

OUR VIEW

The Lighthouse Pentecostal Church needs to stand up

We are all in this together. That was the message, the mantra, for the coronavirus pandemic. We heard it from elected officials at all levels of government. We heard it from community leaders. The Observer, too, emphasized the sentiment. But the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church, Island City, did not buy into the message and became the source of the COVID-19 outbreak in Union County. Given the number of cases, the statistics point to a grim reality — the virus is going to kill people in the county. One church and its actions made Union County the poster child for what not to do during a pandemic.

Other churches adapted their services to protect not just their congregations but the larger community. Not Lighthouse Pentecostal Church, which in the wake of The Observer’s reporting about the outbreak took a defiant stance.

One of the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church’s leaders, James Parker, posted a video to the church’s Facebook page with a message to members: “Our fruit will show that what we did is the right thing. And more people need to do what we did. And the more people that do the right thing, the easier it’s going to be for the rest of the world to combat this, this pandemic that we’re going through. Umm, we shouldn’t hide from life’s circumstances. You got to stand up on your feet and you got to face them. That’s what we do. That’s what we’ll continue to do.”

Now Parker’s video is gone from the page, as are videos of church services in April and May showing disregard for Gov. Kate Brown’s executive order banning large gatherings.

Stand up, indeed. The recent slew of columns, letters to the editor and comments to posts on The Observer’s Facebook page attest to how outraged and just plain hurt the community is because the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church decided it did not have to follow rules for protecting us all.

There was nothing sacred, holy or scriptural about Lighthouse Pentecostal Church holding services and defying practices for keeping the community safe. And now we are reporting four employees at Grande Ronde Retirement Residence, La Grande, have COVID-19, leaving some of the most vulnerable members of our community in quarantine.

Who knows how long members of the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church had the virus while they shopped and worked and went about their lives in the county. The church’s leaders and members, meanwhile, stand silent as the virus continues to wind its way through the county and beyond. Hard to imagine the uptick in neighboring Wallowa County is mere coincidence.

The Lighthouse Pentecostal Church should stand up and apologize to the residents of Union County and the rest of Oregon, admit what they did was wrong and ask forgiveness and to once again join the community. The editorial board of The Observer, however, is not so naive to think these words will enlighten the church and make it change its ways. Perhaps God is playing them like he did Pharaoh and hardening their hearts.

More likely, the leaders and followers of Lighthouse Pentecostal Church will continue to grasp firm to the cultish belief they are special, they did the right thing, they are different from the rest of the community.

The one positive outcome of this mess? The attitude of the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church has reaffirmed we really are all in this together, that our actions have consequences. Whether we like it or not.

STAR TRIBUNE
S&K



Your views

No evidence that BLM protest contributed to COVID-19 outbreak

I find it bewildering that The Observer has chosen to implicate participants in the recent Black Lives Matter protest in the spread of COVID-19 within our community. Both the pointed mention in the feature article on June 16 and the photo of the demonstration — prominently featured above the fold on the front page — heavily imply the event factored in the proliferation of the virus. At best, this editorial choice is carelessly misleading. At worst, it smacks of conscious journalistic misconduct.

Even with the generous allowance that six of the 234 newly confirmed cases may have no connection to Lighthouse Pentecostal Church, a stunning 98% of these cases have been linked to that congregation. To suggest, without evidence, that the protest contributed to this outbreak will only create further ill-will toward BLM supporters and greater division in our community.

Jeremiah Wierenga
Union

Editor’s note: The Center for Human Development did not confirm the source of the outbreak for the article that ran June 16. The center instead said the outbreak had more than one source and large gatherings posed the risk of spreading the virus, which The Observer reported. The day the article published, the Oregon Health Authority confirmed the church was the source of the outbreak, and The Observer has subsequently reported that. COVID-19 numbers in the letter are reflective of the time it was received.

Endangering lives is not the ‘right thing to do’

I read that James Parker of the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church, Island City, said they would continue to congregate against all health authorities’ recommendations because it was the “right thing to do.” He encouraged others to do the same because we shouldn’t hide from life’s challenges.

Of course this would be up to him and his followers if the deadly consequences of these actions were confined to his group. However, because of the way this virus infects everyone in our community, this approach to life’s challenges forces all of us to live under the Lighthouse’s beliefs.

They have endangered thousands and helped destroy all the progress Union County has made.

Jim Kemp
La Grande

City managers erred in forcing move of farmers market

In reference to your article about the La Grande Farmers Market being forced off public property “temporarily,” I wonder if anyone from city management has attended the market since it opened in May. If someone had, they would have seen a textbook case on exercising proper social distancing and hygiene. Booths were quite far apart, shoppers followed the procedures set in place by the vendors, and I, for one, felt quite safe and happy that I could get fresh food from local farmers and merchants.

If those same members of city management had gone instead to the market Saturday in the Eastern Oregon Net, Inc. parking lot, they would have seen a much less ideal scenario: booths packed together with distancing issues (lines of people crossing over one another) and a more crowded feel overall. To the credit of all — shoppers, vendors, market volunteers — it seemed to work, despite the closed spaces. (My wife and I did not see a single person without a mask, for example.)

Farmers markets have been open safely throughout the pandemic across the state: They are as essential for our community as restaurants and other businesses that have been able to operate under current and previous restrictions. By its actions, the city managers have been petty and misguided in their direction. I would hope they would reconsider their actions and let the La Grande Farmers Market operate in its former location, so that it can continue to provide its important function safely to this community.

Rick LePage
La Grande

Take care of your neighbor — wear a mask

“If you slide into a ditch in Union County on a cold wintery night, the first folks to come by will almost always stop to help. Even if they are conservatives and you have a bunch of liberal bumper stickers, they pitch in and help out.”

That is the story I tell out-of-

town friends about the quality of the people and their values here in our valley.

Sadly, this good neighbor attitude is slipping just now when we all face an invisible enemy. Lots of our community members are stuck in the ditch in a big way — our much loved elders, little kids with immune issues, so many of our friends who have some kind of health issue, they are at serious risk of a terrible illness or death. Even young healthy people have died from this, and many will have lifelong organ damage.

This is serious, friends. The facts are clear. The science is not in dispute. Experts around the world tell us the same thing: Wearing masks works. Staying 6 feet apart or more works. We are hardy, tough people and we can easily help our community right now by this minor effort. Or — just say “to hell with our community.” Which is it going to be?

The virus does not care if you voted for Trump or not. If you are tough or not. If you are not worried for yourself, you probably are worried about our economy, which will worsen and not recover if we have an even larger outbreak here. That is a fact.

All of us need to be good examples to one another. Taking care of our community is a basic value we all share. It is time to step up and help.

Leaders of the community, in government, business and others need to rise to this challenge and truly lead. The county commissioners, who have been a disservice so far, should serve us by asking The Observer to print their picture on the front page wearing masks to show its critical importance. They could ask leaders of the community, first responders, business leaders and the like to join them. This is the health of our community we are talking about.

No one likes wearing a mask or social distancing, but this is a minor effort to protect our community and economy. A few more months of helping out will make a huge difference, and then good treatments and vaccines should be available. Compare what our elders did for us in fighting in wars to protect us, building this country, sacrificing for families and community. For sure, we can do this.

Peter Barry
La Grande

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