

EDITORIAL

Churches and ‘the right thing’

Leaders from the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church in Island City, the epicenter for Oregon’s biggest COVID-19 outbreak, have declined to respond to multiple media requests for interviews, including from the Herald’s sister paper, The Observer in La Grande.

This reticence is perhaps not surprising.

But it’s not as shocking as the video message church leader James Parker posted to the church’s Facebook page on June 16, after testing had confirmed that the vast majority of Union County’s infections — more than 235 of them — were connected to the church (the post was later deleted, according to a report in The Oregonian).

Parker said: “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.”

No evidence has been made public showing that Parker has an advanced degree in epidemiology, virology or any other discipline that would lend a shred of credibility to his claim.

To the contrary, those who do have such expertise have been quite clear in saying that the sorts of gatherings the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church hosted in April and May are exactly the wrong thing to do.

It’s difficult to imagine a more brazen example of irresponsibility during the world’s most serious pandemic in 102 years.

As of Wednesday, none of the 287 Union County residents who have tested positive for COVID-19 has died.

But the church’s recklessness has harmed the Union County economy. County commissioners, understandably, reverted to the more stringent restrictions under phase 1 of the state’s reopening plan.

The closures caused by the pandemic have had spiritual costs as well as financial ones. The former are significant, as churchgoers in many cases have been unable to worship as they normally do.

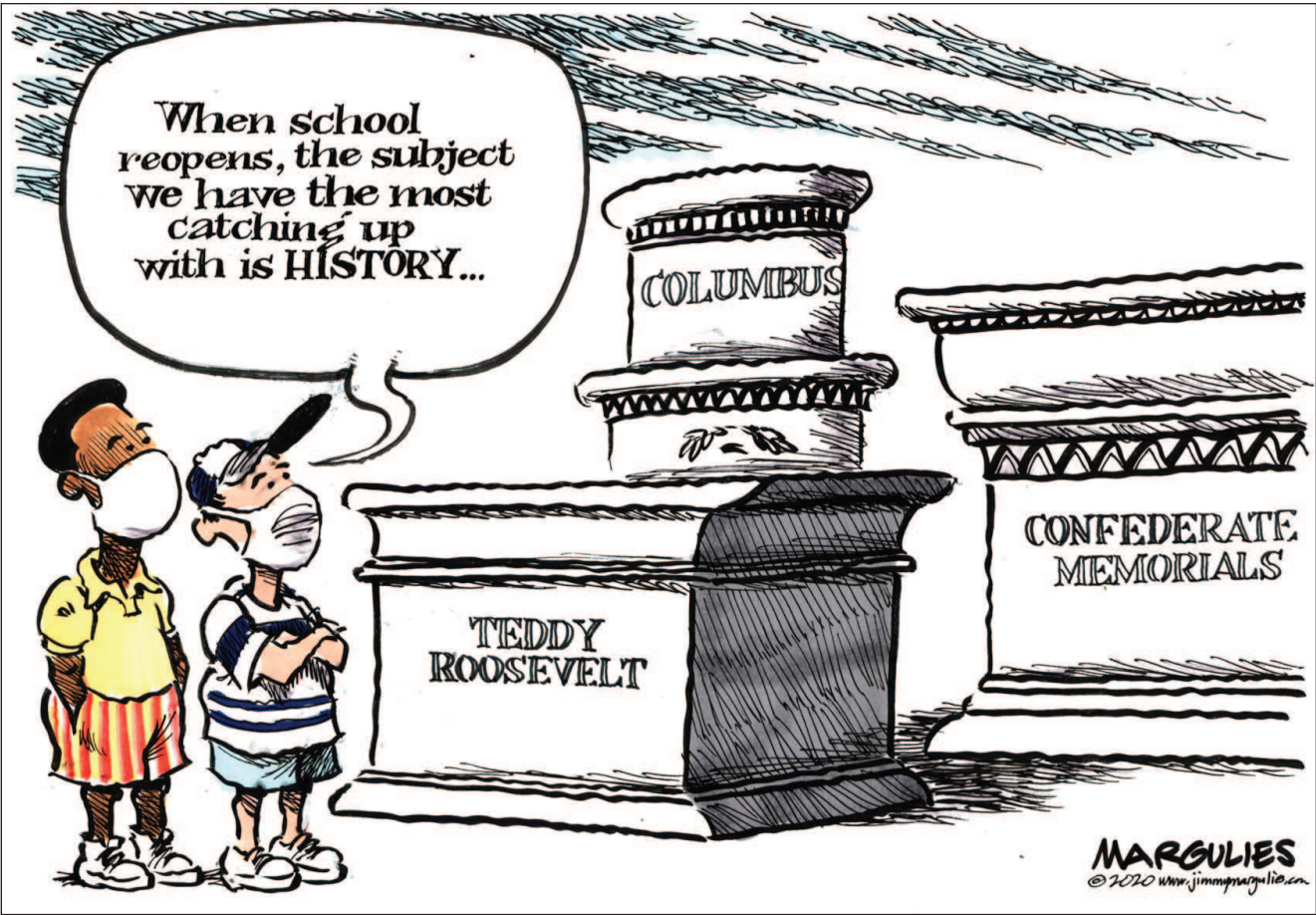
But many other local churches — indeed, it appears all of them, except the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church — have confronted the challenges and continued to serve their congregations without putting them, or the community at large, at undue risk.

Which is to say, all those churches, to borrow Parker’s phrase, did the right thing.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
 - The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only).
- Mail:** To the Editor, Baker City Herald, P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814
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OTHER VIEWS

The pandemic is not winding down

Editorial from The Baltimore Sun:

With COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. topping the 120,000 mark last weekend and some 21 states seeing an uptick in new cases (and worse, in hospitalizations, a number that can’t be dismissed as the product of more widespread testing), it would seem almost too incredible to believe that Americans think the pandemic is over. Or even no longer a threat.

That’s not what we know from the experience of the past or what public health experts are telling us. Yet the signs of such a response, of a collective “well, it’s time to move on,” are unmistakable.

It’s in Vice President Mike Pence’s claim last week that there isn’t a “second wave” which is correct only in that the first wave isn’t finished yet. It’s in the behavior of thousands who thought it a swell idea to crowd the BOK Center for a Donald Trump campaign rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on Saturday even as local health officials warned against it. And it’s in the growing number of Americans who refuse to wear a mask or other facial covering confusing “personal freedom” with “irresponsible, self-destructive behavior.”

There are any number of reasons behind this abundance of wishful thinking. Americans, and probably a lot of other folks around the world, are growing tired of social distancing, shutdowns, the accompanying economic recession and all the rest.

President Donald Trump, ever focused on self-interest and reelection, is not just rooting for recovery, he’s happily misrepresenting reality in an off-the-charts level of denial or perhaps a let-them-eat-cake attitude toward

the masses. And, of course, the overall trends have been moving in a favorable direction including in Maryland where last week marked the third straight of declining number of hospitalizations. Mix in a bit of unmasked envy among the Fox News crowd as they whine about the lack of social distancing among certain Black Lives Matter protesters. Not to mention how so many coronavirus-related restrictions have been lifted successfully by states. Perhaps the moment when people became sick of it all was inevitable.

So here’s a reality check. It isn’t over. And that’s not Democrats-wanting-President-Trump-to-fail talking. It’s not fearmongering in the “mainstream media,” however that’s defined these days. It’s experience and medical expertise.

During the last major pandemic, the 1918 “Spanish Flu,” the first wave in the spring was bad but the second wave in the fall was much worse, killing tens of millions. The opportunity World War I presented for the virus to be spread across Europe and beyond by young men living in close quarters made the difference.

As National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci has observed, this is no time for complacency. Think football can be played as usual in the fall? Not unless players are willing to live in a bubble. That a Republican National Convention in Florida can be held in August without social distancing after authorities in Charlotte, North Carolina, declined to allow full attendance in their arena? Dr. Fauci has strong reservations. And, by the way, he wouldn’t have attended the Tulsa rally, not because of any animus

toward Trump but because he regards it as too dangerous. He just wants some common sense and no indoor crowds. “Outside is better than inside, no crowd is better than crowd,” he has said.

Can masks be uncomfortable and maybe look a little goofy? Sure can. Does it seem decidedly low-tech to use a face covering like those 17th century plague doctors with their beaked masks? Yes to that as well. But researchers caution that the virus passes through little droplets expelled from the mouth and nose every time a person speaks, sings, laughs, coughs or simply exhales. And masks protect against those droplets, both from you passing them to others and you receiving them from folks who may not even realize they have it.

Tight masks around the face is best. Pleats are better than flat. Multiple layers are good, too. Follow those and other social distancing guidelines and you lessen the chances not only that you won’t become sick but that others around you stay healthy as well.

Anyone unconvinced that the coronavirus is nothing to fear ought to take a few minutes to read Baltimore Sun reporter Jon Meoli’s recent account of life on the COVID-19 rehabilitation ward with patients learning to breathe, to talk, to swallow after weeks with a tube stuck down their throat pumping air into their lungs.

Until there’s a readily available vaccine, we need to band together and take these reasonable precautions. That’s how the hospitalization rate fell in recent weeks and it’s how Americans can, hopefully, avoid that dreaded second wave.

Your views

What would the gun-toters do if there were rioters?

Thank you for the excellent article about the use of force policies of Baker City Police and Sheriff departments in the June 11 issue of the Herald.

In the same issue, there’s a photo of two macho men with their big weapons

ready to prevent, so they say, rioting in Baker City.

Makes me wonder what they know about the use of deadly force by civilians. If, for example, in the unimaginable case they were to see rioters on Main Street breaking plate glass shop windows and hauling off merchandise,

what would they do about it?

Perhaps they would like to enlighten me at tubingen@oni.com or better, by writing their own letter to the editor explaining how they see their role as civilian law-enforcers.

Gary Dielman
Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

Another Black man killed by police unnecessarily

Editorial from The Baltimore Sun:

Once again, a city is in turmoil over the horrific killing of a Black man by a white police officer.

This time it’s in Atlanta, where a benign police call June 12 about an apparently intoxicated man asleep and blocking the drive-thru at a Wendy’s frighteningly ended with Rayshard Brooks dead — shot twice in the back as he ran away.

At this moment, when all eyes across this country and the world are on police conduct in the weeks since George Floyd’s killing by police, we struggle to understand why an officer would not look for any other option than to shoot to kill.

Atlanta Police Chief Erika Shields resigned a day after the shooting, which

was video-recorded and shared widely on social media. And Officer Garrett Rolfe was charged on June 17 with felony murder and 10 other charges. Another white officer, Devin Brosnan, faces three charges, including aggravated assault.

Fulton County District Attorney Paul Howard said that after shooting Brooks, Rolfe said “I got him” and kicked him, and officers didn’t render medical aid for two minutes after the shooting. We get that officers are often placed in emotional and volatile situations. But the whole incident suggests a dangerous “shoot-first” mentality that has led to such distrust of the police among communities of color.

In our view, this is another case that highlights the critical importance of de-escalation

training in our country’s police departments — and it hinges on the proper use of deadly force. Officers are supposed to use lethal force only when they feel their lives are in danger or the suspect is endangering other lives.

Consider that videos show that the officers spoke calmly with a cooperative Brooks for more than 20 minutes before administering a Breathalyzer that Brooks apparently failed. As officers were trying to handcuff Brooks, he resisted. One of the officers dislodged his Taser, which Brooks grabbed and ran off with. Disturbing video shows Rolfe giving chase, and after Brooks pointed the Taser at the officers, Rolfe fired three shots.

It seems reasonable that officers could have caught up with a reportedly drunken Brooks on foot, chased him by car or

searched for him — anything but shooting him in the back.

Communities have started a deep and necessary examination of their police departments’ policies and procedures. There is much work to do among those in law enforcement and city governments to make improvements and create confidence among residents that police abuse will not be tolerated.

We also know that no matter the policy reforms, much of the tough work that police officers do will call upon their best judgment. It’s fair to say that even when deadly force is allowed, it doesn’t mean officers should always use it.

We can’t help but believe that Rayshard Brooks did not have to die.