

Saints and sinners: Charles Sheldon's simple question

Charm bracelets, wristbands and sweatbands with the letters WWJD on them are worn mostly by young people. Everywhere you go you can see people wearing them, and the initials always start conversations. If you ask what the letters stand for, the wearers will be glad to tell you. In fact, they hope you will ask.

Sold in religious bookstores and supply houses, they also come in the form of desk mottoes.

The letters stand for "What would Jesus do?" This is the story behind the story.

Charles Sheldon was the pastor of the Central Congregational Church in Topeka, Kan., in the late 19th century.

To bolster his sagging Sunday evening services, Sheldon began reading to his congrega-

tion from the chapters of a novel he had written. Like the later movie serials, he left his audiences hanging in suspense when he broke off his narrative for the evening.

According to Ferenc Morton Szasz's "The Protestant Clergy in the Great Plains and the Mountain West" (University of New Mexico Press, 1988), Sheldon soon found his church filled to overflowing.

When he wrote another novel, "In His Steps" (Fleming H. Revell, 1993), he continued the practice with the same good results. Not only that, "In His Steps" became a bestseller.

The plot of the book is as follows: The Rev. Henry Maxwell asks the members of his congregation to make a vow that for one year they will ask themselves "What would Jesus do?"



george plagenz

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before undertaking any action.

In the novel we learn how a newspaper editor, a businessman, a singer, a college president and several clergymen fulfill the vow.

When Sheldon died in 1946, a Christian Century editorial questioned whether asking "What would Jesus do?" in every situation in life was a solution for "the manifest problems of personal and social conduct, given the great dis-

tance separating our time from his."

Still, said the magazine, Sheldon "made his generation conscious of the shortcomings of their Christian professions and confronted vast numbers of people with an idea they could not easily dismiss."

Asking "What would Jesus do?" may not always result in clear-cut replies. But on many occasions, when we are about to take a questionable step, the answer may come to us, "I don't know what Jesus would do in such a situation, but I know he wouldn't do this."

Without knowing about Sheldon's experiment in storytelling, I once tried something like it. One summer, when I was in the parish ministry in Boston, I read the story of Joseph and his brothers in serial form to my congregation

on Sunday mornings.

This moving story of human passions and familial intrigue, of deceit and pathos, and ultimately of reunion and reconciliation, takes up 13 chapters in the book of Genesis — too long to be read as a Bible lesson on a single Sunday. (There are 459 verses.)

So I broke the story up into parts and read a section of the dramatic narrative each week. One man who had come to church for the first time when I was just beginning the story told me at the end of the summer that he had come each Sunday just to find out how the story was going to end.

If the church is going to hold our attention, maybe it will have to relearn the art of storytelling.

U.S. Jains seek adherence to ancient Indian religion in modern times

By Bennie M. Currie

Associated Press Writer
ROSEMONT, Ill. — They avoid eating potatoes, carrots and onions because uprooting them would harm the plant, or damage the micro-organisms living in the soil around it.

Some sweep the ground in their path to avoid treading on bugs. Others don't wear leather.

For followers of Jainism, faith demands a deeply spiritual deference to all living beings and a strict adherence to nonviolence.

The ancient Indian religion has gained a foothold in this country, and adherents are now trying to pass along their beliefs to the younger generation of American Jains.

"We have established ourselves and we are trying to give back to others, particularly by teaching our youth," said Prabodh Vaidya, of Bolingbrook, who owns a travel agency and helps run

two medical clinics. "It's a challenge and a blessing at the same time."

Teaching young Jains and giving them the tools to practice their religion are ongoing objectives of the Federation of Jain Associations in North America. About 6,000 Jains gathered outside Chicago for the group's biennial conference last week.

According to conference organizers, there are between 60,000 and 100,000 Jains in North America. Like other Indian religious groups, their numbers in the United States began to increase in the mid-1960s when immigration laws were made less restrictive.

But Jains' presence on this continent amounts to just a brief moment in the long history of the faith, which goes back about 2,600 years. The faith derives its name from a title that is given to 24 great teachers, or spiritual leaders.

Jainism is often considered to be a

primordial offshoot of Hinduism, since both Indian faiths share some beliefs — although that view is debatable among Jains.

Both religions teach that each soul is repeatedly reincarnated and that good and evil deeds determine its status in future lives (the law of karma). However, Jains believe the soul is independent and indestructible, while Hindus believe all souls are in principle part of one universal spirit.

In practice, "all that we do is built around nonviolence," said Jain federation president Bipin Parik, of Des Plaines.

He said that while Jains may protect themselves when attacked, even an act made in self-defense is done so with nonviolence in mind. Nonviolence "is a part of our thoughts, our words and our deeds," he said.

In India, more devout followers, such as nuns and monks, sweep the ground

as they walk to avoid killing insects. Some also wear masks to avoid killing insects by breathing, while others in India and in the United States wear them as a symbolic gesture during prayers.

While the Jain diet does involve harm to the plants that are eaten, it is regarded as a means of survival that involves the minimum amount of violence toward living beings.

"Of all of the (religious) traditions, Jainism has the strongest address to nonviolence," said Jim Kenney of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, a Chicago-based group that promotes cultural and religious relations.

"I think the Jains in the West have done very well against difficult odds," Kenney said. "People are not necessarily hostile against them but they do live in a hostile world."

For Hama Pokharna, leading a life of

nonviolence in American society can produce some unexpected benefits. A biochemistry researcher at the University of Chicago, Pokharna is often kept out of office disputes in a show of respect by co-workers.

"People will say, 'Hama is nonviolent. Let's not hassle her,'" Pokharna said.

While first-generation Jains are concerned with whether their children remain devoted to their faith, some second-generation members are actually more adherent than their parents, said Vivek Jain, who lives on Chicago's South Side.

"A lot of younger Jains want to connect with their parents' past," he said. "Some of them are more conservative in their value structure than their parents."

Others, like Aruna Jain, are incorporating some ideas they were raised with, and following their own path in other

ways.

When the 27-year-old from Chevy Chase, Md., was a child, her parents made it clear to her elementary school teachers that she wasn't supposed to eat meat. She's still a vegetarian, but doesn't consider herself a devout Jain.

"I kind of celebrate it in my own way," she said. "I appreciate the religion without trying to impose it on anyone else."

Catholic groups prepare

WASHINGTON (AP) — The National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic Conference have completed their merger and will now be known as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Monsignor William Fay, the conference general secretary, said the renaming will not affect activities or programs, but will simply change how the conference is identified.



Church of Nazarene

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

If you would like to receive a free newsletter, please call the church office.

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

Special Notice: Handicap Accessible, Hearing
Assistance Equipment and Infant and Toddler
Nurseries Available

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 Kafka

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

Sr. Warden for emergencies during the week 899-2067

**Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-Day Saints**

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

Mass Schedule:

Saturday: 6 pm

Sunday: 8 am and 9:30 am

Spanish Mass:

1st & 3rd Sunday: 2 pm

Pleasant Home Church

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Rt. 1, Box 180 • 694-2807 • 3190 Road 70

Pastor: Jim Cress

899-5784

Sunday: Worship Service: 9 am

Sunday School: 10 am

Evening Service: 6 pm

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