THE TENNESSEAN

A GANNETT NEWSPAPER VOL. 78—No. 65 NASHVILLE, TENN., FRIDAY, JUNE 10, 1983

Second Class Postage Paid at Nashville, Tenn.

Tony Alamo Asks Letters From Parents

By ELLEN DEBENPORT

LITTLE ROCK (UPI) — Evangelist Tony Alamo has solicited letters from the parents of foundation members who say their adult children are happy and fulfilled in the Christian sect.

Alamo warned of a conspiracy to spread lies about his religious foundation.

THIS WEEK Alamo mailed to news outlets eight letters from parents who say they support the work of the Tony and Susan Alamo Foundation — or at least accept it. He told UPI Tuesday he will be distributing the letters "by the millions."

One mother, who said she had hired a "deprogrammer" to try to convince her son to leave the group, wrote that she is "old, tired and remorseful" and is "sorry for the trouble I caused in the past."

"It has taken us many years to come to an understanding of God's ways and to understand unselfishly that your ministry is composed of many young devotees who are blessed a thousand-fold each day in their pursuit of what they feel is right," said the letter signed Grace Gonzalez.

FOR YEARS, the Alamos have weathered charges from parents and former members that their followers are brainwashed, forced to relinquish their money and forbidden to see their families. Several parents have sued unsuccessfully to remove their adult children from the group.

Alamo said he asked foundation members to see if their parents would be "kind enough to refute the accusations" of other parents who are combatting the foundation.

"It's not for our sake because I'm already a Christian, I'm already going to heaven," Alamo said in a telephone interview from Miami. "It's for the souls of the people that have been lied to that I want the truth to be shown. We definitely have the truth and we want people to know it. I want everybody in the country to know we're not a bad organization."

IN A COVER letter, Alamo said a "conspiracy between the news media, the one-world church and an unfriendly government" has attempted to stifle freedom of religion "by maligning and making laws against fundamentalists (the true body of Christ)."

The parents' letters emphasized that foundation members are free to visit their families anywhere, are rearing happy children and all have plenty to eat.

Joan Schiff, a Jewish mother, wrote that she was shocked when her 17-year-old son was "saved" during a visit to California 11 years ago. But on her visits to the foundation, she has watched him "blossom and mature in this nourishing community," she said.

ONLY FOUR parents are forbidden to see their children because they are "connected with a kidnapping ring (called deprogrammers falsely)," Alamo wrote.

Tony and Susan Alamo began their ministry in California in 1968 and moved later to Alma, Ark., which was Susan Alamo's hometown. Tony Alamo, originally a singer, has continued their work since his wife's death last year.

The members live in foundation housing and work at 36 various foundation businesses, including a restaurant and clothing store at Alma. Others live at Saugus, Calif.; Nashville; Tulsa, Okla., and in Arizona, New York and Illinois, Alamo said.

The organization operates the The Alamo of Nashville, a western clothing store at 324 Broadway in Nashville.

Alamo said he plans to open a new center in South Miami Beach, Fla., in July to "work amongst Cubans, Haitians, Colombians and Jews."

In December, a federal judge ordered the foundation to pay the minimum wage and overtime to its "volunteer" employees, who are provided free housing, food, transportation and medical care with schooling for their children.