



**The Flourishing Culture Podcast Series**  
"Uplifting Growth is About Caring for Your Staff"  
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Marvin Williams

**Intro:** Today's podcast is brought to you by BCWI's 360 leadership assessment.

**Male:** Welcome to the *Flourishing Culture Podcast*, where you'll learn how to build a flourishing workplace culture that drives the ministry impact of your organization, your church, or your company, brought to you by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. Now, here's your host, BCWI president, Al Lopus.

**Al Lopus:** Hello, and thanks for joining us here on the *Flourishing Culture Podcast*. Today we're continuing our new series on the "Eight Ways to Build a Flourishing Workplace Culture," and each week, we're giving you a close-up look at each of the eight factors that make up the FLOURISH model. It's a key to building healthier workplace culture that leads to greater organizational impact. And on our podcast today, we're going to look at the fourth of the eight drivers that make up the FLOURISH model. It's called uplifting growth, and my guest has plenty to share with you about uplifting growth is a critical driver to help improve, even transform, your workplace culture. Today we have the pleasure of talking with Marvin Williams, the lead pastor of Trinity Church in Lansing, Michigan. Marvin, welcome to the *Flourishing Culture Podcast*.

**Marvin Williams:** Thank you for having me on the show, Al. So grateful to be with you today.

**Al:** We're really looking forward to all you'll have to share with us, and to start off, though, give us a snapshot of Trinity Church and what makes it distinctive week end and week out.

**Al:** Trinity Church is about 67 years old. It is a nondenominational church. It has seeds of intergenerationality. We see all ages here at Trinity Church. It's a diverse body. It's growing in diversity. I've been here about nine years, and we have watched this church go from a predominantly white church to a church that is growing in all kinds of ethnicities as well as socioeconomic standards. You know, one of the things that we love here, we want to see people awakened to full life with Christ, and this means for us that wherever the Spirit leads, we follow Him. We try to keep it real, period because we want to be authentic in our relationships. You won't just find us in the building, but you'll

find us out on the streets and the neighborhoods, and we want to bring others along on the journey. We believe in apprenticing the next generation, the next group of leaders, that are coming up. So I think those are some of the things that make us kind of distinctive, at least in my opinion, on a week-end, week-out basis.

**AI:** Well, apprenticing the next generation, that even points to uplifting growth, which is what we're talking about, as you improve the performance of individuals and the groups and the organization to meet the challenges of a changing world. That's great.

You know, in the next few minutes, we want to talk about three things: the challenges that you face in confronting the health of Trinity Church's workplace culture, the action steps that help to transform the health of the culture, and how the ministry has been positively impacted. So, how's that sound?

**Marvin:** Absolutely. Let's go for it.

**AI:** Let's go for it. You know, when you stepped into your role as lead pastor in 2015, what caused you to think that you need to focus on the health of your staff culture? What was going on that maybe gave you a pause for concern, maybe something that needed attention? What wasn't working?

**Marvin:** Yeah. You know, Trinity Church is a good place to work. It really is. Good place to work; great, great people. But over the years, somehow leaders, maybe before me even some that were still on staff, had created a culture of fear, a lack of trust, poor communication. And it was showing up in the health, or lack of health, in terms of conversations and sidebar meetings, and those are toxic. Those are unhealthy ways to run an organization. There were meetings before the meetings, meetings after the meetings, and, again, you can't win that way as a culture. We had stopped talking about one another as opposed to talking to one another, and we just said, "At some point we have to do something about this if we are to be a healthy organization." And so we heard about BCWI and just said, "This will be a tool for us to help get underneath the iceberg so we can make some improvements."

**AI:** Yeah. Meetings before the meeting, meeting after the meeting, meeting in the parking lot, yeah.

**Marvin:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**AI:** Yeah. And it's exciting to see how that's changed.

So as we talk about uplifting growth, continuing on, for us that means improving the performance of individuals, groups, and the organization, and how you meet the challenges of a changing world. And most significantly, growth comes from job-related experience along with interaction with others, including managers, mentors, and coaches as well as from some formal education events. And as we've seen, learning new things increases the employees' engagement and allows the organization to maintain and improve its effectiveness. In that first year following the first BCWI Survey, tell us about a staff member whose fit, giftings, and on-the-job experience really modeled uplifting growth at Trinity Church. Do you have somebody in mind?

**Marvin:** Yeah. You know, I have to try to be objective here, but my assistant, Brenda Dooley. Brenda Dooley has been with us for about two years. She came out of the workplace—she was working for the state of Michigan—and when she first came, she talked about how toxic the culture was where she was working. And then coming to Trinity, she thought this was an amazing place to work. Again, with new eyes, that person sees differently. When she worked a little bit here, she began to see some of the subculture that was taking place, the underbelly, that said, “We can't change, and we can't do better,” people who were living according to an old story of the Trinity past. And she came in saying, “No, we can change.” And she said, “I've seen it worse than this. And guess what. You have it really good here.” And so her positive spin on we can change, we can do better, and we began to see her leadership. So she's not just an administrative assistant; she is a true leader. She brought all of the administrative assistants together, and now they are planning ahead. So she has been a significant part of, I think, our growth here at Trinity Church.

**AI:** Oh, that's a great story. Brenda, congratulations, good job.

You know, when people ask us, what makes up uplifting growth, as you've seen our Survey, you can see it's when you enjoy a positive, productive relationship with managers and your teammates—you've mentioned that—where you feel supported and cared for by leadership, where somebody receives regular feedback and informal feedback from their manager as well as formal feedback about their performance, where frequently you have opportunities to stretch and grow in your role, and where you have access and practical training for your role. So those are some of the things that we look at for uplifting growth. And one of your strengths at Trinity Church is reflected in the Survey statement, someone at Trinity Church encourages my development. Give us an idea of why your staff responded so favorably to that statement.

**Marvin:** I don't know if there's one particular thing. I think there's a number of things kind of converging together. We have created cross-departmental communication and collaboration. We eat together very often. Eating together is a sacred thing for us. It's a good thing for us, as we get to know one another and as we are spending time with each other, as we are learning about one another's families. One of the things I found out, what we found out, that trust increases as we get to know one another and ask one another about family and things that are happening in one another's lives. It actually begins to create trust, and we've seen a lot of that. In our squads, across departmental collaboration and learning, we read books together, we listen to podcasts together, and so we've shared ideas, we've rumbled—using Brené Brown's word—we rumbled together, and we've had very, very honest conversations. And I think those are some of the things that have helped us in these last four years.

**AI:** Yeah. Marvin, that sounds great. And it's a lot about relationships, isn't it. You mentioned how relationships build trust. There's the old saying, I can't trust you if I don't know you. And even when it comes to people receiving performance improvement kinds of feedback, they're willing to listen to it if there is a relationship much more than if there isn't one. Those are great examples.

You know, what you've described points towards the second turning point of your culture transformation, and that's the intentional well-thought-out strategic action steps that you've taken to unleash uplifting growth at Trinity Church. And here are some things that we oftentimes see, where

people feel like you're listening well to know who your employees are and what their interests and aspirations are and where you have regular conversations of performance, where you view training and development opportunities as investments, where you provide hands-on training opportunities, where you leverage employee strengths, take a coaching and or mentoring approach to employee development, and provide meaningful recognition. And after the first year, your people made great progress on the health of your workplace culture. Give us an example of some of the key action steps that you guys took to tackle an area of your culture that you wanted to improve.

**Marvin:** I think spending regular time with each other, but particularly around conflictual issues. We used to have this culture where we would not talk to each other about the conflict. We would talk to everybody else, with the exception of talking directly to the individual. And so one of our staff behaviors is go to the source, go directly to the source. And we've seen this happen over and over again, when someone on our staff begins to talk to us about another person, our first question is, "Have you had a conversation with that person?" And they will say, "Well, no, not yet. I wanted to tell you first." "Well, no. We need to stop this conversation now because your first responsibility is to have the conversation with the person with whom you have the conflict." And so that has been one significant change for us as an organization. And it is about emotionally healthy engagement. We're of the mind that we cannot have spiritual growth without having emotional health. And so the two are inseparable, and so that has been a significant improvement on our staff. We now have people going directly to the source, "Hey, I have an issue with what you just said. Can we have a conversation about that?" That did not happen four years ago. To me, that is part of the health that we are experiencing four years later.

**Al:** Wow. So, again, back to relationships and healthy relationships. And I love your connection that when you have emotionally healthy relationships, that's also linked to spiritual growth at the same time. And people talk about this, go to the source, but it's hard, isn't it, to really break those patterns. You must have worked on that pretty hard over a period of time.

**Marvin:** We have. And in our staff meetings, we actually did conflict resolution. Here's how you do it. Here's the biblical way in which you walk through conflict. Believe me. Al, this is not just in the church; this is in the marketplace, and people are craving how to have healthy, crucial conversations with individuals they may have conflict with. And so we walk through staff meetings, we walk through our squad meetings, helping our staff, giving them tools by which they have emotionally healthy conversations with other people on staff. And that has made a world of difference for us.

**Al:** Let me ask you this question: How does that connect, then, to the spiritual growth?

**Marvin:** So, if you are claiming to grow spiritually, say, for instance, you and I had beef with each other. And I'm talking to you, you're talking to me, and I'm not telling you how I really feel about what you just said. And the next time you come to me and say, "Marvin, how are you doing?," and I say, "Fine," I'm actually lying at that point. And so I am lying to you, I'm lying to myself, but I go and read my Bible, and I go and pray, and I've not dealt with the conversation, the issue, or the conflict with you, which allows me even more freedom now to have a really healthy relationship with God. And so I'm no longer lying to myself. I'm no longer lying to you And I can't be lying to God because God knows

everything. If I'm emotionally healthy and I'm being truthful with you, it allows me to have freedom in my relationship with God. And so that has been—again that's been helpful for us

**Al:** Yeah. And that's having integrity as well on your relationship with God. That's a great story.

**Al:** I trust you're enjoying our podcast today. We'll be right back after an important word for leaders.

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**Al:** And now, back to today's special guest.

**Al:** You know, many of your staff commented that the leaders at Trinity Church are humble and transparent and that there's now a high level of trust amongst the staff. And that's changed over the last three years. Tell us a favorite story of how that began, and it's even continuing to this day.

**Marvin:** I think we're simply trying to be authentic. That's one of our values in our vision statement is to be authentic in our relationships. And so I don't know where it began. I think it's become now a part of our culture. So it's not uncommon in a staff meeting or in a squad meeting for me or Jack or other leaders to begin sharing things about our personal lives—not that it's a total exposé—but we began sharing struggles and joys and about family, or if we had an argument the night before with our spouse, and we share that because we want to be authentic—and not sharing all the dirty details, but sharing those things that we think would give permission and freedom for others to share as well. And so that is very, very common for us now, four years later. It just wasn't that way four years ago.

**Al:** And that's really opened up the relationships amongst your staff and, again, has built trust. That's a great story.

As you know, Marvin, uplifting growth is one of our eight drivers—I've mentioned that. Why does uplifting growth matter, especially when it comes to improving the performance of individuals or your squads or teams or maybe even the entire church at Trinity? What do you say about that?

**Marvin:** Yeah, Al. People want to grow. People want to be better people. People want to be better followers of Jesus. Most times, they simply don't have the tools to do it. They don't have the pathway to grow. And so when you provide a pathway and when you give individuals tools by which to grow, it enlivens them, it awakens them to something, like, "I didn't know that that was possible. I didn't even know that tool was out there." And so to help them grow, whether they stay with us or whether they go someplace else, it is our responsibility to help them grow, and as they grow they can take these skills

and abilities anywhere and help another team get better. We just simply want to provide tools, pathways, so we can help individuals with their desires to grow.

**AI:** Yeah. And they really feel that in their hearts that you are concerned about them, want them to grow, and they learn new things, and they feel a great outcome as a result of that. That's exactly right.

You know, the third turning point in Trinity Church's commitment to better health of your workplace culture is how you celebrate important outcomes and results. And a huge result is that since your staff first took the BCWI Staff Engagement Survey three years ago, the health of your workplace culture has improved dramatically, as we've mentioned, from toxic, from our dials, to today, where your staff is clearly strongly healthy. And in that first year, 13 percent of your employees were engaged, which is quite a bit below the average of churches. But today, it's increased five times over, 68 percent of your employees are engaged at work, and that's a fantastic outcome. Congratulations. And today, a high level of uplifting growth at Trinity means that your people are recognized for doing a good job, where supervisors care about their staff, and as you've already communicated, the staff has regular conversations with their managers about their performance. What's one significant outcome in your workplace culture that's caused you to admit, "We couldn't have done it without improving the performance of individuals, groups, and the church overall"?

**Marvin:** There is one that I think, and is very recent, and that is our amazing youth pastor is leaving to take a position in Bakersfield, California. Not only is he leaving to take a position, but his associate director is leaving at the same time. And both of these individuals are on different paths, and one is taking a position in Bakersfield, the other is taking a position in Los Angeles, and they didn't contrive this. It was just so happened the way God worked. Both of them are leaving at around the same time.

Four years ago, that disruption would have wounded our soul, but because we've gone through BCWI, because we put in place certain things to help us become better and better each year—to have important conversations, to have the challenging conversations, to celebrate one another as God speaks, because that's one of our values: be attentive to the Spirit—we want to create a hear-and-obey culture. When you hear God speak, we want you to move. And so these individuals have heard God speak, and now they're moving. And our staff is ecstatic.

We're going to hurt. We going to hurt because they're leaving, but we are absolutely ecstatic that they heard God speak and now they are responding to the voice of God. We gathered around these two, and we laid hands on them, and we prayed for them, and we asked God's blessing over them. We are genuinely excited for this new chapter in both their lives. And I think, four years ago, we simply would not have had that. So we've made investments in them, but we've made investments in our staff, and as a result, we're seeing the outcome of genuine celebration, authentic relationships, and really this sense of, we love these guys. We are open-handed as we send them off.

**AI:** Wow. That's great. So you're really seeing improvement in a lot of ways as a result of the development, the effort, the training that you've put into these guys. That's great.

You know, we believe that a healthy culture is a true and worthy end in itself. You just described a great example. We also believe that a healthy-to-flourishing culture leads to organizational growth and

even greater ministry impact. And I love how you say that your church is outside of the boundaries of the church, you're in the community. How has the improved health of your culture influenced the overall ministry at the church? Is there a story that you can share with us about that?

**Marvin:** Yeah. This is coming up. This is the first time we're going to do this. On May 5 of this year, we're going to do something called I Love My City. And we will gather together, we will eat breakfast together, we will have an abbreviated worship service, and then we will hit the streets, and we will love our neighbors through a variety of ways. So we're actually shutting down our worship service—and we are three services on the weekend—we're shutting down our worship services, and instead of going to church, we're going to actually be the church that we can. And there are going to be a variety of ways in which we can serve our community. So we're pretty excited about that.

But this came about because of a cross-departmental collaboration, where people in different departments on our staff said, "Yes, we can do this. We will do it." And it's not one department, it's not just two departments, it's all of our departments coming together, saying, "We want to love our city in a unique way, and we're willing to own this as a group and not just own it as one person." And so our church is really excited about May 5 of this year.

**Al:** Oh, I love that. And because of the health of your culture amongst the staff, that will radiate positively out into the community much more effectively than it would have even three or four years ago, and how those relationships just really grew out of the squads that you have, the teams that you have, at the church working together and across departments. That's a great story.

Marvin, based on all you see happening today at Trinity Church, what's one thing that you believe each senior leader in a church or a parachurch organization or even a Christian-led business must do to help build a healthier workplace culture? What would you suggest?

**Marvin:** Yeah, Al, if I had to boil it down, it would just simply be, love and care for your staff. Love and care for your staff, not just the bottom line. I say, take time to see your people. Take time to actually see them in the arena and be in the arena with them. Care about their families and their hopes and dreams. Empathize with them by walking with them. Again, this falls under the purview of love and care for your people. Tell them how much you appreciate them, not just the job that they do. Appreciate them as people, not just the work that they do on a regular basis. We are human beings, not human doings. Again, yelling criticism from the cheap seats is one way to demoralize and even dehumanize people on your staff. So love and care for the staff that God has given you because they are gifts from God. One of the ways in which we thank God for them is by loving and caring for them.

**Al:** I love that. And, also, part of that loving and caring for them is giving them opportunities, and when you see growth the way that you've seen it in relationships, that's just additional opportunity for growth and development for people. That's fantastic.

You know, I've really enjoyed what we've learned today. And in light of all we've talked about, give us one final thought that you'd like to leave with ministry leaders and all of our listeners.

**Marvin:** That people have a desire to grow. They have a desire to grow beyond where they are. They have capacity to grow. I think we underestimate the value and the desire that people have to grow, and God has placed people in our care. We are stewards of their growth. And I think we ought to, as leaders, we ought to listen to those desires and walk with them and help them grow and flourish as human beings but also as people on our staff.

**Al:** Absolutely. And again, you're a walking testimony of how you've come in, and you've helped, with your team, to build a healthy culture from one that wasn't so healthy, based on data.

So, Marvin Williams, lead pastor of Trinity Church in Lansing, Michigan, thank you for sharing your wisdom, insights, and stories. It's been a lot of fun. And thank you for extending your ministry to the leaders who have been listening and benefiting from all that you've shared with us today.

**Marvin:** Al, thanks for having me on the show today.

**Al:** To our listeners, I want to thank you for listening to the *Flourishing Culture Podcast*, and our new continuing series, the Eight Ways to Build a Flourishing Culture.

Next week, we look at uplifting growth, the fourth of the eight factors that make up the FLOURISH model. And I think you're going to enjoy what next week's special guest has to say about how you and your teams can take your workplace culture to the next level.

Thank you for investing this time in your workplace culture today. If there's a specific insight, story, or action step that you've enjoyed in the past few minutes, please share with others so that they can benefit as well. And please review the show wherever you listen to podcasts.

This program is copyrighted by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. All rights reserved. Our writer is Mark Cutshall; our social media assistant is Solape Osoba; and this is Al Lopus, reminding you that a healthy culture drives greater impact and growth for your organization. I'll see you again soon on the *Flourishing Culture Podcast*.

**Male:** For a free transcript of today's podcast, visit [blog.bcwinstitute.org](http://blog.bcwinstitute.org). Join us next week for another one-to-one interview with a respected Christian leader. The *Flourishing Culture Podcast* with Al Lopus is a presentation of the Best Christian Workplaces Institute, helping Christian organizations set the standard as the best, most effective places to work in the world.