

A Few Additional Details

Almost a year ago, on the evening of Monday August 11, 2025, Revs. Elaine & Axel, who had just returned from their summer vacation that day, received a phone call from one of our church's One Starfish overnight guests, who reported that the ceiling in the Clara Barton room (lower level under the back deck stairway) had collapsed, and that water was streaming from the ceiling. Axel and Elaine rushed to church to investigate, and discovered that one of the men's room toilets upstairs was clogged and running over. Plumbers were called and Elaine & Axel watched them unclog a large mass of material, largely clumps of paper towels, which had caused the running toilet to slowly overflow. Over several hours, water from the toilet had spread across the floors, into heating ducts, through the downstairs ceilings to the rooms below. (The I-HELP men had left the church that morning, and there was no one else in the building that day after they left-- no staff, no committees, no renters, no volunteers.)

For several months thereafter, we were busy coordinating clean-up, decontamination, and repairs-- utilizing many dollars, and much staff and volunteer time. Initially I-HELP seemed to acknowledge their responsibility for the damage, and said that they wanted to make it right. (They volunteered to have one of their participants do the repairs, which we declined for liability reasons.) I-HELP has insurance coverage designed to cover instances like this, however to date the insurance company has been unwilling to reimburse UUCMP for the repair costs incurred. We have had to engage an insurance attorney, who has been very helpful, and yet after many months the matter still remains unresolved.

UUCMP was one of the original sponsors of the I-HELP program, and we have been proud and active participants for over 34 years. Many UUCMP members have volunteered their time and energy (and food) to the I-HELP program. We hosted the I-HELP men for approximately 8 months, 24/7, during the pandemic, allowing them to live in our building for all of that time.

During our attempts to resolve this latest issue, it became clear that although we had a verbal agreement that the restrooms would be checked before leaving (due to previous similar incidents) there is no formal written agreement concerning the responsibilities of I-HELP and UUCMP. (Several years ago, when we hosted the Gathering for Women during their beginning year, we had a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that spelled out clearly the responsibilities of both parties.) On December 18, 2025, we shared the example MOU with the I-HELP Board President, requesting a similar written agreement.

When no such document was received from I-HELP, the UUCMP Board then drew up an agreement, clearly delineating the respective responsibilities of UUCMP and I-HELP (document link [here](#)), and sent it to the I-HELP Board President on Tuesday, March 10, 2026. On April 17,

the I-HELP board finally responded to yet another request for a reply, with their own, much longer version of the document, which removed several important protections for UUCMP.

The UUCMP Board reviewed the revised version, and, after consulting with our insurance attorney, determined that the IHELP version would not adequately protect UUCMP, and on May 29, 2026 requested again that I-HELP sign the original Facilities Use Agreement, by July 1, 2026, or we would need to discontinue our hosting of I-HELP guests.

Unfortunately, I-HELP has not signed, and therefore, the UUCMP Board has put our I-HELP hosting on hiatus. This is not a decision the Board has reached lightly or happily, but after hours of intense conversation and discussion, including insurance professionals and attorneys, over many months. The UUCMP Board has determined that the congregation cannot afford to continue to put our church at risk of this kind of incident again, without adequate safeguards in place.