

Megachurch seeks to reassure new Portland neighbors

by [Steve Beaven](#)

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PORTLAND, Ore. (RNS) The pastor of a conservative Christian church that recently moved into the heart of liberal southeast Portland sought to reassure his new neighbors Thursday (Sept. 8) about the church's philosophy.

Pastor Tim Smith said the Mars Hill Church wants to learn about its neighbors and work with them.

"If someone wants to hear about Jesus along the way that is great," Smith wrote on the church's blog. "If not, we will not force it down anyone's throat and have never gone around knocking on people's doors."

Last month, the Seattle-based evangelical church bought a vacant building in the middle of the Sunnyside neighborhood.

Smith also posted a Twitter message on Wednesday, saying he had "a great meeting" with Reuben Deumling, the president of the Sunnyside Neighborhood Association.

Mars Hill, which prides itself on opposing aspects of mainstream culture, including the growing acceptance of homosexuality, has prompted calls for a protest by some in the gay community.

A Facebook page was created to express opposition to the church and to urge a "kiss-in" at Mars Hill during its first service on Saturday morning.

But that service has been postponed, Smith has said, because it conflicted with Saturday's Belmont Street Fair. Smith urged church members to volunteer to work at the fair.

"We exist to tell people about Jesus and invite them to follow him," Smith wrote. "Outside of that core mission, we want to be good neighbors and seek the common good of the city of Portland."