

# A Group Of Young People Form 'Christian Community'

By PAULA AMBROSI  
Sentinel Staff Writer

Why would a group of young people want to become a "Christian" community?

A community dedicated to being "true Christians" and helping peers with drug problems?

Such is the Koinonia Community which makes its home at 240 West Cliff Drive and 24 Front St., where it also operates a coffeehouse.

Said Andy Geyer, treasurer and core member:

"When I first came to the Community House on West Cliff Drive it was a foster home. There was no Koinonia Community but the foster home was run like a "Christian family."

"I was all strung out on drugs—LSD, methordrine. The really hard stuff.

"I had a bad experience with my parents. I was originally placed as a ward of the court. The people at the Community House showed a lot of love for me.

"I got off drugs and overcame some of my hang-ups. How? I became a Christian."

Geyer, 21, continued, "After I turned 18 and was free to leave I decided I wanted to stay and help because I wanted others to have a place to stay like me.

"Basically, that's why the Koinonia Community happened. Some of us wanted out of the drug scene. Others had emotional hang-ups, others were searching for a purpose to their lives. And after doing it — by becoming Christians—we wanted to help others who have the same problems we had had."

The Koinonia Community is a "Christian family" that just happened, said Geyer. It evolved from a small prayer group who opened a coffeehouse in 1967 that served as an experimental Christian mission outreach to young people in trouble, drugs mostly.

The coffeehouse was taken over by various persons. In 1969 a group of young people who met through the coffeehouse and had become Christians, got together with Margaret Rovick, one of the original prayer group members.

They incorporated as the Koinonia Community, a non-profit charitable organization, in 1969. Objectives: to inspire others by its example to lead "Christian" lives, and help youthful drug abusers.

The community is made up of 22 persons at the present time. Core members constitute the "Christian" family. These are mostly young people aged 17 to 26 who started the community. Since incorporation four core members have left, and six have joined.

Other residents are youngsters placed in the community

by parents and probation departments statewide. They usually have drug problems that lead to delinquency.

Core members, many of whom have experienced the same scene and problems as the placements, serve as friends and counselors. They help to rehabilitate placements by example and "Christian love."

"I don't think of us as being 'Jesus People,'" said Mrs. Lynn Johnson. "The so-called 'Jesus People' I've met are mostly into the religious scene because it's a trend. We may be part of the 'Jesus Movement', but not purposely. For us, core members, living a Christian life dedicated to Jesus Christ is an every day thing, not passing. We've been into this two years now.

"I've chosen this life. We don't call ourselves 'Jesus People'."

The community has no set religion. They simply claim to be "Christians." Placements are not forced to participate in any religious activities, said Mrs. Rovick, 51. The core members incorporate much religion and psalm singing into their daily lives and encourage placements to join in.

"We cannot by law force the placements to participate," said Mrs. Rovick. "They do not even have to say grace at mealtime. They have the option to leave the room."

Said Mrs. Michael Agnone, 20: "When the whole thing first started out the people involved could be called 'Jesus People' if you interpret that to mean 'preachy, etc.' We've changed, at least we've tried to get away from that. If someone wants to accept faith, fine. If not, that's fine, too. Our life isn't for everyone."

"We do witness," noted Geyer, "but we don't give testimonials. We don't try to hide the fact that we're into Jesus Christ pretty heavy."

The community supports itself through a combination of efforts. It runs the coffeehouse which is open 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday. It also operates a Koinonia Odds and Bits Boutique and Christian Bookstore at 111 Beach St. Donations, and room and board fees paid for placements by parents, welfare and probation departments and core members who work outside the community complete the finances.

The core members do all their own work, with placements expected to pull their share. There are no job assignments as such. Each member contributes what skills he has. Lack of funds has cut short the renovation of the living quarters above the coffeehouse.

"Our life is very simple," said

Mrs. Agnone. "We make most of our own clothes, live as frugally as we can yet meet our needs. We all work together to make our community a 'Christian family' in the Biblical context of the word."

Said Mrs. Johnson, "For a while we were living on \$102 a month which went for all our food, clothes, gas money (they travel statewide to perform for different groups), and other needs. It's unbelievable when we think of it now. The coffeehouse is earning a little money now which has enabled us to pay the married men for their physical work such as carpentry, etc. Also each of us has a \$10 monthly allowance. That's kind of encouraging and teaches us the value of money."

The living quarters are divided between the coffeehouse and Community House with placements and core members living together. Each has his own room, as do married couples. "You couldn't survive in the community if you weren't an individual," said Mrs. Johnson. "Privacy is all important."

The community originally had no married couples.

"It's really exciting what has happened," says Mrs. Agnone about the core members. "There have been three marriages in the community so far. We never planned it that way. Our youngest member is baby Sarah Valentine, 4 months old, daughter of Chris and Lynn. We had a double wedding last August. Two more babies are on the way now. We are becoming a 'real family,' children and all."

Both Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Agnone and Geyer said that they "didn't think the Koinonia Community would ever get to be an "institution." They expressed a lot of optimism about its future.

Next fall, for example, Mrs. Johnson, who is one semester away from being a registered nurse, is going back to Cabrillo College. Geyer, too, plans to become a registered nurse. Johnson and Geyer are both Vietnam veterans. Mark Sandman, another member, is now in Vietnam. Johnson has been accepted at UCSC and is 18 months shy of getting a B.A. in psychology. Of these four, Johnson is the only one who became a "Christian" who had not been on drugs.

Said Michael Roukes, 17, a core member, "The Koinonia Community is not like a lot of people think, a 'holy, holy' group. We are just as crummy, just as good, make just as many mistakes, and are just as human as others in other lifestyles.

"The only difference is our lives are dedicated to being Christians."