



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

**Churchgoers sing outside of the Hermiston First United Methodist Church Sunday, Nov. 7, 2021, following the church's service. The church has moved singing and communion outside in response to the coronavirus pandemic.**

## Masks:

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A few such signs, just outside the sanctuary, were actual signs — one that posted recommendations for social distancing, masks and hand-washing. Another sign included a checklist of COVID-19 symptoms.

First United had hand-sanitizing stations at entrances and a sign-in book asking people to admit their vaccination status.

As the service fell on the first Sunday following All Saints' Day, Nov. 1, the church celebrated heroes of Christianity, both past and present. Nance recommended keeping them, and their ways of showing that they were "marked by the fruit of the spirit," in mind.

Guest speakers, Joy Matthews and Jackie Linton, took the pulpit to remind the congregation of suffering individuals. Their examples show us the need for God's forgiveness and justice, as people "seek the face of God," they said.

Meanwhile, the congregation remained masked, and members did not take their masks off when singing their only song of the service, "When the Saints Go Marching In." They went outside to sing that song at the end of the service.

They also took communion outside. Bread, signifying the body of Christ, was served with a gloved hand and tongs. The juice, which represented Jesus' blood, was delivered in tiny, individual plastic cups.

It was not the most comfortable of situations, admitted Bob Daniel of Hermiston. He was at the Nov. 7 service. He said he has been a member of the church for more than 40 years, and he was "not crazy about masks." Still, he said he wore one for every service because he thought it was the right thing to do.

Another member, Janie Early, Irrigon, was at the service. She wore the mask at church and wherever she goes these days, she said. With her family at church that Sunday, she said the masks were uncomfortable, but she wore them out of love for her fellow man. She expressed the belief that masks reduce transmission and wearing them protects her community.

### Love and protection

In an interview the day before the service, Nance said masks help. Also, believers should love their neighbor, and do what they can to promote people's health and happiness, she said.

"I am so proud of them," Nance said of her congregation.

They closed at a point last year, she said, but members came together and agreed on a set of rules that included wearing masks, and they kept to those rules.

Around 35 people attended the service, a typical number, Nance said, and they all keep true to the mask rule. She said she believes these rules have helped reduce the chance that one of them would get sick and die of COVID-19.

"I, personally, can't name one

person in my congregation whose funeral I'd like to conduct because they died from COVID," she said. "And I've seen that, not in my congregation, but other places."

She pointed to some other churches, which suffered deaths and illnesses, from COVID-19.

Her decisions to close the church for a time and to install safeguards have received some criticism from outside her congregation, however. She spoke of one example, where one person called her and challenged her on her lack of faith. The caller, Nance said, asked her how she can profess to trust God while also taking precautions against disease.

"I think it was the most dumb-founding thing anyone had said to me in years," Nance said. She said she believes "God made really smart scientists, and we're going to follow the science."

### Pendleton church takes similar path

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, 241 S.E. Second St., Pendleton, already started putting its services online. The Rev. Charlotte Wells at the church said that made it easy to transition to exclusively online services during the height of the pandemic when the church was closed to in-person gatherings.

And when the church welcomed people back to in-person services, masks were required, she said.

Singing also was something that had to be considered, she said. For a time, she said, the congregation did not sing, but they do now. And they are masked when they do it, she said.

Communion was changed, as well. Wells said the wine is poured into individual cups, then sanitized for reuse.

### What would Jesus do?

Wells said she understands many people have strong opinions against masks, and her take on Jesus includes consideration of them.

"Jesus was always interested in bringing healing to all," she said. "He would have responded with compassion to anyone who didn't believe in wearing a mask, but he would have kept them away from the people that were wearing masks who were vulnerable."

Looking forward to her service in which First United celebrated All Saints' Day, Nance said she was keeping in mind great heroes. People such as John Wesley, Methodist founder, and Martin Luther King, Jr., would have masked.

Jesus, who is the "ultimate healer," taught loving God and loving neighbors, she said, and it is possible to cover our faces even as we seek the face of God.

"Jesus would have masked," Nance said.

Wells agreed.

"Yes, I think he would have worn a mask, because he would not have wanted anyone else to contract the disease, she said.

And there is the possibility, Wells added, that Jesus would have healed everyone.

## Veterans:

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### Patriotism on parade

The Echo School District organized the Veterans Day Parade & Assembly in downtown Echo, beginning with a parade in the morning and an afternoon assembly honoring former servicemen and women.

While waiting for the parade to pass, Melissa Doherty spoke of the importance of the holiday and reflected on her own military service.

Doherty, the Hermiston High School dean of students, was in the U.S. Army from 1997 to 2003, she said. She was scheduled to be the keynote speaker at the Echo school assembly Thursday, Nov. 11. She said she planned to speak to children about the reasons for joining the military, including her own motivations. This happened already, why is it written as a future plan?

Doherty said she joined the Army for the money could earn for college. A person could make \$75,000 a year for college, she said, which allowed her to obtain a master's degree. But military service also comes with less tangible benefits, she said, such as learning senses of duty and honor.

As she watched the procession, other people stood alongside the parade route, many cheering the participants.

Shannon Tacy, Echo teacher and FFA advisor, marched with her students, whom she called an "excellent group of patriots." She said she was not a veteran, but she expressed she was indebted to service people.

John Cox, of Echo, also was in the parade. Cox, who has family members who served in the Vietnam War and World War II, was dressed as Santa Claus and waved a United States flag.

"This is a nice way for us to express our appreciation," he said, as he walked the parade route.

Raymon Smith, Echo School District superintendent, who has been with the district for 11 years, said approximately 300 students, the entirety of the district's children, were involved in the parade. He said the day's events were intended to instruct children.

In addition to the parade, service members from each branch of the military were scheduled to appear at schools to talk to children. Students were encouraged to welcome family members to the event.

Smith said he told students of his father, who served in the Vietnam War and was disrespected upon his return to America.

"It's important for kids to remember that," he said. "That's why we have our kids here today,



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**Army veteran Phil Schmidt, of Hermiston, walks with fellow veterans Thursday, Nov. 11, 2021, past applauding students following Echo School's Veterans Day assembly.**

not just use it as a day off of school but to use it as an opportunity to educate kids about the importance and history of service in this country."

### Pendleton carries on tradition

Roger Rasico had spent most of his morning in the pouring rain.

The Vietnam veteran stood grasping the American flag Thursday, Nov. 11, in front of Pendleton Pioneer Chapel near its memorial garden. The former Arkansas resident greeted fellow veterans with his southern drawl and remarked on what Veterans Day means to him.

"I think about a few guys," he said with a sigh, tears welling in his eyes. "I lost friends over there. It's always the day I remember all the other guys who served their country. I'm honored and privileged to serve and remember."

The chapel on Byers Avenue filled with veterans and community members to commemorate Veterans Day that included a posting of colors and presentation of flowers for various wars.

Pastor Chris Clemons, state Sen. Bill Hansell and Veterans of Foreign Wars Commander Clifford Smith spoke, prayed and shared stories at the ceremony. It concluded with the sound of taps, as nearly 50 people stood, saluted and placed their hands over their hearts.

"It's a day to honor all veterans, no matter where they served or what their job was," Smith said.

Among those honored at the ceremony was someone who hadn't served but had dedicated much of his life to local veterans — Ron Martin. The funeral home's longtime owner died Oct. 4 at the age of 69.

"It's an honor for us to do this. It's a little part of what we can do to say thank you," said Valori Martin, Ron's wife, who added: "It's just the first time I've done it without Ron."

The couple started the annual

celebration in 2008, she said. Veterans in the community said they always felt honored by the annual ceremony and the memorial garden out front, where flowers bloomed in the summer among the engraved with the names of veterans who died in service.

"The one thing that touched me today is being here without Ron Martin," Smith said. "That was kind of hard."

Valori Martin said many community members helped her prepare this year's ceremony. Smith said the VFW stepped in and helped out with things Ron Martin typically coordinated, including closing off streets.

"I'm very thankful that Valori stepped in when it's only been a month since Ron passed away," Smith said.

During the ceremony, Hansell told stories about his father and friend, each of whom served in the armed forces. He spoke about the connection he felt while traveling through China and telling people about his father, who served in the Army there. And he spoke about how veterans such as his family's friend, Donald M. Jones, who served in World War II, never came home.

"I'd never met him," Hansell said. "I don't think there's a single person alive today, in Athena for sure, that's ever heard of Don Jones."

Jones' name is engraved on a monument in the chapel's memorial garden, along with other veterans who died in war.

Rasico sat alone in the front row throughout the ceremony. His job was simple. He carried in the flag, placed it at the front of the room, and then carried it out at the end.

As veterans exited the chapel and headed home, many stopped at a pile of letters sitting near the door. They were from local elementary school students. Several men picked up the letters, read them silently and took them home.

## Democracy:

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Local Journalism Sustainability Act is a welcome relief that will directly aid news gathering organizations, including an estimated 113 newsrooms in Oregon. It's the only piece — some would say the most important piece — left of an original three-part proposal intended to stabilize and reform an industry upended by the deadly trio of Google, Facebook and the pandemic.

The tax credit sunsets in five years, giving media companies a reasonable timeframe to build

a sustainable business model that supports local journalism in the internet age. It also sends a message to young people that journalism is a career worth pursuing where there will be jobs available with those companies that make the successful transition.


Numerous studies show what happens in communities where there's no professionally trained journalists asking questions and accurately reporting on what is happening at a local level: government waste and potential for corruption by public officials increases, voter turnout drops and communities find it harder to

solve their own problems. News deserts create democracy deserts, especially in rural communities.

If you are reading this and want to help, email our Oregon congressional delegation and let them know you support keeping the Local Journalism Sustainability Act temporary tax credit in the budget reconciliation package.

*Heidi Wright is the COO of EO Media Group and the publisher of The Bulletin and serves as treasurer for America's Newspapers, an industry group representing more than 1,600 newspapers across the country. Email her at hwright@eomediagroup.com.*

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