

It takes a village (Continued from page 6)

of preservation.

Duruji said, "A race is not a tradition."

"If race is not a tradition, what are we even arguing about?" Turnage asked. "Why are we talking about all these fine delineations of race if race is not the thing?"

"Well your group has stated that it's important to them to protect the white family, and if you're not a white supremacist group why is it so important?"

"I don't have to be a German Shepherd supremacist to want their to be German Shepherds," Turnage said. "If my heritage is noble and worthy then I should have the ability to protect it, and that's all that means."

"What is your organization doing, actively, at this moment to address the fact that the FBI has identified several members who are active in the KKK, are identified members of neo-nazi hate groups, and have also been arrested and prosecuted in the name of your religion, Asatru, for attempting to bomb a black church, a synagogue and other non-white religions?" asked Guillemard.

"Well see first of all you're trying to paint us with that brush of all these other people who claim this faith have done this bad stuff," Turnage replied. "The Klu Klux Klan is an avowedly Christian organization, so would you exclude the Christian faith from Murdock because the Klan claims to be Christian?"

"All the Christian churches denounce the KKK," said Guillemard.

"The Christian church hasn't, there's no one Christian church," said Turnage.

"My church has, the Catholic church has," Guillemard clarified, "both of which are in Murdock."

"But narrowly to answer your question," Turnage said, "in my recent time we've taken two members out of the AFA for inciting violence. So when that sort of thing comes up we exclude it because we don't want it, we don't want to be associated with it, for all these other reasons. Our membership is not violent, our membership is gentle and good neighbors."

"That did not answer my question though," said Guillemard. "What are you actively doing at this moment to ensure that more violence does not come from the Asatru?"

"I can't do everything," Turnage interrupted. "We don't have the ability to do anything other than, we can barely govern our own religion and keep up with the zoning requirements where we're trying to buy a church. We don't have the wherewithal to police the 200,000 people in the United States who profess Asatru."



Murdock area resident Pam Skoglund spoke of her late mother-in-law who was of Native American heritage. "For many years she was probably the only person of color in this town, but she was never made to feel any different and she was welcome everywhere. And I don't think any of us want Murdock to get a reputation as a town that is not welcoming to all people." --photo by Naomi Baker

Jane Salisbury, of Murdock, said, "Regardless of the outcome of this hearing, I would like to say thank you to your group for removing the eye sore that that church was and for donating the cross to the Calvary Cemetery from the altar to be erected. For the last ten years that property has been an eyesore and now it is not, and I thank you."

"Can you tell us your group's viewpoint of adoption?" asked Naomi Baker, of Kerkhoven.

"We're in favor of it," Turnage replied.

"So you will accept people into your group via adoption?"

"Sure."

Public Comments

The hearing was next opened for anyone present to speak directly to the council regarding their upcoming decision on the conditional use permit for the AFA.

Guillemard spoke first. "I also work locally in the criminal justice industry, so I have a particular interest that I would like the council to address. Tonight you heard directly from the AFA that they do not have the means or ability to control their congregation. A congregation that has produced people, regardless of whether the AFA has outwardly denounced them or induced them, they have produced members who have attempted to bomb churches and synagogues and have been arrested by the FBI. I hope that all of you stand by your comments that you back the blue. When you say 'back the blue' you have to include the Swift County Sheriff's department. We do not have a Murdock police department, how are we going to protect our citizens? I don't care that the AFA said they're not violent, that they're gentle. Evidence does not prove that, and as a student attorney I have learned that you have to go by the evidence, and we have direct evidence from the FBI. So if you're willing to put our Swift County sheriffs in danger, and our residents in danger you need to identify with the fact that granting this conditional use permit will allow them to have a greater congregation coming in. This is one of three hoffs in the entire country. They put Murdock on the map, and this is just the beginning because more people will find out about this. Murdock will become a focus, we will be in the media and other outside groups that are not as peaceful and as respectful as all of the wonderful people here tonight are going to cause a lot of destruction and damage, and you really need to keep that in mind. I grew up in a very peaceful Murdock, and I want it to stay that way for the children that are here and the children that will come, regardless of their color or national origin."

Thomas then took her turn at the mic, "I think it's very important in situations like this to think about what the long-term consequences would be. I think that right now this is the honeymoon period. This group has come in and they've cleaned up the church, they've donated the cross to a wonderful location and they're friendly, etc. But I think it's important as (Guillemard) mentioned, to think about the safety of the community going forward. I know there are a number of minority workers who work at the dairies, for example, that are terrified about what this group could mean for their personal lives and for their livelihood. If we follow the trajectory of that, if they say we're worried, we don't feel safe here, they will leave to find employment elsewhere. That's a significant portion of our area's economy and I think it's important to consider that. ... As this group brings in their members from the Dakotas, from the metro, from Western Wisconsin, as the group congregates what is that going to mean for the local infrastructure that we have here. So my ask is that you please consider what the long-term trajectory for this group could be as you're making your decision."

Corwall was next, and noted that she grew up in Clontarf. "All of these towns dotted along here were started by the Archbishop, it's Catholic communities that were started here and they've been open to all kinds of ethnic groups. That's what made the fabric of these little towns so wonderful." She warned that if the permit was approved, members of the AFA may move to the area, and once that happened they

would have a platform, "and you could really see the fabric of this community change dramatically. I just hope that you keep in mind what we are all about in Western Minnesota - inclusivity, love, acceptance, and that you stand up against what is wrong."

Hatfield said, "I would just like the council to consider that by approving this permit, you are permitting the creation of a social space which has actively stated that they will exclude an entire segment of our community."

"I'm here to ask you to vote against this conditional use permit," said Kennedy. "Regardless of what the council may have been told, you can vote against this permit if you feel it's in the best interest of the community. You don't have to grant it just because. By their own admission the AFA promotes the white race and the Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled them as white supremacist and as a hate group. We don't want this church to be used as a racial center for people from North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin, to come to Murdock and practice hate — we don't want to be known as the hate capital of Minnesota. My heritage is German and Irish Catholic, and when I celebrate St. Patrick's Day, I don't just celebrate with the white Celtic people. I'm just as happy to celebrate it with my neighbors from Mexico and Latin America. Mexicans, Hondurans, Guatemalans, people from El Salvador and other places in Latin America who come here to milk cows and work at the dairies are welcome, and valued members of the community. Yet the AFA would exclude them and look down at them. Don't give in to fear and hate. If you're afraid of getting sued, I assure you that you'll find much more support in defense of your vote, a no vote, than they will in trying to sue you. Don't give in to fear and hate, go on record that the city of Murdock stands against racism."

Next up was Pam Skoglund, of rural Murdock. "This is something that's really important to me. Over 70 years ago, my in-laws moved to this area. My mother-in-law became very involved in this community, she worked at the Murdock school as an aid (which is now known as a paraprofessional), she was active in her church and was a big part of the annual Murdock flower show. She was a self-taught artist who for many years donated one of her paintings as a door prize at the flower show. In fact, until recently there were murals on this wall that she had painted. My point is this, she was a Native American, and there were no doors closed to her. That is really important. Seventy years she was here and no doors were closed. For many years she was probably the only person of color in this town, but she was never made to feel any different and she was welcome everywhere. And I don't think any of us want Murdock to get a reputation as a town that is not welcoming to all people."

Christian Duruji, husband of Cathryn and a person of color, also spoke. "My wife and my wife's family are long-term residents of Murdock, and so when I heard about this whole situation I decided we would go and see what was going on. I didn't plan on speaking, but I did want to point out a couple of things that kind of resonated with me. The first one being, in the ordinances, specifically those governing the granting of conditional use permits, one of the provisions states that the planning commission can base its judgement on whether or not to grant the conditional use permit based on the factors that the establishment, maintenance or operation of the conditional use will promote or enhance the general public welfare and will not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, morals or comfort. For general public welfare, I fail to see how a group that will disqualify me on sight as well as view my daughter as someone that is an aberration or something that is not to be celebrated, I fail to see how that will promote the general public safety. Also I think given the sheer number of people that showed up in opposition to this, I don't see how granting the conditional use permit to these people would do anything to bring benefit to the community. Furthermore, by this gentleman's own admission, a lot of the



Victoria Guillemard, Murdock resident, and member of the Murdock Area Alliance Against Hate, asked the Asatru Folk Assembly representatives to explain why other Asatru communities denounce their specific AFA for racist ideology. --photo by Naomi Baker

people that would be supported by granting the conditional use permit wouldn't even be residents. So I too would urge you to vote no on this. I know there can be fear of litigation, but history remembers the people who do the right thing, and if you don't there's always a price to pay for that as well."

Annelle Guillemard, a Murdock resident and mother of Victoria, gave her perspective. "I have lived in Murdock for 17 years, and I have considered this a very peaceful place, and I was happy to raise my daughter here. As a Murdock resident, I expect the Mayor and the city council to protect me. I look up to you, when there's a problem I come to you, and you've always done an amazing job. You have an opportunity tonight to do so. Make the right decision, do not grant the conditional use permit. I need my safety, and I want my friends and family to be safe. I hope you will consider that."

Finally, Turnage was given a final opportunity to stand up before the council. "I understand the lies that are told

about us, and I understand that it's hard to stand in the face of those lies and represent the truth. That's the fear and hate that's jammed up. The fear and hate of those that don't know us. To tar us with the brush of those who have done wrong in the name of our religion is the exact kind of hate mongering that these people trying to steer you away from. So look at the actual evidence, not the rumors, not the hints and allegations that are told about us by those that oppose us, but look at the actual evidence of our history in Brownsville. Of our history in Lyndon (our other location)."

Mayor Kavanagh had one question for Turnage. "Earlier you mentioned that you kick people out of your group for doing things that were wrong. There was a story somewhere in the Pioneer Press about a Blaine, who had been shooting at cops. I'm just curious if he is still in your group?"

"Blaine is not a member of the AFA anymore. And I'll say two things about this, one in Blaine's defense, you know..." "Hold on a sec, though,"

said Kavanagh. "He's called the city a number of times on behalf of you guys, so I would just like to know, if he's calling on behalf of you guys I assume he's a part of your group."

"Well, but not in the last three weeks." Many of those assembled laughed at Turnage's response. "That's number one, and number two, is people can change. If religion teaches us anything it's that we're not to be condemned for the mistakes of our youth. Yes Blaine made some mistakes, and he conducted himself dishonorably, and he paid the price for that. He's a better man, and he is a different man for that. So to deride someone for their past and they have actually changed that again is the exact kind of thing, the fear mongering that we're trying to disabuse."

The Murdock city council will review the conditional use permit from the AFA and make a decision at their November 4 meeting. Any conditions put on the permit will be agreed upon at that time.

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