



Visiting Other Churches as a Stake Communication Director | A How I Lead Interview with Maria Duncan

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Kurt Francom: Everyone, this is Kurt Francom with leading saints and you may not know this, but I wrote a book. That's right. It's called is God disappointed to me removing shame from a gospel of grace, and it has been so well received. So many people buying multiple copies sharing it. And these principles in this book are are crucial to not only process for yourself.

But also to share with others. I wrote this book for the overwhelm Latter saint. The person who just feels like there's never doing enough or God must be disappointed in them because I keep falling short. But there is so much more grace in this gospel, and so I truly encourage you to check out is God disappointed in me available on Amazon and other church stores. Give it a read, because in this book, I want you to understand.

The true nature of God. His loving capacity. Why we must focus on the past wounding in our life in order to receive his healing. The power of the divine identity is he's given you. This gospel is so red redemption because it leads us to Jesus Christ.

So go check out is God disappointed into me for removing shame from a gospel of grace. Kurt Francom, Executive director of leading saints and obviously the host of the leading saints podcast. Now I started leading saints back in 2010, it was just a hobby blog, and it grew from there by the time 2014 came around. We started the podcast, and that's really when it got some traction and took off 2016. We became a 501 c 3 nonprofit organization, and we've been growing ever since.

And now I get the opportunity of interviewing and talking with remarkable people all over the world. Now this is a segment we do on the leading Saints podcast called how I lead. And we'd reach out to everyday leaders. They're not experts, guru, authors, Phds. They're just everyday leaders who've been asked to serve in a specific leadership calling, and we simply ask them.

How is it that you lead? And they go through some remarkable principles that should be in a book that should be behind a Phd. They're usually that good, and we just talk about us sharing what the other guy's is doing. And I remember being a leader just simply wanting to know K. I know what I'm trying to do, but what's the other guy doing?

And what's working for him. And so that's why every wednesday or so, we publish these how I lead segments. To share. Alright, Maria Duncan from the greater Sacramento valley area, welcome to the podcast.

Maria Duncan: Thank you. And thank you for having me.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. We have the opportunity to connect in person. I was out in Sacramento, which I never turned down an opportunity to go to Sacramento since that's where I served my mission, and I was out there. Doing a fireside, and and we connected to some mutual friends, and I thought we gotta get marie on the podcast, and we're doing it. It's actually happening.

So thanks for doing this.

Maria Duncan: No. Thank you. I'm really excited about this. I love the kind of information that you share with everyone, and I think it's a great opportunity.

Kurt Francom: Yes. So, I'm excited to add you... As part of the library. So you are a stake communications director. Maybe give us just a run rundown as far as what that means in your area, the...

What your... What the... What your stake is like or just this sort of the the frame your frame that calling up for us.

Maria Duncan: Sure. So in... This is a calling that doesn't exist in Utah. It's in the rest of the world. So has communication directors for every stake and, in our area that involved...

Well, this calling used to be called public affairs. And they changed it from being a public affairs director to add internal communications, And so that's when the title shift happened and that happened right before Covid in 20 20. And so we work with our stake presidency to support their objectives and support all their internal communications with the stake as well as where the face of the church tend to be externally with a community. And part of that involves, face work, working with government, elected officials and, education in California. So education is newer to the calling, and that's something that right now, as far as I know, it's just under the umbrella in California.

Have relationships with our school boards and our superintendents and to understand what the sex ed Curriculum is being taught in all of our schools.

Kurt Francom: Wow. Yeah. So is that the education component that is... That was just added on you said? Or...

Maria Duncan: So that was added a couple years ago. After the... I think it's called, like, the healthy use act in California was put into place, and it was also around the Covid era. The sex Curriculum, California changed dramatically. And as school district started implementing that, they decided that it would be good for families to stay informed about that.

And so our job is to build those relationships, have those connections under Dan what's being taught and inform the parents. It's strictly informational. We don't persuade the parents 1 way or another as to how to react to it by any means. And we let them know if there is an opportunity to opt out of the curriculum. What they can do what their options are, just keeping them informed and letting them make the decision as to what works best for their families.

Kurt Francom: Wow. So how long you been in this role as the stake communications rep?

Maria Duncan: So I did... I was public a affairs director in Oregon for 2 years and then I've been doing communication director in California for 4 years.

Kurt Francom: Interesting.

Maria Duncan: I just gonna share in major cities. It's actually full time paid position. So, like, La. It's a employment position Oh city. Mh.

Kurt Francom: Wow. Wow. And then just with your experience with this calling, most people who are called to this. They they typically walk into this with maybe some assumptions or or maybe they don't fully understand their their role and what what it all entails. So what are some of those misconceptions maybe that maybe you had or you've seen others have walking into this role as far as what it's about?

Maria Duncan: Sure. Probably when when I first got this calling, you're given a lot of reading material. And it's not in the short handbook book. We have our own portal and our own access to our own handbook it's separate and different. And it was hours and hours of reading to under expand all the layers of this assignment.

And even after reading through that, probably 1 of the biggest misconceptions is that you are just supposed to do everything that they've calling can do that you should be doing at all. When the reality is, you should be knowing what your scope of your umbrella of your calling looks like and then counseling with your stick presidency and seeing what is important to them and focusing on their pre objectives. Because if your stake presidency says the whole education component. We don't wanna touch it. We don't wanna worry about.

We all. Resources or time, or we just still inspired that that's not important in our area. Then you aren't to do that. You're just to leave that alone. So it's...

That's probably the miss biggest misconception is seeing focused on what your priest leaders need at the time. So some... 1 of the rollout outs that you may have seen in the church because of that is, there have been a lot of traditional pageant and events that used to happen every single year in service projects and in stakes that have now been left behind. Because it isn't meeting what the objectives are currently. And so it's never just to a service project just to do service project, Mormon helping hands.

That was product of communications work under public affairs before. And so they would have, like, their traditional projects So some of those, maybe if it doesn't fit with this pre leaders are, focused on, then you're not supposed to spend time and resources on it.

Kurt Francom: Mh. Yeah. So so you said there is a specific, like, resource in the... Like, is it in the Gospel library or in the handbook section for this or it's separate from that?

Maria Duncan: There's, like, maybe a paragraph or 2 in the handbook, but there's a separate website and login and

Kurt Francom: and... Gotcha. And that's all on a church website.

Maria Duncan: Yeah. It's it's the global communication network is what it's called. And so you can't access it without a special login.

Kurt Francom: Gotcha. And so the good starting point is just sort for a stake communications director is to regroup with their stake presidency and and really understand their objectives on what they would want you to do rather than just try and do everything that's in, sort of in in the general, or in that in that direction. Right?

Maria Duncan: Correct. So, like, you don't wanna pursue your own scope of work, you really... So every year, I sit down and have an interview with my stake presidency. And understand what their greatest concerns are for the sake with their needs are. Any problems we're having in the community.

We counsel back and forth together. In that, global communication network, they have a recommended list of questions to interview your stake presidency with. And so I go through those with them and try to understand everything that they're worried about, and then I consider everything that I can do, and make a list for them of all the ideas I have of how I can help them with their needs and and issues. And then we meet together again, and that's how we build our annual plan. And so my annual plan is pretty strictly devised based on what my stake president needs and wants.

For our stake in our community. And then, I go to the stake council every month, those monthly meetings are sometimes it's more frequent unless I depending on the stake, but I go to those meetings with the high council on the stake council and hear from them and also, share with what we're the work that we're doing. So that's all the leadership is on the same page.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. And so from all that process, what what are the general directions that you have just for your specific area from your stake presidency.

Maria Duncan: In my area, 1 of the things we're really focused on right now is interface work. Bringing the church out of obscurity is a big part of church communications, but it's also serving our fellow man and serving our neighbors and you can't serve them effectively if you don't know them. So I spend a lot of time in other churches, knowing getting to know my community better and building the strong relationships with their church leadership and bringing my big presently into that relationship and helping them build a connection. So it's option... It's common for someone in my calling to be in this calling.

Well, when I first got it, they said 3 to 5 years. And then a couple years later, they said, you'll probably save the life of your stake presidency. At 1 of our more recent trainings, we were told 15 to 20 years. Say we wanna calling. Yeah.

So that we can... Because these relationships that we form are very sincere and and it takes a lot of time to develop them. So we need to be able to stay around and not just you know, just gonna be released on a whim.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. Interesting.

Maria Duncan: Really really hard to get released.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. So, and and how long have you have you done it up to this 0.60 this area.

Maria Duncan: In in this area for. Yeah.

Kurt Francom: Okay. Gotcha. Great. So... And and a lot of people, I would imagine they think of, like, the stake communications director, Like, maybe...

Yeah, So there's this, like, community, like, clothing drive coming up, And, yeah, I'll be there, and I'll be aware of it and make sure it gets announced. But I mean, for you, this has really become a a weekly. I mean, it's a Sunday calling for you. Isn't that. Right?

Maria Duncan: Yeah. I mean, if I if there are times then I'm working on this calling 30 to 4 hour, hours in a week, if I have a lot on my plate with it. On the low end, it's, like, 5 to 10 hours a week. That's when there's not a ton going on. Like, just last week, I was working with a nonprofit organization who's trying to apply to get in the giving machine.

And so helping them with their application and the pictures that they want on their cars and just and talking them through and helping them with that process. I also... I will... Every... Almost every Sunday.

I will just show up at a Christian territory does any church in my area that's welcoming to visitors if it's a church that I've never been to before. Sometimes I'm visiting old churches help keep that relationship going, but I will go visit a church in my area, and I'll just enjoy their worship service with them, and I'll introduce myself to the pastor, and I'll start building a relationship. I learn about, I'm usually asking questions. What are they doing for their congregations, What are their needs? What are...

What are they focused on? What are their concerns? I'm trying to learn about, like, if they're doing any work for the community, a lot of them are functioning under their nonprofit to do food giveaways, and those... And then if they need help. And a lot of times, they'll sign up for J, they'll become if they if they have service opportunities, they'll put those service opportunities on our j website so that they can help do that volunteer matching.

Another thing that is really common that we do is we give them grant food grants to get access to goods from the dealership store health. So there's a lot of churches who do amazing work, providing food for the community, and they need, they always are in need of more. Good. And so we actually recently had salt lake call us and say, hey, we have a a trucker of food a semi trucks full food that needs somewhere to go. Do you have anyone in need and where we were yes.

So we're calling all our contacts at the Zone bay Venice church and at a local Christian church and and we're asking them, hey, can we bring you food? And do you have some somewhere to store it? Do... Are you able to to take care of it so that till it gets out and They're excited. Yes.

Yes. We want it. We want it. So wow. Some of that is coming straight.

Some Salt Lake on trucks out here to help feed our community.

Kurt Francom: Wow. That's fantastic. And and so I'm curious when you go... So on a typical Sunday, maybe you don't have... There's not, like, a pending event that's really...

Taking your focus. Since you wake up on a Sunday and you think, well, I'm I'm gonna go to a church in the community. And you just find 1 maybe you haven't been to and and you show up,

attend the services, and then you just make it a point to talk with the pastor, the the lead pastor after, and then ask him some questions, and and that's kind of it?

Maria Duncan: Yeah. So 1 example that it is more recent is there is a Christian Church in my community that is African American leadership, and the past I'd been to the church a couple of times, and I'd introduced myself and and made friendly, but I just felt like, they were doing this really great food giveaway. And I wanted to share their services with some of our young people. The pastor is amazing. Spirit is so strong during h.

The music is phenomenal. I mean, they have this beautiful choir and they think such great music and it's fun and it's just a great experience. And so I was able to get a couple of my youth in my stake to come with me and do the food giveaway. And help volunteer to get food away during the week. They skipped school for a couple hours and came in health.

And then they came to church with me that Sunday to hear pastor Ne give a sermon, and it was amazing was so good. And some of the things that he says, I mean, it sounds like almost direct quotes from our profit. A lot of the message is exactly the same and he reads right out of the scriptures and he does a great job of bringing the gospel to life for our youth. And so my young men that were there. We're just excited and they loved it.

And they filled this spirit. And then after I brought them up to me pastor Ne, and Mia upon seeing these young men, was reminded of this relationship that he had with 2 other young men from Our church that during Covid, some of our missionaries it helped him set up streaming for his Christian church in Sacramento, is their their main campus. And these missionaries in him have developed a friendship, and he even flew out to salt lake city to attend 1 of their weddings in the in the salt like temple or, like, obviously, you didn't go in the temple, but in that, maybe it wasn't the sally temple, but a temple in in Utah. And he was able to go out and be in Utah meet his family the missionary family and see their wedding. And they come out and visit him, and they still have this friendship.

Life met me I several 10 he's never shared that with me. That he has this connection to our church. In that way, and they get a 10000 dollar graph from us, and he's never brought up this other connections. But when you saw young men, it sparks this conversation because they're... You know, they look like baby mission they will be in a few years.

And so he shared this with us. Which is just really neat, and I can just see heavenly father putting planting these seeds his life. To have this positive beautiful friendship with our church. And, when our when our missionaries go out and they do service in the community, they are... And they do jet serve project, at least in scenario, they're told that they're not to prose at all.

The purpose of the work is just to serve. And, they're not allowed to talk about thoughtful topics if someone is to ask them question, they're supposed to tell them, like, thank you for asking if you'd like to to to get an answer about this at another time. I'd love to share with you, but right now, I'm just here to serve. So they're really there to to do that surface. And so the friendships that they develop with the leadership and those that they serve are very sincere and very strong.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. That's awesome. That's really cool. Do are any of these pastors that that you go to? Are they skeptical as you approach them or and they they hear that you're from our church or, I mean, did get mixed results or most just happy to have you there?

And then, do they have needs that you can immediately help with?

Maria Duncan: No. That's a great question. I do think sometimes they are a little skeptical. There was a pastor that I have a content creator on my team. I have 14 people on my communication committee.

And what I was gonna ask. Yeah.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. It's operation.

Maria Duncan: It is. Was quite the... Like, when we have an event, all these wheels are turning and everyone knows about it from different sources. I have someone that just writes articles to the newspaper. And, so I have a content creator who does video.

And we offered this really great Christian church in our area that has a food giveaway. If he could come and make a video about their food giveaway and what they do so that they could use it for their marketing material to help get more donations to them. And just to let a community know about all the goods they're doing. And the entire time the pastor just seemed like, what how this gonna play out? What's this gonna look like?

Like, not C sure if he's 1 the products from us? And then when you got the finished product and nowhere on it anywhere does it say are church that we made it or have any affiliation you would never in a million year have any idea that we had any do with it. I could just tell you like, was so relieved and was so grateful and then a trust started. And before that, our missionaries when they would volunteer at their food giveaway were asked not to wear their name tag. And then after that, they were told they were allowed to leave their name tags on while they came and search today.

And so I I think that sincere service, over time, it does soften hard, and it does help build this bridge between our church and others.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. Wow that's that's helpful. Anything else is if there's a, like, a stake communications director listening or anybody on the the committee or counsel there. And and they're wanting to show up to Church. Is any other advice you give him in this practice of of visiting different churches?

Maria Duncan: That's a great question. I participate. I think that's important. If I've brought people with me in in leadership that are very stiff and I'm comfortable and they just stand there, and you also those maybe dressed to your audience. So if you're showing up to most Christian churches coming with a full scoop laser tie, is going to make you stand out like a sore thumb.

Yeah. Right? Like, at least shut the tie and button the top button. Like, let's just a little more comfortable And in some churches, like, wearing jeans and a nicer shirt is much, like, a a collar shirt is more appropriate than wearing a suit. So I would say, like, cater to your audience that you're interacting with because you don't want them to feel uncomfortable or, like, you don't belong with them that And, another thing that I would say is when they're singing and they're, like expect to sing.

Expect to clap, expect to wait the music. Have a good time, like, relax a little bit and enjoy it. And when you do, At least for me, I always feel the spirit. I have never visited another church where I did not fill the spirit. Every single time, at some point in the meeting, not always during the music.

Sometimes it's during the sermon, but at some point during every single meeting. I hear the holy ghost teach me something. I feel the Savior love for them and how proud he of them and how glad he is that they're worshipping him. And so that has been just a really beautiful part of my calling is really feeling like we are all 1. We are all God's children together.

And and feeling that connection to his children that don't worship this in the same way that we do.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. That's powerful. And I I love this dynamic of, you know, these stories you tell of of bringing youth with you? Is that is that like a... Is that an intentional thing you do?

Or do you just happen to grab you as you go or or what advice did you give as far as involving youth in in these visits or in this... In the communications?

Maria Duncan: Right. So I try to be really thoughtful about it. I make sure it's the church I've been into before and I know what I'm walking into and that the message... Is very consistent with what we believe, for the sake of taking someone else's children into that. I want that.

I want their parents to know that we're being really thoughtful about that. And then I felt... I mostly just felt inspired. I've prayed about it a lot. We involve our youth a lot out here.

We have used on our communication committee. We have youth the work on the giving machine committee, we have to get a special permission to have you to do that. And when when neighbor were on the giving machine with 2 years ago, it was the first time that anyone under 18 has been allowed to be on the bidding machine committee. And then we have them we have them part of our temple open house. There was a special use that we're able to come and give Vip tours to politicians and religious leaders with alongside general authority seventies that had come out from Salt Lake.

During the Vip portion of the temple open house, which was the week before it was open to the general public. So the youth out here are getting these opportunities and it's so important because if you never in my opinion, if you never bring you into another church, and then they're adults and they somehow go to another church and they sell sure. It could be pretty confusing to them. Like, wait a second. I'm filling this spirit here, I thought I wasn't supposed to.

Is our is and they start questioning things. Right? They need to know that, of course, you're gonna sell the spirit and these other churches we're gonna have these... You can have really positive experiences, and we can still be 1 children, like, 1 group under in the eyes of God together, especially And it doesn't necessarily have to be always with those who are Christian faith. Recently, I was invited like last winter I was invited to a special dinner that a methodist is church was posting for muslims in our community in Sacramento.

And, at the time, our church hadn't been able to form a relationship with that methodist or with the muslims in that area. And so I was very quick to it was the Sunday before Thanksgiving. So I had tons of things planned, and I set it all aside and went out to the dinner and it was amazing. I was treated so beautifully, but I had my name tag on that said that I was from the church of Jesus Christ lottery things. And I had multiple people's shopping names wait a second.

I've never thought we'd see 1 of you here. What do you... Like, they were so trying I would come into their church and be part of something they were doing. And they were so the the method were really surprised. The muslims were surprised.

Everyone was really shocked that I would be willing to come be a part of what they do. And and that really hit me because I thought So often, I'm inviting politicians and leaders from other churches to... When I speak in church, I'll invite them to come. Here my talk is something about my topic pertain to something that they're working on. But I need to be just as quick to go to their church and to be in their world and to experience with their offering.

So I've made a point to do my best to never turn down if I can possibly make any offer any invitation. To attend another person worship of service I will go. And a lot of times, when I'm talking with politicians, and I will ask them, you know, do you have a church that you go to. Oh, yeah. I go to this Christian church in their community Aisle.

Say, oh, I love that church. Oh, I and if they say, I haven't been in a while I must admit. I don't go to church I should. I'll say, oh, I would love to go with you, you know, and I will offer to attend their church with them. And really, anytime we bring anyone closer to you this Christ we're doing his work even if it's within their church.

And so... And I will, I'll go to church with them, and worship with them, and that is that continues to build friendship. And our Muslim friend that we went to church with or went to this muslim event at the methodist Church ended up wanting reaching out to me and asking if they could come to 1 of our church services during Christmas time. So they came to 1 of our soccer meetings, and then they've invited me to break fast at rama on with them. And so we've been able to have quite a few different personal interactions and share a lot about our face.

They came to our temple live nativity event. And, I was really amazed at how much that touched them. These leaders in the muslim community were crying as they as they saw the need the live nativity at our temple. And it was really impactful to them because of their love for Jesus Christ as a as a great profit. So that was really special to be able to share and connect with them.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. And the where my mind goes is, you know, in a more secular context, you know, we we label this networking. Right? And... But the power of networking where you're just...

You're going to events, not because you have a, an agenda or there's a reason for even be there, but you're there, and you're getting more familiar with community. Then, yeah, when you meet that politician and you hear... Oh, he goes to that church? Or I know the pastor there. Or, you know, again, it's just sort of you you'd be in to reach out within the within the community, understanding and having a higher understanding of what's going on and who's where and what churches is there and what they're doing and and in the long run, that's a very powerful place to be, and you can get a lot of good done because you've sort of done the those baby steps of networking over a long run.

Maria Duncan: Right? Absolutely. And sometimes Salt lake will come to town, and It I will have an apostle out here for fireside cider or an event, and they will. I'll get an email that says, hey. They wanna meet with someone of the Catholic church.

They wanna meet with a different, you know, diet, whatever it is that that they are feeling inspired that they need to meet with with someone in the community. And so all the communication directors will go through their Ro desk and say, oh, I've got a great relationship with this guy or with this 1, and then will else that will set up those meetings don't help facilitate that. Because when the apostles travel all over the world, they're serving members of the church if you describe the about our things, but they're also out in the community wanting to connect and to to serve and help their where they can.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. Anything else you'd say, about because you really have to... End the communications, and I think it's been said, a lot, but we'll reiterate it here, but you gotta really turn off the the conversion agenda or the bat, you know, moving people towards Baptism or or learning more about our church so that hopefully, they'll join it someday day. You really have to just turn that part of your brain off and just be focused on connections, relationships, all those things. Anything else that comes in mind that you would add in that around that topic.

Maria Duncan: Thank you for asking that. That's actually been 1 of the greatest relief of my calling. I remember the general conference, maybe just before I got this assignment or just after for the first time, president Do to talk where he said that we do not have to sell the church. And, I remember thinking Okay. I wanna be a missionary.

I wanna teach people about the gospel. How do I not feel like I'm selling the gospel of Jesus this Christ when I'm doing that? And through this calling, where I'm absolutely not allowed cross light in any way. And it would be, you know, very uncomfortable if I tried to and ruin my work really in a lot of ways. Yeah.

That it has been a huge relief because I've learned how to just look at people meet them exactly where they are. Love them for where they are, and then do my best to support them right where they are. Instead of seeing this future for them and wanting to bring them to this future place. I I can just be with them in the in their present. And, it's actually probably been really phenomenal missionary work, and changed what I think about missionary work in a lot of ways.

I know that we've heard stories of missions where they become more service oriented, and they have a lot more stuff. And that that kind of connects to this. And that I do feel like we're softening hearts and sometimes softening them into pools of putt. Like really like so soft, the

hearts of our friends have become that if that if it was the right thing. And if the opportunity was there for someone else to come in and populate to them, it would be very easy.

I mean, Our and friends got to very deep conversations with us about their belief and then and then they'd asked us about our belief. Just out of a natural flow of friendship. Right? Because of me wanting to learn what they really believe in it. Turns out we both believe in pre existence.

Which is kind of a unique doctor in. And it was really special to be able to make that connection with sense, and hear from them. And I just think it is when the savior returns, if this word continues the way that it is, it will be very easy for him to gather all his children and all the different churches and to bring us together. Because we actually have these bridges built of friendship that I think make missionary work really easy. When we had the temple open house during that Vip week, we had all kinds of politicians senators, like, Congress assembly men, secretary of state's office, to, like, city representatives and school boards and super superintendent.

And then we had Rotary clubs, quan clubs. We had Jewish leaders, muslim leaders, peak leaders, catholic leadership. And I was able to go on several of those tours with them through the temple, and it was really amazing to me because of this friendship and trust that we have with them, most of them came in with these really soft hearts and open minds and just wanting to learn and see and curious curious mine. And our general authority 70 would be on the tours with us a lot of times. And we would take them room by room, and they would give very clear details about each room of a temple.

And when we got to the celestial room, we would sit there and complete silence. For about 5 minutes. And then we've moved to the ceiling room and talk about our feelings in the celestial room. And I saw some of our, you know, Christian black pastors stand in front of the mirrors in the suit rooms with our wives learning about eternal marriage crying. I saw their mothers that were on the towards, you know, crying and telling me how they felt so close to their.

Loved ones who had passed away in this celestial room. 1 of our seek leaders, he went through the temple on, like, 12 tours. He kept coming through because he loved it so much, and he would feel so close to his dad while he was in our temple. And this... They were able to have these really powerful spiritual experiences because this wasn't their first time be having a connection with our church.

Because we already had a foundation later of friendship and love. And I just think that some of the best missionary work that you can do.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. That's powerful.

Maria Duncan: Can may not be, like, the converting part for you bob baptized at the, but it's pretty powerful stuff.

Kurt Francom: And what about the other direction? Do you ever feel like, you know, our protestant brothers and sisters are trying to maybe have you rethink the book of mormon or trying to maybe sway you towards their side at all?

Maria Duncan: I haven't experienced that yet. I'm not sure why I. I haven't experienced anyone where I felt like they were trying to convert me to their face. No. And I'm I'm mostly just probably because we're usually looking for ways to help them, and they're just so grateful for the help that we're offering.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. That's cool. That's great. You mentioned it... You have 14 people that serve with you on the stake communications.

Is that right?

Maria Duncan: Mh.

Kurt Francom: And what what just... You mentioned the, like, graphic design person or, maybe rattle off some of the other, like, roles and and focuses that they have as the support team.

Maria Duncan: Sure. So we have the youth specialist. We have someone who's in charge of writing articles to the paper. About events the our speed coast or that we participate in. We also have like, someone who's running the big Instagram account, the social media, Facebook.

We have a big presence number on the committee. I also have just serve leadership and just serve specialists, just serve under the umbrella of our of our committee. We also have education specialists. So those are my people on the ground that are building those connections in the school districts.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. So a good a good team.

Maria Duncan: And then interface work, Yeah. Interface interface leadership and... And we probably could get more more because there's so many different components to what we do.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. And I assume it's just sort of as on a the as needed basis. Right? Like, wow, we're really overwhelmed with Just server or with Social media stuff. So why don't we call another person or ask to another first be put there.

Right?

Maria Duncan: Sure. So with just therapy, we may have 1 person who's more focused on getting volunteers to to use to serve, and then the other person may be more focused on getting nonprofit to sign up opportunities not to just serve. Something that a lot of stakes in our area are doing are getting just serve clubs on the high school campuses. Nice. So that's really cool.

Mh.

Kurt Francom: Nice. And then, so what remind me the name of the temple that is most recent there.

Maria Duncan: So our newest temple is the Feather River temple and.

Kurt Francom: And and so that's dedicated now. Right?

Maria Duncan: Correct.

Kurt Francom: Hard to keep track of all these samples. So any, like, advice or tips tricks or, strategies as far as having a temple open house and, you know, you've alluded to some of them here, but any anything else else that comes with mind?

Maria Duncan: I greatly underestimated how powerful the opportunity was going to be to stand in rooms of helpful sharing test knowing of what we do there and how strong and easy the spirit would come. And if I could go back and do something differently, I would have died in harder. That year and 2, years leading up to the temple open house, every single Sunday, I would have been in a different church. And that's part of what has motivated me to do that now. Is I would have been there, I would have been serving and helping and building strong relationships so that when we had our Vip week, and we were able to to invite people to come to be special closed tours with the general authorities.

I would have I would have had 10 times the amount of people come as came. And we had a huge turnout. We brought a lot more people than Felt Lake was ever expecting us to. But I would... If I could go back, I would have done even more because it was the most powerful experience in my life, it completely changed.

My testimony, my focus and my understanding of the temple forever.

Kurt Francom: Wow, that's really encouraging. And helpful. And it seems like nowadays that pretty much every member in the church, you're you're gonna have a local... Temple open house to some Grad. I get there some that maybe you're several hours away, But you know, with all this temple building happening.

I think it's a really an opportunity for us to have an opportunity to to seize that day with with inviting people and and inviting people to stand in our temples and let the the spirit do the rest of work. So really powerful. Yeah.

Maria Duncan: It's interesting. In this calling, we're told that we don't have big boundaries. We don't have more boundaries. To not operate based on any kind of boundaries of the church to just get out and do the work. So if I meet, like, there's a a town council member in my town whose brother is a pastor of a church in a neighboring stake it's even a different coordinating council.

But I still go visit him and have... I've helped to connect local leadership to him because then when he... Like, if he needs grass or volunteers, that's more reasonable. But I still keep that friendship going and is still considered very appropriate. So with communications work you don't have boundaries.

And so it makes it great because when they have these temples and houses, if I have a friendship with someone I've develop if there's an assembly man from San Diego that keeps coming up here that I've made a friendship with. When they red dedicate the San Diego temple, I'm going down there. And I'm gonna take that stake assembly then through. So Mh.

Kurt Francom: Yeah.

Maria Duncan: Really cool.

Kurt Francom: Yeah. You really don't have to wait for the temple in your area or, you know, things happen in your stake to do. Be aware of what's happening even within AAA drives distance, and you can... You can really have an impact. You know, to take them to these things and they can still have the similar experience.

Maria Duncan: Hold on.

Kurt Francom: Well, Murray, this has been so insightful and inspiring. Any other point principal concept story, wanna make sure we we fit in here before you wrap up, or is that a good good summary or synopsis?

Maria Duncan: I feel like that's that's good. I've been just so grateful to be part of this work. It's really fun. Yeah some of the fun work I've ever done in the church. I miss serving in my ward.

I miss having that connection to our members, but I love being able to connect to my brothers and sisters of other faith.

Kurt Francom: Awesome. Well, it sounds like you're in light because they may keep you in there another 14, 15 years. So...

Maria Duncan: Right. Something it have plenty of times. That's right. Yeah.

Kurt Francom: That's awesome. It what a awesome calling to have and to be involved in and and connect with people and and offer them the spirit of Christ in in our way and and take that this spirit of Christ in in our way and and just makes for thriving communities for sure. So last question I Maria is, as you reflect on your time as a leader in as the stake communications director. How's is being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ. Every

Maria Duncan: I think I realized how important how important every individual is to Jesus Christ and how if I'm working hard at something and it's really hard then I'm probably not doing it right. And I'm bored Probably need to pivot somehow. It's that when god cares about something, it is easy, way easier than it should be, and he mag signifies our efforts. And and that revelation really can come instantly when we need it. And I'm just...

I love all of God's children. And I love learning about the different ways of people worship him. And I know that when I leave these other churches, I fell this spirit and I'm changed, and I wanna be a better person, and then I'm so so grateful. When I come back to our and I get to experience my priest covenants and ordinance and having the priest did. Has...

It's also been something that has shine for me, maybe being in so many different organizations that I have more value of the priest than I've ever had before, and I'm so grateful for priest of covenants and poor for our access to priest student authority. I also feel like, I feel like I get to use the priest of authority that I've been given and the realm of my colleagues all the time, and I'm amazed at how how them and father will bring my efforts to life in and mag them and make it better than I have any business, being... I have no training for anything like this. I studied computer science in college and in technology systems. I'm supposed to be a nerd in my house.

You know, on computer not out in the community. And so I feel like he he's really helped me to... To go beyond what I'm capable of because of this assignment.

Kurt Francom: And that concludes this how I lead. Interview. I hope you enjoyed it, and I would ask you, could you take a minute and drop this link in an email on social media in a text. Wherever it makes most sense and share it with somebody who could relate to this this experience. And this is how we how we develop as leadership.

Hearing what the other guy doing, trying some things out, testing, adjusting for your area, and that's that's where great leadership discovers. Right? So we would love to have you share this with somebody in this calling or a related calling, and that would be great. And also, if you know somebody, any type of leader who would be a fantastic guess on the how I lead segment, reach out to us go to leading scenes dot org slash contact, at maybe send this in individual email, letting them know that you're going to be suggesting their name for this interview. We'll reach out to them and See if we can line them up.

So again, go to leading saints dot org slash contact, and there you can submit all the information and let us know. And maybe they will be on a feature I lead segment on the leading Sai podcast.

Gordo B. Hinckley: It came as a result of the position of leadership, which was imposed upon us by the God of Heaven who brought fourth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when the declaration was made discerning the own and only true and living church upon the face of the earth. We were immediately put in a position of loneliness. The loneliness of leadership from which we cannot shrink nor run away. And to which we must face up with bold and courage, and ability.