

PATHWAYS TO GROWTH WORKSHOP

2005 GA

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WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Welcome to Pathways to Growth! I'm Anthony David, Lead Pastor of Pathways, and I'd like to share a little bit of our story with you, together with some of the specific tactics we use that might prove useful to you in your own church context.

Given the amount of material I want to present, I'm going to ask you to save your questions until near the end. When we have around 15-20 minutes left, we are going to move into break-out groups, led by members of the Pathways Staff and Board, so we can more effectively answer any questions you might have.

- Meryl: questions about finances, fundraising, and marketing
- Christine: questions about worship
- Rob: questions about family life ministries
- Board members: questions about policy-governance
- Anthony: questions about evangelism, social justice, vision, and church-planting in general

There's also this packet of materials from our yearbook for you to look at...

PATHWAYS IN A NUTSHELL

So what is Pathways? One way of answering is to say that at Pathways, we are learning the instincts and tactics that people like Bil Cornelius use to grow their churches.

Who is Bil Cornelius? Listen to his story, as recounted by church consultant Bill Easum.

Bay Area Fellowship, a nondenominational Christian church in Corpus Christie, Texas, began as a dream in the heart of Bil Cornelius. Five people gathered in Bil and Jessica's home for the first meeting, where Bil announced boldly "We're going to be a church of thousands one day." After every core group meeting he would challenge them with this vision "Bring everyone you can." And they did. The group went from five to ten people. Then the group grew from ten to fifteen people.

Before long the group grew to twenty people and moved out of the apartment traveling from home to home. Soon the homes were too small and they moved into a small storefront. The momentum was gathering and so was the excitement.

When the group reached twenty-five, Bil said to the group, "Alright guys, here's what we're going to do. We're going to spend every dime we've got. We're going to blow it all in one weekend. Let's launch. And let's do this big."

With that the tiny group rented a school, employed a regional marketing company, and sent out 70,000 direct mail pieces to people's homes. This was a tactic no other church in the area had used before. At the same time Bil challenged every single person in core group to bring in at least ten people... EACH!

The first Sunday 236 people showed up and Bay Area Fellowship was born. As expected, the next week attendance dropped to 150 people, but compared to the twenty-five who launched the church, this number appeared awesome to the group!

The church grew from 150 to about 250 people and moved from the elementary school to a junior high for a bigger campus and more parking. Again, the church grew to 400-500 people and God opened the door for the church to purchase an old Moose Lodge. It was a piece of junk, but it's their own junk. No longer did the group have to set up and take down each week. Today, it's still junk, but its pretty piece of junk now.

Over the next 3 years the church grew an average of 75% a year. Today, (2005) Bay Area Fellowship averages 4,000 and has purchased 100 acres of land and is building a 2500 seat auditorium at a cost of 14 million.

It is very do-able—church plants that grow to large size rapidly. Pathways is doing it, although it is happening out of faithfulness to a very different spiritual vision, for very different people, and admittedly, at a slower rate. Our demographic target, we're finding, is tricky. It is characteristically suspicious of churches and turn the other way when they hear that word "church." There's 15,000 potential UUs in our service area in Northeast Tarrant County, but they can't imagine that a church like Pathways exists out there, so they turn away and become hard to reach. Shields up! It makes marketing and evangelism difficult, but we are called to minister to these people. They are our people. We will find a way.

See if anything I am about to say rings a bell. Most of the people in our service area are busy two parent, two earner families with children. They are in their cars a lot. Many have just moved into the area and are looking to connect with a community ASAP. In particular, they

- are on a quest for authentic spiritual growth integrating different cultures, world religions and science, and they see this as linked to social awareness and a desire to spread progressive social values. Many will never have heard about Unitarian Universalism before.
- want their children and youth NOT to be absorbed by the conservative Christian culture that surrounds them but, rather, to develop a positive spiritual identity characterized by openness, creativity, a sense of reverence, continual learning and growth, and service;
- are looking for a positive and encouraging community in which they can transcend their sense of isolation, build friendships, improve their relationships, and develop themselves personally and spiritually.

Pathways is all about learning about how to connect with these people as quickly and efficiently as possible. It means exploring tactics that are truly out of the box for Unitarian Universalists. It means being intentionally seeker-friendly, intentionally evangelical, intentionally tuned-in to the needs and aspirations of people who are UU but don't know it.

It also means learning about how to do all of this the hard way. Trial and error. Going where no UUs have gone before.

Some of you might know that part of the original vision behind Pathways was to start regular worship with 300 people in attendance. We had half that number our first Sunday. 150. And the plain fact is this: the 300 plan would have required us to be working at 100% efficiency from the very beginning, and that's just impossible when you're starting from pure scratch and learning as you go.

But you know what? I am so proud of all that we have accomplished so far against such great odds. These people (my staff and board) are true Unitarian Universalist trailblazers, and I want you to give them a big hand!

Let me say one more thing about Pathways. Pathways represents a regional growth initiative involving individual entrepreneurs, congregations, and inter-church organizations (like the North Texas Association of UU Societies)—all joining forces to help grow our movement. Almost 75% of our start up funds come from individual families who are members of the First Unitarian Church of Dallas! That's what I call true entrepreneurial spirit and true commitment to taking our movement to the next level.

OK—that's some basic stuff about Pathways.... Now, let's turn to some stand-out tactics that might prove useful to you in your own context.

DNA

Take a look at the yellow DNA sheet.

DNA is the oak tree that is potentially there in the acorn. It's the vision of what the church is becoming, created by the people themselves in the style of true congregational polity.

When you are planting a church, it's one of the first things you do. Develop the DNA. You have to have a concrete vision so people have something to gather around, a vision that is so beautiful and irreplaceable that people take it personally and do all they can to make it real. No matter what. As in walk through minefields. Brave tornadoes. Whatever the obstacles turn out to be!

People just don't gather around vagueness. Or if they do, they bring with them so many expectations and assumptions that in the end you have, say, 70 people going 70 different ways. And this doesn't make for vital church growth. Without a vision, the people perish. Or rather, when there's no common vision, the people cast off restraint. Go haywire.

So, as the Bil Cornelius example suggests, you start with 5 core people, or 10, no more than 12, and they craft the DNA. It all starts there. ***You start small and slow to grow large fast.***

Now at Pathways, I learned about this almost a year into our process, around three months before we started regular worship. So we had to hurry up and formulate the

DNA. At the last minute. I would have preferred using Bil Cornelius' strategy, but the one we used worked too. The results have been amazing....

Read Pathways' DNA

Immediate implications of congregational DNA:

1. The congregation is able to clarify what "growth" actually means. "growth" usually means something so vague as to be useless, but core values especially define clear growth directions for the congregation.

If you are familiar with the Carver Governance model of board leadership, you will see immediately how DNA is the source of ends statements and the ultimate context of meaning for board governance. DNA unites people in a common vision of who we are, what we are doing that we want people to invest their time money energies into, and what is beyond the bounds for us.

2. Congregational DNA spells out what we are willing to pay the price of change for. Change is hard, so there must be a beautiful and compelling vision that justifies it.

Change is hard, and so is generous giving. But here again, people will give generously to a beautiful and bold vision. That's why the per average pledge at Pathways this year was \$2800 dollars.

3. Congregational DNA builds trust inside the organization: laypeople trusting each other, pastors trusting laypeople, and laypeople trusting pastors.

One of the most important results of DNA is that it helps build a culture of *Trust* throughout the entire organization. Define this, and you move towards healing the "institutional diabetes" that afflicts so many of our churches. The energy and resources are there, but since we don't have a common agreement about who we are and what our boundaries are, people aren't granted permission to do things easily. Bureaucratic channels guarantee that it takes forever to get to a yes. The sugar can't get into the bloodstream....

But if you have a clear sense of boundaries, then if what you are doing is within the bounds, you have automatic permission. It leads to free enterprise in the church—in terms of social justice missions, programs, small groups, and on and on. A large church literally swarming with ministry initiatives of all kinds. The only question is one of coordination and equipping leaders to do the work with excellence.

You also heal a distrust of strong pastoral leadership. I've heard the concerns: "But what about the abuse of power? Who holds the pastor accountable?" And so churches create leadership contexts which focus so intently on insuring that something bad can't happen that we hamstring the leader to the point that we insure little good can happen,

too. Churches that peck the minister to death, absolutely guaranteeing that nothing good will happen, forget about something great!

DNA, on the other hand, takes us to a different place, one where we can build a leadership context of trust within clearly designated boundaries. Trust, not fear of what bad things might happen... DNA goes a long way in creating that liberating, creative, releasing context of congregational trust in which great things can happen, especially from the staff.

What does the process look like for developing congregational DNA?

I'd like to recommend a book that contains a full and thorough process. It's by Tom Bandy, called *Moving Off the Map: A Field Guide to Changing the Congregation*. Look at Part III of that book in particular.

A briefer process, one that focuses just on forming a church's core mission and values. is in the resource section of the Pathways "yearbook." (One is here, the other is located at the NTAUUS booth in the exhibition hall)

WORSHIP

With DNA, the task then becomes one of embedding it into every tactic, every program, every relationship in the church. Aligning all that we do to it.

In particular, let's talk about worship. Many if not all of our core values come together to dictate certain things about how we will worship together and how we won't.

Take a look at our worship bulletin. This is a moral document, and we are always trying to see it through the eyes of seekers, asking ourselves: "What does a seeker need to see? What's relevant and important to them?"

- Prominence of mission and other elements of DNA
- Lots of info about getting started
- Only information about events that anyone could come to if they were so inclined
- Blurbs written without insider-speak
- Perhaps one of the big things you will notice is that we give only a brief nod to the actual order of service events. More important to appear like we are a dynamic church swarming with activities and growth opportunities.
- Notes section (I wish we could also include sermon outlines, but too hard...)

Relevance and seeker-friendliness also dictated that we started with a contemporary style worship, one that church planting experts strongly emphasized as necessary to connecting with many more kinds of people than traditional worship does. We call our service *SpiritSong*.

On the other hand, we don't believe in "one-size-fits-all worship." Fact is, no single style of worship can maximize relevance and seeker-friendliness when tastes vary so much.... Which is why we are launching a traditional service in the fall. *Simple Gifts*.

Check out the slide show

Evangelism

- *In a spirit of compassion, we continually remember seekers unaffiliated with a church who are looking for what we have to offer*
- *We talk to our friends about how Pathways is important to us, and we invite them to programs or activities that suit them*
- *We regularly engage in marketing and other forms of public visibility*
- *We are entrepreneurial and risk-taking in creating “signature ministries” that reach out to seekers in our area*

How this happens at Pathways: :

- At worship, we regularly remember the people who are not there but ought to be. Two messages we send:
 - “Remember what it was like for you before you found Pathways? “
 - “Our worship table is full, and there’s not enough people to eat all the soul food. And what happens to food that’s not eaten?”
- Website: see www.pathwaysuu.org
- Friendship evangelism: See pink sheet for coaching material.
- Marketing: see Pathways yearbook.
- Signature ministries. See green sheet on “Community Blitz.” Next year, we’re inviting Debra Haffner down to kick off our OWL program which we will offer to the entire community. In 5-7 years, we’ll start work on a ministry to second generation Hispanics. In 10 years, we’ll start work on a school.

BREAKOUTS

- Meryl: questions about finances, fundraising, and marketing
- Christine: questions about worship
- Rob: questions about family life ministries
- Board members: questions about policy-governance
- Anthony: questions about evangelism, social justice, vision, and church-planting in general