

From: Laurel Hallman and Bill Sinkford

To: All those interested in the Pathways "Fast Start" Congregation

Re: How they're doing. What happens next.

Date: October 21, 2005

We are writing this letter jointly to report to you on the status and future of Pathways Church, a "Fast Start" Congregation established in Keller, Texas, a growing community in what is known locally as "the DFW corridor" between Dallas and Fort Worth.

The church was formed in the recognition that our usual methods of starting churches have been self-limiting. We had a vision of planting a church which would have the resources to grow quickly as many other denominations (and non-denominational churches) have done.

The DFW area had all the right elements: entrepreneurial UU donors in the First Unitarian Church of Dallas who were willing to underwrite most of the projected \$1. million budget; NTAUUS, the North Texas Association of UU Societies which was willing to purchase and hold land for the future of the congregation; the willingness of the UUA Administration to contribute the remainder of the money needed from the UUA Capital Campaign monies; the conservative religious climate in Texas which challenged us as religious progressives to come out, gather together, and to be bold in our faith.

Since this had never been done before within our denomination, we knew that much of the wisdom and practical skills for such a project would have to come from sources outside our usual circles. A donor in First Church gave money to provide for training in 'planting' such a large church start. UUA and Pathways staff attended a United Methodist conference on large church life that included visits to the six large United Methodist congregations in the Houston area to observe and analyze best practices. We contracted with the Texas-based Easum, Bandy Associates, a consulting firm specializing in church growth, that included extensive on-site consultations with Tom Bandy at Pathways.

We formed a local search committee that carefully researched many of the large churches in the DFW area to glean the qualities necessary for the minister of such a church. After interviewing several very good candidates, the committee was excited to choose Anthony David, who had the tenacity, entrepreneurial spirit, and excitement we believed would make this experiment a success. He accepted the challenge and moved to Keller with his family to plunge into the process of learning 'church planting'.

The plan was to spend a year preparing the staff and programs for the church and provide enough publicity to gather 300 people at the first service. While the first public Sunday worship service on September 19, 2004 had an attendance of 140, we knew that the UUA Media Campaign that was being tested in Kansas City and Houston would be coming to Dallas/Ft. Worth within the year, and so missing that first goal did not seem as important as the enthusiasm generated on that Sunday.

Despite this planning and enthusiasm, however, we must regrettably report that Pathways has not grown as rapidly as we all had hoped. After more than a year of public worship, Pathways has 71 members. At current spending levels, the UUA's financial commitment to Pathways would be completed in a matter of months.

Due to these circumstances, Pathways leadership needs to adjust staffing and expenditures to match the reality of their current size in the near term. This adjustment will not be easy, but the Pathways vision is strong, and the church will continue to bring Unitarian Universalism to an unserved part of the Dallas/Ft. Worth region. With 71 members and 110 average attendance at worship, Pathways has a pledge base of \$110,000, with an average pledge of \$2,600 per pledge unit. They have a strong membership and a committed board, and they remain undaunted. It is our sincere hope that Pathways will continue to grow even if at a less strenuous pace. The Dallas/Ft. Worth UU Churches have just enjoyed a significant media campaign as part of the *Metroplex Growth Strategy* which was funded by NTAUUS and the UUA Capital Campaign. All the UU Churches in the DFW Metroplex area are 'coming out' in significant ways and we hope that Pathways, in spite of their current task of reorganization, will also be able to enjoy the benefits of that campaign.

We are disappointed that we could not achieve our goals for a large church at Pathways. But we have learned much from the Pathways experiment, learnings that we are already using. We have learned that we need to have more experience embedded in the new congregation and available to church leadership right from the start; that the new congregation needs to have a close and clear relationship with a mentor congregation for guidance; that all understandings, financial and otherwise, between the new congregation and the UUA must be in writing; and that there must be clear benchmarks for progress reported to and analyzed by the mentor congregation and the UUA. At the same time, Pathways has much to teach the rest of us about the process of planting a church, including "start small and slow to grow big fast." These lessons were hard-learned, but they will serve us well in the future.

The UUA Board of Trustees has requested an independent review of the Pathways effort, and an independent committee will submit a report by April, 2006. We did not want to wait, however, until that report was received to inform you of the situation at Pathways.

Our disappointment that the Pathways experiment did not result in the outcome we dreamed of must not distract us from our mission to grow Unitarian Universalism. Pathways has been a bold undertaking by some brave and generous UUs who have done the best they could. Pathways will continue to do good ministry where our voice so desperately needs to be heard. In addition, the skills and experience gained at Pathways are being applied as we support the next large church plant which has emerged from the Mainline UU Congregation in Devon, Pennsylvania. We may have fallen short of our immediate goals with Pathways, but what we have learned will be invaluable as we continue our efforts to grow Unitarian Universalist churches.

In faith,

Rev. William Sinkford  
UUA President

Rev. Laurel Hallman  
Sr. Minister, First Unitarian Church of Dallas

**Pathways FAQ**  
**October 2005**

**How did Pathways come about as a new start congregation?**

The idea to experiment with a large UU church start-up came independently from several organizations and groups: (1) In its strategic plan, the Dallas/Ft. Worth Metroplex Growth Steering Committee listed starting a large church as one of its goals; (2) The Senior Ministers of Large UU Churches included such an effort in its visionary platform for growth; (3) The UUA Board of Trustees affirmed growth as a priority, and the Board-appointed New Congregation Formation Task Force developed bold recommendations for new congregation formation; and (4) the UUA Administration committed to developing new strategies for the growth of our faith.

**What did the UUA promise to Pathways?**

The UUA promised to support Pathways financially with a grant of \$1 million over four years. The UUA has also provided support from staff and consultants.

**Has the UUA's promise of funding been fulfilled?**

Yes. By June 30, 2006, the UUA will have provided approximately \$1,050,000 in support of Pathways. Staff and consultants have provided support as needed and in accord with their job descriptions. Pathways does not owe the UUA any repayment of funds.

**Where did the grant money for Pathways come from?**

It came from two sources. Approximately \$350,000 came from the UUA's Campaign for Unitarian Universalism. Approximately \$700,000 came from donors in the DFW area specifically for this effort. None of the funds for the support of Pathways came from the UUA's operating budget. No Annual Program Fund monies or Friends of the UUA funds were used.

**Who holds the contracts for Pathways staff?**

The UUA holds the contracts for the Executive Director, Lead Pastor, Associate Pastor for Family Life Ministries and Associate Pastor for Worship and Spiritual Development. Pathways hired a part time office manager/music coordinator and holds that contract.

**Who holds the leases on Pathways temporary spaces?**

The UUA holds the lease on the office and meeting space. We are in the third of four years on this lease. Pathways holds the lease for the space currently used for worship services and religious education on Sundays.

**What about the land that was bought for Pathways?**

The North Texas Association of UU Societies (NTAUUS) bought land for Pathways. An agreement about ownership and repayment was negotiated between NTAUUS and Pathways. No UUA funds were involved.

**In this transition year for Pathways, what is happening to staffing, space and land?**

As of December 31, 2005, the Associate Ministers will have concluded their service. The Executive Director will also conclude her service no later than December 31, 2005. The Lead Pastor will be continuing. A part-time Family Life Ministries Director is being sought. Pathways will continue to worship in its current location for now. A tenant to sublease the office space is being sought. Any changes regarding the land will be negotiated between Pathways and NTAUUS.