

I serve Portsmouth Union Church in North Portland. We are active members of the Leaven Community Land & Housing Coalition, a interfaith collective of over 40 communities of faith across Oregon devoted to liberating our land to build diverse affordable housing.

When I began serving my church in 2014, I was horrified to see that households in our own congregation - not to mention our broader neighborhood - were being deeply impacted by rising housing costs and displacement. However, rather than close up the building due to dwindling numbers or simply complain about this painful injustice, we vowed to build as much affordable housing as possible on the half acre of our land standing empty by our church building.

Congregations like mine get calls on a weekly and even daily basis from neighbors needing a place to live. How better to answer the problem than with a rental application and a home, rather than yet another 'I'm sorry I can't do more to help' and a referral to a shelter? And yet it is supremely difficult to build on faith land.

At the point when we began, we were required to undertake very complicated lot line adjustments, extensive conditional use review, creating an independent LLC, ground leasing the lot to ourselves, and moving through extensive and expensive city processes. Despite being a 501c3, we struggled with tax issues.

Those efforts UNNECESSARILY cost us an extra 2 years and more than \$50,000. This is time and money that WOULD have allowed us to be housing people who are currently living either on the edge or on the streets. Last month, we finally broke ground on 20 units, but we are just one of over 600 acres of developable faith land in Portland alone. We do not have a shortage of land in Oregon - what we suffer is a shortage of cooperative institutional courage.

- Religious organizations have available, undeveloped land all over the state that can be used to build affordable housing. Faith communities own the most land of any type of entity in most cities and communities, second only to the State itself.
- There is a huge cost savings to building using faith land because we already own the land we are developing.
- Faith land is already zoned residential, in almost all cases, and is often situated in the midst of communities experiencing community destabilization due to high housing costs.
- Allowing faith communities to build affordable housing stabilizes our neighborhoods and is a strong anti-displacement strategy.
- Current land use regulations can be a lengthy process and add cost to these projects. Please remove regulatory barriers for religious organizations to build on the land we already own.

Your action is crucial. Please approve the SB 8 so that faith communities across the state of Oregon can build affordable housing on our land with as few barriers as possible. Our neighbors need your help, creativity and support in leveraging every option and financing stream to begin solving the crisis of housing instability and homelessness in our city and county.

Respectfully,  
Rev. Julia Nielsen