$278,394 in federal student-aid money, and in October 1980, school officials said they were moving to the small Austrian town of Hochfield.

They invited Ms. Elkins, her new husband and her 16-year-old son Todd on an all-expenses paid journey to help set up the school.

Once there, they found the school operating under the name Episcopal Church of America in Austria.

U.S. Episcopal church Canon Richard Anderson says Hempel's group was in no way linked to the Episcopal Church in this country.

The school's facilities were sumptuous, Ms. Elkins said.

"Three stories, chandeliers, a real big-money operation," she recalled.

But she was alarmed when Hempel began wearing bishop's robes and calling himself Bishop Hempel, the paper said.

"We were supposed to pretend we were nuns and priests. I refused. Arthur hung a Nazi flag in the dining room," she told the paper. "...He wore a mustache like Hitler's. He began separating husbands and wives and preaching homosexuality. He said the female spirit was evil."

When after two days Ms. Elkins and her husband wanted to leave, she was told they couldn't take her sons because she didn't have custody.

"I would have just walked out with the children, but we feared for our lives," she said.

Austrian officials advised them to get the custody papers revoked back in the United States, she said.

She did so in April 1981, but an Austrian judge let Ms. Marshall keep the boys until Austrian officials could make travel arrangements. When the officials went to get the boys, Hempel and everyone in the school was gone, she said.

She says her marriage has since broken up, her hairdressing career was a failure, and she now works as a secretary and tries not to think about fears for her sons and her own safety.

"The worst part is when I have dreams that the kids have come home," she said.