Covenant House: Journey of a Faith-Based Charity

Peter J. Wosh
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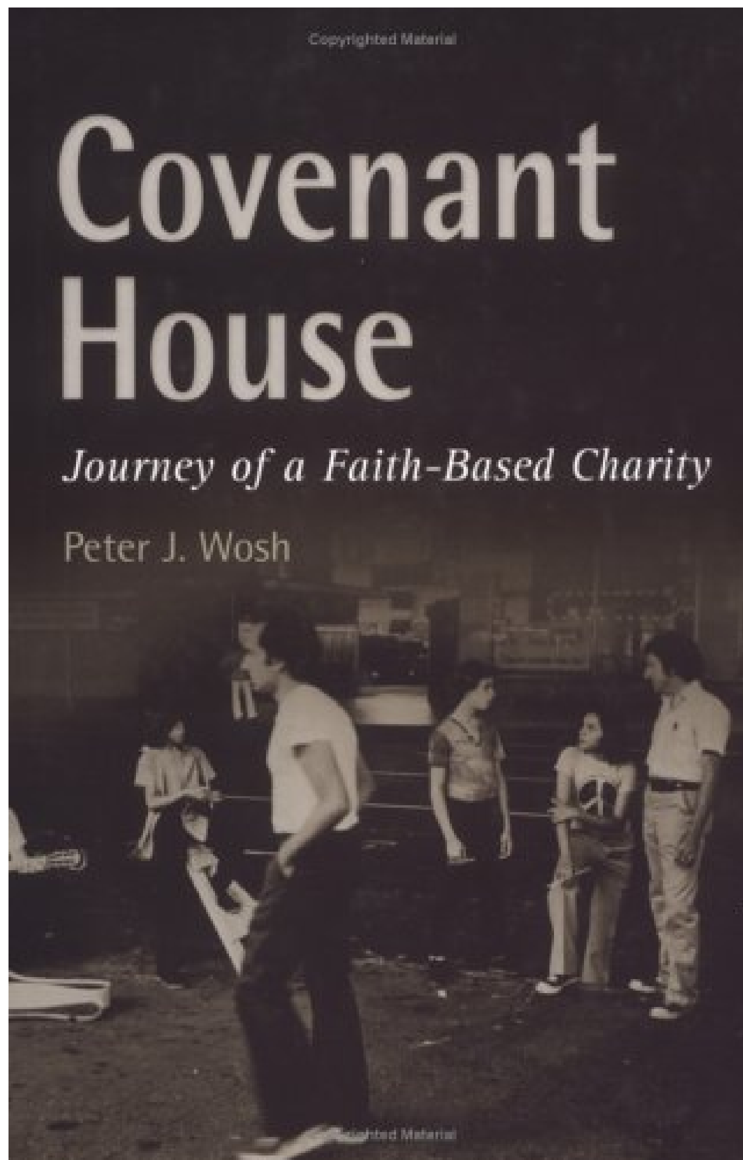

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Peter J. Wosh : Covenant House: Journey of a Faith-Based Charity before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Covenant House: Journey of a Faith-Based Charity:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Largely succeedsBy Raymond L. MuellerI was in the Covenant House community and worked there for several years in the early eighties. The author apparently did not interview any community members, but other than that I think the book largely succeeds in providing an objective look back at the

organization, up to 2004.16 of 20 people found the following review helpful. Vanity Press schlockBy Bradley MatfordSave your money.This looks like a book that is going to be an independent review of the scandal-ridden Covenant House charity, but it's really a Covenant House-commissioned work that feebly attempts to rewrite that charity's history, and it's scandal-filled past.Although it was printed afterward, this book completely ignores the sexual abuse of teenage boy committed by former Covenant House executive Bruce Harris during Sr. Mary Rose McGeady's tenure as President of Covenant House, and of how that sexual abuse continued into current Covenant House Sr. Patricia Cruise's term. It breezes by the millions of benefactor dollars that have gone missing.If you want to read Covenant House public relations material, get on their mailing list. If you want to waste your money, buy this book.

Covenant House occupies a prominent place among American charitable institutions. For more than thirty years, it has provided shelter and care for homeless youth as a faith-based social service organization. Founded in 1968 by the Rev. Bruce Ritter, Covenant House began its life as a modest ministry of availability to the poor in New York City, inspired by Franciscan traditions and by the expansive vision of Vatican II.By 1990 Covenant House had grown into a $90 million enterprise. Its innovative programs assisted homeless and runaway youth throughout cities in North and Central America. Conservative politicians, philanthropic foundations, and average citizens considered it a model for faith-based social service initiatives. Suddenly and unexpectedly, however, the organization suffered through a major scandal, as Father Ritter faced charges involving sexual abuse and financial misconduct. The institution quickly became fodder for tabloid journalists and hovered on the edge of ruin. How did such a respected organization, in the words of an iconic New York Post headline, "fall from grace"?Peter J. Wosh explores this question, along with a variety of other compelling issues, as he relates the history of Covenant House. His intricately woven history considers changing perceptions of youth homelessness, the pervasive influence of mass media, and the unique dynamics of faith-based organizations. Drawing extensively on oral histories and rich archival collections, this meticulous and compelling work charts the path of Covenant House from its humble beginnings to its meteoric ascent, through the scandals and crises of the early 1990s, to its eventual reemergence as a strong and respectable charity.

"A fascinating in-depth case study of one faith-based nonprofit organization from the early 1970s to today. . . . Read this book as a means to understand the personal, social, and administrative complexity of organizational life."Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector QuarterlyAbout the AuthorPeter J. Wosh is Director of the Program in Archival Management, and a member of the Department of History, at New York University.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.INTRODUCTIONThe Rev. Bruce Ritter generated little attention in 1968 when he decided to resign a tenured professorship at Manhattan College and move into a dilapidated tenement apartment in New York City's East Village in order to begin a new ministry. A few Franciscan colleagues some devoted former students, and an assortment of old friends and neighborhood residents joined with him in an idealistic and loosely structured crusade to serve the poor. By the late 1970s, however, "Father Bruce" had achieved considerable fame within the New York metropolitan area. Newspapers and television networks carried adulatory stories concerning this remarkably energetic friar who now lived near Times Square and seemed to be single-handedly confronting smut peddlers, pornography purveyors, and corrupt politicians. Ritter, according to glowing media reports, had personally taken on the task of rescuing lost, abandoned, homeless, and hopeless teenagers in the great metropolis. He had incorporated an organization known as Covenant House to carry on his good works, with a large crisis shelter located near the Port Authority Bus Terminal and a series of group homes scattered throughout the Greenwich Village area. Volunteers flocked to the ministry, inspired by Ritter's sermons, lectures, and monthly newsletters. He preached a gospel of unconditional love, equality before God, and selfless service. The Franciscan spoke with moral clarity, certitude, and passion about the problems of homeless children, and he attracted a large and influential audience.Growth occurred at a dizzying pace over the course of the 1980s. By the end of that decade, Covenant House's annual budget stood at nearly $90 million. The organization operated twelve programs for homeless youths throughout Canada, the United States, and Latin America. Its expenditures exceeded federal appropriations for runaway children, with over 90 percent of its contributions emanating from private sources. Wealthy Catholic philanthropists allied themselves with the agency, major corporations contributed money and in-kind services, and the organization's direct-mail program became a model for nonprofits everywhere. A professional staff coalesced, more sophisticated programs expanded the agency's offerings beyond mere crisis care, and the ministry appeared to be an unqualified success story. Covenant House embodied the pragmatic entrepreneurship, private initiative, and voluntary spirit that politicians praised during the 1980s as the federal government retreated from supporting social programs in the inner cities. Ritter was at the center of it all. He remained the charismatic leader of the organization, attracted universal praise, and personified Covenant House for its supporters and advocates. The Franciscan seemed completely focused on, and perhaps even obsessed with, his mission. His calls to shelter the needy, feed the hungry, and provide troubled teens with a second chance struck a responsive chord and appeared beyond reproach. Ritter had carried his religious commitments out of the pulpit and onto the streets in the best tradition of Catholic social reformers. People supported his efforts with enthusiasm. But matters soon took a surprising turn.The ministry suddenly appeared on the verge of collapse in 1990.

A young male prostitute who resided at Covenant House charged that Bruce Ritter had provided him with money and support in exchange for sexual favors. Additional accusations surfaced. Investigative reporters turned their attention to the agency, leveling charges of sexual abuse, financial improprieties, and official misconduct against the founder. The sensational revelations dominated New York City tabloids and local news broadcasts. Within a few short months, Ritter resigned and Covenant House struggled to survive. Contributions declined by $22 million in one year, the debt skyrocketed, and public confidence dissipated. Now journalists charged that the organization embodied the worst personal and financial excesses that they associated with the 1980s. The fact that Covenant House's troubles occurred on the heels of a series of other religious scandals involving sex and greed further damaged the agency and permanently disillusioned many supporters. Neutral observers questioned whether the organization had lost its moral compass. Covenant House did manage to overcome the scandal, though the process proved to be a long and painful one. The board of directors thoroughly reformed its own operations during the 1990s and also selected Sr. Mary Rose McGeady, D.C., as the new president to replace Ritter. She played a major role in restoring institutional credibility, rebuilding the donor base, and eventually moving the organization in new directions. The agency recovered financially and programmatically from the crisis, though the scars remained visible for some time.As this thumbnail historical sketch suggests, Covenant House has traveled an extraordinary institutional distance in a relatively short period of time. Its mission, successes, travails, and high public profile make the ministry a worthwhile object for closer scrutiny. Scholars will also find other compelling reasons to examine the history of this nonprofit philanthropy. Faith-based institutions have received considerable attention in recent years. In 2001, for example, George W. Bush created a White House Office for Faith-based and Community Initiatives as part of his effort to increase federal assistance to religious ministries that deliver basic social services. His announcement immediately produced a firestorm of criticism from civil libertarians and generated considerable debate within religious circles. The entire discussion, however, largely lacked historical perspective. Few scholars have studied the origins, development, and growth of specific faith-based social ministries in adequate detail. These nonprofit entities have long exerted a major influence over the course of American history, but their internal operations remain obscure and mysterious to many academics. Their distinctive histories, diverse missions, varied governance structures, administrative peculiarities, and complex relationships with other organizations make broad generalizations difficult. Some question whether they even compose a coherent institutional sector. By examining individual ministries in greater detail, scholars and policymakers may begin to discover whether these organizations really possess common characteristics. Covenant House offers an instructive start. Several themes that profoundly inform the organization's history offer useful points of comparison with other faith-based social ministries.First, an ongoing tension between charismatic authority and bureaucratic institutionalization remains at the heart of the Covenant House story. Ritter established the enterprise as a highly personalized endeavor. He founded the organization, shaped its mission during the early years, and recruited a loyal band of personal friends and close associates to support his efforts. Ritter left no doubt that divine inspiration guided him and formed the basis of his authority. A complete disdain for institutional forms and bureaucratic routine characterized his rhetoric, and he relentlessly promoted the voluntary aspects of the ministry at every opportunity. The founder emphasized his nearly mystical bond with "the kids" who sought shelter at Covenant House. At various times, he even considered establishing a lay religious community of faithful disciples in order to carry on his work. The Franciscan's followers and supporters appeared dazzled by his personal charisma and spellbinding oratory. Ritter inspired unquestioned loyalty from many subordinates, who imbued even his routine programmatic pronouncements with nearly sacred significance.But charisma constitutes only part of the Covenant House story. Ritter also functioned as a master institutionalizer. He carefully built a formidable bureaucracy, promulgated a variety of tightly structured rules and regulations for staff, and hired a talented cadre of professionals to administer his agency. Ritter legally incorporated his ministry, established a hierarchical managerial structure complete with flow charts and chains-of-command, and legitimized his group homes and shelters by obtaining licensing with appropriate state agencies. He successfully translated his initial prophetic vision into concrete institutional form, ultimately ensuring that the organization would survive his own departure from the scene. Covenant House in many ways functioned as a routine and stable operation under the founder's direction, with a clearly defined program and a highly structured approach to serving homeless children. Ritter understood the contradictions and often struggled with the implications. Charismatic enthusiasm and institutional routine may coexist effectively within the same organization. They can also serve as divisive oppositional forces, creating confusion and harvesting bitterness among various institutional constituencies. Faith-based organizations typically owe their energy to zealous commitment and a transcendent sense of mission. They face particular problems integrating standard rules and regulations into their operations. Covenant House experienced difficulty reconciling charisma and institutionalization throughout its history, forever attempting to achieve the appropriate balance.Second, Covenant House struggled with its prophetic and culturally accommodationist qualities. The ministry initially seemed to assume an oppositional and countercultural stance toward secular society. Ritter and his small band of followers chose to live with the poor in a troubled and dangerous New York City neighborhood. They rejected all outward trappings of the seductively alluring consumer capitalist culture that many middle-class Americans found irresistible during the late 1960s. Covenant House's founders mutually pledged to

confront oppressive structures, work to end poverty, and expose the blatant inequalities that characterized late twentieth-century American society. Ritter himself aggressively criticized politicians, child care institutions, and governmental bureaucracies for their structural failure to address the problems of homeless youths. Covenant House claimed to operate on radical principles that differentiated its programs from those of conventional child care agencies. During its formative years, the ministry kept both church and state at arm's length. The founder chose not to formally affiliate with Catholic Charities and occasionally pursued policies that placed him at odds with archdiocesan authorities as well as municipal officials. Ritter also operated on the fringes of the social work profession, maintaining an outsider stance and forgoing cooperative ventures with other similarly situated agencies. He seemed determined to preserve the purity and uniqueness of his ministry. Covenant House even maintained a financial independence from both public funding agencies and official Roman Catholic sources by relying heavily on private individual donations. The organization vigilantly guarded its freedom to assume a profoundly critical perspective toward other established institutions.Countertendencies soon developed. Covenant House's broadly prophetic purposes appeared more difficult to maintain as the organization grew in stature during the 1970s. Ritter became increasingly tied to influential supporters who found his ministry appealing precisely because of its privatistic orientation. Catholic philanthropists, powerful corporate entities, and conservative politicians found it convenient to affiliate with the agency during the early 1980s. They celebrated Covenant House's socially ameliorative qualities and lauded its entrepreneurial spirit. Ritter, who deeply believed in his own program and who knew that a need existed to expand the number of shelters and group homes, gladly accepted their support in the interest of serving "my kids." Such alliances, however, necessarily muted the organization's prophetic voice. Covenant House continued to witness for the oppressed, but by the 1980s it targeted villains who most often appeared to be marginal figures and social outcasts in their own right: child pornographers, peep show proprietors, and pimps. It became increasingly problematic to constructively challenge more respectable political and corporate interests when those very forces composed the financial backbone of the ministry. Covenant House's history thus reflects the difficulties facing all religious institutions that seek to speak with an authoritative moral voice yet also hope to operate effectively within larger secular cultures. Compromises and internal conflicts result as ministries make uncomfortable choices, weighing the benefits of overtly confrontational tactics against the need for practical political alliances.The struggles of faith-based organizations to define appropriate relationships with secular cultures hints at a third theme that runs throughout Covenant House's history: the interdependence of social sectors. Nonprofit religious organizations do not exist as isolated entities. Their governing boards, administrative practices, financial supporters, and staff overlap with, and remain inextricably linked to, public and corporate institutions. Rhetoric sometimes obscures this fundamental reality. Ritter, for example, always trumpeted his independence from state control and aggressively sought out private sources of funding in order to free his agency from public regulation. Yet the ministry owed its early existence primarily to public/private partnerships. Ritter depended on municipal and state grants to support his programs. Public funding provided him with the legitimacy and stability necessary to approach private donors. State regulations also forced the founder to upgrade his group home operations, thereby providing children with a cleaner and safer environment. Ritter relied on municipal judges, public social welfare administrators, and city policemen, all of whom referred children to his agency and publicized his efforts among other potential supporters. Covenant House even secured its substantial shelter at Tenth Avenue and Forty-first Street in 1979 from the State of New York for a nominal rental sum, owing to the goodwill and support of friendly elected officials. The agency thus never existed as a purely private entity despite the founder's rhetoric. It actually enjoyed a long and often mutually beneficial relationship with the public sector.Corporate connections proved equally critical for Covenant House. Chase Manhattan Bank, Young Rubicam, Ziff-Davis, and IBM were just a few of the major corporations that provided the agency with board members, direct monetary support, and consultative advice over the years. Cravath, Swaine Moore offered pro bono services that helped the organization survive its crisis in 1990, and this leading New York City law firm has represented the agency ever since. Private foundations, financial institutions, direct mail experts, telecommunications agencies, investment bankers, and high technology firms all contributed professional assistance at various historical moments. Covenant House's administrators developed their internal policies and procedures by borrowing from comparable corporate practices. Board members invariably drew upon their experiences in the private sector when advising the philanthropy. Nonprofit entities exist within a complex institutional universe. It remains essential to dissect the personal and professional links between organizations in order to better understand their internal operations and unique administrative styles.Interinstitutional connections often point historians in unanticipated and surprising directions as seemingly peripheral issues assume center stage. It becomes impossible to understand the founding of Covenant House, for example, without engaging such topics as working-class life in an industrial New Jersey city during the Great Depression, 1960s student culture at a traditional Catholic college in the Bronx, changing theological stances and social commitments within religious orders in the wake of Vatican II, and the tumultuous character of an ethnically divided and socially troubled New York City neighborhood. Covenant House further owed its creation to increased middle-class anxieties over a new breed of runaway teenagers who seemed to be flocking to hippie enclaves in metropolitan areas. Grisly murders, personal quirks, and chance encounters also played important roles. All of these

apparently random and disconnected developments coalesced in the late 1960s and early 1970s in order to give birth to Covenant House. Historical coherence only materializes after carefully stringing together these disparate strands of the story.Covenant House thus appears more comprehensible when viewed against the backdrop of these larger issues involving bureaucratic and charismatic authority, prophetic criticism and cultural accommodation, and the connections that bind seemingly independent and unrelated institutional sectors. The agency's history, however, also touches on some additional themes that deserve consideration. Social attitudes toward youth homelessness underwent a significant transformation as Covenant House matured. During the late 1960s, mainstream media outlets and youth advocates first focused attention on runaways as a serious and widespread social problem. They often depicted homeless teenagers as white children who hailed from comfortable middle-class families in privileged suburban environments. These youths supposedly sought thrills and meaning in America's thriving countercultural venues, forsaking family and friends in order to pursue a more dangerous and inherently unstable existence. This stereotype took hold even as social workers discovered a far different reality. Covenant House's founders recognized that homeless youths in New York City principally constituted abused and neglected children, who typically had been shuffled through a variety of childcare institutions. They described these overwhelmingly African American and Hispanic youngsters more accurately as urban nomads, or "throwaway kids." Most had grown up in poverty and lived outside of stable familial and social networks.As Ritter gained fame and achieved expert status for his work with troubled teenagers, however, he contributed to the creation of a new social stereotype. Covenant House's size and stature ensured that the organization could affect broader cultural debates concerning youth homelessness during the 1980s. Ritter chose to channel his political influence in a peculiar direction. He increasingly identified juvenile prostitution, child pornography, and sexual promiscuity as the critical problems facing transient youths. The founder helped to initiate a national discussion concerning these issues, but his narrow focus on the sex industry obscured other urban problems. Familial breakdown, parental abuse, neighborhood deterioration, substance addiction, joblessness, poverty, and federal welfare policies largely disappeared from the institutional rhetoric even as they reflected the overwhelming daily realities faced by most homeless teenagers. Only in the 1990s, when new leadership emerged within Covenant House, did a more complex consideration of the factors that contributed to youth homelessness once again characterize the institution's advocacy efforts.Covenant House's history also sheds light on the powerful role of mass media in defining public discourse. Bruce Ritter emerged as an American religious celebrity during the late 1970s owing largely to his communications skills and his ability to craft an appealing public image. His plainspoken, forthright, and direct prose captivated reporters and listeners. He knew how to explain complex issues in easily understandable language. His appeal letters conveyed a reassuring warmth and intimacy that attracted personal and emotional responses. Ritter cultivated contacts among the press corps, and he always appeared ready with the perfect quip for every occasion. He understood the significance of symbolism, and his dual identities as a pious friar and a streetwise New Yorker served him nicely. Journalists found that his story played well with diverse audiences. They never dug too deeply beneath the surface, and their laudatory articles initially reinforced the founder's reputation. These positive press relations did not last forever, however, and Ritter eventually learned a hard lesson concerning the precarious nature of fame.Sensationalist news stories, salacious headlines, lurid reports, and prurient expos had become institutionalized practice within many media outlets by the time Covenant House confronted its crisis in 1990. Ritter's high profile and righteous rhetoric made him the perfect target for derision and ridicule as scandalous allegations surfaced. Illicit sex, hidden trust funds, secret identities, and priestly intrigue offered irresistible fodder for the tabloids. The scandal seemed ideally suited for memorable headlines and snappy double entendres: "Broken Covenant," "Sins of the Father," "Fall from Grace." Tainted heroes made excellent copy, and the story appeared a perfect morality play. Ritter initially had embraced media coverage as an effective means of building a broader audience for his ministry. He discovered during the scandal that his message now reached supporters primarily through media filters. It became impossible for him to regain control of the story. Covenant House had creatively used press coverage in order to gain its initial credibility, unsuccessfully attempted to combat negative publicity during the scandal, and struggled to rebuild its image during the 1990s. Mass media outlets now played an extraordinarily powerful role in either conferring legitimacy or destroying institutional credibility.Covenant House's development additionally coincided with profound transformations that altered American Catholicism over the last half of the twentieth century. The agency's founding clearly reflected the experimental social ministries, innovative spirit, and strong lay involvement that characterized post-Vatican II reforms within the Church. Covenant House remained Catholic in orientation throughout its corporate history, though it never officially existed under the formal aegis of any archdiocesan agency or religious community. This independent status provided the ministry with some flexibility in defining its connection to the institutional church. Generally, however, the ties grew closer over time. The agency relied heavily on Catholic donors, needed to maintain good relationships with archdiocesan officials and social service providers, and carefully developed its policies toward clients in accord with official Church teachings. This alienated some early supporters who viewed the ministry as a countercultural force, but it attracted wealthy and influential backers who felt comfortable within a more conservative Catholic context. At times, Covenant House found itself enmeshed in uncomfortable and touchy public controversies as a result of its political proximity to ecclesiastical officials. In other instances, notably during the crisis

in 1990, archdiocesan intervention proved instrumental in saving the ministry from possible ruin.Covenant House's history most obviously intersected with American Catholic history as a result of the events of 1990. The accusations against Ritter opened a second wave in the ongoing series of clergy sexual abuse scandals that first surfaced in Lafayette, Louisiana, during the mid-1980s and continued into the twenty-first century. The Covenant House scandal contained some similarities with events elsewhere. Press reports revealed the problem. Disbelief and defensiveness initially greeted the accusations. Inadequate internal mechanisms existed for investigating the charges. An unhealthy subculture of secrecy and deference within the organization required reform. Various outside observers attributed broader political and social significance to the controversy in accordance with their own political stances toward the ministry. The accusations shattered public confidence in the institution, and it took considerable time and effort to restore credibility.But the differences between this scandal and the sexual abuse charges leveled against other Roman Catholic clergymen appear even more compelling. Covenant House's troubles occurred within the context of one specific organization rather than over a broader institutional network. They were largely confined to one individual. The entire duration lasted less than three months from the appearance of the initial newspaper stories through the resignation of the founder. Key individuals came to understand fairly quickly that saving the ministry itself proved more important than protecting the reputation of any particular person. Immediate and substantive reforms ensued. In the long run, the Ritter scandal exerted a significant impact on American Catholicism. The incredible accusations and the abrupt resignation of the founder convinced many lay observers that a broader problem existed within church circles. Ritter was a powerful, respected, and very visible churchman whose reputation and work inspired accolades and who operated on the national stage. Subsequent scandals involving less prominent individuals now seemed more believable and less shocking. The events of 1990 deeply disillusioned many faithful Catholics. Neither Covenant House nor American Catholicism ever appeared quite the same again.Finally, a few words concerning institutional history seem appropriate. Two other studies of Covenant House exist. Ritter himself penned the first history of the organization in 1987. Covenant House: Lifeline to the Street consists of appeal letters that the founder had written to donors between 1972 and 1987 interspersed with some chatty reminiscences concerning the origin and development of the ministry. Ritter fully understood the power of the past. He used his book to construct an authoritative account of the agency's founding, early struggles, and subsequent triumphs. In the process, he enshrined his own personal stories and anecdotes as official history. The founder's interpretation appeared beyond challenge at the time, but within a few short years another voice entered the conversation. Charles M. Sennott, the New York Post reporter who first broke the Covenant House scandal story in 1990, wrote Broken Covenant in 1992 in order to chronicle his own investigative exploits. The book jacket's synopsis accurately conveys the overriding tone: "Broken Covenant is a searing portrait of power at work in Reagan/Bush-era America, in the Catholic Church, and in the sophisticated, ruthless world of big-time philanthropy. It rips away the veil of sanctity shrouding this religious charity to reveal an unholy truth of excess, corruption, and cover-up." Sennott's contribution contains some rich detail and invaluable firsthand interviews, but its relentlessly condemnatory stance undermines its analytical strengths.Covenant House: Journey of a Faith-Based Charity seeks to serve a different purpose from either of its predecessors. The agency commissioned this book in 1997, in conjunction with the twenty-fifth anniversary of its incorporation. The organization hoped that the project might produce a constructively critical administrative history of the agency based on solid scholarship, extant archival documentation, and oral history interviews. Covenant House has enjoyed a remarkably rich, often dramatic, and occasionally controversial past. This book seeks to place that past in a larger perspective. It especially emphasizes the broader social context that influenced and intersected with specific institutional events. Leadership styles, internal power dynamics, programmatic decisions, fundraising strategies, and public relations ventures receive considerable attention. Historians necessarily make thematic selections, and this study unfortunately slights several important and interesting topics. Some Covenant House sites and programs receive only brief mention or cursory treatment. Social workers and counselors appear less visible than major administrators and board members. No systematic attempt has been made to recover the perspectives of individual children and clients. These topics all offer extremely worthwhile objects for further investigation, but this history simply has a different focus.The book itself proceeds in a relatively straightforward chronological fashion. Two narrative elements, however, require some explanation. First, Covenant House as an institution does not actually enter the story until Chapter 3. Earlier chapters consider the prehistory of the agency in detail primarily by examining the life and career of Bruce Ritter. The founder exerted a tremendous influence over Covenant House. His personal background and extensive social networks proved critical in determining the founding and direction of the organization. Biography and institutional history thoroughly complement each other in this instance. Ritter, however, did not operate alone. Other individuals also played an important role in shaping the ministry, though many eventually dropped out of the story. These early chapters seek to recover their stories and recognize their contributions as well. In any case, Covenant House's establishment in 1972 makes little sense without thoroughly considering a range of factors that predated the agency's formal incorporation.Second, each chapter begins with a substantial excerpt from a primary source. Early chapters reproduce some of the founder's favorite and most frequently repeated stories. Ritter carefully defined the official history of Covenant House during its formative years through his sermons and newsletters. Donors, volunteers, employees, supporters, and colleagues received their

impressions of the ministry by listening to his stories and reflections. Ritter's voice dominated the discourse, and it seems appropriate to present his thoughts and analyze his words in considerable detail. By the late 1970s, however, the dynamics had changed. Journalists, politicians, philanthropists, board members, and major administrators now significantly influenced Covenant House, and their opinions carried considerable weight. Accordingly, introductions to the latter chapters contain more diffuse commentary from a broader range of individuals. No single authoritative voice could any longer set the tone for such a diverse and multifaceted agency. In the beginning, however, things functioned quite differently. Covenant House's complex history actually started with a deceptively simple story.