

# Saints and sinners: Sunday school needs spicing up

It was like a TV game show, except that it was about the Bible. The moderator asked one of the panelists what his wife was doing when he first met her. "She was taking a bath," the husband replied. It brought a big laugh from the pupils in the classroom, who were supposed to identify the Bible characters being referred to.

Those who knew the Bible had no trouble with the answer. The "wife" was Bathsheba. The "husband" was David. The Bible story is found in Samuel 2:11, which reports that "one evening David got up from his couch and, as he walked about the roof of his palace, he saw there a woman bathing, and she was very beautiful. He went to inquire who she was. ... She became his wife."

This game wasn't being played in a Sunday school class, but many pupils wish Sunday

school was as much fun. The Bible game show was a project in a Bible literature class in an Ohio public school. Although prayer and the teaching of religion are forbidden in public schools, the teaching of the Bible as literature is not.

Some of the quiz questions in the Bible literature class were harder than the David and Bathsheba puzzler.

For instance: "When asked how the mother of her intended reacted to the news of their impending marriage, she replied, 'She had a fit.'" The answer is Delilah. It is based on a passage in Judges 14, which reports that Samson's parents were upset when he told them he planned to marry Delilah. She came from a Philistine family, and the Philistines were enemies of Israel.



**george plagenz**

• saints & sinners

One high-school girl, who was telling her father about the class, said, "Why can't Sunday school be this interesting?"

It is a common complaint among children that Sunday school is dull. Life magazine once referred to Sunday school as the "wasted hour."

In the opinion of one church's religious education director, "Sunday schools too often cram

the minds of our children with irrelevant data. When a crisis arises in their lives, which religion is supposed to prepare them to meet, it is no help to know there are 66 books in the Bible or that the Lord's prayer is found in Matthew 6."

Others put the blame on Sunday school teachers. "We have to beg people to teach Sunday school," says one minister. As a result, we accept anybody without regard to their understanding of the Bible or their ability to relate to children."

What's the answer? The late Dean Willard Sperry of Harvard Divinity School had a revolutionary suggestion.

"I have found myself asking," said Sperry, "why we should not solve the otherwise insoluble problem of the Sunday school by taking our children to church instead?"

By now, said Sperry, the pedagogues will be saying, "That's all very well, but the average child simply cannot understand what goes on in church."

Sperry's response was, "Because most children are in Sunday school while the main part of the church service is going on, they miss the dignity and color and symbolism and ceremony of the adult worship service—and impressions in the area of religion are quite as important as information."

It is in their impressionable years that children can be persuaded that religion is majestic, mysterious and beautiful."

Let's be sure, said Sperry, that we do not kill that for them in a Sunday school atmosphere that is drab and uninspiring.

# Unitarian Universalists debate how much God should be in religion

By Rachel Zoll

*Associated Press Writer*

To its harshest critics, Unitarian Universalism is a religion — like "Seinfeld" — about nothing.

There are no required rituals. There is no church doctrine. Members don't even have to believe in God to belong.

But for centuries, most members have shared principles: They've been committed to progressive movements, from abolition to gay rights.

Now a group of churchgoers, including some political conservatives, is accusing the denomination of replacing spirituality with social activism. They're forming a rival organization to attract like-minded Unitarian Universalists.

The split has manifested itself as a trademark lawsuit over who has the right to the name American Unitarian Association, but the real divide is over the definition of religion.

"To a non-Unitarian Universalist, the

idea that there needs to be a major effort to restore God to religion is oxymoronic," said David Burton, a 41-year-old lobbyist and co-founder of the maverick group. "But in many Unitarian Universalist congregations, and at the Unitarian Universalist Association, it is sometimes controversial to talk about God and the divine."

The Rev. John Buehrens, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Boston umbrella group for the denomination, argues Burton and his supporters are driven by politics.

"They claim a theological motive, but when you have a paid conservative lobbyist at the core of it, you wonder," Buehrens said.

The debate moves to Cleveland when the Unitarian Universalists, with 220,000 members, hold their annual meeting starting Thursday.

Burton chose the name American Unitarian Association when he incorpo-

rated his group in his home state of Virginia. The Unitarian Universalist Association sued, arguing the name, which they never registered as a trademark, became their property in 1961 when Unitarians and Universalists merged.

"They are appropriating to themselves the Unitarian Universalist Association's history and goodwill and tradition," said Edward Leibensperger, the attorney representing the UUA.

The case also raises questions about who has rights to millions of dollars the Unitarian Universalists have been collecting from trusts established in the name of the American Unitarian Association. Burton said he would be willing to sign away any legal right to those funds.

The Unitarians, with roots in a movement that rejected Puritan orthodoxy in New England, are famously resistant to dogma. They have considered removing any reference to "God" from their principles. They debate whether to de-

scribe their houses of worship as churches or even call themselves a denomination.

Unitarians support a free search for spiritual truth. Atheists and pagans are a significant part of their membership. Jews, Buddhists, Christians and others sometimes join to maintain their traditions without having to accept, wholesale, their denominations' creed.

Members say Unitarian Universalism is the only religion that allows them to change theology without changing churches.

"Almost all of us went through a long period of agnosticism and atheism," said the Rev. Carl Scovel, who led the Unitarian Universalists' Kings Chapel in Boston for nearly 40 years. "We feel a sense of identity, a sense of sympathy, with those raising questions about conventional religion."

That questioning has led the denomination to take liberal positions on hot-

button religious and political issues over the years.

The Universalists ordained their first female minister in 1863. Churchgoers were among the more active supporters of the civil rights movement. They have backed gay rights since 1970, and not only endorse same-sex unions, but some churches also offer the couples premarital counseling.

Yet some Unitarians fear their denomination has become nothing more than a political debate club.

"It's a matter of how open do you become to all beliefs?" said Roger Finke, a Penn State University sociologist. "It's hard to justify: why are we a religion?"

Burton was raised in a Baptist church, joined up briefly with the Methodists, then was baptized a Presbyterian before marrying a Jewish woman and deciding to join the Unitarians.

He said he was drawn by the diverse

views in his Florida congregation. But when he moved to the Washington, D.C., area in 1995, he found the sermons more often concerned federal legislation than faith.

"There was little talk about spirituality," Burton said. "It became clear to me that that was commonplace throughout the country. The Unitarian tradition was basically being subsumed into a political movement."

Buehrens sees Burton more as political operative than spiritual seeker. Burton belongs to the Unitarian Universalists conservative forum and, as an attorney and lobbyist, represents Americans for Fair Taxation, which advocates replacement of the income tax with a national sales tax.

Burton was on the Maryland steering committee of 1984 Reagan-Bush campaign and was an adviser to the 1988 National Republican Platform Committee.



## Kanorado United Methodist

**Bible Baptist Church**  
**Pastor:** Don Crutcher  
 Fifth & Broadway  
 899-7368  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9 am  
 Worship Service: 10 am  
 Evening Service: 6:30 pm  
**Wednesday:** Evening Bible Study: 7 pm

**Calvary Gospel Church**  
**Pastor:** Rev. Steve Rains  
 Fourth & College • 899-3605  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:15 am  
 Morning Worship: 10:30 am  
 Evening Worship: 6:30 pm  
**Wednesday:** Family Night: 7 pm  
 Adult Bible Study and Youth Group  
**Saturday:** Prayer Meeting: 5-7 pm  
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**Church of Christ**  
 401 Caldwell  
 899-6185  
**Sunday:** Bible Study: 9:45 am  
 Worship Service: 10:45 am  
 Evening Service: 6 pm  
**Wednesday:** Bible Study: 7 pm

**Church of the Nazarene**  
**Pastor:** Matthew Delp  
 Third & Caldwell  
 899-2080 or 899-3797  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:45 am  
 Worship Service: 10:50 am  
 Evening Service: 6 pm  
**Wednesday:** Evening Service: 7 pm

**First Baptist Church**  
**Pastor:**  
 Fifth & Center • 899-3450  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:15 am  
 Morning Worship: 10:30 am  
 Evening Worship: 6 pm  
**Tuesday:** Mens' Prayer Group: 5:30 am  
**Thursday:** Ladies' Bible Study: 10 am

**Seventh Day Adventist Church**  
 1160 Cattletrail  
**Pastor:** Bobby Potter • 332-3956  
**Saturday:** Sabbath School: 9:30 am  
 Worship Service: 11 am

**First Christian Church**  
 (Disciples of Christ)  
**Pastor:** Loren Strait  
 Eighth & Arcade • 899-5233  
**Sunday:** Worship Service: 9 am  
**Activities:** Junior High & High School Youth Groups,  
 Adult Bible Study, Choir, Men's and Women's Groups,  
 Devotions Study, Monthly Fellowship  
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**First United Methodist Church**  
 1116 Sherman  
 899-3631  
**Pastor:** Rev. Carol Moore-Ramey  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 10:15 am  
 Worship Service: 9 am

**Sonrise Christian Church**  
 Ninth & Caldwell • 899-5398  
**Minister:** Tony Kaika  
**Youth Minister:** Doug Bean  
**Sunday:** Worship Service: 9:30 am  
 Sunday School: 10:45 am  
**Wednesday:**  
 Junior/Senior High Meeting: 7 pm  
 Adult & Children's Classes: 7 pm

**Emmanuel Lutheran Church**  
 13th & Sherman • 899-6161  
**Pastor:** Scott Grimshaw  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 8:45 am  
 Worship Service: 10 am  
**Wednesday:** Confirmation: 6 pm

**Kanorado United Methodist Church**  
**Pastor:** Leonard Cox  
 399-2468  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9 am  
 Worship Service: 10:15 am

**Goodland Bible Church**  
 109 Willow Road • 899-6400  
**Pastor:**  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 9:45 am  
 Morning Worship: 11 am  
 Evening Worship: 6 pm  
**Wednesday:** Call for location

**Grace Fellowship Church**  
 104 E. Hwy 24 • 899-6423  
**Pastor:** Bob Snyder • Residence: 899-0134  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 10 am  
 Worship Service: 11 am

**St. Paul's Episcopal Church**  
 13th & Center  
 899-2115 or Rectory 899-2114  
**Priest:** Father Charles Schneider  
**Deacon:** Gretchen Talitha  
**Saturday:** Church School: 4 pm  
 Holy Communion: 5 pm  
**Wednesday:** Bible Study: 7 pm  
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 1200 15th Street • Burlington, CO • (970) 664-2470  
**Sacrament Meeting:** 9:30 am  
**Sunday School:** 10:45 am  
**Priesthood/Relief Society:** 11:30 am

**Word of Life Foursquare Church**  
 223 E. 10th  
 899-5250  
**Pastor:** John Coumerilh  
**Sunday:** Worship Celebration & Kids' Church: 10:30 am

**United Methodist Church Brewster:**  
**Pastor:**  
 Worship Service: 10:45 am CST  
 Sunday School: 9:45 am CST  
**Winona:**  
**Minister:** Rev. Bob Winters  
 Worship Service: 9 am CST  
 Sunday School: 10:15 am CST

**Iglesia Del Dios Vivo**  
 La Luz Del Mundo  
 Spanish Speaking Church  
**Minister:** Esteban Ortiz B.  
 1601 Texas • 899-5275  
**Daily Prayer:** Sunday thru Saturday: 5 am & 6 pm  
**Sunday:** Sunday School: 10 am

**Our Lady of Perpetual Help**  
**Pastor:** Father Daryl Olmstead  
 307 W. 13th • 899-7205  
**Sacrament of Reconciliation:**  
 4:30-5 pm Saturday or by appointment  
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 Sunday: 8 am and 9:30 am  
**Spanish Mass:**  
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