

Pizza Evangelist #2 — Jay Strack — \$75,000 Recruiter

"Evangelist Gets Message Across Without Using God's Name," was the headline of a news story which ran in the Plano, Texas, press following a recent public school appearance by evangelist Jay Strack. Like Johnston, Strack purposefully self-censors overt preaching on school property, but blatantly uses the public school set-up to recruit students for after-school revivals. Students are a captive audience, not only required by law to attend school, but usually forced to attend mandatory assemblies by evangelists, who, in the process achieve name recognition and credibility, not to mention a nice fee. Strack claims a \$75,000 a year salary.

As critics are quick to point out, it goes without saying that schools would not tolerate exploitation of students by Moonies, Hare Krishnas, or Satan Worshipers, much less pay them to recruit!

Pizza Evangelist #3 — Ira Lee Eshleman — Football is His Facade

Sports World Ministries is an 11 year old organization of former professional athletes who push a message of deliverance from substance abuse through fundamentalist Christianity. Despite the group's ministerial affiliation and overtly sectarian emphasis, it has gained easy access to public schools in 49 states, reaching, the ministry claims, 1 million youngsters a year. Capitalizing on the legitimate concerns of school administrators and parents, Sports World markets its talks as simple anti-drug or suicide prevention messages. What they don't make clear to school officials is that their speakers believe the answer to such problems lies in their brand of Christianity.

Recently, Ira Lee Eshleman, the group's founder expressed a desire to boost the ministry's roster by three dozen athletes. Eshleman is a man driven by a mission that co-mingles football and religion. To Eshleman, professional athletes are heroes that young people readily admire and want to emulate. Eshleman infiltrated the world of professional football in 1967, launching a ministry under the name of Sports World Chaplaincy. He counseled players for several years, encouraging them to attend pre-game chapel services. All the while he worked toward the goal of establishing personal relationships with the athletes in the hopes of convincing them to participate in a program geared toward public schools. In 1978, that project — Sports World Ministries — was born.

Sports World — An Organization With Friends in High Places

Aside from football notables, Eshleman, who holds an honorary doctorate degree, has other friends in high places. During a visit to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, last spring, President George Bush and William Bennett, former Education Secretary and now Drug Czar, met briefly with Eshleman and other Sports World officials. Bush

reportedly told Eshleman, "We appreciate the impact that your athletes are having on society." Responded Eshleman, "It will be much greater when we can get 36 more ex-pros trained and in uniform for God and country, and a caring and concerned public can make it happen." The ministry also has ties to the Bush administration through Jack Kemp who is now secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Kemp, who once was a professional football player, serves as Sports World's honorary chairman.

While Bush, Bennett, and Kemp may applaud Sports World's work, some people in the ministry's own backyard don't share their enthusiasm. Last year, Sports World and Children's Bible Ministries (CBM), an unrelated evangelical proselytizing organization, were forced out of the Clairborne County (New Tazewell), Tennessee public schools because of parent complaints and a threatened class-action lawsuit. CBM used so-called "Bible ladies" to give lessons in area public schools. Alongside this activity in the lower grades, Sports World twice sponsored programs in the local high schools. The Sports World talk, billed as non-sectarian, began with the speaker discussing his problems with drugs and alcohol, but, of course, the answer for students was fundamentalist Christian — to turn their lives over to Jesus Christ.

According to some experienced school officials, a brush with Sports World Ministries can have a positive effect: it can force educational administrators to think very carefully about church-state related issues in their schools.

The Country Copes with Kuhlmeier

In January of 1988, the Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* holding that school sponsored expression — in newspapers, magazines, and other official forums — may be censored if a school official believes it to be "inconsistent with the school's basic educational mission" or "inappropriate" for a young audience, or if it is perceived as bearing "the imprimatur of the school." Since that time, PPE Board Reports have recounted incidents in Illinois, Nevada, New York, California, and Florida where book-banners have used the decision successfully to squelch a wide range of ideas (see Sept. and Dec. 1988 Board Reports).

More recently, however, the enactment of liberal statutes at the state level, and the adoption of enlightened school board policies at the local school district level have begun to turn the tide somewhat. A few examples:

*Oregon, the Scappoose school board decided to retain Aristophanes' "Lysistrata" in the senior honors English curriculum despite parental complaints similar to those which resulted in the work being banned in Columbia County, Florida. The Oregon board determined the work to be "pedagogically sound."