

## **When the fox preaches, look out for the geese**

By Rose Huskey and Sandra Lund

We grew up with the old-fashioned notion that ministers behaved more ethically than the rest of us. After all, we reasoned, they chose godliness as a career path.

When Douglas Wilson, pastor of Christ Church, declares that "members of a very weird alliance of evangelical Christians, gay activists, abortion rights activists, open theists and secularists" are conducting a "diversity-cleansing" campaign against him and his congregation, it must be true. Why would he lie? The fact is, people lie to protect themselves or to enhance their standing. Wilson is no exception.

For several years community members have bumped heads with Wilson over many issues. In 2003, Moscow residents became aware of Wilson's biblically based defense of Southern slavery. Wilson insists that the content of his book, "Southern Slavery As It Was," is not racist and that it is scripturally correct. Despite scathing reviews and biting criticism from professional historians and religious scholars, Wilson continues to defend his book.

Peaceful protesters were on-hand for his annual church-sponsored history conference in February 2004. The three-day event was not disrupted, but Wilson's apparent anger over the negative community response to his book and his conference has not diminished. In the April 28 edition of the Moscow- Pullman Daily News Wilson claims the Latah County commissioners were used as a "cat's paw" for settling personal scores. What personal scores?

Last summer we protested property-tax exemptions given to Anselm House, a church-owned office building, and New St. Andrews College. Two of the three parcels in question lost their tax exemptions. We don't believe this loss justifies the subsequent, continuing, public attacks on us from Wilson, some church members and their allies. Recently we have been called: vultureness (sic), ugly, troubled women, pigs, god-haters and hypocrites.

This winter, zoning issues drew community attention to NSA. Pastor Wilson is a founder and life member of the board of trustees of NSA. City code does not allow educational institutions or schools to locate in the central business district. Wilson's prior experience with similar NSA problems should have prepared him to expect difficulties with the Main Street location.

In 2000, NSA operated from a private home in the Fort Russell District. When unhappy neighbors complained about the increased traffic and parking problems, city officials, who were unaware of the college, notified NSA administrators that the college was violating zoning laws and must relocate.

Zoning officials specifically alerted them to the applicable codes and processes required for operating schools and boarding houses. Meanwhile, Christ Church members opened two new church-sanctioned schools, one in the Nuart Theater, and the other just around the corner from the old NSA location. Monthly reports on these schools are provided in Christ Church congregational meetings. That information, however, was not shared with city officials, who were unaware of their existence until last month.

Because NSA administrators, including Wilson, philosophically oppose college dormitories, NSA facilitates a boarding program for students. Approximately 22 Christ Church family households in Moscow, including Wilson's, offer room and board for one to five students. This lucrative business operates beneath city radar and with arrogant disregard for their effect on neighboring homeowners.

These surreptitious activities give lie to Wilson's blog-published remarks "I am a believer in full disclosure."

Like most of us, Wilson doesn't enjoy being thwarted. But few mature adults retaliate like schoolyard bullies when they don't get their own way. Wilson recently claimed in a national evangelical magazine (where he was reciting the troubles heaped upon him by the Moscow community), that the University of Idaho offered class credit for protesting his 2004 history conference.

That is a lie.

His allegation that the Moscow School District was "materially involved in the harassment of the history conference" is pure baloney.

Wilson's practice of being silent when speech is lawfully required damages our community, his credibility and his ministry. The fact is, twisting the truth, name-calling, bellyaching, and bullying invite more, not less, community scrutiny.

Insisting on civic accountability doesn't make Wilson a victim of intolerance; it just means that he is held to the same standards we are; standards that apply even to ministers.