

MY VOICE

To be welcome in this community, you must obey the authority of the law

I'll admit it. Years of driving past the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church in Island City several times a day and reading the quips on their sign has occasionally given me the desire to slip in under the cover of darkness and make some witty alterations. I'm a big child, I know. Of course I never considered actually doing it. Their congregation had never done me any harm and a petty act of mischief for my own amusement would have been, well ... petty.



ROGER BARNES
LA GRANDE

In light of recent events, I've begun reconsidering my restraint. Their innocence of having injured

me is certainly no longer a consideration, and what would previously have been petty now seems not only justified but perhaps even a civic duty. I could even argue it would be an act of religious freedom.

After all, my beliefs include doing unto others as I would have done to me. If I ever commit an act so egregiously selfish, reckless and consequential as the Lighthouse leadership and congregation did over and over again these past few months, I dearly hope the community wouldn't hesitate to lightly trespass my property in order to both shame me appropriately and give itself at least a small taste of justice.

My beliefs also strongly value taking personal responsibility for my actions. If I were to perform my little act of sign editorializing I wouldn't destroy any evidence, and if anyone asked I would confess. I assumed the Lighthouse Church held this value as well, as whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

So now I wonder. Would I be prosecuted for my minor crime? If so, would I be subject to the penalties described by law? Would I be instructed to apologize to those hurt by my actions? Understanding that being a member of a community comes with the responsibility to abide by the rules of that community, I would certainly expect to be held accountable for breaking the law whether or not I agree with that law. This concept is both foundational to democracy and a recurrent lesson in Western religions.

Lighthouse Church leaders and congregation members: My 3-year-old son wasn't allowed to play with his friends for nearly three months. As a community, we had finally made it to the point where he could. Every parent knows the pain we felt every time he asked when he would finally be able to see them and play more. Same for his grandparents. Now my heart will break again every single day when he pretends his friends have come to see him and sets his toys out for them. You took this away from him.

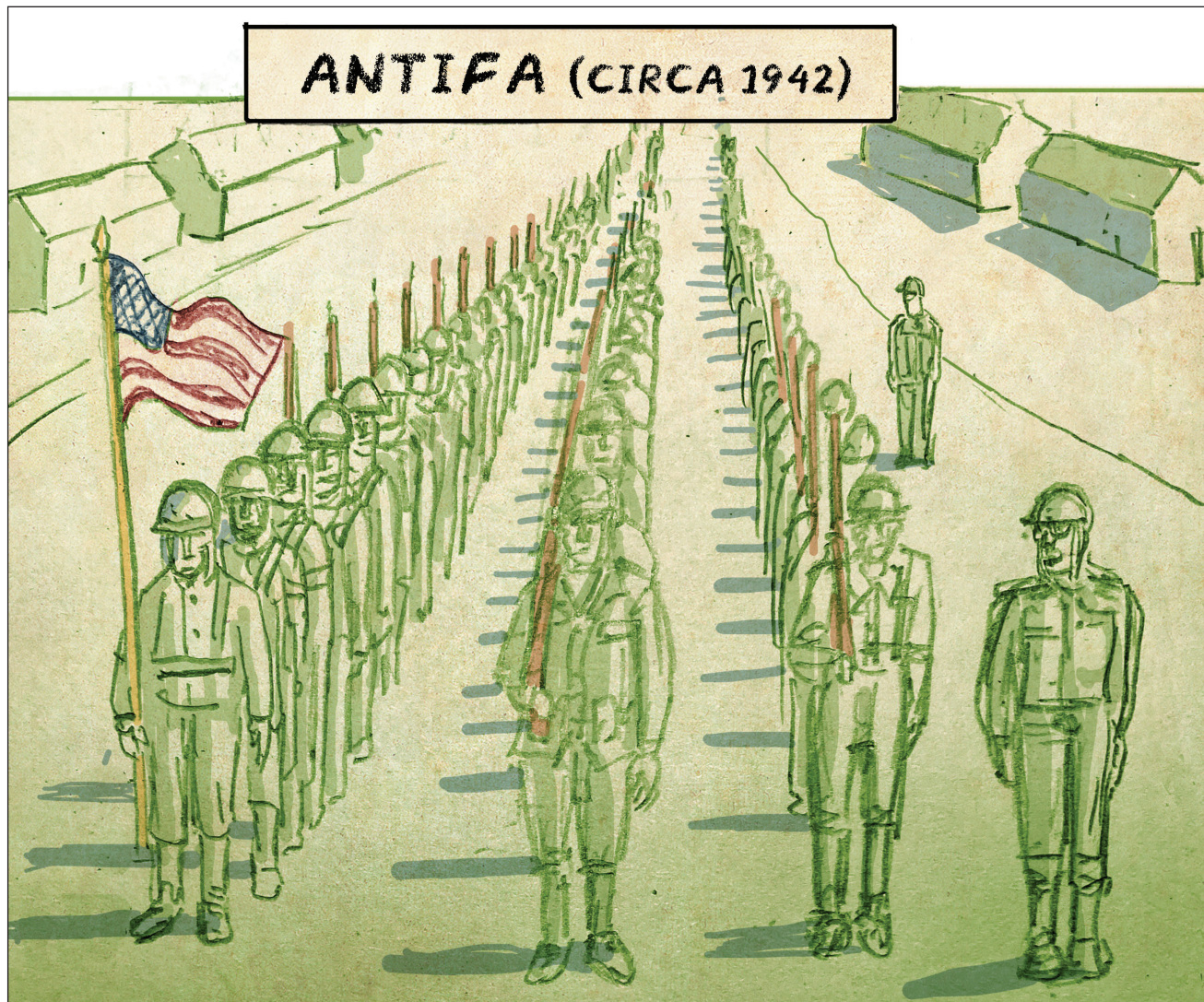
I am one of tens of thousands of people in this community who each have made sacrifices and endured hardships because of your actions. Perhaps you did have a right of religious freedom to disobey the law and gather in the numbers and fashion you did, but you did not and do not have the right to then participate in our community as if you were abiding by the laws.

Accept responsibility for what you've done and understand you will obey the authority of the law or you will no longer be welcome in this community.

In the meantime, if you find your highway sign has been "adjusted," feel free to come ask if I'm responsible. If it was me, I'll proudly admit it.

About the Author:

Roger Barnes has lived and worked and sometimes voiced his opinions in La Grande for 25 years. He welcomes your comments and criticisms.



Your views

Print news today is more important than ever

If ever there were a time for an independent, free press that informs local citizenry about important and relevant issues, it is now.

I am increasingly appreciative of the reporting from The Observer on topics ranging from out-of-county county commissioner meetings to coronavirus to public school goings-on like finances and the many challenges educators face. Editor Phil Wright is ably carrying the newspaper through its transition from the prior publisher and writes refreshingly honest and pertinent editorials.

Although paper media are dying a not-so-slow death, we should support them more than ever, especially in these times of tremendous uncertainty and increasing reliance on social media for "facts."

My parents set a wonderful example for their children decades ago, reading the regional paper religiously every morning and the local paper in the evenings. Talk around the dinner table often included the news of the day as reported in print. Thank you for continuing to serve our community in this vital way (we have been subscribers since moving here 30 years ago). I have "put my money where my mouth is" by contributing today to help keep the presses going.

Mary Rowland
La Grande

Pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement are testing democracy

Blessings and thanks to all the churches, businesses, social groups and individuals who followed the governor's directives even when Union County felt so safe it was hard not to feel smug. That safety hung on our relative isolation, which is exactly what the governor's orders were meant to enforce. Union County's very concerted effort and compliance almost worked.

Most county churches did not meet regardless of how parishioners and church leaders felt. Only Lighthouse Pentecostal Church felt their religious freedom bestowed divine immunity.

History graphically illustrates that churches in particular must watch their behavior toward those outside their belief system. The Crusades and early European settlers committed atrocities on non-Christians ostensibly in the name of God. Contempt and disregard for people of other faiths does not constitute religious freedom. Yet that is exactly what Lighthouse Church showed to our diverse community.

Trump and pastor Parker both underplayed the virus, and their followers not surprisingly followed. Even our county commissioners were sending mixed mes-

sages by not wearing face masks, not enforcing distancing and crowd size regulations at the church.

We don't yet know how many family members, friends and neighbors have literally been dealt a death blow.

Certainly some businesses struggling to remain viable will now be forced from the community. Meanwhile the virus is alive and spreading among us.

Many locals have high regard for individualism and little regard for government. But democracies such as ours claim to have the citizens most in mind. For a democracy to work requires continual pressure in that direction through the voting process. I believe in the democratic process. Under that system fairness and justice should be what laws provide.

Many of those demonstrating for Black Lives Matter follow strict safety distancing guidelines for their own safety and the safety of those they encounter. However, they put themselves at risk to demonstrate support for long overdue changes to America's policing and culture.

Demonstrations are critical to democracy.

This pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement are testing America's democracy.

Mary McCracken
Island City

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Donald Trump: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov/contact.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Pendleton office: 310 S.E. Second St. Suite 105, Pendleton 97801; 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building,

Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; walden.house.gov.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

State Sen. William S. Hansell (29th District/Athena): Salem office: 900 Court St. NE., S-423, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1729. Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/hansell. Email: sen.billhansell@oregonlegislature.gov.

State Rep. Greg Barreto (58th District/Cove): Salem office: 900 Court St. NE., H-384, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1458. Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/barreto. Email: rep.gregbarreto@oregonlegislature.gov.

State Rep. Greg Smith (57th District): Salem office: 900 Court St. NE., H-482, Salem, OR, 97301; 503-986-1457. Heppner office: P.O. Box 219, Heppner, OR 97836; 541-676-5154; Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/smithg. Email: rep.gregsmith@oregonlegislature.gov.

Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

City of La Grande: Mayor Steve Clements, City Manager Robert Strope; P.O. Box 670, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-1309; fax 541-963-3333.

Union County Commissioners: Donna Beverage, Matt Scarfo and Paul Anderes; 1106 K Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-963-1001; fax 541-963-1079.

Wallowa County Commissioners: John Hillock, Todd Nash and Susan Roberts; 101 S. River St., Room 202, Enterprise, OR 97828; 541-426-4543, ext. 11; fax 541-426-0582.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE
NEWSSTAND PRICE: \$1.50

You can save up to 34% off the single-copy price with home delivery. Call 541-963-3161 to subscribe.

Subscription rates per month:

Union & Wallowa Co. \$11.80
By mail, all other U.S. \$15



THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896

(USPS 299-260)

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801. Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (except Dec. 25) by EO Media Group, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

COPYRIGHT © 2020 THE OBSERVER
The Observer retains ownership and copyright protection of all staff-prepared news copy, advertising copy, photos and news or ad illustrations. They may not be reproduced without explicit prior approval.

Phone:
541-963-3161

Toll free (Oregon):
1-800-781-3214
Fax: 541-963-7804

Email:
news@lagrandeobserver.com
Website:
www.lagrandeobserver.com
Street address:
911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to:
The Observer,
911 Jefferson Ave.,
La Grande, OR 97850

Periodicals postage paid at:
Pendleton, Oregon 97801

STAFF

Publisher.....	Karrine Brogotti	Classifieds	Devi Mathson
Regional circulation director	Kelli Craft	Home delivery advisor	Amanda Fredrick
Editor	Phil Wright	Advertising representative	Juli Bloodgood
News clerk	Lisa Lester Kelly	Advertising representative	Amy Horn
Sports editor	Ronald Bond	Graphic design supervisor	Dorothy Kautz
Reporter.....	Dick Mason		
Reporter.....	Sabrina Thompson		

Chris Rush, Regional Publisher