

Dear Members of the UUCB Board of Directors,

I am writing this letter to express some concerns I have had regarding communication and coordination of volunteer activities within the church. My concerns stem from my recent experience in volunteering with the Safety Implementation Team and with the Social Media Team. It is within these teams that I feel like I have been inadvertently set into situations that are stressful for me and I would like to share what I think may have led to my particular situation and what lessons I've learned. In particular, I would like to share how I feel like I have been pulled into a leadership role that I did not want at the time.

Before I share my specific experiences I would like to state up-front that I don't believe that any one person's intentions have been purposeful in creating the stressful situation I feel I was in. I believe that my situation is a mix of multiple factors, not the least of which is my own tendency to over-commit myself as well as the apparent mismatch in the church's needs and resources. I also recognize that my experience is very likely not unique and I am not asking for special treatment for myself.

My introduction to volunteering with the church came from Rev. Kristin asking if I would be a part of the Safety Implementation Team. The introduction and initial direction for this team, comprised of myself and two other members, was well defined thanks to the efforts of Rev. Kristin and the more experienced members of the team. I understood the Team's role to be one of communication and education. We would be tasked with understanding the Safety Plan ourselves and then reaching out to the various Programs to make them aware of what the plan contains. We would help to clarify the plan and its potential impacts on Programs by acting as a communications liaison to the Coordinating Team to help resolve any ambiguity and relay any concerns.

While the Team started off strong in its efforts, things began to fall apart once we were asked by Rev. Kristin to focus our next steps on educating Programs on the specifics of the evacuation section of the plan. This was determined to be a high priority as the Safety Plan requires an annual fire drill. Due to events in our Team members' personal lives that conflicted with the timing of this event, all of which are entirely reasonable and to be respected, this particular task devolved down largely to being my individual responsibility. While the training that I conducted was successful and proceeded to my expectations, largely with the active support and outreach of Family Ministry, I was concerned to find my role expanding to include coordination between Programs to help plan the fire drill itself.

This expansion of role included things like relaying concerns from Buildings and Grounds to the Greeters about the need to facilitate people in parking their cars away from the white loading zone after members with mobility issues have disembarked. This would likely need to be resolved if Kensington Emergency Services would be involved in drill as the fire trucks need the space. Another example is Family Ministry asking for help in recording potential improvements to fire and medical safety and relaying those ideas to Buildings and Grounds. In retrospect, I should have directed these items to the Coordinating Team to be handled from there instead of acting as an inter-program liaison myself. Additionally, it is my belief that the various Programs may have misunderstood the scope of my Team's role in the context of preparation for the fire drill.

This misunderstanding is reasonable given the fact that there is no formal designation for who is responsible for coordination of the drill itself. The safety plan only notes who is responsible for a given portion of the drill and their responsibilities therein. Having a member of the Safety Implementation Team conducting outreach efforts to help people understand their role in the drill, it is not unreasonable to think that the Team is also responsible for coordination of the event. Also, given that this is the first time for many of us in participating in such an event, it is reasonable to expect some ambiguity and fluctuation in who is expected to do what and how the event should be conducted.

That said, I believe going forward there needs to be a clearer understanding of how Programs coordinate, especially on mandatory events that require the combine efforts of all Programs. I believe this is a major contribution to the reason I felt pulled into a leadership role. My suggestion would be to place this responsibility within the Program Council. It is my understanding that while the Program Council exists to provide a venue for this sort of coordination, it is currently a more casual and informal venue for Programs to voluntarily communicate. I would recommend that it be given the responsibility and authority to require attendance to prepare for such mandatory events. This would provide a formal method to coordinate schedules, identify necessary resources or information, collate requests to the board, and act as mediator to resolve conflicts between Programs.

Additionally, I believe this sort of role would be helpful in mitigating the confusion I saw in my recent efforts to support the Social Media Team. For reference, the Social Media Team has been seeking representatives from the major Programs to help conduct social media outreach. This recently involved the staging of a workshop to help acclimate members to social media technology and provide them with resources for conducting outreach based on UUA guidelines. While the Program members were generally supportive of using social media to help expand the churches outreach efforts, I had concerns expressed to me from Family Ministry and Pastoral Care members surround the workshop's goals and ultimately on what they are 'obligated' to do.

I stressed to these members that they are not obligated to conduct outreach in this manner if they are not comfortable. Indeed, we should be proactive in understanding and respecting the varying needs and limits of our volunteers commitment to specific church activities. I note these exchanges as I was simply reflecting to them what Rev. Kristin and Merrin had told me when I discussed with them my own concerns regarding my experience with the fire drill preparations. I reflected their recognition of Programs needing to be cognizant of asking too much of our volunteers and that we should have the expectation of clear boundaries on what we are willing to do. I believe that we can foster this manner of supportive environment if volunteers are given a clear understanding of how Programs operate and coordinate and if they have an understanding of where they should go with any concerns they should have any.

To provide such support, I believe the Program Council needs to be bestowed with the responsibility and authority to engage with volunteers. I believe it also needs to provide guidance and collective decision making for events and issues that potentially effect all Programs. In this way I believe we would provide our volunteers with a more supporting and engaging community. Our beloved church has many needs and there are a number of people who are willing to give much to help it prosper. Let us try to find ways in which to take care of those things, together.

Sincerely,

Gregory Lemieux