

# features

THINK  
ON THAT

“She was free in her wildness. She was a wanderess, a drop of free water. She belonged to no man and to no city.”  
Roman Payne

## ‘Yes In God’s Backyard’ Addresses Housing Crisis

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Pastor Jon Doolittle of Clairemont Lutheran Church is working to build affordable housing on a large portion of the church’s parking lot. Clairemont Lutheran is part of the ‘Yes In God’s Backyard’ or YIMBY initiative, a group that works with faith-based communities throughout San Diego to help them build multi-family residential projects on their unused property.

San Diego’s affordable housing crisis continues to worsen as the rate of homes being built isn’t keeping up with economic and population growth that’s been happening for the past few decades, according to Voice of San Diego.

Doolittle has faced many obstacles with the City and the many regulations needed to build affordable housing, including city code that requires churches to have a certain number of parking spots. However, on Oct. 30, San Diego city planning officials proposed a new code that would help faith communities build affordable housing on their parking lot land, according to KPBS. Doolittle said he is excited about this change and looks forward to the next steps of the project. The Point sat down with Doolittle to hear about his vision for the church’s affordable housing and the reasons behind this project.

**Q: What is ‘Yes In God’s Backyard’ all about?**

A: Churches have lots of unused resources, particularly land, that we’re not using. How can we as churches be better stewards of that which we have? ‘Yes in God’s Backyard’ is people getting together to try to address the community need of affordable housing, and churches that have the resources to make it happen. One of the most difficult parts of creating affordable housing is land acquisition because places

like San Diego are so expensive, but churches already have the land acquired. Oftentimes older congregations don’t have mortgages or strings attached to that land any longer, so it’s really an underutilized resource.

**Q: As a faith community in San Diego, why did you choose to confront homelessness in this way?**

A: We’ve been a part of the Interfaith Shelter Network for a long time, which is a movement of churches that open up their facilities to house people for two weeks at a time. We’ve been doing that for years, and a few years ago we were the last church at the end of the shelter time [cycle], and a couple families didn’t have anywhere to go. And it was really heartbreaking for some of the people in the congregation to see. We thought, we could do something. This doesn’t have to be the end of the story for these people.

**Q: How has this work and this project impacted you and your congregation?**

A: For me personally, I think it’s a real connection to see that we are all part of God’s household of faith, and to bring people up into a place of value within that. We deal with people who are homeless all the time. They knock on the door, they wander in, looking for whatever it is that they’re looking for. It’s a daily reality to be connected in the lives of those people who just show up. Jesus sat with the marginalized in society. That’s who he ate with, that’s who he drank with, that’s who he especially made sure were included in community. So, we as a church are called to do that as we are able to. There’s always pushing the edges of what people are comfortable with. We’ve always been very good at looking at who is our community, what does Clairemont look like, who is here.

**Q: What is your vision or hope for the affordable**

**housing?**

A: I think a lot of that depends on where our financing comes from, and how much freedom we have as a congregation to rent out those units. If we need to do a master lease in order to secure the financing, then we’re probably dealing with more governmental agencies, which would have a higher level of restrictions on what sort of intentional community we can create.

**Q: How did you push through the many obstacles you faced and continue to face with the city?**

A: Tenacity has been an important part of our project over all these years. We just keep talking about it, and praying about it, and saying, God, if we’re to do this, bring it together. And our connections with people in City Hall and being able to talk to councilmembers, and now this new change in the restrictions on parking and being able to work with city councilmembers on all that was an important way that shows that if you keep talking about it, change can happen. And somehow all of this is going to be possible, that churches can help address the affordable housing crisis.

**Q: What would you say to college students who are curious about this issue?**

A: Learn about the real crisis. Don’t just watch the headlines or believe what people say. Do a bit of research and find out where the roadblocks are in affordable housing, and use your voice. Become an advocate for the things you’re passionate about. No one can be passionate about everything, but we all are passionate about something.

Find your connection to the housing crisis, and become an advocate and a voice for those who aren’t heard. The world is changing so rapidly, and we’re connected to it, all in [the phones] we carry around in our pockets. Find ways to make good out of it.



Pastor Jon Doolittle outside Clairemont Lutheran Church. Photo courtesy of KPBS

## Got Fines?

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Students can receive residential fines for a number of things: 116 to be exact. The “Fine Reference Sheet” is a six-page long document filled with residential fines for students, accessible under “The Housing Process” page on the PLNU website. Some fines include violating housing’s pet policy, having “unapproved university furniture” in their room, not vacuuming properly or leaving a sticker behind at the end of the academic year.

If, somehow, a student managed to rack up a fine for every single violation on the fine reference sheet, their student account would show a whopping bill of \$8,685. Jake Gilbertson, Dean of Students and Director of Residential Life, however, said most fines range from \$25 to \$50.

“The only fines that are significantly more than this is when students cause damage to the hall and are responsible for those repairs,” Gilbertson said. For example, a broken window results in a \$200 fine and a missing desk, \$300.

If the fine is received during the school year, alternative

methods of payment are negotiable. “Students can always speak with [their Residential Directors] and ask to complete community service hours if the financial burden is too significant,” Gilbertson said.

According to Gilbertson, there are two violations students are most commonly written up for. The first are open hour violations, when students of the opposite sex are found in halls during closed hours.

“We’ve expanded those hours significantly in the past few years,” Gilbertson said. “Fines encourage students to be responsible with that freedom and the impact on the people they live with.”

Secondly, fines accumulate at the end of the year during the close down process: for either not cleaning their room, not following instructions or for damage to their rooms, Gilbertson said.

Chris Gotz, a senior finance major and Residential Assistant in Young Hall, said most fines in his experience, have been administered during health and safety inspections.

“[The] most common are [written for] tacks in the walls, candles and breaking the screens for the windows,” Gotz said.

According to Gilbertson, although student RAs are often the ones who report violations

or damage in the halls, RAs are not individually responsible for imposing fines. This is instead the role of a Residential Director, “a full-time staff person who lives and works in the hall,” according to the PLNU website.

Kayleigh Hofer, Assistant Director for Residential Life and RD of Flex Housing, explained the process of determining if a student will be fined.

“We determine a fine based on the student handbook, and if a violation of the handbook has occurred,” Hofer said. “We strive for consistency in our student conduct responses.” The RD team is further consulted as needed when determining responses to handbook violations, said Hofer.

Once a fine is billed to a student’s account, the money is collected into a “Student Activities” account managed by Residential Life, Gilbertson said. The pool of money is not filtered back to individual halls.

“[They] do not receive fine money back into their budgets, as this would incentivize fines,” Gilbertson said.

According to Gilbertson, the money from residential fines is instead used to sponsor events—like the freshman or Halloween dance. In the past, Residential Life has also budgeted this money to support educational

programming or help bring significant speakers to campus.

“The hope,” said Gilbertson, “is [ultimately] that fine money collected is used to enrich student experience.”

*Fine Reference Sheet 2017 from PLNU website.*

Residential Life Fines	Amount
Health & Safety violation	\$15
Visitation violation - First offense	\$50
Visitation violation - Second offense and loss of privileges	\$100
Failure to register overnight guest	\$25
Unapproved university furniture in individual room	\$50
Smoke detector tampered	\$100
Furniture policy violation	\$100
Pet policy violation	\$50
Residential Life Check-In/Check-Out Fines	Amount
Unapproved early move-in	\$200
Entering the hall when hall is closed	\$200
Failure to check-out on time	\$50
No check out at end of year (room dirty)	\$200
No express check-out envelope turned in	\$25
Lost key	\$25
Beds not set up properly, as specified by RD	\$25
Blinds left up	\$25
Room not vacuumed	\$25
Window left open or unlocked	\$25
Each item not wiped down and cleaned	\$25/Item
Items left behind in room or bathroom	\$25/Item
Micro fridge not defrosted, not cleaned, or not left in room	\$25