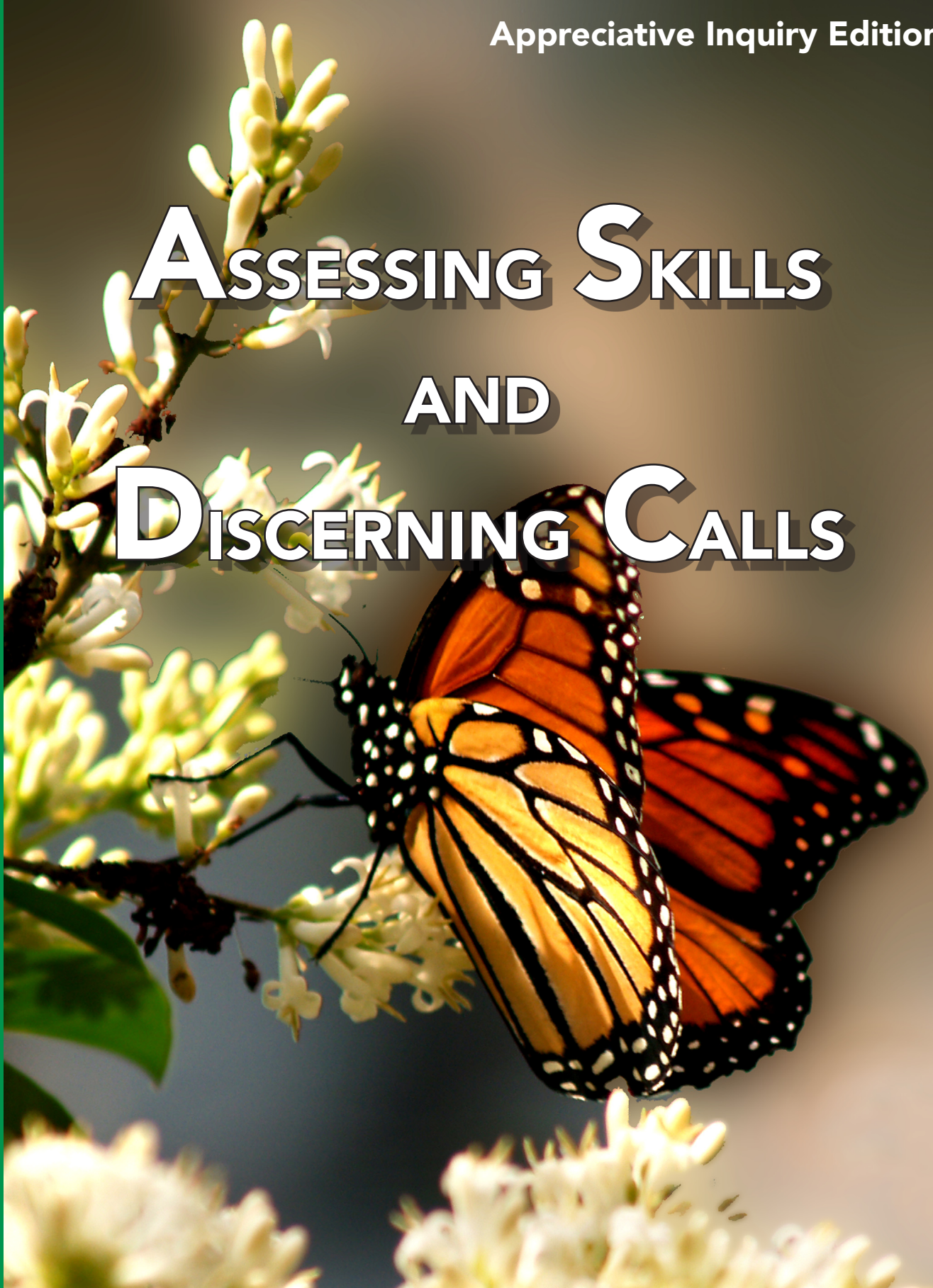


Appreciative Inquiry Edition

ASSESSING SKILLS AND DISCERNING CALLS



A Comprehensive Guide for the Clergy Search Process

ROBERT J. VOYLE AND KIM M. VOYLE



**Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls:
Appreciative Inquiry Edition**

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With our prayers that their search would be
a rich, creative, and rewarding time
for themselves and their candidates.

Rob and Kim Voyle

ASSESSING SKILLS AND DISCERNING CALLS

A Comprehensive Manual for
the Clergy Search Process

Appreciative Inquiry Edition
Episcopal Church Version

Rev. Robert J. Voyle, Psy.D.

Kim M. Voyle, Ph.D.

2009



The Appreciative Way

ENABLING INNOVATION AT THE *SPEED OF LIFE*

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Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls: Appreciative Inquiry Edition Episcopal Version

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Many, many, people have been instrumental in developing our understanding of the **Appreciative Way** and the clergy search process that forms the basis of **Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls**. As we reflected on all these people we realized it would be impossible to list them all in any coherent manner. However, we also realized that there are two groups of people that we would like to thank specifically.

Firstly, we are indebted to the congregations and dioceses that we have worked with as search consultants, and those who have used our search materials over the years. The challenges you have faced and invited us to participate in have consistently drawn forth our best and created opportunities for us to learn and create. Your feedback and “feed forward” have been very helpful as we have created and revised this search manual.

Secondly, we are indebted to the participants in our training programs at the **Clergy Leadership Institute**, and especially those who have gone on to be part of teleconferences. These participants are a very significant learning community for us and assist with the ongoing development of our ideas and procedures. Years ago in math classes we were taught that to test if a logical formula was really true you would test it with the variables 0, 1 and infinity. If the formula held true in these extreme cases then it was true in all cases. The participants in our training programs have provided these extreme cases. Their steady stream of challenging “what if” and “how would you” questions has invited us into a place of curious wondering that has called forth new insights and creativity.

As voracious learners, an invitation to help is an invitation to experiment and learn, and for those opportunities we are very grateful. To the congregations who have used our resources and the participants in our programs, we say “thank you” for the ongoing opportunity to learn and create.

Throughout the manual we have used numerous quotes and call-outs to capture and express the thoughts and ideas we are presenting. Many of the quotes go beyond being simple information to pithy statements, or meditation starters that tease our imagination to consider new possibilities or ways to think. Beyond our own reading we have two additional primary sources for the quotes: Bruce Elkin’s coaching newsletter, www.bruceelkin.com, includes timely quotes that support his appreciative inquiry based approach to coaching;

*In times of profound
change the learners
inherit the earth,
while the learned
find themselves
beautifully equipped
to deal with a world
that no longer exists.*
— Eric Hoffer

*The second kick
of the mule has no
educational value.*
— Steve Andreas

*I love quotations
because it is a joy to find
thoughts one might have,
beautifully expressed
with much authority by
someone recognized as
wiser than oneself.
— Marlene Dietrich*

and web based quote anthologies such as www.thinkexist.com or www.wisdomquotes.com. To the multitude of thinkers and authors who have shared their thoughts in ways that inspire us to see things differently or just get us to think, we are grateful. Where possible we have endeavored to provide the original author, however some of these quotes have become part of mainstream conversation to the point that original source and exact statements are lost. Side quotes without attribution are the products of our imagination, inspired by reflecting on daily living and helping others. We trust they are helpful to you by conveying ideas and opening you to the world of possibilities.

To all who engage in calling clergy our prayer is that by using these resources you are led by the Holy Spirit to make wise and loving choices that enrich you and the communities you serve. We trust that like a butterfly that emerges from its chrysalis and spreads its wings your search process will lead to the dawning of a new day of blessing and grace in which you manifest the glory of God within you.

With Gratitude and Love
Rob and Kim Voyle

OVERVIEW OF ASSESSING SKILLS AND DISCERNING CALLS

The procedures described in *Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls* have been designed to augment Diocesan search processes and the National Episcopal Church Deployment Office search resources. Within the life of most parishes, choosing a new rector is a rare occurrence. While this stability is good for the life of the congregation, it does mean that few parishioners are experienced in the science and art of assessing and calling clergy. This manual is designed to provide a parish with the accumulated experience of many searches and current personnel procedures.

Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls provides focused technical resources for the clergy search process. These assessment procedures are developed from proven contemporary personnel assessment and selection practices that have been successfully adapted to the assessment of clergy abilities and skills. These procedures are grounded in the practice and philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry, which will be described in more detail in the next section. Although technical in nature, the procedures are also based in a theological understanding of ministry as a sacred covenant relationship between clergy and laity. Our goal is to provide resources that can be used for an objective assessment of clergy skills and abilities, and also to assist in the more intuitive or spiritual process of discerning whether to call a clergyperson to a specific ministry.

Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls was developed in an Episcopal parish context to assist in the search for a new rector. For ease of reading we refer through out the manual to the "vestry", "search committee", and "rector" as the key groups or individuals in the search process. You can adapt the processes of *Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls* for other types of search processes such as those for bishop, vicars, chaplains, or associate clergy.

Your diocesan clergy deployment office has policies and guidelines for your search process. The diocese may also provide search consultants who are trained to assist in facilitating many of the search procedures. We also recommend that you check the resources available online from the Episcopal Church Deployment web site at www.episcopalchurch.org/cdo/. A non-Episcopal language version of this manual is also available for use in Protestant churches that use a congregational-based search process.

*How wonderful it is
that nobody need wait a
single moment
before starting
to improve the world.*

— Anne Frank

*I don't know what your
destiny will be,
but one thing I do know:
the only ones among you
who will be really happy
are those who have sought
and found how to serve.*

— Albert Schweitzer

*Ask not what your priest
can do for you.
Ask what your church can
do for your community
and then ask
what do we need
in a priest to
help us do that?*

*We are committed to equal
opportunity employment
and support employment
practices that do not
discriminate on the basis
of race, color, ethnic origin,
sex, national origin, marital
status, sexual orientation,
disability, or age.*

Within the Episcopal church, parishes are governed by the vestry. In the absence of a rector this body is responsible for day-to-day parish operations and alone has the power to elect a rector and issue a call. This call must be approved by the bishop. The search process is guided by diocesan and national church policies and procedures. In general, a parish is guided through the process by a diocesan search consultant who provides input from the bishop's office and offers search expertise to the parish. The vestry usually establishes a search committee to review and assess the potential candidates and to make recommendations to the vestry about the qualities of the candidates. While the search committee may do a substantial amount of the work in the search process it is ultimately the vestry who has the authority and responsibility to call the rector.

Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls provides technical resources and strategies to accomplish the entire search. While specific examples of assessment procedures are provided, this manual does not contain a generic selection process. Rather, it provides the tools by which a parish can develop a specific selection process which meets their needs. This has been done deliberately. Parishes do not need generic clergy, they need clergy who can help them meet their unique needs. Consequently, parishes must assess clergy with respect to their parish needs and not a generic standard. The search process is not simply a time to find a new rector, it is a time to reflect on what purpose the parish serves in the Kingdom of God, the nature of its ministry, and the congregation's goals as they seek to serve Christ in the world. Only when a congregation can answer these questions will they know what to look for in their next rector.

The procedures in ***Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls*** are presented in the order in which they generally occur in the search process. This manual serves as a workbook for the entire transition process. It provides background information and an overall structure for the process while at the same time allowing considerable flexibility so that a parish may incorporate specific procedures to meet their needs. Not all of the material will be helpful or required by every parish or by every group within a congregation. Congregations can purchase a license to use and copy the resources and worksheets for use solely within their congregations.

We are committed to equal opportunity employment and support employment practices that do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, sex, national origin, marital status, sexual

orientation, disability, or age. Many of the objective procedures in ***Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls*** are designed to reduce the potential for bias and prejudice. We strongly recommend that the initial screening of candidates - such as reviewing computer profiles or evaluating supplemental written responses - be done “blind” so that personal, demographic information does not bias the decision making process.

While many of the procedures in ***Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls*** are technical in nature, the search process should be viewed as a venture in faith. A realization that God has a purpose for your congregation and will provide the staff needed to achieve that purpose is a necessary prerequisite of a healthy search process. As a venture in faith, the search process, including the technical parts, needs to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is best achieved by a continuous, prayerful offering of the parish and the search process to God, trusting that by diligently and faithfully engaging in the work of calling a new rector, the Holy Spirit will lead all involved into a deeper understanding of God’s love and faithfulness.

What’s New in This Edition?

This edition of ***Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls*** is based on our understanding and application of ***Appreciative Inquiry*** which we discovered after we wrote the first and second editions of this search manual. Because the appreciative approach is relatively new and represents a fundamental shift in philosophy and approach, we have provided a substantial introduction to the use of appreciative thinking in all aspects of the search process.

Because the search process takes place during the transitional time between rectors it is impossible to separate the search from the tasks of ministry during this time. We have provided resources for designing an appreciative transitional ministry that will provide a solid foundation for a successful search. We have also provided resources for transitional tasks, such as developing the congregation’s vision for the future, that are fundamental to the search process.

One omission from the earlier versions is the parish survey. We no longer use or recommend congregational surveys as a primary part of our search process. Instead, we rely on Appreciative Inquiry processes such as an “appreciative inquiry summit” to engage all parishioners in a conversation about their hopes and expectations for the congregation and its new clergy. We have found this approach

*We are here on earth
to do good for others.*

*What the others
are here for,
I don’t know.*

— W. H. Auden

*When our first parents were
driven out of Paradise,
Adam is believed to have
remarked to Eve:*

*“My dear, we live in an age
of transition.”*

— Dean Inge

*There is nothing
so useless
as doing efficiently
that which should not
be done at all.*
— Peter Drucker

*Sometimes
the road less traveled
is less traveled
for a reason.*
— Jerry Seinfeld

to provide rich and relevant information for the search process. This appreciative approach also energizes and mobilizes people in the direction of their preferred future, something a survey never could accomplish.

Another significant change is that we no longer recommend congregations spend time and resources on creating large written parish profiles. Rather we encourage them to spend their resources on creating or upgrading their web site, which can be used for the search process and, more importantly, can become a valuable resource for the congregation in an ongoing way, something static profiles stored in a box in a closet never could. While not encouraging the production of large written profiles we do encourage congregations to create concise executive summaries that can be used during the search process. Basic information about web sites and creating executive profile summaries are provided.

All of the material in the previous edition of ***Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls*** has been revised to reflect both the appreciative inquiry approach and also our ongoing experience and learning in working with congregations and dioceses through their search processes.

Online Resources and Copyrights

One new feature of ***Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls*** is the online resource library at the Appreciative Way web site:

www.appreciativeway.com/search/assessing-discerning.cfm

All the sections, exercises, templates, and samples, plus additional worksheets, are available online in ".pdf" and ".doc" formats. Additional resources will be developed and made available in response to congregations' needs.

Congregations can purchase a non-transferable library subscription that provides access to the online resources and a limited copyright licence that allows them to copy sections of the manual for their exclusive use within their congregation as they engage in their search.

Summary of the Sections

I. An Overview of the Search Process

We use the call of Mathias as described in the Acts of the Apostles as a template for structuring the search process.

II. An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry

We have included a substantial introduction to Appreciative Inquiry because this is a relatively new approach that has a subtle but profound impact on the entire search process. We recommend that all people engaged in the search be familiar with this approach as it forms the fundamental rationale for the strategies that we recommend.

III. Designing a Transitional Ministry

Primary Question: *What kind of ministry does the congregation need during the transitional period to ensure a successful search?*

It is impossible to separate the search process from the transitional ministry that occurs in the congregation during the search. Using appreciative strategies we offer a way for diocesan and congregational representatives to design a transitional ministry that will respond to the congregation's unique needs and provide a foundation for a successful search. Of particular focus is the length of the transitional period and when to engage in the specific steps of the search process.

IV. Conducting the Congregation's Self-Study

Primary Question: *Who are we and what is our purpose?*

In this section the congregation is invited into a process of self-study to develop their understanding of their purpose, identity, values, ministries, and environment. We provide several strategies such as an appreciative inquiry summit to help congregations discover or affirm their purpose and to create a vision for their future.

V. Establishing a Vision for the Future

Primary Question: *What would a successful ministry look like in our parish?*

The self study leads to the congregation deciding what its preferred future would look like. We like to explore and establish this vision by asking the question: "Imagine your new rector has been with you for five years, and together you have been incredibly successful. What

The search and the transition are intertwined. Separating them from each other into discrete activities will steal life-giving synergy from both tasks and the congregation.

Whatever is at the center of our life will be the source of our security, guidance, wisdom, and power.
— Stephen Covey

Imagine your new rector has been with you for five years and together you have been incredibly successful. What would you have accomplished and what would you be doing?

Cheshire Puss, asked Alice.
 Would you tell me, please,
 which way I ought
 to go from here?
 That depends a good deal
 on where you want to go,
 said the Cat.
 I don't much care where,
 said Alice.
 Then it doesn't matter
 which way you go,
 said the Cat.
 — From "Alice's Adventures in
 Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll

would you have accomplished, and what would you be doing?" Without a clear sense of the congregation's purpose and a vision of what a successful ministry would look like it is impossible for a congregation to determine what they need in their next rector.

VI. Establishing the Search Criteria

Primary Question: *What skills and abilities do we need in our next rector to help us be successful in manifesting our purpose?*

In this section we use the congregation's vision, purpose and values to create a specific list of skills and abilities that the next rector will need to help the congregation be successful.

VII. Assessing Candidate Skills

Primary Question: *Does this candidate have the necessary skills and abilities to help us be successful?*

In this section we describe the difference between assessment and discernment. Extensive strategies are provided to turn the search criteria into a graduated set of assessment strategies, such as written questionnaires, interviews, and sermon reviews.

VIII. Discerning a Call

Primary Question: *Is God calling this candidate to be our rector?*

We provide strategies that the vestry and candidates can use to prayerfully discern who God is calling to be the next rector.

Timeline for the Search Process

The following timeline shows the major steps, in sequence, for the search process. The timeline is very variable. A typical search takes 12-18 months, but the transition period may be anything from a very brief period of 3 months to an extended period of 3 years. Seasonal celebrations such as Christmas and Easter can significantly disrupt any timeline.

| Activity | Tasks to be Completed | Manual Resource Page |
|-----------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Rector Announces Departure | | |
| | Parish Leadership Meets With Bishop/Diocesan Staff | 129 |
| | Transitional Ministry Determined | 143 |
| | Self-Study and Profile May Be Initiated | 187 |
| | Exit Interview With Rector | 109 |
| Rector Leaves | | |
| | Transitional Ministry Begins | 129 |
| | Foundation for the Search is Established | 130 |
| | Self Study and Profile Begins | 187 |
| | Appreciative Inquiry Summit | 192 |
| | Search Criteria Determined | 249 |
| | Clergy Compensation is Determined | 245 |
| | Rector Contract Prepared | 250 |
| Search Begins | | |
| | Position Advertised | 271 |
| | Candidate Names Gathered | 285 |
| | Search Committee Prepares Search Process | 294 |
| | Written Questions Evaluated | 300 |
| | Telephone Interviews Conducted | 315 |
| | Candidate Visitation | 316 |
| | Reference Checks | 349 |
| | Finalist/s Selected | 360 |
| Discernment | | |
| | Discernment Activities | 363 |
| | Finalist/s Meet with Vestry | 367 |
| | Call is Issued | 374 |
| | New Rector is Welcomed | 378 |

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SEARCH PROCESS

Theological Perspective of the Search Process

A model for the search process is provided by the Disciples in the book of Acts. One of the first tasks the disciples faced following Jesus' ascension was to name a replacement for Judas. The selection of Matthias is described in this manner:

"So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us— one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection." So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.' And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles. Acts 1:21-26

A cursory glance at the passage suggests that all a congregation needs to do is to cast lots for a replacement leader. However, a more detailed examination of the text reveals three distinct steps taken by the disciples in their discernment process. These three steps are also set within the context of a specific purpose that structures and energizes their decision-making process.

Purpose

The disciples have a mission: to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus. The reason for engaging in the search for a new apostle is to fulfill this mission. As consultants we have found that it is very rare for parishioners to know and be able to clearly state their congregation's purpose or mission. When parishioners are able to readily articulate their purpose, their congregations are likely to be dynamic and growing. Conversely, when parishioners have little sense of their congregation's purpose, they are easily demotivated and distracted into conflicts and personality clashes that have little to do with proclaiming the Gospel. A strong sense of purpose is also needed to guide the search process. It provides the basis for determining the skills and abilities that the rector will need in order to assist the congregation to successfully fulfill their mission.

From their sense of purpose the disciples derived three steps in their search process:

*You have to be
very careful
if you don't know
what you are looking for
because you may not
find it.*
— Adapted from Yogi Berra

*Without a vision
the people perish.*
— Proverbs 29:18

1. Setting the Search Criteria

The disciples begin their search process by establishing a set of criteria that would determine who is qualified for the position. The primary criteria was that the person had accompanied them throughout Jesus' ministry and witnessed Christ's resurrection. This criteria is essential to help them achieve their purpose of proclaiming the resurrection.

2. Assessing Potential Candidates

The disciples use the criteria to assess potential candidates. From their criteria-based search two persons are brought forward.

3. Discerning Who is Called

The disciples discern God's will through prayer and casting lots.

Creating the Search Process

We use this same purpose-centered three-step process to create our search process. Appreciative Inquiry-based strategies are used to clarify the congregation's purpose. Criteria setting and assessment are essentially objective and current personnel selection procedures can be adapted to set the criteria and assess skills and abilities. However, the third step of discernment is considerably more subjective and requires the use of intuitive processes rather than objective or analytic ones. It is important that these processes be done separately with the assessment being completed before the discernment. Trying to discern God's call from a list of candidates who do not have the necessary skills and abilities will result in turmoil and increases the risk of an inappropriate selection. The discernment process can only be entered into confidently when the committee knows that any one of the candidates could perform the rector's job if they are chosen.

To ensure that both the assessment and discernment tasks are accomplished appropriately we recommend that they be divided between the search committee and the vestry. The prime assignment of the search committee is the objective task of establishing a list of qualified candidates from which the vestry can discern who is called as the new rector. With regard to the discernment process, we propose using a covenant-relationship model rather than drawing lots. In this process the vestry prayerfully seeks to answer the question: "Can we as a parish enter into a relationship with this person as our rector? Can we together, under this person's leadership, behold the Goodness of God and seek to establish His kingdom?" Specific ways to assist in answering these relational questions are provided in this manual.

Clarifying purpose and the three steps of criteria setting, assessment, and discernment form the basis of the selection process in Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls.

*Assess skills before discerning a call.
A prayed-over turkey is still a turkey and is only good for Thanksgiving and not for preaching.*

*Hire for attitude,
train for skill.*

— Unknown

*In looking for
people to hire,
you look for three
qualities: integrity,
intelligence, and energy.
And if they don't have
the first, the other
two will kill you.*

— Warren Buffet

Deciding Who Does What

As you can see from the list of search tasks there are many steps to be accomplished in the search process. Some tasks will be very time-consuming. It is important to delegate these tasks to as many people as possible to make full use of the parishioners' talents and to prevent overburdening a few people. Until the discernment phase of the process, the vestry is primarily responsible for the day-to-day running of the parish and ensuring that the search tasks are accomplished. It is not specifically their job to do the above tasks but to ensure that they are accomplished in a timely manner.

One responsibility that the vestry will have is appointing people to various committees to accomplish the tasks. As with finding a new rector, this is an issue of appointing people with the necessary skills, commitment, and time to fulfill the assigned task. The vestry needs to appoint people who have demonstrated the necessary abilities and commitment to get specific tasks done. It is also a time to resist those who seek involvement because they have a need to be in power or those who have a limited personal agenda. It is also important to ascertain whether people have the time to fulfill their responsibilities. Members of the search committee may be required to have weekly evening meetings and some all-day Saturday meetings for several months.

In smaller congregations with limited numbers of people some of the tasks may be combined and done by sub-committees of the vestry or search committee. The actual practice across the country also varies from one diocese to another. In most congregations the committees that will be needed are:

- **The Vestry**

While it may delegate many tasks to other committees, the vestry is ultimately responsible for all aspects of the search such as:

- appointing people to the committees,
- accepting the findings of the various committees,
- clarifying the congregation's mission and goals,
- issuing a call.

In addition to overseeing the search process, the vestry is also responsible, in conjunction with the transitional minister, for the day-to-day administration and the pastoral care of the congregation during the transition.

- **The Self-Study and Visioning Committee**

Often called the “Profile Committee,” this committee is responsible for overseeing the self-study and visioning process, and preparing the documentation that will be sent to candidates and used by the search committee. We recommend congregations spend their resources on developing internet accessible parish profiles rather than extensive printed parish profiles. In some dioceses the custom is for the profile work to be done by the search committee. This has both advantages and disadvantages. It ensures that the search committee has a clear understanding of the congregation’s life, what they are seeking to become, and what they are looking for in a rector to help them achieve their future. On the other hand, it adds significantly to the workload of the search committee. There is also the danger that the profile and search criteria may become too localized within one committee of the congregation and will not be representative of the congregation as a whole. Cross-congregational conversation is essential in the development of the profile regardless of whether it is done by the profile committee or the search committee.

- **Clergy Compensation and Housing Committee**

Often overlooked until after the process is completed, this committee is responsible for providing recommendations to the vestry on stipend ranges and compensation plans for the new rector. Typically this committee is small with a very specific task to accomplish. The compensation plan needs to be provided to all prospective candidates at the beginning of the search process.

- **The Search Committee**

The primary responsibilities of the search committee are screening the potential candidates, assessing their skills, and providing the vestry with qualified candidates from which the vestry can discern a specific call. In some dioceses the search committee also does the bulk of the discernment and only sends one candidate to the vestry to be confirmed. In these situations it is imperative that the discernment be done after the objective assessment of skills and abilities.

It is appropriate for the vestry to have a liaison on each of the committees to ensure accurate communication from the committees to the vestry. The required skills to function on these committees will be addressed in further detail in the following sections. Resources for each committee to achieve their objectives will also be provided.

Waiting until the end of the search to decide what you can pay your new rector is a great recipe for future misery.

The Law of Triviality... briefly stated, it means that the time spent on any item of the agenda will be in inverse proportion to its importance.
— Adapted from
C. Northcote Parkinson

*If you don't know where
you are going you won't
know who to ask to
help you get there.*

*In the absence of data
people assume their
feelings are facts.*
— Unknown

Using a Search Consultant

The use of search consultants varies across the country. Some dioceses provide minimal search consultation support while others have well-trained search consultants available to assist the congregation. In some situations artificial barriers have been created between the transitional ministry tasks and the search consulting process. It is our belief and experience that many of the preparatory self-study processes, and even some of the interview and assessment training, can be done by the transitional minister, provided they have received search consulting training.

We have found the following approach works well: the transitional minister facilitates the self-study process, and the search consultant facilitates the search process once the congregation has begun contacting candidates. In many cases, the self-study process overlaps many of the transitional ministry tasks, and having the transitional minister facilitate these processes makes good use of their time and talents. Even if these processes are facilitated by a separate search consultant it is important that the search consultant and the transitional minister are in regular contact to resolve pastoral issues and conflicts that may interfere with the search process. The transitional minister also needs to be fully acquainted with the outcome of the self-study process, as the congregation's purpose and mission will need to be a frequent subject of the preaching during the transitional time.

When using a search consultant, spend some time clarifying what the consultant will do and creating shared expectations. Some things to consider when choosing and contracting with a consultant:

- The consultant's experience working with churches and the clergy search processes.
- What will the consultant actually do? What will the process look like? How many times will the consultant visit or be with the congregation, search committee, and vestry?
- What will the consultant's availability be between visits, by telephone or e-mail?
- What does the consultant expect of the congregation?
- What will the relationship be between the transitional minister be? Who will be responsible for what?
- What will the consultant cost?

Keeping the Parish Informed

Throughout the search process open communication needs to exist between the various committees, the vestry, and the parishioners. While the names of the candidates are confidential, the actual process needs to be transparent and accessible to the parishioners. Open communication with regular updates on the status of the search reduces gossip and rumors which fuel the anxieties that can arise during times of transition. This is especially true during those natural times of delay that occurs while congregations wait for people to respond to invitations to engage in the search process, or when little progress seems to be occurring, such as during a holiday season.

At the beginning of the transitional time, create an anticipated timeline to give the congregation an overview of the search process and what to expect during the self-study and subsequent steps in the search processes. If it has been decided to delay the search so that the congregation can resolve grief or conflict, this needs to be clearly communicated to the congregation with anticipated timeframes for the actual search. Parishioners and committee members also need adequate time to respond to requests for information and for their participation in self-study exercises.

Multiple forms of communication also ensure that parishioners are kept up to date with the process. Regular search updates can be included in Sunday service bulletins, or monthly newsletters, web sites, and e-mail. More indirect methods of communication include using prayers in the worship that relate to the specific stage of the search process and preaching on the spiritual issues related to the search process. Once the congregation's purpose has been developed, it is important that the purpose be included in the preaching and the prayers on a regular basis, and that it is also used at other church gatherings.

The colossal misunderstanding of our time is the assumption that insight will work with people who are unmotivated to change. Communication does not depend on syntax, or eloquence, or rhetoric, or articulation, but on the emotional context in which the message is being heard. People can only hear you when they are moving toward you, and they are not likely to hear you when your words are pursuing them. Even the choicest words lose their power when they are used to overpower.

— Edwin Freidman

It's impossible to discern the will of the God of Love when we are living in fear.

Trying to reduce the presence of fear is likely to be counterproductive. Telling yourself not to be afraid, when you are afraid, is telling yourself to be a phoney. A much better strategy is to find what you need to restore yourself to a state of hope and love.

Hope is the ability to look into the future and imagine a world we want to live in and to confidently know we have the resources to achieve it.

Creating a Culture of Love and Hope

As Christians we are privileged to live in the reality of the love of God. As we live in that love we are called to allow it to be our motivation and source of inspiration. Unfortunately there are many distractions from that love, and many of our decisions are made out of fear rather than love. We may be afraid that a painful past will come back to haunt us or that our present happiness will be destroyed in the future. When we are afraid, our intuition will be constricted and often unreliable. Fear-motivated decisions will consequently be short-sighted, ensnaring, counterproductive, and ultimately continue to inflict pain rather than protect from pain. If a congregation or one of its committees is afraid, then the decision-making process is not likely to result in creative outcomes for the congregation's well-being.

Fear is what we experience when we perceive that we do not have the resources we require to meet our needs. The opposite of fear is love. It is in the presence and assurance of God's love that we know that we will have everything we need to fulfill our destiny. It is this love that allows us to live in hope rather than to be frightened and to live in despair. Many fears are reasonable, and not all need to be resolved immediately. Trying to reduce the presence of a fear or trying to be non-anxious will actually make the fear grow. Spending time trying to understand the cause of the fear is likely to be counterproductive, for we will still be afraid. When we are anxious it is helpful to explore what we need to return to a place of love and confidence, rather than focusing on the fear and trying to reduce its presence.

Many of the procedures in ***Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls*** have been designed to grow a realistic hope to counter the anxiety that often arises during the search process. Moving from fear to love will create the greatest likelihood that the congregation and its committees will make wise, loving decisions that will be a blessing for all concerned.

At the beginning of the search process, and during the process itself, it is helpful to name any fears that may arise. While you are acknowledging the fears, we do not encourage you to explore them, but rather to focus your attention on what you will need to regain or maintain your confidence. The following exercise is designed to discover the resources that people need to resolve their anxiety and return to a place of love and confidence.

The challenge of this life is not to stay alive. The challenge of this life is to stay in love. — Chris Rankin-Williams

Instructions: Invite each member of the group to name their biggest fear as they engage in the search process. They do not need to explain or understand the cause of the fear. This process can be done at any time when a committee is aware that they are working from a place of fear and need to return to a place of love.

Some of the fears that are likely to surface:

- I'm afraid that we will make a mistake and choose the wrong person.
- I'm afraid that we will never find anyone as good as the former rector.
- I'm afraid that we will be deceived and end up with someone like the former rector.
- I'm afraid that we will get into a major argument between members of this committee.
- I'm afraid that there won't be any good candidates.
- I'm afraid no one would want to come here.
- I'm afraid that the parishioners won't accept our decision.
- I'm afraid that the diocese will interfere and not allow us to call who we want.
- I'm afraid that we will have to acquiesce to one small group in the parish.

And perhaps later in the process:

- I'm afraid to tell the parish that we need to take more time and start the search again as the first search did not yield a suitable candidate.
- I'm afraid that if we take any longer with more candidates we might lose a good candidate that we already have interviewed.

What is your fear?

What do you need to return to love? What is your way back to love?

After you have listed your fear take a moment and determine what you need to be able to move from the place of fear to a place of love and confidence. Share with the group what you need to return to a place of confidence.

Remember the resource.

Remember a time when you have experienced the resource that restored you to a place of love. Take some time to relive the memory and allow yourself to return to the place of love.

*Love empowers action.
Love is never one thing.
On the path of life,
love is the beginning
and the end,
and the light
along the way.*

*Frightened people do
scary things that end up
causing more things
to be frightened of.*

*If we want an end
to terrorism,
then you and I
must renounce
using fear
as a means to
motivate anyone.
When we use fear
to motivate others
or even ourselves
we have become
a terrorist in their lives
and in our own.*

Stay Loving and Wise While Resisting the Pressures!

In addition to our own fears, others can evoke fear in us by pressuring us to behave in ways we may not personally choose. When decisions are to be made, vestries and committees need to be aware of the possible pressures and fears that may motivate a particular decision. Some of these pressures may be exerted by members within a committee. Other pressures may be exerted by parishioners who want to influence a committee in some way. Some of the pressures that need to be resisted:

- To go too fast, making hasty decisions. Or to go too slow — there is always one more clergyperson that may be better than what we've seen!
- "If I'm not on the search committee I will withdraw my pledge." Parishioners who make such threats have clearly indicated that they are not qualified to serve on a search committee. "If you call (or don't call) him or her I will leave." People who voice such statements are unqualified to serve on the search committee, and committee members need to resist such manipulation from parishioners voicing these threats.
- To allow one member on a committee to do all the work, or to allow one member to exert undue influence.
- To zealously uncover every stone on every candidate and turn the search process into an inquisition.
- To allow circumstances to dictate the process. For example, towards the end of the search, several candidates may withdraw leaving the vestry with one marginal candidate. The vestry then may feel pressured into accepting this remaining candidate.
- To circumvent the search process by calling the current associate minister or the transitional minister! When parishes are in transition the greatest temptation is to seek immediate stabilization by calling an associate or transitional minister as the new rector. We will explore the wisdom of calling an associate or transitional minister in the section on developing an initial list of candidates.

When responding to pressures it is important to refocus on the specific task at hand and to make decisions based on loving wisdom rather than threat and coercion. Having open conversations with members of a committee and coming to a common mind on how to respond to the pressure is essential to growing a loving community that is capable of discerning God's call.

Prayers and Blessings for the Search Process

The following are some prayers and blessings that we have found helpful during times of transition:

*Almighty God, shine upon us the wisdom of your Incarnate Word as we embark on this journey of discovery. Enkindle in our hearts the fire of your love, that warmed by your presence and inspired by your Spirit we would find your purpose and glorify you in the way we live our lives through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.***

Almighty God, you have made us your chosen people, not your protected people. Help us be courageous because you are courageous. You have given us a lodging in this world but not an abiding city. Help us in this present moment, as a pilgrim people, to endure hardship and delight in goodness, knowing that at the end of our journey your Christ has prepared a place for us. **Amen.**

*God of peace, keep us from a mindless acceptance of things as they are. Let us all know that at the heart of change and turbulence there is an inner calm that comes from faith in you, and that from this central heart of peace, there may flow a creative compassion, a thirst for justice, a relentless proclamation of your love, and a willingness to give of ourselves in the Spirit of Christ. **Amen.***

God of grace, you have endowed us with talents and capabilities beyond the imagination of our finite minds. Shed upon us the light of your infinite understanding that we can behold ourselves as you see us, so that we would manifest in the world your hopes and promises and liberally share your love with those we encounter, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*Praise to you, Almighty God, for all your work among us. Yours is the vigor of new creation, yours is the impulse in our new discoveries. Give us eyes to see, ears to hear, minds to understand and hearts to hold your love as we seek a new leader, that together with them and You our lives will shine forth with your love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***

Eternal God, you have always taken men and women of every nation, age, and color, and made them saints by transforming them in your love. Grant us grace to humbly walk with Jesus, that as we search for the "right" leader we would remember your call to us to be your "right" people, transformed in your grace to love and serve our neighbors as ourselves. **Amen.**

*While it is common to ask
"What would Jesus do?"*

*It is actually more
helpful to ask*

"What is Jesus doing?"

— John Wilkerson

*We need to stop trying to
earn God's love and just
start spending it.*

— Steve Bhaerman

*Every evening I turn my
worries over to God.
He's going to be
up all night anyway.*

— Mary C. Crowley

When you come to the end of all the light you know, and it's time to step into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things shall happen: Either you will be given something solid to stand on or you will be taught to fly.
— Edward Teller

I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.
— Nelson Mandela

A Blessing for the Journey of Self Discovery:

The God of Abraham and Sarah call you to your purpose.

The Light of Christ shine upon you and scatter the darkness from before your path.

The Spirit of Love grant you courage to journey and fulfill your destiny with integrity.

And the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer and Life-Giving Spirit, be among you, and remain with you now and for ever. **Amen.**

A Blessing as You Seek God's Vision:

God the Creator bless you with a vision so that you can look forward to the day when you can look back and behold with wonder the great things you and God have done together. **Amen.**

God the Lover bless you with love to fan the fire of your compassion so that your neighbors will be glad of your presence. **Amen.**

God the Giver of Life bless you with the living waters of companionship, authenticity, competence, and courage to fulfill your purpose so that following your days on earth you will hear the heavens proclaim: "Well Done!" **Amen.**

And the Eternal God, whose love echoes through the universe, bless you, and all those you love, now and forever. **Amen.**

A Blessing for the Search:

The God of Truth bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficiality so that you live and make decisions from deep within your heart. **Amen.**

The God of Understanding make you tender in the face of pain and rejection so that others can know the comfort of your acceptance. **Amen.**

The God of Justice make you fierce in the face of oppression and exploitation so that others can live with dignity in the midst of your respect. **Amen.**

The God of all Wisdom bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can lead others to do what many claim cannot be done. **Amen.**

And the Blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer, and Life Giving Spirit keep you as Jesus' friends, in your search for a new leader, and forever. **Amen.**

An Appreciative Inquiry-Based Understanding of the Search Process

In addition to creating parish search processes, we have coached many clergy to find congregational positions. In our coaching we have two fundamental questions we get the candidates to ask of the congregation:

What do you value about your church?

What would a successful ministry look like in this church?

After the candidate has discovered that information they then have two questions to prayerfully consider:

Can I value what they value?

Can I help them be successful?

If the answer to either of these two questions is “no,” we strongly advise the clergyperson to keep looking for other positions. To accept a position when you don’t value what the congregation values or when you can’t help them be successful is to violate their integrity. Far too often we have seen clergy identify things in a congregation that they do not value and believe they have the right to preemptively change them upon their arrival. Such an understanding is a violation of an incarnational ministry and it is not surprising that parishioners take offense and resist such actions. Jesus did not come and violate our integrity by inflicting salvation upon us, rather he came and lived among us and as one of us helped us to discover the Kingdom of God that already is. For Jesus to come and live among us shows a profound respect and valuing of what it means to be human. From that deep valuing of what it means to be human he offered us new life. We want your search processes and your congregation’s subsequent ministry to result in that same incarnational style of ministry.

This search manual represents the flip side of these two search questions. Using a variety of appreciative strategies we will describe how congregations can discover and affirm what they value about their congregation, and also describe a future that they would like to achieve. Once having defined their values, identity, and purpose, the search process is structured around developing strategies to find candidates who share these values and can help the congregation create its preferred future. Just as we don’t want clergy to violate the integrity of a congregation, we don’t want congregations to violate the integrity of the clergy they interview and subsequently call.

To accept a position as rector when you don’t value what the congregation values or when you can’t help them be successful is to violate their integrity.

Jesus did not come and inflict salvation upon us. He came and lived as one of us.

Just as we don’t want clergy to violate the integrity of a congregation, we don’t want congregations to violate the integrity of the clergy they interview and subsequently call.

*Knowing what you
don't want
will not ensure
that you get
what you do want.*

*When we are at our
best we most closely
approximate the
image of God that
God created us to be.*

*To create a better world we
don't need
better people;
we just need to help
the people we have
discover and be
their best.*

Knowing What You Want

We once worked with a congregation that had called four actively drinking alcoholic rectors in a row. The good news is that they gained insight and became aware of the pattern and became determined that they would not repeat the pattern of calling an alcoholic. The bad news was that, because of their pain associated with their previous alcoholic rectors, they made this their sole search criteria. They were very successful in ensuring that their next rector was not an alcoholic. Unfortunately what they ended up doing was calling a highly incompetent person who many thought was not even smart enough to pull the cork from a bottle let alone drink its contents. This person's ministry was just as much a failure as the four previous rectors.

While this is an extreme example it is typical of many searches, especially following disappointing ministries. Parishioners and clergy can become so hyper-attentive to what they don't want that they miss getting what they do want. From an appreciative perspective we need to engage the search process around the issues of who we are when we are at our best, what we want to become, and what we need to achieve that desired outcome.

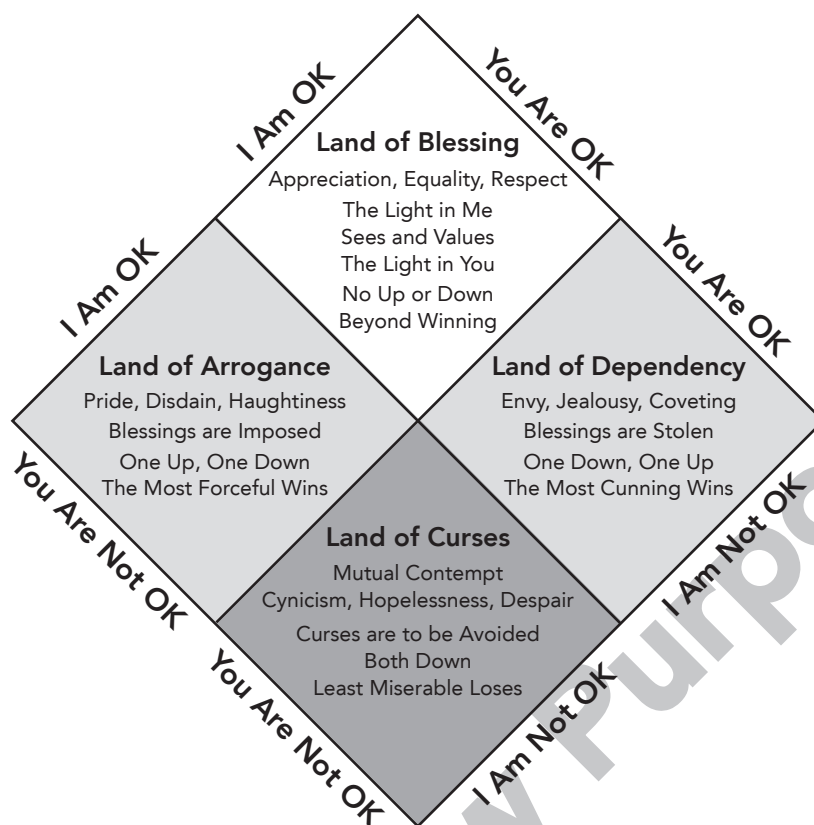
Discovering the Best

The appreciative approach places great emphasis on helping people and congregations discover their best. From our perspective there is a profound theological reason for exploring people at their best. When we are at our best, we most closely approximate the image of God that God created us to be. Within the stories we tell of being at our best, we can discern our God-given purpose. This is true for individuals as well as the congregation as a whole. Throughout this manual we provide strategies for the congregation and its leadership to discover their best, and how to discover the best in their candidates.

Transactional Analysis Model of Our Best

The Transactional Analysis model of "I'm OK — You're OK" made popular by Eric Berne and Thomas Harris¹ provides a way of understanding ministry from the perspective of our best and worst. When we are at our best we are OK. When we are at our worst we are not OK. Harris's model provides four different ways we can engage in ministry.

The "I'm OK — You're OK" Model of Ministry



Namaste:
*I recognize that
 within each of us is a place
 where Divinity dwells,
 and when we are
 in that place,
 we are One.*

— Hindu Expression

I'm OK, You're Not OK

Unfortunately, a lot of well-intentioned ministry is offered from this perspective. A large portion of church outreach has been piously offered from this perspective, often with disastrous results. On a local level we may see people less fortunate than ourselves and offer them a handout — which is really a “hand down” — that may feed them for a day, but ultimately keeps them down and dependent.

At a global level, cultures and peoples have been destroyed in the blind assumption that “our way is better than your way.” When “we have God on our side” and the other person or group is perceived as not having God on their side, people feel justified in imposing their so-called blessing on them. Sometimes this is done in very violent and, at a minimum, disrespectful ways.

Many people who enjoy problem solving operate from this perspective of “I’m OK” while the person who has the problem is seen as “not OK.” When ministry is done from this perspective, regardless of the intention, it will be perceived as arrogant and resisted.

*Blessings that are imposed
 on others will be resisted
 and the person offering the
 assistance will be
 perceived as arrogant.*

*Empathy is not asking
"what would I feel
in that situation?"
Genuine empathy comes
from asking:
"If I was that person,
in that situation,
what would I feel?"*

*Darkness cannot
drive out darkness;
only light can do that.
Hate cannot drive out hate;
only love can do that.
— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

I'm Not OK, You're OK

This is the story of the women with the hemorrhage who reached out and touched the hem of Jesus' coat. (Matthew 9:20-22) She had been taught that the hemorrhage made her unclean and unacceptable. Because she did not feel worthy of a blessing, she could not stand and look Jesus in the eye and ask to be healed. So she had to wait until he was not looking and steal the blessing from him. Jesus' interaction with her not only deals with her physical complaint, but also heals her internal sense of shame and unworthiness.

Many churches who operate food pantries have experienced this same phenomenon when people break into the pantry and steal the food, rather than coming during the open hours and asking for the food. But stolen blessings will not be life-giving, as they create dependency and reinforce the shame.

When people engage in ministry from a perspective of guilt, or as a way to find personal worth, they will be operating out of this "not OK" perspective. Unfortunately, this motivation does not provide worth, but increases the pressure to do more in the hope that eventually — if they could do just a little more! — they will finally gain acceptance and worth. At the same time, people who are ministered to from this negative space will feel trapped by the unspoken demands for approval or gratitude. The "not OK" caregiver will also be afraid that the recipient would actually get better and move on, and so the caregiving will be provided in ways that create dependency rather than healing and transformation.

I'm Not OK, You're Not OK

In the domain of mutual "not OK," people will have an experience of equality and genuine empathy. This is a common place for people to join with others. Everyone knows they have places in their lives where they are "not OK." These places are very alienating and people feel a great sense of relief and acceptance when they find that they are not alone because others share these "not OK" feelings or experiences. But because the joining or connection is made at a place of weakness, the relationship will only reinforce that weakness. This place of shared weakness or false humility is not a foundation on which to build a sustainable relationship.

The church that over-emphasizes the sinful nature of humanity often casts people into these kinds of negative relationships with miserable consequences. Likewise, psychotherapies that are preoccupied with

pathology and brokenness keep people mired in broken relationships. Theologies that are based in the utter depravity of humanity may glory in the salvation offered by Jesus but not allow people to access that power in their current life. This negative way fundamentally denigrates humanity and its Creator and is unable to create an environment that calls forth and empowers the image of God that people were created to be.

Ministry that occurs from the mutual “not OK” perspective will focus on preventing bad things from happening. Unfortunately, ensuring that bad things won’t happen does not ensure that good things will happen. Jesus did not come that we might have less death, he came that we might have life, and share that life abundantly with others.

I’m OK, You’re OK

This is the only domain for genuine incarnational ministry. This is the ministry that Jesus offers and invites us to share in. We care for one another, not because some are needy, or we are needy, or we are both needy; we care because we recognize the unique worth and dignity of the other. In Quaker terminology “the light in me sees and values the light in you.” It is in the glow of that shared light that people feel blessed and affirmed.

It is in this place of mutual respect and worth that people are transformed and empowered to be their best. It is the place where people are able to come alive and manifest the glory of God that is within them.

Implications for the Search

Because genuine ministry occurs in the realm of “mutual OK” the search process needs to be a process of discovering how the congregation is “OK” and how the candidates are “OK.” The appreciative approach of inquiring into the best discovers how people and organizations are fundamentally “OK.”

The first task of the search process is to discover what the congregation’s best is, and what that best realistically could become. The next question that needs to be asked is what the congregation needs from a rector to manifest this vision. It is only after these qualifications have been determined that the congregation can engage in the assessment and interviewing of candidates. In this phase of the process, the task is to discover what each candidate’s best is. The discernment phase relates to discovering whether the

The glory of God is the fully alive person.

— St. Irenaus

Instead of making others right or wrong, or bottling up right and wrong in ourselves, there’s a middle way, a very powerful middle way...

Could we have no agenda when we walk into a room with another person, not know what to say, not make that person wrong or right?

Could we see, hear, feel other people as they really are? It is powerful to practice this way... true communication can happen only in that open space.

— Pema Chodron

Discovering whether the congregation and candidate can enter into a mutual relationship of calling forth, empowering, and sustaining each other's best is the basis of an appreciative search

candidate and congregation can create a mutual relationship of calling forth and empowering the other to be their best in a sustainable way.

From an appreciative perspective we have a series of positive, affirming questions for the search process:

- What is the congregation's best?
What does the congregation need from a rector to be their best?
- What is the candidate's best?
What does the candidate need from the congregation to be his or her best?
- Can the congregation and candidate enter into a mutual relationship of calling forth, empowering, and sustaining each other's best?

This is often a very different way of thinking about the search process. Congregations and clergy who have been recently hurt in failed ministries can often get trapped into relying on negative questions instead, such as "What is the worst you could do to me?" or "Could I/we tolerate each other's problems?" In these situations the underlying emotion is fear, and the focus is on and trying to prevent a bad thing from happening. The appreciative process keeps the focus on mutual efforts towards making a good thing happen.

The appreciative approach also focuses on why the congregation should call someone, rather than focusing on why they shouldn't call someone. It is about "ruling someone in" rather than looking at the process from the perspective of "ruling someone out." These decisions need to be made from the foundational understanding of what the congregation values about itself, and what it needs to fulfill its purpose.

In the next section we will provide a deeper understanding of Appreciative Inquiry and how the theory and process of the Appreciative Way can be applied to every aspect of the search process.