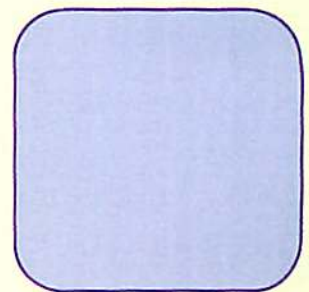
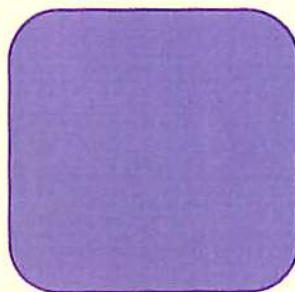


Andy Olsen

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Asbury College

2004 Finalist  
Chandler Award



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California; Metro Desk

**Religion; A Pastor Accused, a Congregation Torn; At Trinity Lutheran in Ventura, the Rev. David Hall faces allegations of crude jokes and actions. He refuses to step down and members have taken sides.**

[REDACTED]

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26 July 2003

D-24

English

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When the Rev. David Hall dons his robe and steps to the pulpit, he delivers the Word with a passion that has fortified his parishioners for years.

But now, threatened with losing his career, the leader of Ventura's Trinity Lutheran Church is spending a lot of time talking about healing.

A controversy over allegations of inappropriate behavior by the pastor has shaken the 1,000-member congregation. Worshipers are leaving, an associate pastor plans to resign and a possible lawsuit looms.

At a time when the conduct of religious leaders is being scrutinized more closely than ever, the difficulty at Trinity illustrates the problems that Protestant churches can face with ministers who haven't broken any laws but may have violated church rules and breached a congregation's trust.

Church members contend that Hall, 51, has made jokes about oral sex in front of women and has given unwanted hugs to some congregants, and that five years ago he played a sophomoric prank on a female education minister.

Bishop Dean Nelson, who heads the Southwest California Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, asked Hall to resign in June. Hall refused. And, under the denomination's rules, there isn't much church leaders can do about it.

Leaving "may be an easy thing to do, but for the healing of the church I want to be there," said Hall, who has been pastor at Trinity for nine years. "I don't think it ever helps to run away from situations."

That stand has left the congregation divided. Some members say they will leave if Hall stays. Others say they will leave if he leaves.

"I don't feel supported," said Karen Cherry, one of seven congregants who gave signed statements to Nelson and other church leaders concerning Hall's behavior. "I won't go [back to Trinity] if Dave's there."

On the other side, Luther Tolo, Trinity's 65-year-old former pastor and a member for 24 years, said, "There are a lot of people who are on his side and say if Dave goes they'll go too."

Hall said he regretted making remarks with sexual innuendo and hugging female parishioners who felt uncomfortable with such actions. He acknowledged behaving inappropriately when he gave a "wedgie," a sharp tug on the waistband, to the former education minister, according to a report from the Oakland-based Center for Ministry, an interdenominational organization that provides training and counseling for evangelical pastors.

But Don Kelley, Hall's lawyer, said that the allegations leveled against his client were false or exaggerated and has threatened to sue the church for "gross overreaction."

"There are a few people -- and when I say that I mean less than five -- who have wanted for years for Dave to resign," Kelley said. "This was an opportunity for them to get him out."

Lutheran bishops may suggest that a pastor resign, but church rules prevent a bishop from removing a pastor unless the pastor faces criminal charges or a disciplinary committee proves he or she has violated codes of conduct.

The policy assumes that the pastor will do the right thing and follow the bishop's recommendation, Nelson said.

In his tenure, Nelson has advised four pastors to resign. This is the first time one has refused to do so.

"The authority of the bishop comes more in a moral persuasion than of a legal power," Nelson said. Hall, he said, "chose not to respect that authority."

The standoff "raises a question that we as a church, and everyone, is becoming more interested in: How do we organizationally remove a person who's ordained and called by a congregation into ministry?" said Kevin Mannoia, dean of the Haggard School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University.

"I don't know of a denomination in the United States that has not had to deal with this issue," said Mannoia, former president of the National Assn. of Evangelicals, an organization of nearly 43,000 churches.

In churches that are strongly hierarchical, such as the Roman Catholic Church, bishops have the clear authority to remove pastors. However, many Protestant churches lack that structure.

By contrast, most nondenominational churches and some denominations such as the Baptists treat congregations as self-governing businesses.

The Lutheran church and some others fall in between, having a central hierarchy but giving considerable authority to individual congregations.

The controversy at Trinity began building in January when Nelson visited the church to investigate alleged administrative misconduct, including the sudden firing of staff members without explanation, according to Nelson and other church officials.

In April, Nelson asked the church to grant Hall a three-month paid leave of absence while the accusations were investigated. When the bishop asked congregants to comment about Hall, some women such as Cherry felt they could finally share their concerns about his behavior.

"Typical of being an abuse victim is you think you're the only one," Cherry said of why she didn't come forward sooner. "Who would believe me?' I told the bishop."

When Nelson told the congregation about the sexual harassment claims, many did not believe them.

"That was a complete surprise to us," Tolo said. "Most people probably felt that the charges were not true."

Rumors spread that Nelson, Associate Pastor Jon Christenson and other congregants were working together to oust Hall. Some churchgoers dismissed the accusations as lies.

Christenson, who said he plans to leave Trinity, admits that he disagreed with Hall about the way some staff members were let go, but denies any organized effort to have the pastor fired.

"I've been called a disease, an infection that needs to be removed," Christenson said. "I'm becoming a divisive issue in the church and it's affecting my credibility. I told the bishop, 'I'm gone.' "

Cherry, one of a dozen congregants who shared information with Nelson, said she believed the church council listened too passively to her and other women's grievances.

"I'm assuming since they're not asking me about my story that they don't care," said Cherry, who has since left the church. "To me it seems like a done deal, so those of us who have been damaged -- well, I'll have to find a new home for my faith."

Despite complaints such as Cherry's, the council has decided for now to keep Hall as head pastor, provided he undergoes additional training and counseling. Nelson invited him to another hearing with the synod Monday to address the allegations and other concerns about his leadership. Kelley told the bishop that his client would not attend the hearing.

Earlier this month, Hall, who grew up the son of medical missionaries in South Africa, choked back tears as he preached to the congregation for the first time in three months.

"I deeply regret and apologize for any insensitivity I've had, for any actions ... that may have hurt anyone," he said. "These past few months have been a jail for me."

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City & Region

**When court becomes chapel; Class studies hoops religion**

[REDACTED]

23 January 2004

English

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David Hall is a man of letters, not prone to flaky religious ideologies or superstitious whims. But what the Centre College assistant professor of religion muses when he watches a Wildcats game is anything but conventional: somewhere between the hardwood luster and the screaming fans at Rupp Arena, he sees God.

Hall leads his students to explore spirituality through athletics in a course he designed for Centre's three-week January term, during which students take only one class.

"If you watch the fans at a UK game, it looks very much like a religious festival," Hall said. "I'm not trying to say sports is a religion ... But there is a sense of the sacred in the community around it."

The class, called Basketball as Religion, is part of a growing number of efforts nationwide to study religion as it relates to athletics, Hall said. In the mornings, Hall's 30 students digest the writing of influential religious thinkers and debate it in the classroom. They sweat the afternoons hustling on the basketball court.

Hall came to Centre two years ago from DePaul University with degrees from Cal State Sacramento and the University of Chicago. He teaches the similarities between religious rituals such as prayer and athletic ones such as chants, between gender stereotypes on the court and in the pulpit.

"We were talking today about why men dominate sports," said Caitlin Donohue, a sophomore from San Antonio. "It's because they were created by men."

And if Cooperstown, N.Y.'s Abner Doubleday didn't really create baseball, one of Hall's students suggested, perhaps God didn't shape the world from scratch.

"There's this whole museum in Cooperstown," senior Matt Burgess said. "It's like a temple, a legend, even though Cooperstown had nothing to do with baseball. But we need it to understand baseball as American. It's just like a lot of people see the creation account as an allegory, but we still believe it literally -- we need that to help us understand."

Most of the students enrolled in the class study religion at Centre and consider themselves fairly athletic. Far beyond basketball, they've searched for God in rowdy games of flag football, soccer and Frisbee.

Not all discussion revolves around superficial similarities between faith and athletics. It's no secret that Americans worship the game.

"You've got scientists who think fundamentally their whole life revolves around science," said junior Ryan Reynolds as he waited to go back into an in-class basketball game. "That could very easily extend to sports."

Hall's class is actually the brain child of his wife, Sarah Scott, who suggested the idea as the couple watched the

NCAA basketball tournament last spring.

The teaching is based largely on the work of Joseph Price, whose book, *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*, highlights how humans have long looked to athletics for deliverance.

"Sports is the hope of the oppressed for gratification, for salvation, for enrichment, for glory -- all of which sound like religious goals," said Price, who has been teaching a course on religion and sports for 20 years at Whittier College in California.

"Even if it means just to paint their faces blue and buy Wildcat memorabilia and participate in a joyous community of fans." The rite of sport

[REDACTED]

Faith & Values

**Say a little prayer for you; Bedtime rituals can help parents instill culture and spirituality in children**

[REDACTED]

6 March 2004

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Ziggy Rivkin-Fish fights with quiet songs in the night.

The father's struggle to preserve his Jewish heritage for his 4-year-old son, Itai, ends daily with a bedtime prayer they chant together in Hebrew. Rivkin-Fish knows it's easy to forget where you come from when you're the minority in the Bible Belt.

So with age-old Jewish songs and bedtime stories, the father tells his child each evening: "Whatever happened to you, happened to you as a Jew."

"This bedtime ritual becomes part of the deliberate immersion of children within a Jewish framework," said Rivkin-Fish, director of Gan Shalom Preschool in Lexington.

Across faiths, bedtime prayers have long served to calm young minds and fears before children climb under the covers. But many parents and ministers say the prayers' purpose is as much cultural as spiritual, a good way to keep struggling families from falling apart and to pass on beliefs and traditions.

"It's a time after a busy day for families to come together," said Carrie Beth Tonks, minister of children's education at Lexington's Calvary Baptist Church. "It's a good starting place for people if they don't feel comfortable with a family devotion."

Teaching children to pray can start early, when they're toddlers or even before. The most basic prayers revolve around giving thanks and recognizing God's protection through the night. Experts say such prayers also help parents build a sort of moral bulwark around children.

"There's a desire to counteract the kind of greed and entitlement understandings of the culture by expressing thankfulness for the things that God has provided," said Karen-Marie Yust, assistant professor of Christian education at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis.

"You're remembering that you didn't get it yourself because you're so wonderful, but you got it because God cares for you."

Not all bedtime prayers fit readily into the quaint mold portrayed in scenes from movies like *It's a Wonderful Life*. Today, many evangelical Christian bedtime rituals are apt to include bits of Catholic liturgy or a candle lighting ceremony. Occasionally, Jewish children might incorporate a free-flowing prayer of thanks alongside the Shema, the cornerstone Jewish prayer, Yust said.

And in interfaith marriages, parents could well kneel with their children and pray to Jesus in one breath and to Allah in another. Steve Waldman, Jewish co-founder of Beliefnet.com, an interfaith Internet site, and husband of a Presbyterian, writes on the site: "A few nights a week, this interfaith couple sings our children the Shema, sometimes before and sometimes after the Lord's Prayer."

Many parents even choose to teach their children prayers from other religions to increase their cultural awareness, Yust said.

"In an increasing multireligious, multinational, global world, what it's doing is offering an opportunity to connect with God through the many-avenues that people have found, rather than restricting them to one," said Yust, whose book, *Real Kids, Real Faith: Practices for Nurturing Children's Spiritual Lives*, will be released in March. "Many of the prayers of the Jewish tradition are common to the Christian tradition. Parents say, 'When we pray this prayer, we're praying alongside our Jewish brothers and sisters.'"

Not every faith turns to bedtime as a moment to give thanks to God or to ask for blessings. Muslim parents often teach their children bedtime prayers that communicate a sense of submission to divine control.

"The purpose is to remind yourself of God's presence, and also there is a recognition almost of the mystery of sleep," said Ihsan Bagby, associate professor of Islamic studies at the University of Kentucky.

"Oh Allah, in thy name do I die and live," goes one Muslim bedtime prayer, which Bagby said was first uttered by the prophet Muhammad.

Many ministers agree that bedtime prayer reminds children that God is watching over them and tends to calm them in the night, much as bedtime stories can put children to sleep. Prayer rituals can smooth over the exciting or traumatic events in a child's day, Calvary Baptist's Tonks said.

"Maybe somebody bullied them that day, or maybe they're worried about something they saw on television, or maybe they're worried about terrorism or something that could happen to the city," Tonks said. "It's a time to remind them they're not alone."

Proponents of reading liturgical and traditional prayers say that personal, ad hoc prayers sometimes can't provide the comfort of predictability that reciting time-tested prayers does. Some Protestant parents are turning to Catholic prayer books for inspiration, Yust said.

Rabbi Sharon Cohen of Lexington's Ohavay Zion Synagogue said the families she knows don't deviate from standard Jewish bedtime prayers, and she wouldn't have it any other way. She has fond memories as a young baby sitter of putting children to bed to the sound of the Shema. It is a tradition as old as Judaism itself, she said.

"These words have been uttered and said for generations. There's a comfort level there," Cohen said. "That's how we as Jews tuck our kids in bed at night."