



# People of many faiths come together to build a home

BY JEFF VONKAENEL / [jeffv@newsreview.com](mailto:jeffv@newsreview.com)

**Last week's groundbreaking for two new Habitat for Humanity homes in South Sacramento was an unusual combination of construction site and interfaith religious revival.**

There were shovels and bulldozers. There were leaders of Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Lutheran, Episcopal, Presbyterian and Methodist congregations. There were the future homeowners and their children. And there was Sacramento Vice Mayor Eric Guerra and his small child, who delighted in holding the big shovel.

There was love and empathy, and the thrill of doing something bigger than oneself. I have been involved with numerous interfaith builds where people from different religious groups, political persuasions and races have come together to build a house for someone of another race, political party or religion. Our differences make it even more special.

"Today we stand in this open space; it's an open space where a dream resides, a dream to have a home to live in that is safe, and secure, and full—full of laughter, full of family, good food and an abundance of love," Congregation B'nai Israel Cantor Julie Steinberg said at the groundbreaking. "Today we begin to make that dream come true by turning this open space into a home."

I suspect that living in a home built with interfaith compassion is actually different than living in a home built the conventional way. Somehow, having your wallboards signed by dozens of different people from a rainbow of religious faiths must create some sort of positive energy.

And an interfaith Build for Unity house impacts the people doing the build as well. It is really so simple. If you want to experience compassion, be compassionate. If you want to experience hope, be hopeful. If you want to

experience community, be part of a community. If you want to be accepted, be accepting.

In 2016, I was on the Habitat for Humanity of Greater Sacramento board when we launched this idea of Unity Builds. Muslims and other religious groups came together to sponsor a house, and they built two houses together. This was at a time that our future orange-haired president was attacking Muslims. I believe in forging bonds with groups that are being targeted by hate. We can build homes or play softball, but it's important to build those bonds.

Our vision was that we could start the Build for Unity project here in Sacramento and then it would spread across the country. And remarkably, it has. Leah Miller, the CEO of Habitat for Humanity here in Sacramento and a passionate advocate of this project, told me that 30 Habitat for Humanity chapters have started similar interfaith build projects. At the groundbreaking, she mentioned that the Orange County affiliate just signed on. I am very proud of this movement that started here in Sacramento.

In our 2016 Build for Unity project, we had 108 different Sacramento faith communities involved, as well as numerous other organizations. It was a real interfaith endeavor.

You can help us build these Habitat homes. Habitat has raised only \$144,000 of the \$200,000 needed to sponsor the two houses. So please pass the plate, or donate at the website listed below. And come to one of Habitat for Humanity's Unity Concerts at St. John's Lutheran Church, at 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 18. RSVP at [habitatgreatersac.org/get-involved/buildforunity](http://habitatgreatersac.org/get-involved/buildforunity). □

Jeff vonKaenel is the president, CEO and majority owner of the News & Review.

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