

## **Executive Summary**

### **Dallas/Fort Worth Metropolitan Strategy for Growth of Unitarian Universalism**

#### **Overview**

While the Unitarian Universalist congregations in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex have grown at a rate of about 25% over the last ten years, the rate of growth has lagged behind the rate of increase in area population. One result of this trend is reduced influence and importance of the UU voice and presence in community life as our voice comes from a smaller percentage of citizens. Today there is approximately one member of a UU congregation for every 3,000 persons, a minuscule presence.

To remedy this trend, the Steering Committee for this project was gathered in October, 2001, and charged in November by representatives of area congregations to produce a plan addressing these goals:

1. Plant a large church in a strategic location.
2. Develop a satellite of First Church, Dallas.
3. Grow Horizon Church (Carrollton) from a midsize to a large church.
4. Promote the growth of existing small and mid-sized churches.
5. Acquire land in strategic locations for future churches.

Task forces were set up for each goal, except (2), which is being delayed until appropriate personnel are available to develop the plan.

#### **Large Church Start**

The Large Church Start Task Force

- Visited D/FW area large churches.
- Met with Stefan Jonasson, Coordinator of Services for Large Congregations, about UU large church demographics.
- Met with Lyssa Jenkins (Vice-President for Research, Dallas Chamber of Commerce and President, First Church, Dallas) about demographic trends in the D/FW area.
- Conducted other research.

The task force identified several key elements for large church success. Among them are:

- Small group ministries.
- Team of staff to support a wide variety of well-run programs for all ages.
- Excellent production values in Sunday morning worship.
- “Seeker” services with positive messages paired with inspiration or entertainment.
- Location in a demographically growing area.
- Marketing targeted to attract a new crop of UUs.

We believe a UU meta-church will succeed in Northeast Tarrant County given certain assumptions:

- a team of staff who can devote 6 months to gathering members before beginning worship with a core of 300 members.
- acquisition of about 10 acres of strategically located land by 2002; building to accommodate 1000 worshipers completed by 2004.
- development of covenant groups and other small group ministries.
- targeting of “Cultural Creatives.”
- staffing and facility to provide a full range of services.

This approach represents a substantial departure from traditional start-ups of UU churches: more reliant on staff, marketing and small group ministries. Though the up-front money required is greater, so is the return. . . even within a few years.

**We recommend that the development of such a church begin with the search for a senior minister.**

### **First Church Satellite**

Plans will be developed beginning in the fall, when Lyssa Jenkins will be available to chair the effort and Laurel Hallman will have returned from sabbatical.

### **Grow Horizon to a Large Church**

Key to the plan to develop UUism in DFW is an increase in the number of large churches. With First Church Dallas and the new congregation, Horizon will provide a third large church option for potential church members. Located in one of the fastest growing areas in the country, Horizon is poised to become a large church, given its staffing pattern, adequate land to accommodate growth, and the preparation and enthusiasm of its congregation.

The Horizon Growth Task Force solicited input from almost half of Horizon’s members through small group meetings. Four areas were addressed in planning:

- Growth and Involvement
- Ministry and Staffing
- Program
- Membership Facilities

Key recommendations include:

- Expansion of ministry through Covenant Groups, Pastoral Caregivers, and Neighborhood groups.
- Increased visibility and public image.
- Increased staffing (including office staff and a youth and young adult minister).
- Leadership and Lay Ministry training.
- Expansion of programs for youth and young adults, including after school programs and campus ministry.
- Expansion of sanctuary to serve 1000 members church at 2 or more services.

- Larger, more flexible rooms for religious education and faith development.
- Large multi-use space and additional administrative and parking space.

**We recommend outside assistance for Horizon to help accomplish their goals.**

### **Small To Mid-size Growth**

Because of the preponderance of small congregations, they cannot be ignored as we develop an overall growth plan. Two D/FW area congregations – First Jefferson in Fort Worth and Community in Plano – are working to move to program church, becoming stable mid-size congregations. These congregations and the five smaller congregations in the Metroplex need encouragement and support to grow.

The Small to Mid-size Growth Task Force studied the past growth efforts in D/FW and the factors that contribute to and hinder congregational growth. Conclusions reached by this task force were:

- Growth is a choice made by an organization willing to change.
- Self-study of all aspects of congregational life is required for an individual congregation to produce growth.
- Funds advanced to congregations should be contingent on careful self-study and a comprehensive Growth Plan.
- A fulltime professional Growth Consultant can help in the development of a Growth Plan.

**We recommend:**

- **Continued support and expansion of the SWUUC growth Consultant Program**
- **Sharing of the “Best Practices” among congregations through such mechanisms as the Fall Leadership Conference.**

### **Land Acquisition**

Tracts of about 10 acres or more were identified and priced in:

- Northeast Tarrant County
- Frisco/McKinney
- South Arlington/Mansfield
- Far Northeast Dallas
- Far Southwest Fort Worth.

Prime locations are available in each area, with prices as low as the \$30-40,000/acre range in S. Arlington to \$100,000+/acre in much of the area explored. Northeast Tarrant County is filling in fast, but land could be acquired in the immediate future. Land in other areas could be acquired in the longer term.

**We recommend**

- **Purchase of land in Northeast Tarrant County for the Large Church Start and**
- **Further investigation of who might purchase land for future congregations and how it might be financed.**