

Roloff

## Housing of girls here temporary

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Staff Writer

About 30 girls between the ages of 12 and 21 from a Roloff Evangelistic Enterprises home in Hattiesburg, Miss., will be housed "temporarily" at the Rebekah Home for Girls which was closed by the State Welfare Department last fall.

The Rev. Lester Roloff, head of Roloff Evangelistic Enterprises, told newsmen during a press conference that the girls had been evacuated from the Bethesda Home for Girls because of floodwaters that damaged the home.

Sitting on a bench in front of the girls during choir practice, the evangelist said he had not sought permission from the welfare department to bring the girls to the home. "This was an emergency. We had to take them where we could."

The flooding occurred about a week ago when the Leaf and Boue Rivers flooded portions of Hattiesburg with a 34-foot flood crest, 12 feet above flood level.

Roloff, who earlier this year was sentenced to five days in jail and fined \$5,040 for failing to get state licenses for homes operated by his corporation, declined to say how long the girls would be housed here and commented: "They'll be here just as long as it takes us to clean up the home in Hattiesburg."

Roloff was accompanied at his press conference by Mr. and Mrs. Hubert Barnhill, superintendents for the Mississippi home.

Roloff denied that the evacuation was due to a Hattiesburg grand jury investigation of the home. "They found nothing wrong with the home. How could they? We are doing nothing

wrong."

The evangelist, who has laid the responsibility for his troubles on the welfare department and the news media, challenged newsmen to explain to him the reasons "why I'm a hero in Hattiesburg and a criminal here."

"You ought to have three or four homes built by now for these boys and girls since this place was closed down," he chided newsmen.

Roloff expressed some degree of pessimism at the prospects of what he termed justice. "We have lost the meeting of the minds. First they said we could keep the 16 and 17-year-olds and then they changed their minds."

The evangelist again defended his decision not to secure a license from the state "on grounds this is not a child-care facility but a child-changing facility ... and that the state should not have the right to control a facility which does not receive state funds."

The question of separation of church and state has not been answered, Roloff commented.

During questioning by newsmen, Roloff said he did not have any second thoughts about his decision to defy the welfare guidelines. "Son, I've still got my conscience. You may grind me to sausage and you may get my reputation, but I got this book (holding the Holy Bible) to go by and this is older than their (Welfare's) book."

Roloff remarked that he did not hold any bitterness or hostility to anyone, "but the day of judgment is coming for them (persons Roloff claims are responsible for closing the home) and justice will be done."



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