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# In God's name: Unlicensed religious group homes in Florida

# tampabay.com



- Facility profile

# New Beginnings Girls Academy

Location

3111 Zepp Lane, Pace, FL 32571

Website

http://www.nbministriesmo.com/main.html

Accreditation

FACCCA (inactive)

This group home is no longer operating in Florida.

Children served

girls

Mission

children's home

- Description

New Beginnings was a fundamentalist Christian reform home for teen girls that operated for years in Florida but voluntarily moved away in 2007. Girls sent to the Florida campus say they were whipped with switches, made to hold others as they were whipped and made to stand in place for so long they urinated on themselves.

Former students tell stories of preacher Bill McNamara publicly confronting girls about masturbation and about homosexuality. They say he called them “faggots.”
Several recall nights when McNamara would burst into their dorm room screaming he could smell masturbation.
DCF investigated the facility three times and, in one case, found evidence of bizarre punishment and bruises.
New Beginnings did not respond to a phone call, a letter or emails sent by the *Times*.

- Photo Gallery





The driveway to what used to be New Beginnings Girls Academy in Pace. The site is now occupied by Marvelous Grace Girls Academy.

- Former residents

Taylor Hicks, 21

**“On night duty, you had to walk up and down the dorm and make sure the girls were asleep,” said Hicks, who was at the program in Florida in 2007 and in Missouri in 2009. “You had to check to make sure no one was masturbating. We had to yank their blankets off and make a lot of noise. I never caught anyone, but I never wanted to. I was always pointed out for being gay.”**

Misha Wallace, 22

**“If somebody ran away, we all got in trouble,” said Wallace, a resident from 2004 to 2008 who rose to the rank of “helper.” “All of the helpers, we were running for dear life trying to catch the girls. We chased them toward the road.”**

- Financial information

Most of the religious group homes reviewed by the *Tampa Bay Times* are nonprofit organizations and must file financial information each year with the IRS. The *Times* collected these public records, which reveal income and expenses and other basic information about each organization. In some cases, the forms could not be found.

Tax information for 2006:

| | |
|---|---|
| Gross receipts | $413,271 |
| Expenses | $357,134 |
| Net revenue | $56,137 |
| Net asssets | $454,271 |

- History

New Beginnings was founded as the Rebekah Home for Girls by Lester Roloff, a fundamentalist Baptist preacher credited with sparking a deregulation movement for private religious schools and foster homes.
The school opened in 1967 in Texas and, after years of battle with the state over its lack of a license and allegations of abuse, left for Missouri in 1985. But it returned in the late 1990s, after then-Gov. George W. Bush established a faith-based task force to determine which state laws or regulations impeded religious organizations from flourishing. The Texas Association of Christian Child Care Agencies (TACCCA) was created and approved by the state as an alternative to licensing. The Rebekah Home returned.
In its earliest days, Texas officials expressed concerns after numerous girls said they were beaten, locked in isolation rooms and handcuffed to drainpipes. “There’s nothing wrong with handcuffing a girl to keep her from going to hell,” Roloff was quoted in a 1979 *New York Times* story. But TACCCA welcomed the home back to Texas, where it collected more abuse allegations until legislators decided to do away with the exemption in 2001.
The school moved to Missouri for a stint, then came to Florida, where it remained until 2007 as New Beginnings Girls Academy.
It is now in Missouri, a state known to have even more lax regulation of religious residential facilities.

- Other employees

Bill McNamara

president

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