

# Studying the Bible to Buddha

## Preaching, from Page 1

school year, which basically plots out the curriculum. The sixth grade curriculum goes from early civilization through the ancient Greeks and Romans, through the birth of Christianity, through the Renaissance. Akin said it is almost impossible to teach that winding river of history.

"The bible, for example, is a history book," Akin said. "It's important to discuss all religions to understand each other. How can you teach Judaism without the 10 commandments? How can you talk about Israel without Moses and the Sermon on the Mount?"

It's all right in the sixth grade textbook. The Sermon on the Mount is in there, as well as separate sections on some of the world's major religions. Akin said it makes for some interesting discussion among class members, but that it never gets out of hand.

He even admits that some of the reading is hard for sixth-graders to understand, but that to conceive the world as it is today, they have to at least have a foundation.

It's not only Christianity that the schools area teaching. All of the world's major religions are examined, and it has been an eye opener for a lot of the students.

"The Buddhists, for instance, believe in reincarnation," Akin said. "We can't try to convince them or not convince the students about reincarnation, but it is a responsibility to make them aware of its existence."

Akin said the curriculum makes for some spirited discussion.

"Some of the kids raise interesting questions, and some of the kids have some very strong beliefs, depending on how they are raised. I can't condemn any religion; I can only try to help them understand."

Akin also said he's concerned that many of the kids don't know any of the bible stories at all while some of the kids know all of the bible stories.

"It's important to study those stories that are so cool," Akin said. "It's not the teachers that wrote the stories, it's the bible and that is part of what makes the world what it is today. Religion is so woven into life today and it's a main reason things are the way they are."

Parents haven't always been pleased with the curriculum. Akin said he's had several parents voice concerns, but for the most part, they have been supportive and understanding. He said there will be more of an outcry when the students move on to their next topic, Greek mythology. In the end, though, Akin said the students seem to enjoy the class and their chance to interact with other cultures. Some of the kids, he said, aren't all that interested, but most of them seem to grasp the concept right away. Whether they look at stories from history that may or may not involve religion, it's a learning tool, Akin said. If they grasp the meaning behind the bible stories, great. If they just look at them as cool stories, that's great also, he said.

"The bible is the building block for so much in this world," Akin said. "We can't tell them what to believe and we have to preface almost everything as 'according to the Bible,' but it really is a great way for kids to gain an understanding."

To many of the kids at Haile Middle School, it's making for a world of difference.

# Silence Decision Left to Schools

## Silence, from Page 1

Kerley said she's fine with letting the students have their moment.

"They just stand silently and we don't tell them what to do," Kerley said. "If they pray, then they do, but it's not specifically a time for prayer."

Most Manatee County principals referred questions about moments of silence to the school board, and even the school board had to research its policies. Bowen found that the two-minute moment was the maximum time allowed, but he also said the issue has never really been raised.

He said there have been times that religion in schools has been a hot-button topic, such as the annual "Meet Me At The Pole" ritual done at many high schools in which students meet at the school flagpole for a prayer. In public schools, there is no official prayer before high school football games, but players from both teams usually kneel at the center of the field after the game for an unofficial prayer. When public schools travel to a

private school for football games, there is always a pre-game prayer over the stadium loudspeaker, and the players can the public schools can choose to participate if they want.

Bowen said some schools are going overboard trying to be politically correct when it comes to celebrating the Christmas season.

"We even have heard of the elimination of any religious songs from holiday music programs," Bowen said. "Such actions are unnecessary. Courts have recognized that more than 75 percent of serious music is of a religious nature and have ruled that the inclusion of Christmas carols in a public school holiday music program is not a violation."

Bowen said he was interested in taking a further look into the moment of silence practiced at some schools, but said he is fine with such things as long as the teachers or school administrators remember that they are adhering to school district rules.

While teaching anything with religious implications in history classes, for exam-

ple, teachers are required to always preface any religious comment with "according to..."

As far as what students do with their minute, it's completely up to them.

"Even though there is no school-sponsored prayer, public school students still have a right to pray at schools individually or in a group as long as it is not disruptive," Bowen said.

For example, if a student wants to say grace before lunch and is not intrusive, it would be permitted, Bowen said.

Until a statute comes down on one side or the other, each school is allowed to do what it chooses when it comes to a moment of silence. Most teachers say that it is impossible to teach history or current events without some reference to religion, so it is a tight rope that has to be walked. Schools are allowed two minutes of silence after the pledge, or can choose to have none.

Bowen said he would be interested in studying the moment, but until then, it's on a school-by-school basis.

## Victims, from Page 1

tem or anyone that needs medical expenses."

White said prior to 1991, there were no victim's advocacy groups in Manatee County. It was talked about often, but nothing ever materialized until one was put into effect, but White is hoping the program grows through volunteer work.

Joyce got involved 10 years ago and started by working in an office, going through reports. After extensive training, she now feels she's ready to visit a crime site to help victims in need. Her husband is a retired state policeman from Illinois, and she said she wanted to make a difference after moving to Palmetto.

"I feel like I am able to make a difference here," Joyce said. "Just being here is reward enough. I can help people who need it and it's better than doing nothing."

Victims of any crime are entitled to certain financial payments and White is partly responsible for making sure the victims are taken care of.

After receiving a return card from a crime victim, White makes contact with the victim and discusses where to go from there. She said she gets about a one-third response rate to the cards. She then sets the wheels in motion to take care of the victim.

There's only so much White and Joyce can do by themselves. White said it is a

tough process to become a volunteer, but Joyce said it is all worthwhile. Volunteers can work as often or as little as they want, but have to go through an extensive background check, be fingerprinted, and take a polygraph.

After that, it's a matter of helping victims get back on their feet. White said the department is bracing for a run of bike thefts that typically occur this time of year.

Until she gets some help, White is a one-woman show with Joyce at her side. The program has been a tremendous success, White said, but there is a lot more to accomplish.

People interested in volunteering can call the Palmetto Police Department at 721-2000, ext. 126.

## Traffic, from Page 1

the \$33.5 million road-widening project is completed.

Hayes said the best way to alleviate congestion would be construction of 44th Avenue from 301 East to Lorraine Road. She agreed with McClash that the widening of the roads from two to six lanes would be a great help, but that more needs to be done.

Hayes and McClash disagree on allowing further development in the area. McClash said that he does not support additional approvals for development until State Road 64 is completed unless the approvals have a stipulation restricting the permitting of buildings. Hayes, was a little more lenient, but also said she didn't want the development to go out of control.

"I would support further development along State Road 64 if the road construction plans are approved during the next two years," Hayes said. "To enter into a moratorium on construction would be detrimental since 50 percent of incomes of local residents are dependant upon income from some phase of construction."

McClash also countered Jensen's criticism that the commission should shoulder some of the blame for the spiraling development.

"SMR will have a difficult time with any future approvals unless new corridors are provided to accommodate their growth," McClash said. "They have been made aware of this for several years."



Hayes

Both commissioners agreed with a need to raise impact fees.

"Impact fees need to be increased," McClash said. "A state law passed this year prevents the fees from being increased for three months. The county will consider increasing the fees to an average of \$10,000 per home in October."

"Since impact fees are currently based upon a 2003 study, they are too low," Hayes said. "I support raising impact fees to the maximum in order to provide roads and infrastructure necessary for growth without taxing current residents."

McClash was asked why State Road 64 is not up to capacity, and he responded bluntly.

"State Road 64 is not up to capacity for two reasons: Growth occurred twice as fast and the state delayed funding of construction two years."

Hayes added that the funding for the expansion should be handled by the state and also blamed some of the problem for the delay on construction.

Hayes defended charges by Jensen that there wasn't proper preparation for the growth in Manatee County, especially on the east side.

"Planning for the growth in East County may not have been adequate," Hayes said. "Having said that, I question whether anyone could have foreseen the sudden growth that exploded in the last 10 years... Yes, the commission approved development, but I am not convinced that the rapidity of construction was expected by those commissioners."

McClash countered that the commission was prepared.

"The county had good plans to handle the growth," McClash said. "The growth occurred in concordance with planned growth projections and revenue fore-

casts."

McClash added that the problem was that growth happened at least twice as quickly as expected, the cost of road projects doubled and the revenue counted on for the road projects were deferred or reduced in half.

He added that during the growth period, developers asked for special conditions to allow their development to proceed before proper infrastructure was put into place.

"Knowing what we know today," McClash said. "It was wrong to give them special consideration. They should have been required to expedite building roads they needed instead of approving what they asked for."

As far as Manatee County residents dealing with rapidly rising taxes based on the growth, McClash said he and the commissioners are keeping an eye on it.

"Manatee County has been conservative with setting the county budget," McClash said. "There is an allocation of budgeted projects that can be shifted to recurring operations funds. The board will also hold a special meeting in the spring to evaluate the revenue forecast and set a proactive path to ensure that the budget for the next year does not increase tax rate."

Hayes said she might support a tax, but only for the right reasons, such as more parks, schools, libraries, and environmentally sensitive property.

"Without construction, funding of community services would be difficult," Hayes said. "One solution may be a tax, but I would not support funding solely obtained by taxing property owners. Instead, funding should be reinvested in the community by economic development."