

MOBILIZING THE FAITHFUL



WHEN THERE IS NO WAY

There's more to the evangelical part of Donald Trump's victory than well-reasoned articles like Jim Garlow's or the work of grassroots supporters like Ray Moore appealing to voters by conventional means. There's also a previously untold story of how Evangelicals gave Trump a ground game that many political experts completely ignored. And, here again, there's a miraculous aspect to it.

Meet David Lane. He is a political adviser, organizer, and planner who generally tries to keep a low profile. He is well-known to the Left, however, because of the Pastors and Pews events he has organized since 1994. Over the years these events have attracted an estimated twenty thousand pastors and ministry leaders from all over the country. Media reports on the meetings often describe them as a subversive operation, mobilizing right-wing conservatives and teaching them to impose their will on the public. Lane, of course, sees it differently: There are sixty-five million to eighty million Evangelicals in this country, he says, and only 50 percent of them (roughly forty million) are registered to vote. Of those registered, only 50 percent (twenty million) actually do vote. And when 75 percent of the evangelical community fails to vote, the nation will inevitably suffer at the hands of the non-Christian Left.

The Pastors and Pews event I went to in Orlando in August 2016 was attended by about five hundred pastors and ministry leaders and their spouses. It was a grand affair with a delicious meal, Disney-quality patriotic music, and some great lead-in speakers, including Gov. Mike Huckabee, who introduced Trump. Lane learned how to put on a great show and connect with people when he worked for several years with Jerry Falwell in the mid-1990s. Earlier he had learned fundraising while working in Washington during the Reagan years. Then he worked as a grassroots organizer in Texas with Dr. Steven F. Hotze who Lane says is the best precinct-level grassroots organizer in the country. He proved his Pastors and Pews format worked in Texas by helping George W. Bush beat the Democratic governor Ann Richards and by defeating a proposal to make same-sex marriage legal.

A wealthy Republican donor gave Lane the money for his first Pastors and Pews event in Austin in 2005. Lane hoped he could get fifty pastors to meet with the governor. His benefactor said he wanted five hundred to attend the event at the Hilton Hotel downtown. In less than four weeks he got five hundred confirmations and had three hundred on a waiting list. “The Lord showed up,” he said. “Everything exploded. The hand of God was moving.” When that happened, Lane told me, he knew he had found his niche.

His preparation for the work was not what you’d expect, he said. His early life was “wine, women, and song,” but he became a Christian at a Bill Gothard seminar he attended at Zig Ziglar’s brother’s invitation, thinking it was a motivational seminar. “I deserved judgment but was given mercy,” he says. Mentored spiritually by retired Texas Court of Appeals judge Paul Pressler of Houston, Lane’s long resume includes a stint as a registered agent for the Nicaraguan resistance in Miami in the 1980s. But his organizational skills clearly come from a higher authority.

I first met Lane when I was involved with Mike Huckabee’s campaign in 2008. The former Arkansas governor was a featured speaker, along with other evangelical-friendly Republican candidates, at some of Lane’s events. Candidates eager to get ahead of the pack looked forward to speaking at Pastors and Pews events because they were scheduled before the state primaries, and the candidates always wanted the pastors’ support.

In January 2015 Lane helped sponsor a prayer rally at Louisiana State University in which Gov. Bobby Jindal played a key part. I was

invited to attend the dinner later that evening at the governor's mansion, along with a few other evangelical leaders. Jindal talked about whether or not he would run for president, and he asked for prayer. He did announce his bid for the race on June 24, 2015, but dropped out less than five months later, partly because of all the heat being directed his way by the Trump campaign.

After the Indiana primary, which made Trump the presumptive nominee, someone asked Lane what Trump would do as president. Lane replied, "I don't know, but I know what Hillary will do." Then, making reference to the recent incident in Kentucky when county clerk Kim Davis came under attack for refusing to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, Lane said a Clinton presidency would be bad for the country. "If she wins," he said, "what happened to the clerk in Kentucky is just the warm-up act for what's going to happen to you and your kids."

Two things followed the Orlando event I attended that Lane says were miracles. A week later Lane received an e-mail from Paul Manafort, Trump's campaign director at the time, who invited him to come up to New York to discuss mobilizing the evangelical vote. So Lane flew to New York, and as he was getting dressed in his hotel room for the appointment with Manafort, he got a call from a billionaire friend who had supported Lane's previous campaigns. The caller asked him, "How are you doing on that \$18 million?" A year earlier Lane had come up with a plan to mobilize voters and projected it would cost approximately \$18 million. For the moment, Lane told him, that plan was on the shelf, and he admitted he hadn't raised anything so far. "Well," the caller said, "put me down for \$5 million."

Lane thought that was amazing. He hadn't talked to the caller for eight months, and this call came out of the blue. But he thanked the man profusely then went on to his appointment where he laid out his idea for a way to mobilize evangelical voters. After listening to his idea, Manafort told him there was no money to fund a plan like that. At that moment Lane understood why he had been contacted by his billionaire caller. He said, "I have \$5 million. If you can find \$4 million, I believe we can be competitive in six key states. If the money doesn't come in, then we'll work in three states."

Manafort was clearly surprised by Lane's quick response, but he asked Lane to give him a couple of days to see if he could come up with the money. Lane left the meeting exhilarated but uncertain

whether or not Manafort could actually persuade his donors to produce the cash. Manafort never called him back. He resigned the next day as Trump's campaign manager. But this was the Lord's deal, and that same day, Lane's billionaire friend called again and said, "Put me down for another \$4 million." And twenty-four hours later he wired Lane the full \$9 million.

By this time they were just ten weeks away from the election, and Lane began to worry, how on earth could he mobilize millions of voters in such a short time? That's when the second miracle happened. He got a call from Murphy Nasica, a highly respected campaign firm in Dallas, Texas, that had spent \$150,000 training what they called "generals" for the political ground game. They had brought in campaign workers, trained them, and prepared the marching orders when, suddenly, the funding fell through and Murphy Nasica realized they would have to drop the plan.

Lane couldn't believe his ears. This was exactly what he had been praying for, so he told the folks at Murphy Nasica he would give them \$5 million so that all the people they had trained could get to work. Beginning on August 22, 2016, an army of "generals" orchestrated a million phone calls and door knocks in six key states: Florida, Ohio, Missouri, Virginia, North Carolina, and Iowa. Trump won all but Virginia on Election Day. His victory in the southern states, capped with the unexpected victory in Pennsylvania, gave Trump the win.

On the night of the election Paul Bedard of the *Washington Examiner* tweeted: "Huge: ABC reporting largest turnout of evangelical vote in history. Congrats @GDavidLane."⁹ I came across that tweet several weeks later and captured a screenshot as a reminder of the emotions we all felt. I had been standing in the large crowd of Trump supporters gathered at the New York Hilton when we got word that our prayers had been answered. The ground troops had done their job. David Lane and his generals had spread the word. And God had given them the means and the manpower to make it happen. It was amazing, and Bedard's tweet served as a great reminder of what happened that night, when providence, prayer, and persistence made a way where there was no way.

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