

Public high schools offer Bible course

For AP Weekly Features
How do you teach the Bible in public schools?

Very carefully. Yet this academic year, 78 U.S. school districts in 26 states are boldly embarking on a newsworthy experiment. They're offering high school elective courses using a new textbook, "The Bible and Its Influence" alongside Bible versions chosen by each student.

More schools might have signed up but the all-important teacher's edition of the book wasn't available for assessment till late August.

The teacher's version, by freelance writer and former college religion teacher Marjorie Haney Schafer, tells educators to cultivate "respect" — for the U.S. Constitution as interpreted by courts; for Bible scholarship; for divergent opinions about the Bible; for various religions; and for the scriptural text itself.

Don't "disparage the Bible or treat its content lightly," but also "avoid uncritical adulation" that violates academic objectivity, Schafer advises.

A tall order. But "Influence" strives for non-sectarian attitudes and cleverly slides through potential trouble spots — for instance, creation in the Book of Genesis and the prophetic predictions in the Book of Revelation.

Are such courses even legal? The U.S. Supreme Court answered yes in the famous 1963 ruling that barred ceremonial school Bible readings. It stated that "the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities" so long as material is "presented objectively as part of a secular program of education."

In practice, however, schools have shied away from Bible courses and potential controversy. Surveys show widespread biblical illiteracy among young Americans, much to the distress of high school and college teachers who recognize Scripture's central role in culture and history.

"Plenty of high school students don't even know who Moses was," lamented a favorable review of the textbook from the New York State School Boards Association.

"Influence" was edited by Cullen Schippe, retired vice president with textbook publisher Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, and businessman Chuck Stetson, leader of the nonprofit Bible Literacy Project that publishes the textbook. Dozens of Protestant,

Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish experts representing various standpoints served as consultants.

The textbook hasn't roused major opposition from church-state separationists. Marc Stern of the American Jewish Congress, a leading lawyer advocating strict separation, calls it "an excellent and evenhanded introduction" that "without question" meets constitutional standards for public schools.

Surprisingly, brickbats come instead from conservative Protestants who favor an older market rival, the course outline published by the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools.

The National Council's Web site posts a typical attack from the Rev. D. James Kennedy, a TV preacher and conservative activist, who calls the new textbook "extremely radical" and "very anti-biblical." Bible Literacy's Web site posts replies to such critics.

True, "Influence" doesn't supply what such conservatives would want for church instruction, but it does seek fairness for all sides. The teacher's edition claims the course acknowledges both "the science of biblical criticism" and "people of great biblical faith and evangelical spirit."

Actually, conservative Protestant leaders are divided and some endorse "Influence," among them the Rev. Ted Haggard, president of the National Association of Evangelicals. Other boosters include the chairman of the Catholic Biblical Association, the editor-in-chief of the Jewish Publication Society and numerous scholars — the sort of coalition that's rarely achieved when it comes to the Bible.

Bible Literacy designs its material to implement a 1999 accord, "The Bible and Public Schools," that it brokered with the First Amendment Center of the Freedom Forum foundation. Significantly, that accord has been endorsed by seven major public education organizations.

A Nov. 20 panel during a Washington, D.C., convention of university professors in the American Academy of Religion will mull further the whole question of the Bible's role in public education.

On the Net:
Bible Literacy Project: <http://www.bibleliteracy.org>
National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools: <http://www.bibleinschools.net>

IRS is ensnared in pulpit politics

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The IRS is increasingly being asked to referee disputes over whether churches are improperly engaging in partisan politicking from the pulpit. And some fear the trend could endanger the taxman's neutrality.

Months before November's midterm elections, the Internal Revenue Service warned that it would be scrutinizing churches to make sure they do not violate their tax-exempt status. Groups both liberal and conservative have responded by lodging numerous complaints against churches with the IRS.

"Any citizen can form a group and spy on all these churches and report the results," said Ed McCaffery, dean of the University of Southern California School of Law and a tax law expert. "This entanglement of church and state vis-a-vis the tax laws is deeply out of control."

Churches can be important political forums during election season. Under federal tax law, churches can discuss politics, but

"What was not intended to be a biased audit program is at risk of becoming one," Owens said.

Steve Miller, commissioner of the IRS' tax exempt and government entities division, dismissed such concerns, saying each complaint is reviewed by a three-person panel before being forwarded to the administrator. The decision to investigate a church must also be approved by an attorney, he said.

In 2004, the IRS launched investigations of 110 organizations; of the 90 it completed, it found violations in about 70 percent of the cases. In 2005, the agency began audits of 70 churches and charities, which are still pending. It has 40 cases pending this year, a time when IRS officials have promised to redouble their scrutiny.

The agency relies on material gathered by outsiders. "I don't think anyone would want to see our guys sitting in the back pew," Miller said.

According to the IRS, the only church ever to be stripped of its tax-exempt status for partisan political activity was a church near Binghamton, N.Y., that was penal-

if they endorse candidates or parties, they can be stripped of their tax-exempt status.

The IRS saw a spike in complaints of partisan politicking in 2004, the last national elections.

More recently, a group of pastors in Ohio filed a complaint with the IRS against two megachurch pastors they accused of actively supporting Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell, a Republican running for governor.

And the IRS was in the spotlight when the liberal All Saints Church, an Episcopal congregation in Pasadena, refused to cooperate with an investigation into an anti-war sermon a guest pastor delivered two days before the 2004 presidential election.

William Murray, who started the Web site <http://www.ratoutachurch.org> in 2004, predicts the number of IRS complaints about politics in the pulpit will increase in two years as Republicans and Democrats hone their tactics.

Murray said he collected more than 30 complaints against liberal,

mostly black, churches on his Web site during the last presidential contest. He referred several cases to the IRS, he said, and has received two more during this year's midterm contests.

"I actually believe that what I'm doing with this is wrong, but I'm doing it in a defensive nature," said Murray, executive director of the Religious Freedom Action Coalition. "Somebody has to defend the conservative churches and the only way to protect them is to attack the liberal churches."

Some of those familiar with the IRS say recent changes in how the agency handles such cases could make it more vulnerable to political manipulation.

Until 2000, the decision to investigate churches and charities was made by one of a few high-ranking regional commissioners. Now that decision is made by a lower-level administrator, who may be less politically attuned, said Marcus Owens, All Saints' attorney and a former IRS administrator.



Worship in the church of your choice this weekend.



REXFORD COMMUNITY CHURCH, Rexford, Pastor Lane Purcell, 687-3305, Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Worship Service 10:30 a.m.

Schedule of church services

- ASCENSION-ON-THE-PRAIRIE EPISCOPAL**, Rev. Don Martin, College Drive & Wheatridge Rd., 462-3041, Holy Eucharist, 9:00 a.m. every Sunday, Evening Prayer, 5:15 p.m. Wednesday, September through May. Christian Education for Youth, 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, September through May
- COLLEGE DRIVE ASSEMBLY OF GOD**, Pastor, Jeremy Gundling, 245 W. College Dr. - 462-8234, Early Service - 8:00 a.m.; Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Morning Worship - 10:45 a.m.
- BEREAN CHURCH**, 1000 S. Franklin, 460-2763, www.colbyberean.com; Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 10:45 a.m. Awana Clubs, Wednesday, 7 p.m., Middle & High School, Wednesday, 7 p.m. @ the Heartland Christian School Gym
- FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH**, Grant & Webster Street, 462-2867, Sunday School 9:15 a.m., Morning Worship 10:30 a.m., Youth Group 7:00 p.m., Wednesday Kids Club (K-6) 7:00 p.m.
- COLLEGE VIEW BAPTIST CHURCH**, (SBC), Pastor Tom Huffman, 1185 Wheatridge Rd. at College Drive, 460-7144, Sunday Bible Study 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship services, 10:45 a.m.
- MINGO BIBLE CHURCH**, 420 Main Mingo, 785-462-2992: An independent community church served by Village Missions Pastor Chris Shubert. Sunday School: 9:30AM - all ages. Sunday Services: 10:45AM. Sunday Nights: 1st Sunday of the month: potluck following morning service - no evening service; 2nd Sunday: services at 6:30 PM; 3rd Sunday: informal fellowship - bring a snack to share!; 4th and 5th Sunday: services at 6:30 p.m.
- SACRED HEART CATHOLIC**, 462-2179, Father Dana Clark, Pastor, Saturday Eve. Mass 5:30 p.m., Sunday Masses 8:00 & 10:00 a.m., Confessions will be heard Saturday 4:30-5:05 p.m. and from 7:30-7:45 a.m. and 9:25-9:40 a.m. on Sunday.
- FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**, Rev. Carol Rahn, 515 W. 4th, 462-6342, Worship, 9:00 a.m.
- WESLEYAN CHURCH**, 320 W. Pine - 462-8391, Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 10:40 a.m., Sunday Evening Cell groups at 6:00 p.m., Wednesday Youth Ministries, Kids Clubhouse 7 p.m.
- CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS**, 1145 S. Franklin - 460-6605, President Gary Slavens, 460-2656; Rocky Robbins, 1st counselor, 460-1101; Tim Wilson, 2nd counselor, 785-846-7796. Sacrament meeting 10 a.m., Sunday School and Primary 11:20 a.m., Priesthood, Relief Society, YM/YW, 12:10 p.m.; Family History Center open to public, 7-9 p.m. Thursdays or by appointment. Call 462-3571.
- COLBY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**, Rev. James Mardock, pastor, 950 S. Franklin, 462-6521, Sunday Worship Services at 8:30 and 11:00 a.m., 6:30 p.m., Fellowship coffee 9:30 a.m., Sunday School, 9:45 a.m., KXXX broadcasts 11:00 worship. <http://www.gbmg-umc.org/colby-umc/>
- REDEEMING LOVE MINISTRIES, INC.**, 345 N. Franklin, Apostle W.G. and Rev. Orvella Romine, Equipping Class, Sunday, 10 a.m., Sunday worship, 11 a.m., Wednesday, R.L.M Training Center (Bible School), 7 p.m.
- CHURCH OF CHRIST**, 510 E. 4th, Jay Kelley, minister, Sunday Bible Study 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 10:30 a.m., Sunday Eve. Worship 6:00 p.m., Wednesday, Bible Study 7:00 p.m.
- COLBY EVANGELISM CENTER**, Rev. Robert Cooper, 815 West 3rd - 462-2062, Sunday School 9:45; Sunday service 10:00 and 6:30 p.m.; Wednesday Bible Study 6:30 p.m.; Friday Youth Power Hour at 7:00 p.m.
- FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH**, (Disciples of Christ), Pastor Bradley L. Herndon, 385 W. 3rd - 460-2718, Sunday Morning Worship at 9:00 a.m.; Sunday School at 10:30 a.m. E-mail: fccolby@st-tel.net
- TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH**, Rev. John L. Schmidt, East 5th & Country Club, 462-3497, Services, Sat., 5:30 p.m., Sunday; Sunday School and Adult Bible Class 9:15 a.m.; Services, 10:30 a.m. Visit us at www.trinitycolby.com
- OUR SAVIORS LUTHERAN CHURCH**, Brewster, Sunday worship 9:00 a.m.; 2nd Sunday of the month at 8:00 a.m.
- PLEASANT HOME CHURCH**, Pastor, Charlie Busch, 694-2242, 3190 Road 70, Edson, Worship, 9:00 a.m., Sunday School 10:00 a.m., Evening service, 6:00 p.m.
- LEVANT COMMUNITY CHURCH**, 205 1st St., Pastor Jerry Vincent, 586-2376, Sunday School (classes for 3 years & up and 3 adult classes) 9:30 a.m., Morning worship 10:30 a.m.
- WINONA METHODIST CHURCH**, Rev. Sheryl Johnson, Sunday School, 10:30 a.m., Morning Worship 9:15 a.m. (CDT)
- BREWSTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**, PO Box 250, Brewster. Pastor Dorine Chambers, 785-462-6044, Sunday School: 9:45 a.m.; Worship Service, 10:45 a.m.
- THE SHEPHERD'S STAFF, REXFORD**, Joan Dingwerth, Director, 687-2565
- REXFORD COMMUNITY CHURCH**, Rexford, Pastor Lane Purcell, 687-3305, Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Worship Service 10:30 a.m.
- BREWSTER COMMUNITY CHURCH**, Mike Pinkelman, Pastor, Brewster - 694-2720, Sunday School (all ages) 9:30 a.m., Worship Service 10:30 a.m., Bible Study 7:00 p.m., Wed. mornings 6:30 a.m. - Men's Bible Study, Wed. 7:00 p.m. - Children's Ministries (Royal Rangers/Missionettes), Wed. 7:15 p.m. - Intercessory & Prayer, Thurs. 4:00 p.m. - Women's Bible Study

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Amish girls buried

GEORGETOWN, Pa. (AP) — Bearded men in black suits and hats and women in dresses and bonnets made their way to a tiny, wind-swept cemetery to mourn four young girls who were gunned down in their schoolhouse.

Mourners gathered Thursday inside the fading white rail fence among small, aging tombstones to bury four Amish girls killed by a gunman Monday in the one-room school in Nickel Mines.

A fifth victim's funeral was set for Friday, and the community faced the possibility that at least one of five girls wounded in the shooting spree could die.

A sixth victim was reported in grave condition Thursday. County coroner G. Gary Kirchner said he had been contacted by a physician at Penn State Children's Hospital in Hershey who said doctors expected to take one girl off life support.

Thursday was a day for the Amish to share their grief without the intrusion of outsiders.

State troopers blocked off all roads into the village and led horse-drawn buggies and black carriages holding the girls' hand-sawn wooden coffins to the cemetery on the crest of a hill.

"I just think at this point mostly these families want to be left alone in their grief and we ought to respect that," said Dr. D. Holmes Morton, who runs a clinic that serves Amish children.

Funerals were held for 13-year-old Marian Fisher, 7-year-old Naomi Rose Ebersol and sisters Mary Liz Miller, 8, and Lena Miller, 7. The funeral for 12-year-old Anna Mae Stoltzfus was scheduled for Friday.

The girls, in white dresses made by their families, were laid to rest in graves dug by hand. Amish custom calls for simple wooden coffins, narrow at the head and feet and wider in the middle.

Amish funerals are conducted in German and focus on God, not on commemorating the dead. There is no singing, but ministers read hymns and passages from the Bible and an Amish prayer book.

Funeral processions passed the home of Charles Carl Roberts IV, the 32-year-old milk truck driver who took the girls hostage, tied them up and shot them before killing himself.

Benjamin Nieto, 57, watched the processions from a friend's porch.

"They were just little people," he said of the victims. "They never got a chance to do anything."

The attack was so traumatic there is talk that the school house may soon be razed to erase the memories. Many Amish have embraced Roberts' relatives, who may receive money from a fund established to help victims and their families.

Roberts' wife, Marie, was invited to attend the funeral by the family of Marian Fisher; it was unclear whether she attended.

Media were blocked from the funerals and the burials, and airspace for 2 1/2 miles in all directions was closed to news helicopters.

Tragedies such as the massacre at Columbine High School in Colorado have become moments of national mourning, in large part because of satellite and TV technology. But the Amish shun the modern world and both its ills and conveniences.

Donors from around the world are pledging money to help the families of the dead and wounded. Amounts ranging from \$1 to \$500,000 have been received and could help defray mounting medical bills.

At the behest of Amish leaders, a fund has also been set up for the killer's widow and three children.