INTRODUCTION TO APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Since writing **Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls** in 1996 we have become acquainted with the organizational development process known as Appreciative Inquiry, developed by David Cooperrider[2] at Case Western Reserve University in the mid-1980s. This approach has radically transformed our perspective on working with people — and consequently our understanding of the search process.

Cooperrider's Research

As part of his doctoral studies, Cooperrider was involved in doing a traditional organizational development consulting exercise at the Cleveland Clinic. His approach, based on the best wisdom of the day, was to conduct an assessment of the organization to determine a diagnosis or description of "what's wrong" with the organization. Once this diagnosis had been achieved then "treatment" could be applied to the causes of the problem. This approach was based on the assumption that development occurs through the continual solving of problems.

What is Life-Giving?

As Cooperrider gathered his data, he became amazed at the high level of cooperation, innovation and organizational effectiveness at the Clinic. His academic advisor, Suresh Srivastva, observed Cooperrider's excitement in these discoveries and encouraged further exploration of what was enabling such high levels of collaborative performance. The focus of the assessment was changed from "what's wrong" to "what's working." Cooperrider discovered that the more he asked questions and had people share stories about what was working and life-giving in the organization the more these life-giving realities grew. Understanding this phenomenon and ways of growing what works, rather than focusing on preventing what doesn't work, became the focus of his research. Cooperrider called this approach *Appreciative Inquiry*.

Appreciative Inquiry's Development

Since its initial development in the mid-1980s, Appreciative Inquiry has been used extensively in a variety of contexts such as business, churches[3], relief agencies, and wide-scale community development, and as a foundation of executive and personal coaching[4]. In many situations it has been used for organizational transformation rather than linear incremental change and development.

Appreciative Inquiry is based on a reverence for life... More than a method or technique, the appreciative mode of inquiry is a means of living with, being with and directly participating in the life of a human system in a way that compels one to inquire into the deeper life-generating essentials and potentials of organizational existence.
— David Cooperrider

Think of Appreciative Inquiry as a new conversation, as a search engine for the positive core of a system, as a convergence zone or "space" creating a multiplier effect in the area of human imagination and intellectual capital.
— David Cooperrider

Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry

Assumptions are a set of beliefs, or the mental model, shared by a group, that causes the group to think and act in certain ways. They are usually not visible to or verbalized by the participants, yet they exist and influence the group's choices and behavior.

In the *Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry,* author and appreciative inquiry practitioner Sue Hammond[5] lists eight assumptions that form the foundation of Appreciative Inquiry thought and practice.

1. In every society, organization, or group, something works.

2. What we focus on becomes our reality.

3. Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities.

4. The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.

5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past with them.

6. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.

7. It is important to value differences.

8. The language we use creates our reality.

In our work and the development of the ***Appreciative Way*** we also add two additional assumptions.

9. The deepest longing of the human heart is for acceptance. The only changes and outcomes that will be sustainable are those that result from greater self-acceptance and acceptance of others.

10. At any given moment, people are doing the best they know how to do, in that context, at that time.

On the following pages we will expand on these assumptions and how they inform congregational dynamics and the search process.

Assumptions
A set of beliefs, or the mental model, shared by a group, that causes the group to think and act in certain ways. They are usually not visible to or verbalized by the participants, yet they exist and influence the group's choices and behavior.

Flawed assumptions result in flawed actions.
— Unknown

Begin challenging your own assumptions. Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in awhile, or the light won't come in.
— Alan Alda

In Every Church, Something Works

Assumption 1. In every society, organization, or group, something works.

Sometimes, especially after a traumatic experience, it is difficult to imagine that anything is working. I (Rob) was once trying to explain this assumption to members of a small congregation that had experienced a considerable decline in membership and finances. They told me things were so bad that nothing worked, and as an example, said they couldn't get anyone to volunteer for altar guild duty. I asked them what they were inviting people to volunteer for, and they said "polishing the brass, pressing linens, and basically getting ready for Sunday." Since they said nothing was working, I became curious about the congregational life, and engaged them in the following conversation:

"You say nothing works here, so I am curious: did you have Eucharist on Sunday?" I asked them.

"Yes," they replied.

"Were there candles on the altar?" I continued to inquire.

"Yes," they replied.

"Were the candles lit?"

"Yes."

"Were there flowers on the altar?"

"Yes."

"Was there bread and wine on the altar?"

"Yes."

"Now I am really curious! You say nothing works, yet you had Eucharist, with bread and wine, and there were flowers on the altar and the candles were lit. If nothing is working, how did all that happen?"

"Oh, that's Helen," they chorused.

"So what you are telling me is that Helen works! We need to find Helen and discover what she knows that you really need to know."

We found Helen and I asked her what she did at the church, to which she replied:

"I have the best job. I get to come down to church on Saturday and prepare a place for God and people to sit down and have a meal together."

All the greatest and most important problems of life are fundamentally insoluble…

They can never be solved, but only outgrown. This "outgrowing" proves on further investigation to require a new level of consciousness.

Some higher or wider interest appeared on the horizon and through the broadening of outlook the insoluble problem lost its urgency.

It was not solved logically in its own terms but faded when confronted with a new and stronger life urge.
— Carl Jung

We need to discover the root causes of success rather than the root causes of failure.
— David Cooperrider

A pile of rocks ceases to be rocks when somebody contemplates it with the idea of a cathedral in mind.
— *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*

In the name of God, stop a moment, cease your work, look around you.
— *Leo Tolstoy*

And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.
— *2 Corinthians 9:8*

When we heard this, I suggested to the leaders, "Rather than asking people to come down and polish brass and press linens, why not invite people to come down to the church to prepare a place for people to sit down and have a meal with God?"

What happened in this congregation is that the members had become obsessed with what was not working, and in that frustrated obsession they were blind to the good that was happening. Granted, there may have been little besides Helen that was working! But if we are to build a future we need to build the future on what is working. It is impossible to build a future on having less of what is not working.

At some point some congregations, like Helen's, may need to prayerfully consider whether they are able to continue. Perhaps it is costing them more in time and energy to sustain the little remnant of life that is present. However, even in these cases, we would still want to discover what life-giving reality is present, because the remaining few members need to take that up in their hearts and minds and carry it with them when they close the doors and start attending another church.

What in God's Name is Going On Here?

In our work we often call this discovering "what in God's name is going on here?" This colloquial expression is usually answered with all the nonsense or things that aren't happening in God's name. Our task is to discover the Godly things or those things that give life to the congregation, and then having discovered them, to ask, "How can we join God in doing more of them, and what would our congregation become if we did do more of them?"

Jesus put this first assumption slightly differently when he said, "Whenever two or three people gather in my name I am with them" *(Matthew 18:20)*. Our first task is to affirm Jesus' presence and to begin discovering how his presence is manifested, and how that could be the foundation for the future.

Implications for the Search

We use appreciative storytelling to help congregations discover what is working and life-giving. This first step articulates the congregation's purpose and vision for the future. The congregation's purpose and vision then become the foundation for setting the search criteria and developing the candidate assessment criteria.

Instructions: This exercise can be done individually or can be led by one member of your team.

1. Take a few moments and look around the room you are in, and memorize everything in the room as though you were going to be quizzed at a later time on what was in the room.

2. Now look around the room and make a mental note of everything that is <u>red</u> in color.

3. Now look around the room and make a mental note of everything that is <u>blue</u> in color.

4. Now look around the room and make a mental note of everything that is <u>green</u> in color.

5. Debrief. Did you discover that despite the fact that you had observed everything in the room when you were directed to focus on a color, things began coming to the foreground, or "leaping" off tables or walls into your consciousness?

This exercise demonstrates part of the second assumption of Appreciative Inquiry:
What we focus on becomes our reality. Because we are bombarded by so many stimuli we learn to screen for certain things rather than being overwhelmed by "too much input."

6. Now take a few moments and think about where your attention goes when you enter a new situation, or go to church, or to work. Does your attention go to these things:

   What is wrong?
   Who is to blame?
   Is there a problem?
   How long has it been going on?
   What do we need to do to prevent failure?

   Or does your attention go to these things:

   What is working?
   What is life-giving?
   I wonder what we will achieve?
   I wonder what the future will bring?
   What do we need to ensure success?

7. What do you screen for? Do you focus on problems, or on possibilities?
   Do you focus on who is to blame, or do you focus on solutions and what needs to be done?

8. What do you need to be a love-based possibility thinker?

The Importance of Focus

Assumption 2. What we focus on becomes our reality.

*We don't see things
as they are,
we see things
as we are.*
— Anais Nin

We are confronted with millions of stimuli during the day, and it is impossible to pay attention to them all. What we have learned to do is filter or screen for certain information, and ignore other things. Over time, this filtering process becomes an unconscious habit that typically serves us well, as we automatically focus our attention on information that we have deemed important in enabling quick and wise decisions. On the other hand, these unconscious habits can create blind spots that limit our potential to respond creatively and compassionately to the world around us, especially when that world is changing and we are locked into seeing reality as it was, and not as it currently is. Likewise, being highly attentive to only a few things will result in our missing many other important things.

*What I see is
not what I am looking at
but what I am looking with.
And so my first and
principal duty…
is to find my eyes of love.*
— Dan Jones

Focus is not only an individual process but also a group process. Different groups will focus on specific things within the community. Police officers will look for criminals and signs of crime, while psychologists and mental health workers will look for people with psychological problems. At times, they will view the same person from these very different perspectives. This way of looking will also result in different actions when responding to the same person.

Church sub-groups also will view the same situations from very different perspectives that lead to very different actions. It is as though some people naturally look for all the blue things while other look for all the green things. Some may look at a pastor and see only what is done wrong, while others see only what is done right.

Focus is Self-Confirmatory

*What we water
with our attention
will grow.*
— Unknown

Observing something isn't benign. To observe something means that we have begun to engage with what we are observing, and in this engagement we begin to impact what we are observing. Both the way we focus and the object of our attention become important because "what we focus on will become our reality." Golfers know the negative impact of focus all too well. If a golfer is admonished just before they strike the ball, "don't hit it into the trees," they are likely to look up, focus on the trees, and then hit the ball straight into them. As they focus on the trees, the trees become their reality.

Similarly, if we view the world as hostile, we will see signs of hostility everywhere, to the point that we will miss numerous

signs of love and peace. As we see this hostility, we will respond defensively in ways that evoke further hostility from the world. Alternatively, if we see the world as loving, we will see signs of love everywhere, and we will respond to the world in loving ways that will evoke further love.

Applying labels to people or groups is one way we selectively focus on certain aspects of the individual or group. Things that are consistent with the label will be acknowledged, while things that are inconsistent with the label will be ignored. This selective focus according to the label will reinforce and grow those characteristics that match the label. In the "Pygmalion" research[6], two sets of teachers were given children who were equally matched in ability. One set of teachers was told that their students were of low intelligence and that they should simply be contained, with little expected of them academically. The other teachers were told that their students were highly intelligent and that they needed to be stretched and challenged. At the end of the school year the children were assessed. The students who had been labeled as intelligent outperformed the students who were labeled as having low intelligence, using standardized assessments.

We need to be careful with the labels we use to describe our congregations and the groups within the congregations. How we focus on these groups will impact what we call forth from them. When a congregation is labeled a "clergy killer" it is likely to repeat those patterns. Yet no congregation is absolutely any one thing. If we want to call forth the best from people we need to use language that evokes their best, rather than their worst.

Focus is a Choice

You can choose what you focus on and attend to. Throughout the Scriptures the word "behold" or "see" is used to focus people's attention on the things of God. For example, "See what love God has given us, that we should be called children of God" *(1 John 3:1).* Since we can choose what we focus on, and what we focus on becomes our reality, we can choose to focus on those things that bring us closer to the reality we want to live in. "Right Seeing," as the Buddhists call it, is a behavioral habit that you can consciously develop. We can focus on those things that help us get to where we want to go, rather than focusing on why we can't achieve our goals.

Jesus demonstrated the power of focus throughout his ministry. He kept his focus on the Kingdom of God, yet the reality of the people

The moment a person forms a theory, his imagination sees, in every object, only the traits that favor that theory.
— *Thomas Jefferson*

The first rule of focus is this: "Wherever you are, be there."
— *Unknown*

If you chase two rabbits, both will escape.
— *Unknown*

around him was the Kingdom of Rome. When we have "multiple realities" present the question arises: which reality is really real? It is possible to argue that both are real, so it makes more sense to ask, "Which reality do you want to live in?" By focusing on that reality it will grow in consciousness and become more true to you. This is what Jesus did with his proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The people had some current, partial experience of the Kingdom of God. The more Jesus talked of the Kingdom of God, the reality that was still to come in its complete fullness, the more it grew in the hearers awareness.

Focus isn't Denial

Choosing to focus does not mean ostrich-like avoidance or being in denial. There are many miserable things in the world that we do need to attend to — but how we focus is critical. When you see something that is wrong, acknowledge it, and then focus on what would make it right and not on who is to blame. In any situation, along with what we don't want there are the seeds of our desired outcome. We need to focus on the life-giving seeds and allow them to form the foundation for creating our future.

Focus on What is Life-Giving

It is easy to be distracted by problems and the things that we don't want. What can be particularly frustrating is the way minor irritants can become major distractions and interfere with our enjoyment of life. In the Gospel Jesus taught us to leave the weeds in the field as our attempts to pull them out would also damage the good crop that we wanted. As any gardener knows, the way to prevent weeds is to plant and grow healthy plants we do want. They will crowd out the weeds. Likewise, we need to continually pay attention to what is life-giving and how we can affirm it

Appreciative Inquiry is More Than Being Positive

While our goals need to be positively stated, the appreciative approach is more than positive thinking. In many ways "positive" and "negative" are value judgments. The appreciative focus goes beyond positive to what is life-giving. Businesses know that they need to focus on their core purpose and product or service. This is their life-blood. The church is no different — it needs to focus its attention on what is life-giving. Within the church, most would say that God is what gives life. However, in understanding a church's purpose, we need to know how God and God's life is experienced within the

Finally, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
— Philippians 4:8

All the things we take for granted once were nothing more than a figment of someone's imagination. We need to focus on what we need to do to make our dreams reality rather than consider why we can't achieve them.

specific congregation. Some may find it in the worship, others in the fellowship, or in the outreach. This becomes critical for the search because the congregation will need to find a pastor who can share in what is life-giving in the congregation.

Focus on Your Preferred Future

What do you imagine your future to be? Do you desire the future you imagine? Are your images of the future happy or miserable, hopeful or despairing, successful or full of failure? Because our imagination is one way we focus our attention, we will grow toward our images of the future. Since we will all spend the rest of our lives in the future, we need to examine our images of the future to ensure that we are creating a future that we would prefer to live in.

Avoidance and denial are forms of negative focus. They just keep the avoided thing as the focus of unspoken, mind-gripping attention.

Similarly, are you growing toward your preferred future, or are you trying to grow away from something you don't want? St. Paul describes this situation in his letter to the Romans: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" *(Romans 7:15).* The harder he tries not to do something, the worse it actually gets. The solution for St. Paul — and for us — is to stop focusing on what we don't want and to reorient to the grace of God in Jesus that already is. To create a desired image of the future, we need to start in the present and discover what is really life-giving. Then from this perspective of what is already working, we can create images of the future that we can grow toward with faith and confidence. The more we focus on a preferred future that we would choose to live in, the more that future will become our reality.

Dealing With Elephants in the Room

"Elephants in the room" are those things that we all know are present, so we cannot ignore them, but no one will discuss them. Their very existence is an example of negative focus. To intentionally not talk of something requires that we have to keep it in focus so that we know to avoid it. With all that negative focus most "elephants" grow and overwhelm the emotional space, so that eventually there is no real conversation.

If you force people to talk about the "elephant in the room" you'll just have more manure to clean up. A much smarter strategy is to ask, "What do we need to do to make it safe enough to talk about the elephant?"

The "elephant in the room" phenomenon indicates that it is not safe to talk about something. Underlying the negative focus of the elephant is a focus on ideas of blame, judgment, threat, and defensiveness. Rather than forcing people to engage in the conversation, which would be an act of violence, we need to have a conversation about what would make it safe for the people to have the conversation. For

some, creating norms of behavior and respect may provide enough safety. In other situations, the presence of an external facilitator may be required to create sufficient safety. Only when it has been made safe will the people be able to freely have a conversation about the "elephant" and resolve the unspoken issue.

Implications for the Search

Because all action begins with focus, what the congregation and various committees focus on will be critical. In situations where there has been turmoil or conflict, the congregation is likely to be very distracted with multiple foci, many of which have very little to do with creating a Godly future. With the best of intentions, well-meaning people will work hard to prevent additional failure, only to find their efforts in vain. Reorienting the congregation to its core purpose and values will be an essential part of the work of the transitional ministry in order to create a unified foundation for the search and the congregation's future.

The broad-minded see the truth in different religions; the narrow-minded see only the differences
— Chinese Proverb

A very narrow search focus can also be problematic. Some congregations may focus all their effort on ensuring their candidate meets one particular narrow criterion, such as being conservative or liberal, or their views on one aspect of theology or morality, and be blind to other competencies or personality issues. The focus of the search needs to go beyond these narrow issues to how the person expresses their perspective in their daily work, and how they deal with people who both agree and disagree with their perspective.

As you think about the search, reflect on these questions:

- Are you focusing your efforts on preventing failure, or are you focusing your efforts on what you love about your congregation and how to grow that love?

- Have you narrowed your search criteria to one issue to the exclusion of other factors, or are you focused on the life-giving realities in your congregation and are seeking a rector to join you in growing what is life-giving?

The Social Construction of Reality

Assumption 3. Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities.

Appreciative Inquiry makes considerable use of the philosophy and practice of social constructionism. At its core, social constructionism posits that there is no objective reality, but that individuals and groups construct an understanding of reality which then becomes the reality that they live in and experience.

A somewhat more moderate position would state that even if there is an objective reality, what we as human beings do is socially construct an understanding of what that reality is. Rather than dealing directly with reality, we are always dealing with it through our perceptual processes and our subjective interpretation of our perceptions. Theological statements, for example, are always "statements about God," they are not God. Even when we are being "objective" or "literal" we are using language, which is an abstraction or metaphoric process. This process of perception and interpretation is not linear, but organic and reciprocal. As we focus on an understanding of reality, that view will in turn shape us in self-confirming patterns.

The authors' personal understanding of social constructionism and our theological perspective takes the more moderate position that, while we believe there is an objective reality, our experience and understanding of that reality is socially constructed. We would rewrite this assumption as:

Assumption 3. The experience of reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple experiences of reality.

One way to comprehend social constructionism is to consider the difference between a map and the territory that the map represents. The map is a representation of the territory — it is never the territory. In conflicted situations, people are actually arguing over their maps of the territory and not the territory itself. Individuals and groups of people together create maps or understandings of themselves and others. Even when viewing the same reality, these maps may vary considerably.

For example, have you ever been in a gathering of people from a different religious denomination, and heard them state what it is people from your denomination believe or do? And do you then wonder where they came by that understanding, because it so

Appreciative Inquiry is an articulated theory that rationalizes and reinforces the habit of mind that moves through the world in a generative frame, seeking and finding images of the possible, rather than scenes of disaster and despair.
— *Jane Magruder Watkins*

Those who do not have power over the stories that dominate their lives, power to retell them, rethink them, deconstruct them, joke about them, and change them as times change, truly are powerless because they cannot think new thoughts.
— *Salmun Rushdie*

What a man believes upon grossly insufficient evidence is an index into his desires – desires of which he himself is often unconscious. If a man is offered a fact which goes against his instincts, he will scrutinize it closely, and unless the evidence is overwhelming, he will refuse to believe it. If, on the other hand, he is offered something which affords a reason for acting in accordance to his instincts, he will accept it even on the slightest evidence. The origin of myths is explained in this way.
— *Bertrand Russel*

You've got to be very careful if you don't know where you are going, because you might not get there.
— *Yogi Berra*

different from your experience of your denomination? Even within a denomination people may have very different maps or understanding of groups within the denomination, or even within a congregation.

The most common way groups of people create their maps or shared understanding of reality is through story telling. Within organizations, there are shared stories that form a common narrative. Within the Christian community, the Scriptures are the shared stories of the people of God. Jesus understood the process of story telling when he asked the Disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" *(Matthew 16:13)* Within local church communities there are shared stories that create and sustain the reality of the congregation.

Nathanel's question in John's Gospel,*(John 1:46)* "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" indicates that in his view of reality, nothing good <u>could</u> come from Nazareth. This view probably represents the view he shared with others in the region. The shared understanding would have been created and maintained by telling stories about people from Nazareth. As we have noted in the previous section, the view would have been self-confirmatory, since the way they paid attention to people from Nazareth would have elicited behaviors and actions consistent with their viewpoint, while any evidence to the contrary would have been ignored.

The social construction of reality becomes very important when we come to theological perspectives. For many social constructionists, God is nothing more than a social construction. The more moderate view would understand that God does exist in an absolute way, but everything we say about God is actually a social construction. All theology is a statement <u>about</u> God, it is not God. Theology is an abstraction or metaphor for something that is a mystery, in many ways beyond comprehension, because the infinity of God is unknowable to the human mind. Theology is a "map" of God; it is never God. Within the church, considerable argument occurs over whose map of God is true. Because our understanding of God impacts deep, existential things like life, death, and the possibility of an afterlife, it can be very anxiety-provoking to have our map of God challenged. The extent of this anxiety can be seen in the ways that some people become easily angered when their map or understanding of God, or of existential concepts of life are challenged. Understanding that it is just the map and not the territory will help in reducing the anxiety and allowing people to enter into dialogue.

Pay Attention to Outcomes

Rather than getting invested in long arguments over whose view of reality is true or right, the appreciative perspective pays attention to the outcome rather than to the content of the viewpoint. This past winter we planted bare-root fruit trees in our orchard. Even though the trees have labels, there is no easy way to tell if we have planted peaches or nectarines, apples or pears. The only way we can truly know what we planted is when the trees bear fruit. Our theology is the same. What is the fruit of your theology or "map" of God? Does your understanding of God lead naturally to a place of love, acceptance, reverence, caring for the poor, justice, and other things we would associate with the followers of Jesus? If your understanding of God leads to hatred and war, and perpetuates injustice, then we would suggest that you may want to change your map.

Implications for the Search

From a social constructionism perspective, your congregation's self-understanding is created through the telling of stories. Different groups within the congregation, such as the early service or the later service attendees, will often have different understandings of the nature of the congregation. Some congregations may believe that they are failing, while others may believe they can do anything they put their mind to. Both beliefs will be based on the stories that people tell about their congregations.

The shared narrative of a congregation is not written in stone, it is shared in human hearts and minds. As such, it can always be changed. The stories can also be told from a variety of perspectives. We want to deliberately tell stories in a way that empowers people. If a congregation repeatedly tells the story of how they were victimized by a previous rector, they will feel powerless and will easily perceive themselves as potential victims in the future. But this same experience of victimization could also be told from the perspective of how they survived: that while many may have left, those who stayed are the faithful remnant. They could also find many parallel stories in the Scriptures and see in their experience a story of the saving power of God.

The self-study process, based in Appreciative Inquiry, uses structured storytelling to create a shared narrative of who they are at their best and that empowers the congregation to co-create with God their preferred future.

Buddha left a road map, Jesus left a road map, Krishna left a road map, Rand McNally left a road map. But you still have to travel the road yourself.
— Stephen Levine

Stop thinking in terms of limitations and start thinking in terms of possibilities.
— Terry Josephson

You are the author of your own story. If you don't like the story so far, start rewriting.

The Power of Questions

Assumption 4. The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.

This assumption only hints at the great power of questions. The standard scientific method would claim that it is possible to be an objective observer asking questions without influencing that which is observed. While there may be an element of truth in that claim when considering large-scale material science, it is not true in quantum physics and in the social sciences. Because an electron or subatomic particle is so small and never stationary, observing it means altering it in some way. The same is true in social science research. The act of observing someone will change the person being observed. We can see this even in day-to-day events. For example, the moment a TV camera is turned on, people's behavior changes. Some people become withdrawn, others demonstrative. As search consultants, we know that the moment we ask questions of a congregation, they are influenced to move in some direction.

Since every question moves the group in some way, we need to begin asking questions that move them in the direction that we want them to move. Do we want them to move into having bigger and deeper problems, or do we want to move them into the abundant life that Jesus promised? If we want them to have more problems, then we need to keep asking them about their problems, and who is to blame for them. If we want them to move in the direction of life, then we need to ask them questions about what is life-giving.

To create powerful questions, we need to pay attention to the outcome of the questions, and not simply to the verbal responses. Appreciative questions are those questions that cause a value to grow in consciousness or that motivate people to pursue a desired outcome. In the search process we design appreciative questions to motivate, inspire, energize, and mobilize people for action, not just to provide information.

The Two Elements in Every Question

Every question is composed of two elements: the surface content and an underlying assumption. Regardless of how someone responds to the surface content of the question they will always be affirming the reality of the underlying assumption. The classic example of this is the question: "Have you stopped beating your spouse?" This question is built on the assumption that the person is beating their spouse.

Start asking smart questions that move people in the direction you want them to go even before they have had a chance to answer.

Organizations grow in the direction of what they repeatedly ask questions about and focus their attention on.
— David Cooperrider

Whether they answer "yes" or "no" to the question, they will not be refuting the assumption that they were beating their spouse. The alternative response of not answering the question at all leaves the respondent in the uncomfortable position of having to either avoid the question or defend themselves against the accusations.

Questions designed to trap people create double binds where the person is put in the awkward situation of having to affirm an underlying assumption or to avoid the question. Once the question is raised, the issue has become part of the focus of attention (whether it is true or not) and avoiding the question leaves the person open to the possible accusation that they are guilty.

The Pharisees tried to use this strategy when questioning Jesus. For example, in an endeavor to trap him they asked Jesus "whether it was lawful to pay taxes to the emperor?" *(Mark 12:13-17)* If Jesus said "yes," then he would be guilty of siding with the oppressive Roman empire against God's people. If he said "no" he would be guilty of promoting sedition. Jesus' response was to craftily avoid the question and respond with a similar paradoxical question. He asked them to show him a coin and tell him whose face was on it. When they responded "the emperor's", he responded, "give to the emperor what is the emperor's and to God what is God's."

Even when the intention is not to trap a person the underlying assumption to a question can result in unforeseen consequences. For example, imagine a consultant is called to a vestry that is in conflict, and the consultant begins their work with the vestry by asking them, "What is the problem you are having?" First of all, this question assumes that there is a problem. More importantly, in our society a problem also means that someone is to blame for the problem. The moment someone on the vestry begins to give their understanding of the problem, they will affirm the assumption of blame. This in turn will evoke defensiveness and judgment on the part of the other vestry members as they come to the defense or judgment of those blamed.

An alternative strategy for the consultant would be to begin with the question, "What you would like to accomplish at our meeting tonight?" Or, "If we were really successful in our meeting tonight, what will we have accomplished?" The underlying assumption here is that the people desire to be successful. Any attempt to answer these questions means that the people gathered are affirming that desire for success and they will begin moving in that direction.

*Questions that
call forth ideas of blame
are no blame good.*

*Washing one's hands of
the conflict between the
powerful and the powerless
means to side with the
powerful,
not to be neutral.*
 — Paulo Freire

*The question is not
whether we
will be extremists,
but what kind of
extremists we will be...
The nation and the world
are in dire need
of creative extremists.*
— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Questions, Answers, and Context

Have you ever been put on the spot by a question and the only way you can think to answer is "it all depends"? These kinds of questions are really unhelpful in terms of creating strategies to develop a congregation's future. A common form of unhelpful question is one that requests a yes-or-no answer. For example, when considering candidates, a congregation may ask the question, "Is it possible to consider the associate rector as a candidate for rector?" This is a polarizing question that doesn't take into account the nature of the congregation, the associate rector, or any of a series of other contextual issues. Our church experience indicates that in some situations associate rectors have gone on to be fine rectors, and in other situations they have performed poorly.

We will explore this question, and its parallel question of whether the transitional minister should be a candidate, in more depth in the "Establishing an Initial List" section on page 287. For our immediate purpose of understanding the nature of questions, we would ask the question from this perspective: "Under what circumstances would it be appropriate to consider the associate as candidate for rector?" This question opens the possibility of conversation from which people can make a reasoned, incarnational, response rather than relying on externally preconceived traditions and rules that restrict life-giving options. For a more detailed exploration of whether associates or transitional ministers should be considered candidates, please see the section "Establishing an Initial List."

Questions and Elicited Emotions

Imagine a search process in which a consultant asks a group of people these questions in the following order:

1. What is working well around here?
2. What is not working well around here?
3. What do you want in your next rector?

The first question is an appreciative inquiry question and will lead the group into a creative, loving mindset that will allow them to explore possibilities and think in generative ways[7].

The second question will call forth blame, defensiveness, and feelings of alienation. This leads to negative emotions and a mental state we call "funky brain." Research shows that in this state, people will be unable to think outside of the rut they are in, they are likely to be

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The problem is not the problem. The problem is the attempted solutions to the problem.

Appreciative Inquiry gets much better results than seeking out and solving problems. We often concentrate enormous resources on correcting problems. But when used continually over a long time, this approach leads to a negative culture… or a slip into a paralyzing sense of hopelessness. Don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating mindless happy talk. AI is a complex science designed to make things better. We can't ignore problems – we just need to approach them from the other side.

— Tom White

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prejudiced and intolerant of others, and their intuition is more likely to be inaccurate[8].

Unfortunately the third question is asked of a group of people who have been led into the uncreative space of funky brain which now gets to decide the qualities of the next rector! When people are in this state, they will describe what they <u>don't</u> want in a rector rather than what they <u>do</u> want. But knowing what they don't want will not help them discover what they need to create their desired future.

The outcome of the three questions is similar to the emotional hijacking that can occur during a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis. When people intensely explore weaknesses, they often experience negative emotions that prevent them from being able to engage in creative conversation about their opportunities.

Rather than simply ignoring the problems that might exist, we would ask these questions in a slightly different manner.

1. What is working well around here?
2. What do you want more of in the future?
3. What do you want in your next rector?

The second question is focused on the future. Any problem that exists is reframed into what they want more of, rather than what they don't want. The future-focused question also allows for the possibility that what they want more of are things that are working well. Regardless of whether they are reframed problems or things that are already working well, the answer will begin to evoke images of things they desire, which will continue to keep them in a creative mental state.

Implications for the Search

The search process is all about asking and answering questions. The process begins with a general question: "What kind of a congregation do we want to become?" And the process ends with a specific question: "Which one of these qualified candidates is called to be our next rector?" Between these two questions are multiple layers of other questions that need to be explored. Since appreciative questions can have a powerful impact on the congregation and the candidates, the inquiry process is not simply about gathering information, but is about moving hearts and minds.

In crafting questions for the search, we need to pay attention to our underlying assumptions. It is also important to remember that every question gives the candidate information about the questioner,

The first rule of holes:
When you're in one,
stop digging.
— Molly Ivans

Don't worry,
just because you keep
an open mind,
your brains won't fall out.

and how the candidate is likely to be treated if they were called as the rector. If a parishioner has been badly treated by a rector and no longer trusts clergy, many of the questions are likely to have the underlying assumption that clergy aren't to be trusted. As the candidate responds to such questions, they may often end with an uneasy sense that something is not quite right, without necessarily being able to say why they have this sense. In their own discernment they are likely to interpret that disquiet as an indicator that the parish is not the position for them.

Multiple yes/no questions may also elicit frustration, as the candidate may feel they are being put into an either/or bind that is not congruent with their experience. If such questioning is excessive, the candidate may feel they have been subjected to an adversarial interrogation, and again decide against accepting a call to the parish.

If you find yourself in the position of not trusting clergy, perhaps you can modify the absolute statement "clergy aren't trustworthy" into "some clergy are trustworthy" and "our task is to find a trustworthy rector" before you actually engaging in the search. If you cannot move from the position of absolute certainty that clergy are not trustworthy, we recommend that you withdraw yourself from the search process, because it is nonsensical for you to be part of a process that you perceive as merely calling and hiring someone who cannot be trusted.

Knowing how to get helpful information from questions is vital for a successful search. Using questions that mobilize people toward their preferred future will enrich the search process and the congregation's life. Throughout this manual we will provide models of how to develop appropriate and powerful questions.

Life's most urgent question is: What are you doing for others?
— Martin Luther King, Jr.

People don't want to be changed, they want to be blessed. — Stephen Gilligan

Instructions: You can do this exercise individually or as a sharing activity at the beginning of a committee meeting. Think of a change that you have made in your life that you gladly and confidently entered into, that went smoothly, and that brought you to a place that you really wanted to be. As you think back, you realize that the change was a real blessing. As you remember the blessing, take a moment to reflect on what gave you the confidence to engage in the change and what made it a blessing.

What gave you confidence?

Check to see if the confidence you had was related to the fact that you were getting to do or use something with which you were already familiar. For example, perhaps you had used this skill successfully in the past and could expect to be successful if you used it again.

What made it a blessing?

Check to see if the outcome was ultimately of more value to you than your starting place or that the result of the change was that you were able to keep something that you really valued.

What does this teach you about creating change that people will readily embrace?

The church needs to get out of the change business and back into the blessing business.

52 | Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls

Ensuring That Change is a Blessing

Assumption 5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past with them.

Assumption 6. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.

Because Assumption 6 follows naturally from assumption 5, we will review them together.

Life is a Journey

All of life is a journey. Any change can be thought of as a journey from one place or state to another. Churches are in the business of changing hearts and lives and the world in which they live. Concurrent to the church promoting change, the world the church exists in is also changing, and is therefore subject to change as a result of the prevailing social, political, and economic influences. Since churches are in the business of change and exist in a world of change, they need to be experts in ensuring that change is a blessing and not a curse.

Blessings, Curses, and Resistance

Blessing: Any change in which the final outcome is more valuable than the initial state plus the cost of the resources to get there.

Curse: Any change in which the final outcome is less valuable than the initial state plus the cost of the resources to achieve it.

Resistance: A reluctance to engage in a change because the change is not perceived as a blessing.

Contrary to popular opinion, we believe people do like change, especially when it is a blessing. What they do not like is any change that steals something of value from them. In most coaching texts, considerable emphasis is given to dealing with resistance to change. Resistance is a pejorative term used against people who manifest reluctance or hesitancy to embark on a change. We find most of these approaches unsuccessful in actually helping people to make changes. From our experience, resistance occurs because part of the person who is resisting is unable to perceive the benefit of the change. In some cases the part that is resisting is actually a wise part that knows the outcome is a curse rather than a blessing. To respond to resistance requires that we help the part that is resisting

If your congregation doesn't "get it." Stop and ask yourself: have you "given it?"

Look at every path closely and deliberately, then ask ourselves this crucial question: Does this path have a heart? If it does, then the path is good. If it doesn't, it is of no use.
— *Carlos Castaneda*

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to perceive that the change is a blessing. If we cannot achieve that, we will be compelling the person to make the change, and it will be experienced as an act of violence.

For example, the Rich Young Ruler *(Mark 10:17-22)* could not perceive that the value of following Jesus was worth giving away all of his possessions, and so he resisted following Jesus. For whatever reason Jesus was not able to alter this perception, but he looked on him with love and respected his freedom rather than judging, condemning, or rebuking him. In contrast, James and John perceived that following Jesus was more valuable than being fisherman and so they followed Jesus *(Matthew 4:18-22)*.

We Want to Grow But We Don't Want to Change

We have heard this comment from several parishes. When I repeat it to participants in our training programs they mostly laugh with derision, for it is impossible to grow without change. However, to us it seems an honest appraisal of what parishioners want. The derisive laughter stems from a misunderstanding of what the parishioners are really saying. From an appreciative perspective they are saying "we want to grow but we don't want to lose our essential values and identity." What these people need to do is to examine their core values and incorporate these values into their plans for growth. Assumption 5 says that people will confidently accept change if the change means that they are able to keep what is of value to them. These churches may need to lose some part of their current state in which these values were manifested, but as they grow into their new state they will be able to retain their core life-giving and eternal values as the platform to build the future. However, if growing means that these life-giving values are taken from them, then the people will naturally resist.

Jesus used this strategy of embedding change in core values when he ministered to the people. When he called James and John he told them to leave their nets and to come follow him *(Matthew 4:19)*. This call to a journey into the unknown could have created considerable anxiety or a sense of loss that could render the disciples ineffective. To counter this possibility, Jesus said to them that he would make them "fishers of people." James and John knew how to fish; it was their way of life. Jesus embedded the future — "following him" — in something they knew and valued: being fishermen. While the context may have changed (fishing for fish, to fishing for people) the underlying core value of fishing was maintained.

You will have to be incredibly smart if you don't want your church to change because it is the one constant in a world that is in great flux. Since you live in a world that is rapidly changing and you want to stay the same, you will have to decide what you are going to do differently as a church in order to stay the same.

My interest is in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there.
— Charles F. Kettering

Change is inevitable.
Suffering is optional.
— Unknown

The cross is the full satisfaction of every objection that you have to the Good News that God loves you unconditionally just as you are.

The major reason for setting a goal is for what it makes of you to accomplish it. What it makes of you will always be the far greater value than what you get.
— Jim Rohn

Assumptions 5 and 6 also show the appreciative understanding of the past and the future. The future is always beckoning and calling us. We cannot change one iota of our past, but we can decide what of our past we take with us, and what we allow of our past to inform our future. When we build the future on the best of the past, we know this desired future is possible, because it is built on what we have known to be true in the past.

Seeking and Satisfying Objections

No human motivation is ever perfect, nor is it possible to be one hundred percent committed to anything. We are a mixture of both selflessness and selfishness. At times opposing values such as freedom/individuality and belonging may be in conflict. Whenever a person sets a goal there is a good probability that, while they are primarily in favor of the goal, some part of them will object to the goal. This is also true when organizations or groups create goals. Not only will individuals have internal objections to the decision, but groups of people within the organization will have objections to the organization's goals. There are three options when responding to these objections: overcoming them, ignoring them, or satisfying them[9].

If we simply "overcome" our objections or the objections of a group to a goal we will be doing violence to ourselves and the people in the group. These overcome objections are likely to go "underground" and be manifested in resistance that sabotages or undermines our efforts to achieve the goal. Even if we do achieve the goal, it is likely that we will not be able to sustain, it as the overcome objection will result in a growing sense of dissatisfaction and resentment. Ignoring the objection is a passive form of overcoming an objection. The ignored part of us is likely to become increasingly "loud" in unproductive ways until it gets our attention. To create sustainable change, instead of overcoming or ignoring these objections we need to satisfy them.

Most of our objections have our best interest at heart, although the strategies they rely on are often ineffective. For example, part of us may object to a goal it perceives as risky and the objecting part doesn't want us to fail or get hurt. However, the simple strategy of being seized by fear and not doing anything becomes counterproductive as we are denied pleasurable or fulfilling outcomes. A more effective strategy is to satisfy the objection by developing resources that create the confidence to pursue successful outcomes.

Developing Resources to Satisfy Objections

As you make goals, ask yourself if any part of you objects to the goal. Then ask that part which is objecting what it would need to satisfy the objection. Make sure that the same part of you that objects also states what would satisfy the objection. As you satisfy each objection, more of you will be aligned with the goal, which will enable the change to be achieved and sustained.

Similarly, when working with groups of people, conflict occurs because people's objections are overcome or ignored rather than satisfied. When a group feels their objections have been overcome, they will feel violated and are likely to respond in a manner that violates the objections of others. One of the ways peoples' objections are overcome rather than satisfied is by the voting process. If the winners in the majority don't take time to protect the rights of the minority and satisfy their objections to the decision, the minority will find other ways to resist and hinder the goal. Over time, this resistance can grow from a mild resentment to outright hostility and aggression.

Throughout the search process we rely on consensus-building, rather than voting, as a means to coming to decisions. Consensus-building requires the process of seeking and satisfying objections. In the Quaker consensus-building discernment process they ask the question: "Are all hearts clear?" In their clearance committee work they are "clearing" or satisfying people's objections to the plan.

Are all hearts clear?
— Quaker Discernment Practice

The Ecology of Sustainable Change

When planning any change we need to ensure that the change is ecologically sustainable. Ecological decisions are not simply about the physical environment, but also the emotional and spiritual environments in which people live. In addition to considering whether we have the resources to <u>create</u> the change, we also need to ensure that we have the resources to <u>sustain</u> the change. "Volunteer burnout" is often an example of emotional and spiritual strip-mining of parishioners. They are putting forth effort, or using their emotional and spiritual resources, in ways that are not sustainable over time.

Issues of justice also need to be considered to ensure that changes are ecological. Is one part of the system being enlivened at the expense of another part of the system? Groups within the system that are deprived of resources are likely to become resentful and act in ways that sabotage the well-being of the system as a whole.

I sit on a man's back, choking him and making him carry me, and yet assure myself and others that I am very sorry for him and wish to ease his lot by all possible means – except by getting off his back.
— Leo Tolstoy

Ecological changes require that our changes are blessings, that we have the resources to create and sustain the change, and that we have discovered and satisfied any objections to the change.

Implications for the Search Process

The search process is about change. Understanding the dynamics of change and how to lead people through a successful change is essential if the search process is to result in a genuine blessing for the congregation and the new rector. When a change is not perceived as a blessing, people will feel violated and resist the change.

If the congregation is to confidently journey into the future with their next rector, they will need to know that what they truly value now will also be part of their future. In the self-study part of the search process, considerable attention will be paid to discovering what the congregation deeply values and finds life-giving. They will also spend considerable time exploring their God-given best.

The subsequent candidate assessment process will include strategies to discover what the candidates value, and whether the congregation's values and the candidate's values are compatible. Strategies will also be provided to help the search committee and vestry discover the candidates at their best, and then to consider whether the congregation and candidate can mutually inspire and provide resources to each other to be their best.

The issuing and acceptance of a call also represents the beginning of a change for the new rector. These same assumptions about change are equally applicable to the new rector. They will more confidently make the transition to be rector of the congregation if they get to bring their best to the congregation. The search process is not simply a one-way street where the congregation discovers information about the candidates, it is also about the candidates discovering the congregation's talents, values and purpose.

Only when the candidate and the congregation can call forth each other's best will the ministry be a mutual blessing. If one party is blessed at the expense of another, it is not really a blessing — it is actually theft. Even though some candidates will be disappointed if they are not offered a call, we want their participation in the search process to be a blessing — an enriching opportunity to discover their own giftedness, and a time to reflect on God's purpose for their lives.

I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.
— *Mohandas Gandhi*

Any blessing that comes at the expense of another is not a blessing, it is theft.

A shrewd man has to arrange his interests in order of importance and deal with them one by one; but often our greed upsets this order and makes us run after so many things at once that through over-anxiety to obtain the trivial, we miss the most important. — François de la Rochefoucauld

Instructions: If you are a member of the search committee or vestry, take a moment and consider whether you have any objection to serving on the committee.

Once you are aware of the objection, ask the part of you that objects what would satisfy the objection.

Keep seeking and satisfying objections until you feel free to serve on the committee. If there is an objection that you are unable to satisfy, consider withdrawing from the committee.

The above questions can also be used by Vestry members when they approach parishioners about serving on a committee. If a parishioner appears reluctant to serve on the committee, ask them what their objection is. Then ask them what would satisfy the objection. If you are unable to satisfy their objections it would be better not to have the person on the committee.

The name of the game is taking care of yourself, because you're going to live long enough to wish you had.
— *Grace Mirabella*

Everyone's Voice is Important

Assumption 7. It is important to value differences.

Just as different people focus on different things within a congregation they also will value different things within the congregation. Some will value the quiet of the early service, whereas others will value the fellowship and community feeling of the later service. With these differing perspectives and interests, it is clear that no one person has a complete understanding of the entire congregation. To make changes and to create a vision for the future, we need to value these differences and incorporate them into the whole. If we don't value the differences, and simply ride roughshod over groups of people, we will plant the seeds of resentment and the potential for future conflict.

In his letters to the Corinthians, St. Paul expresses the essence of this assumption when he describes the Christian community as the body of Christ. All the parts of the body are valuable and interconnected. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'" *(1 Corinthians 12:21)*. In the search process we will need to engage and hear from all the body, and not just from one or two parts of the body.

Valuing Diversity and Creating Community

The importance of valuing differences is expressed in the baptismal covenant, where we are instructed to "respect the dignity of all people." However, this valuing is only one step in creating community. We cannot create community on the basis of diversity alone. We create community on the basis of what diverse people have in common — their "common unity." Creating a "common unity" doesn't mean that we overlook the diversity but rather, from a place of radical respect for our differences, we create a safe and sacred space where we can discover our commonalities. Exploring these common values and life-giving realities creates the "umbrella" under which the diversity is embraced and sustained. It is these common values that become the life-blood of the body, to use St. Paul's metaphor.

Valuing diversity also requires that we engage the entire congregation in order to define these life-giving values. It would be very easy to sit remotely apart and theologically describe what these values should be. But these top-down approaches violate the integrity of a congregation's experience, and deny the incarnational reality that God is already present and working in these congregations. The task

I am different just like you.
— Unknown

If you want the body to be whole you need to engage the whole body in co-creating and welcoming its preferred future.

We cannot create community on the basis of diversity. We create community on the basis of what diverse people have in common – their "common unity."

of ministry is not to bring God to people, but to help people discover how God is already present, and to join God in what is life-giving by allowing that reality to lead the people into their future.

Implications for the Search

The valuing of differences needs to be an essential foundation for the search, especially in conducting the self-study and preparing the profile. This valuing of differences needs to be behaviorally enacted in the practical processes developed for the search, rather than remaining an abstract concept. At a very practical level we want to create processes that allow people from differing sub-groups within a congregation to be able to share their stories with people from other sub-groups. In the appreciative interviewing process, Cooperrider recommends "the unlikely pairing of opposites." For example, people from the early service would interview people from a later service, or men interview women, conservative interview liberal, newcomers interview old-timers, and so on. The best approach is to invite the sharing to occur across the widest spectrum of the congregation.

Some search processes may be conducted with the idea that they are valuing differences when, in fact, they are minimizing differences. For example, in the belief that they are valuing difference, many congregations will use a survey to "hear from everyone in the congregation." The results are then tabulated and averaged. This process does not actually value differences, but blurs them into averages which exclude "outlying" positions. Statistically speaking, Jesus was an outlier. He was not the norm, and he challenged the cultural values of his day, just as he challenges our cultural values.

Here's an example of how averages blur differences rather than valuing them. Imagine you have a church with two services on Sunday. The first is a quiet contemplative service that is well attended by a large number of people who do not have children, or whose children are no longer living at home with them. When polled, these people express little interest in Sunday school for children. The second service, which is also well attended, includes a large vibrant Sunday school for children. When polled, people at the second service place a high value on Sunday school for children. When we average these responses over the congregation we would find that the congregation as a whole on average has only a moderate or mild interest in Sunday school for children. This averaged outcome blurs and then minimizes some significant differences in the way individual members of the congregation value their Sunday School program for children.

In our daily lives, we must see that it is not happiness that makes us grateful, but the gratefulness that makes us happy.
— *Albert Clarke*

USA Today has come out with a new survey: apparently three out of four people make up 75 percent of the population.
— *David Letterman*

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?
— *Book of Common Prayer, Baptismal Covenant*

Feelings of worth can flourish only in an atmosphere where individual differences are appreciated, mistakes are tolerated, communication is open, and rules are flexible – the kind of atmosphere that is found in a nurturing family.
— *Virginia Satir*

You can't average people or their values. If you try, you will simply compromise everyone and everything.

While it is possible to do a deeper statistical analysis to highlight these differences, the reality is that few congregations have access to the statistical expertise to conduct such analyses. In addition, most congregational surveys are relatively small, statistically speaking, which makes meaningful sub-group analysis irrelevant. For these and other reasons we will discuss in the self-study section, we no longer recommend surveys as part of the search process. The appreciative process of valuing differences in the sharing of personal stories forms the foundation of the Appreciative Inquiry summit which we use in place of congregational surveys.

Valuing difference is also an important part of developing community within the search committee and vestry. In the candidate assessment and discernment phases of the search, it is essential that differences are valued in order to build consensus among committee members. Using their radical respect for each other, they can find their wisdom in the wisdom of the whole that transcends a simple additive collection of ideas.

This is the true understanding of consensus. Consensus is not simply compromising or averaging opinions. From a perspective of respecting and valuing their differences, people can find the underlying commonalities that all can live with and find life-giving. When developing consensus we need to ask "What can we all live with?" rather than "Do we all agree?" If people compromise their core values, they will feel compromised rather than being of one heart, and when compromised they will be unable to enthusiastically embrace the outcome.

Valuing differences is also essential as the candidates are interviewed. No two candidates are the same, nor will any candidate be just like the former rector. Valuing differences allows interviewers the opportunity to incarnationally enter into the world of the candidates and appreciate the unique gifts and talents that they bring to their ministry — and could bring to the congregation.

The Power of Language

Assumption 8. The language we use creates our reality.

Appreciative Inquiry pays particular attention to the impact of the language we use to describe our experience. Language is one way we describe and communicate our understanding of reality. Language thus focuses our attention and, as we have previously discussed, how we focus and what we focus on creates our reality.

Beyond simply being descriptive, words can also motivate people to action. Words can hurt, heal, incite violence, or inspire love. When we use language, we pay attention to the outcome of the language and not simply our intention. Does our language move people in the direction that we want them to move? Jesus was a master in the use of a wide range of linguistic strategies to challenge and transform people's lives. For example, he used parables and paradox to create confusion or doubt in people who were rigidly certain that they really understood the kingdom they were living in, and the Kingdom of God that they could be living in. In other cases, he used a quiet tenderness — or, alternatively an "in your face" ferocity — to create new understanding and to motivate people to make choices and act upon them. For more information on Jesus' varied responses to people, see our essay *Compassion: the Crazy Wisdom of Jesus, Buddha and other Agents of Transformation*, which is available from the web site www.clergyleadership.com.

The Impact of Negative Statements

The human mind has considerable difficulty in knowing how to process negative statements. For example, take a moment and try <u>not</u> to think of what a purple cow would look like. The harder you try not to think of something, the more that thing comes into focus. Many Lenten devotional booklets have large catalogues of sins that people should not engage in. Rather than helping a person lead an ethical and righteous life, these catalogues simply excite a person's senses toward the forbidden activity and create in their consciousness ideas and images of activities they may never have thought of if left to their own devices. If we want people to live moral lives, we need to teach what morality is, and not simply give them lists of things they shouldn't do.

Jesus understood the impact of negative statements and turned it into a powerful strategy in growing people's awareness of the

*The words on the menu aren't the food.
But you can't access the food without using the words.*

If we want people to live moral lives we need to teach them what morality is and not simply give them lists of things they shouldn't do.

God is not the words we say about God, but we often confuse the two. People often love the words they use to describe God more than they love God. Consider how Christians argue about their words for God rather than sitting in the presence of the One their words point to.

The problem is not that there is too much racism in the world. The real problem is that there is not enough cross-cultural collaboration for the benefit of all humanity.

Kingdom of God. One of Jesus' goals was to recruit people to share their experience of the Good News with others. Yet what we often see in the Gospels is Jesus telling people <u>not</u> to tell others about a healing they had received. Paradoxically, the more he tells them not to, the more the people tell their friends what he had done for them. This technique of "don't tell" also changes the peoples' motivation for telling the story. If Jesus had simply told them to tell others of the great thing that he had done, then they would be telling others simply because that is what they were told to do. However, because Jesus had told them not to tell others, they have to own both the motivation to tell and the story they are telling.

Consider this common question from an Appreciative Inquiry Summit interview protocol: "Without being humble, tell me, what do you value about yourself?" This classic appreciative inquiry question shows an interesting use of the negative. As we have seen, the human brain does not process negatives very clearly. Here we are in effect saying: "Humbly tell me what you value about yourself." That statement as it stands evokes a paradoxical double bind. If I am humble, I wouldn't tell you what I value about myself. The use of the negative in this statement calls forth the idea of humility, but then gives permission for people to "brag" about themselves. In our experience, people will humbly tell amazing stories about themselves in a way that evokes a genuine pride and satisfaction, with elements of wonder and awe. They can value these things about themselves without egotistically taking credit for them. Although they may not use theological language, they are deeply valuing who God made them to be and the talents God has given to them.

Framing Problems

The way we frame a problem will either limit our options or open us to possibilities. We need to frame problems from the perspective of the solution, not just as a description of the current reality. Think of a problem you are having. Notice how optimistic you feel about resolving the problem. Now place yourself in the future when the problem no longer exists. What would you be seeing or doing in place of the problem? Now restate the problem from the perspective of needing more of what you would be doing. As you restate your situation from this perspective, notice how your optimism and sense of resourcefulness has changed. In most cases people will feel more optimistic that they can resolve the problem.

For example, we have a problem in this country with racism. Merely stated or framed in this way, we are given no insight into possible options or how to deal with the problem of racism. On the other hand, we could frame the problem of racism thusly: "We have a problem in this country of insufficient collaboration between differing cultures for the benefit of all humanity." By stating the problem in this way, we are framing the problem from the perspective of what we need more of to create a world in which the problem did not exist.

The Danger of Labeling

Within any person or group there is both good and bad. The challenge is to draw out the good at the expense of the bad. The more good we do, the less time we will have to do bad. However, when labels are applied to people and groups, they make absolute one aspect of the group, rather than allowing for both the good and the bad to co-exist. Once this element is made absolute, it will be all that can be called forth and accessed from the group. In the classic Pygmalion research project[10] mentioned earlier, teachers were given groups of students who were equally matched but differently labeled. The labels of "smart" and "slow" set up different expectations in the teachers, which in turn became self-confirmatory. At the end of the year the students labeled "smart" outperformed the students labeled slow in standardized testing, though they had started on an equal level.

Congregations know themselves by the image they create from the stories they tell about themselves. These personal and collective narratives become self-confirming labels. Some congregations may have a narrative that says, "We are poor and can't achieve anything." They remain mired in mediocrity. Other congregations may have a narrative that says, "We can do anything we set our mind to." They will continually be looking for new opportunities to minister to their community. In congregations with little sense of mission or purpose the narrative may be vague, or operating implicitly rather than explicitly in the decision-making in the congregation.

Transforming the Congregation's Narrative

When leading congregations in transition, leaders must ensure that the congregation's narrative is transformed to be consistent with their desired purpose and goals. If the narrative remains inconsistent with a goal, the outcome will not be sustainable and the people will return to living and manifesting their former narrative. This is the struggle Moses had in leading the people out of Egypt. The people came out

A name is a label, and as soon as there is a label, the ideas disappear and out comes label-worship and label-bashing, and instead of living by a theme of ideas, people begin dying for labels.
— Richard Bach

If you find yourself frustrated that your congregation or the people you lead "don't get it." Stop and consider whether you have "given it" in a way they can understand.

of Egypt with a slave narrative to which they were easily tempted to return *(Numbers 11:4-6)*. It took forty years for the "people of God" narrative to take sustainable root in their consciousness. Within the congregational community there will be many narratives about the past. Rather than working to have a shared historical narrative, it is more important to work toward having a shared future narrative that the people can grow into by manifesting it in their present.

Jesus was a master at transforming people's narrative to ensure that individual acts of healing, and ultimately his entire ministry, were sustainable. Jesus ministered to people whose narrative was the oppression of the kingdom of Rome. Yet in his preaching, Jesus did not talk about resisting Rome, or fighting Rome, or overthrowing Rome, or reducing the power of Rome in their lives. In fact, Jesus said very little about the kingdom of Rome. Rather, he changed the narrative from the kingdom of Rome to the Kingdom of God. If he hadn't changed the narrative to the Kingdom of God, after his death the people would have simply reverted to being oppressed people living under the rule of Rome. But after his death and resurrection, people were aware of the reign of God in their lives, and that became their narrative. When the people said "Jesus is Lord," they were, in part, making a political statement that Nero was not lord and the Romans weren't lord. At that point, the Kingdom of God became the realm in which they were living, despite the continuation of the external Roman reality.

To transform their narrative Jesus used stories that the people could relate to and knew to be true. He talked of the Kingdom of God not as some futuristic kingdom, but as a reality that was among them and that they already knew in part. As he focused attention on this kingdom that they already knew in part, and that would be coming in its fullness, the kingdom's reality grew in their consciousness. Without grounding the coming future in their past and present experience, Jesus would have created an unrealistic fantasy with no power to sustainably transform lives.

Appreciative Inquiry is commonly known for its use of interviews and having people share stories of their best experiences of their community. The purpose of this storytelling is to transform the congregation's narrative rather than just gathering data or opinions. Many congregations use surveys during transitional times to gather opinions; however, these are of minimal value in transforming a congregation's narrative or motivating people toward a preferred

Of course that is not the whole story, but that is the way with stories; we make them what we will. It's a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained, it's a way of keeping it all alive, not boxing it into time.
— *Jeanette Winterson*

Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming: "Wow! – What a ride!"
— *Erma Bombeck*

future. Christianity did not flourish because eleven disciples took a vote and ten said they believed in the resurrection. Christianity flourished because people told stories of their encounters with the risen Jesus and how he had transformed their lives.

A congregation cannot change one iota of its past. It can, however, choose which parts of its past it will use as a foundation to build on and inform its future. Within a congregation there are both helpful and unhelpful narratives. Both stories are "true" — but neither story is absolutely true. Humanity is never completely anything. We are both selfish and kind. Appreciative Inquiry calls forth the best from people, rather than trying to get them to do less of their worst. Knowing which stories to tell, and framing the "right" questions to engage these stories, is essential to liberate the power of the appreciative process. We ask people to tell stories of their best because we want to bring their best to their endeavors. Just as Jesus found the coming Kingdom of God in the people's past and present, we use appreciative storytelling to discover the congregation's future in the life-giving stories of their past and present. When grounded in these stories, the congregation is able to imagine a preferred future that they know is achievable — because they have manifested parts of it in the past.

When dealing with problems or negative narratives, there is little need to spend significant time considering their antecedents or causes, just as Jesus spent little time considering the origins of the Roman oppression narrative. In many transitional ministry settings it has been fashionable to diagnose or label conflicted congregations as pathological. Some congregations have even been labeled "clergy-killers," and stories are gathered and shared to reinforce this narrative. Unfortunately, knowing the origins of this narrative and identifying who is to blame for it will actually reinforce the narrative rather than liberating the congregation into collaborative relationships with clergy. Unless and until the "clergy-killer" narrative is transformed, no amount of transitional ministry will be helpful or of value.

There are several steps to transform a negative narrative such as "We are clergy-killers." The first is to consider what is wanted in its place, such as, "We are the people of God, clergy and lay, who collaborate with each other in life-giving ways." In this way the problem is not ignored but transformed into a desired goal. With this goal in mind the congregation is invited to share stories of times when they have collaborated. Even if these times of collaboration are rare, they must exist for the congregation to have been created and survived

This then is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one... the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.
— George Bernard Shaw

If you keep telling the same sad small story, you will keep living the same sad small life.
— Jean Houston

despite their apparent problems. These "rediscovered" stories of collaboration are used to create the foundation for the new narrative that can be shared by the congregation. Other congregations that have been badly hurt by clergy abuse may have narratives such as "Clergy aren't to be trusted because they are vindictive or hurtful." Unless these narratives are transformed by the remembering of trustworthy clergy or a redemptive experience of a trustworthy priest, the people will remain untrusting and uncooperative.

While the examples of "clergy-killers" or "congregation-abusers" may be extreme, all congregations have narratives that need to be remembered, owned, and transformed. In the appreciative approach the focus is on the outcome of the narrative rather than the veracity of the narrative, because all narratives have some element of truth embedded in them. Many congregations have a "we are welcoming" narrative. This narrative is obviously true for those who were welcomed and remained to share in it. On the other hand, people who attended only once and did not feel welcomed do not share in that narrative. Rather than enter into argument and debate over whether the congregation is actually welcoming, the appreciative approach inquires into people's experience of being welcomed. The very telling of those stories will expand the welcoming narrative in consciousness and empower people to replicate them.

Implications for the Search

Language is a powerful way in which people focus their attention. Throughout this manual and in the search process we pay particular attention to the subtleties of language to ensure that the language we are using helps people focus on what they want rather than on having less of what they don't want.

Congregations socially construct their self-understanding through the use of language in the telling of self-confirming stories. The self-study and profile phases of the search process are an opportunity for the congregation to create, modify, and/or affirm their narrative or story. This story can also be placed like an individual thread within the great narrative of the People of God. It is essential that the congregation's story is consistent with their desired future and that the story's language calls people into its reality just as Jesus did with the narrative of the Kingdom of God.

Candidates also have a personal and professional story. As the search process unfolds, the task is to see whose story can best be woven with the congregation's story to create a new story that enriches both the congregation and the candidate.

The master gave his teaching in parables and stories, which his disciples listened to with pleasure – and occasional frustration, for they longed for something deeper. The master was unmoved. To all their objections he would say, You have yet to understand that the shortest distance between a human being and the Truth is a "story."
— Anthony de Mello

Because there is a natural storytelling urge and ability in all human beings, even just a little nurturing of this impulse can bring about astonishing and delightful results.
— Nancy Mellon

The Longing for and Power of Acceptance

Assumption 9. The deepest longing of the human heart is for acceptance. The only changes or outcomes that will be sustainable are those that result from greater self-acceptance and acceptance of others.

While acceptance is the deepest longing of the human heart we often experience life as a state of alienation. We experience alienation in three ways:

1. Alienated from our self, our capability and our potential.
2. Alienated from our neighbor.
3. Alienated from God, the Source of our existence.

Jesus' cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is one of the deepest expressions of the cry of alienation that is in every human heart *(Mark 15:34).* We do not need to spend time considering the origins of the alienation. Instead, we can focus on the atonement, God's response to humanity's alienation. Rather than trying to understand how the mystery of our "at-one-ment" has taken place in Christ, we suggest people start with the radical acceptance of God's infinite love — and then wonder how they can be part of sharing that radical acceptance with others.

Because the longing for acceptance is so powerful, only those changes that result in greater acceptance will be sustainable over time. When the outcome of a change leads to greater alienation, the alienated parts are likely to respond in kind, which will lead to ongoing cycles of change and deepening alienation. For example, it is possible to use fear to motivate people. However, any change in behavior will be short-lived, especially when the threat is removed. Alternatively, when threatened, people may respond in similar threatening ways, simply exacerbating the alienation.

To know and feel acceptance, people need to have the following four aspects of their lives recognized and enacted:

1. **All have existence** and need to be seen and have their presence affirmed.
2. **All have a voice** and need to have their story listened to and heard.
3. **All have talents** that need to be received as a unique contribution offered for the well-being of the group.
4. **All have dreams** and need hope, the ability to look forward to a better tomorrow.

If a change process results in greater alienation from God, Neighbor or Self it will not be sustainable.

Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune.
— William James

What can we gain by sailing to the moon if we are not able to cross the abyss that separates us from ourselves?
This is the most important of all voyages of discovery, and without it, all the rest are not only useless, but disastrous.
— Thomas Merton

The Appreciative Inquiry process — shared story telling, listening, dreaming, and aligning people's strengths with core purposes — by its very nature creates a culture of acceptance which results in outcomes that are inherently sustainable.

Accept Where You Are

Accepting does not necessarily mean 'liking,' 'enjoying,' or 'condoning.' I can accept what is – and be determined to evolve from there. It is not acceptance but denial that leaves me stuck.
— Nathaniel Branden

We cannot change what we cannot accept. Acceptance means we have to acknowledge where we are. If we are unable to acknowledge where we are, we will be in denial and not able to change.

Accepting our current situation does not mean that we have to like being in that situation. Unfortunately, not liking something is a very poor motivation for trying to change, as St. Paul discovered (*Romans 7:13-25*). Hating our present reality will be very counterproductive. Hate promotes short-term gain at the expense of long-term gain. Most hate-based initiatives will be difficult, if not impossible, to sustain over a long period.

God rains on the just and the unjust. Faith is not a way to control the rainmaker but a way to learn how to use a funnel.

We also need to accept the fact that, even if we dislike our current reality, the Source of our existence has not rejected us for being there. As we create goals, we need to consider whether we believe that only by achieving our goal will we be loveable. If your only motivation for achieving your goal is to make you loveable, then you are not likely to achieve the goal. It is only in the light of the love and acceptance you already have that you will have the power to achieve your goal. This is the heart of the Gospel message of grace. Christ did not wait for us to get perfect before he died for us. It was while we were sinners that he died. It is through accepting that grace in this present moment, with all our faults and strengths, that we have the power to transform our lives.

Implications for the Search

Since alienation is antithetical to the reconciling ways of God it is impossible to discover God's will by using strategies that result in alienation.

In conflicted situations it is not uncommon for one group to engage in behaviors that disenfranchise or alienate others. Since alienation is antithetical to the reconciling ways of God, it is impossible to discover God's will by using strategies that result in alienation. In such circumstances it is impossible to collectively discern God's will as these alienating paths create greater divergence rather than consensus.

To discover God's will the group needs to be of one mind. That can only occur in places of acceptance. The continual use of the appreciative strategies in this manual are designed to grow a culture of acceptance that can discern God's will.

One thing is sure. We have to do something. We have to do the best we know how at the moment. If it doesn't turn out right, we can modify it as we go along. — Franklin D.Roosevelt

Instructions: *Take a moment and think of someone whose behavior really offends you. As you think of the person and their actions, notice what you feel, and what you think you would like to do to them.*

Now shake off the feeling. Distract yourself and think of something else, something pleasant.

Next, think of that person again, but view them from the perspective that they are doing the best they know how to do in the current situation. Notice what you feel as you think of them from this perspective. Does that lead you to different ideas regarding what you would like to do?

Now reflect on the two feelings and responses. Which of the two responses would create a better world for you, the person, and your neighbor?

Which of the two responses would be considered most Christlike?

Notice that neither position condones the other person's actions. What we are seeking to create is an environment where we can be an agent of transformation rather than someone who contributes to the ongoing sustenance of the problem.

We are what we are, having become what we always were, the image of God we were created to be.

We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that deep inside us is someone valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our trust, sacred to our touch. Once we believe in ourselves we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight or any experience that reveals the human spirit.

— E. E. Cummings

Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.
— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Underlying Behavior is a Positive Intention

Assumption 10. At any given moment people are doing the best they know how to do in that context at that time.

A parallel assumption to this is that underlying all behavior is a positive intention.

People Are Doing the Best They Know How To Do

Often this is a difficult assumption for people to accept, especially when their own behavior is personally shaming or when someone is acting violently toward another. It needs to be made clear that this assumption does not mean that we underline approve of the behavior or that we do not hold the person responsible for their behavior. Even when people do know that they "should" do something better, contextual factors may limit people's ability to respond appropriately. An example would be telling the truth or lying. Many people who typically tell the truth may resort to lying when the threat of injury or loss increases. At that point, immediate safety concerns may take precedence over the long-term damage to the person's integrity. This is not to condone lying, but is one way of understanding why, in some situations, generally honest people may lie.

From a Biblical perspective, Jesus' plea from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing," expresses the truth of this assumption *(Luke 23:34)*. Jesus did not attribute evil to the people who sought and achieved his execution; rather, he attributed their actions to ignorance. In their ignorance they believed that Jesus was a menace and their lives would be better if he was dead.

The parallel assumption of positive intentions underlying behavior may require exploring several layers of intention to find the positive intention. To do this, we need to separate the intention from the surface behavior. It is the behavior that is unacceptable, not the underlying intention. We are not condoning behavior that denigrates or destroys humanity. What we need to do is find the positive intention underlying the behavior and then encourage respectful, life-giving alternative behaviors to achieve that intention.

Some current problematic behaviors may have been learned or adaptive responses to real dangers in the past. For example, a child may have learned to avoid abusive adults and, by extension, all relationships with adults. This may have been a highly intelligent strategy to stay safe at that time. Unfortunately, this avoidant behavior

may become habituated and persist long after the real danger has passed. As an adult the person, may still avoid close relationships. When helping such people change their behavioral patterns, we need to do so from a place of awe and respect of the person's best efforts as a child to stay safe, rather than offering assistance from a place of judgment that their current behavior is inappropriate. This is also true for the person with the problem. No amount of judging themselves or hating themselves will empower them to change. It is only in the light of their self-acceptance, that this behavior was and is the best they know to do in the situation, that they will have the power to change to a more effective behavior.

Shaming a person or making them feel guilty rarely creates sustainable change, especially when dealing with problem habits. When shamed, people feel small and vulnerable rather than strong and equipped to resolve a problem. If a problem behavior such as excessive drinking is used to resolve anxiety, then making the person feel guilty about their alcohol abuse will actually drive them to drink rather than set them free.

Sometimes the positive intention may be a violent, primitive survival instinct that is inappropriate in the given circumstances. We can accept this intention of seeking safety while rejecting the strategy of violence, because we know that violence begets violence and will never lead to a sustainable safe environment. However, to change the person's response, the first step is to discover and honor the positive intention, and only then work on alternative strategies. Discovering and honoring the positive intention creates a very different foundation for creating change than trying to change from the judgmental perspective of hating oneself or the actions of another. As St. Paul, attests in his letter to the Romans, hating a behavior actually makes it worse and does not bring healing and transformation.

Whatever Became of Sin?

Just as the appreciative approach doesn't ignore problems, we don't ignore sin either. In fact, we take sin very seriously — but we take grace and living the way God intended even more seriously. We cannot have a grace-filled life by focusing our attention on having less sin in our lives. Hating our sinful nature is a very poor strategy for dealing with our sinful nature. In fact hating, our sinfulness is a guaranteed way to stay miserable, alienated, and trapped in the sin we hate. As St. Paul clearly shows in his letter to the Romans, the way to a grace-filled life is not the path of trying to have less sin,

It is arrogant to believe that your capacity to sin is greater than God's capacity to forgive and transform.

Hating yourself is a very ineffective motivation for wanting to change. In most cases it will make what you hate about yourself even worse.

but comes from turning one's attention to the grace of God that is already present in Jesus.

Acceptance Three Step

When you find yourself doing something you do not like:

1. Accept that you are doing it.
2. Accept that doing it has not separated you from that which gives you life, God the Source and Sustainer of your existence.
3. Accept that at this given moment what you are doing is the best you know how to do, in this circumstance, to meet your perceived needs.

From this place of acceptance learn a better way to meet your needs in a manner that is sustainable and equitable for all.

Implications for the Search

The Gospel message is fundamentally about the infinite loving acceptance of God as it has been made known to us in Jesus. Churches need to reflect God's acceptance of us by being places of acceptance for others. The search process also needs to be a process that is based in this climate of acceptance.

In congregations where conflict has led to the rector's departure or in places where people experience great anxiety about the future, it is easy for people to begin judging and blaming others for the situation. Rather than helping create a positive future, this judging will keep the conflict alive and impair the search process. Assumption 10 moves people from a place of judgment to a place of curiosity that will allow for creative responses to arise. This assumption also focuses people toward the underlying positive intentions and shared values that can be helpful in the task of reconciliation, and which creates a loving foundation from which the congregation's future can be built.

This same attitude is necessary on the various committees as they deal with differing personal opinions and agendas. People's behaviors are likely to become less than helpful when they become afraid that their viewpoint is going to be challenged, ignored or overridden. It is important to continually create a community of love and acceptance rather than one of judgment and alienation so that differences can be openly discussed. The assumption of people doing the best they know is one way to help create such an atmosphere of love and acceptance.

If we want a better church we don't need better parishioners or leaders, we simply need our current leaders and parishioners to be their best.

Love is the total absence of fear. Love asks no questions. Its natural state is one of extension and expansion, not comparison and measurement.
— Gerald Jampolsky

The Appreciative Way and the Search Process

In the previous section we have shown that Appreciative Inquiry is more than an organizational process; it is a way of thinking, seeing, doing, and being in the world that is fundamentally different from the problem-focused approaches of many organizational development practices. The problem-focused approaches are typically based on the medical model of "assess, diagnose, and treat." While the medical model may be effective in helping treat physical medical conditions, it has significant limitations when dealing with social systems.

Diagnosis is essentially a sophisticated form of judgment and blame. The "cure" is often violent (in the form of surgery), or alienating (in the sense of rejecting or destroying invading bacteria). Medically speaking these can be helpful procedures, but when people in human systems are treated in blaming, violent, or alienating ways they typically respond with alienating and damaging reactions. Even with the best of intentions of trying to help, the process of blame often leads to negative spirals of enfeeblement where every attempt to help creates a more negative outcome.

The medical model works best in relatively simple systems that can be reduced to linear patterns of cause and effect. Churches and other social organizations are complex organic systems that cannot be reduced to linear cause and effect processes. When the entire system is involved in the problem, the entire system needs to be involved in the solution. In many cases these solutions will be independent of the problem, and will not be discovered from an analysis of the problem. For example, in the middle of conflict people often lose sight of the purpose of their organization. Reorienting them to the purpose and engaging them to achieve those deeper callings will often resolve the conflict without direct analysis, diagnosis, or treatment of the conflict.

It was in our search for an alternative to the medical model for organizational development that we discovered Appreciative Inquiry. What we have also discovered is that Appreciative Inquiry is not alone in using alternatives to the medical model when dealing with human systems. Appreciative Inquiry has parallels in, or is compatible with, other schools of thought, such as the change work of Milton Erickson and his students, solution-focused therapy, neuro-linguistic programming, positive psychology, narrative therapy, and, from a theological perspective, contemplative spirituality. In our lives and work we have synthesized these approaches into what we call the *Appreciative Way.*

The Appreciative Way is a foundational way of thinking, being and doing that transforms every aspect of the search process.

Even with the best of intentions of trying to help, blaming processes often lead to negative spirals of enfeeblement where every attempt to help creates a more negative outcome.

When the entire system is involved in the problem the entire system needs to be involved in the solution.

*If you want to find
a loving rector
then you will need to use
loving strategies
in the search process.*

*We need to know the rules
so we know how and when
to break them.*
— *Unknown*

*The incarnation teaches
us that sustainable change
must be an inside job.*

From our perspective the *Appreciative Way* is more than "doing an appreciative inquiry" process — it is a foundational way of thinking, being and doing that transforms every aspect of the search process. This approach leads to a search process that is incarnational, future-oriented, purpose-centered, solution-focused, values-informed, and inspired by love.

An Incarnational Search Process

The search process needs to be a process that is done <u>with</u> people not <u>to</u> people. Consultants, transitional clergy, and diocesan leaders need to incarnationally join the congregation where they presently are and not where the consultant wants them to be. From within this system they can create a search and transition process that honors the best of the congregation — and then uses their best as the foundation to co-create their new future in God.

Jesus never relied on only one method of healing. The Gospels are full of the varieties of ways he encountered people, entered into their unique worlds, and created strategies to bring transformation and healing. Using Jesus as a model, we reject the "one size fits all" approaches that impose a process from outside of the congregation. Our incarnational approach creates a process that respects and enriches the uniqueness of each congregation. While we detail many steps in the search process, not all congregations will need to do all the steps, and others may need to invent alternative processes to meet their needs. What we hope the reader will find here are the basic appreciative skills, and strategies to create and adapt these processes to meet their unique needs.

At the same time as we honor the congregation's uniqueness, we also want to honor diocesan expectations and procedures. Diocesan search processes vary in the assistance they provide to congregations. While becoming one of us, Jesus never lost sight of his Divine perspective or objective. While consultants and advisors need to join with a congregation, they also need to remember that the congregation is part of a greater whole. The clergy are not coming simply to serve a congregation, but to be part of and serve a diocese as well. This manual is intended to be a resource for dioceses and congregations to co-create a search process that facilitates a new chapter in the shared life of the congregation and the diocese as they minister to their community.

Moreover, search processes are not just about congregations and dioceses. They also involve the candidates and their families. An incarnational approach requires that search committees join with the candidates in a mutual path of discovery and discernment. While some candidates may be disappointed when they are not called to a position, we want their involvement in the search process to enrich their lives and their understanding of their Christian life.

We want the search process to be a blessing for all involved. When a blessing comes at the expense of another it is not a blessing, it is theft, and such blessings are never sustainable. An incarnational search means that the process respects the physical, social, and spiritual environments of all parishioners, the candidates, and the diocese.

Purpose-Centered

There is an old design saying: "form follows function." To create a process we need to know the purpose of each step, and we also need to know the greater purpose of the entire process, and the purpose of the organization in which the search is being conducted. When a rector leaves and parishioners begin to look toward the future, the first thing they typically begin to think is "What do we want in our next rector?" Unfortunately, this creates a search process that is disconnected from the congregation's current and future reality. At the initial stage of the search process the real question is not about the next rector. It's about the congregation:

What kind of parish do we want to become?

Only when this question is answered can the congregation reflect on the skills and abilities they need in a rector to help them become that congregation.

Our experience of congregational life suggests that one of the greatest needs in the main-line churches today is for congregations to rediscover and live their core purpose. This purpose needs to be lived in the context of their understanding of the local and global mission to which they are called. Apathy and conflict often arise because there is no unified purpose that inspires the activities within the congregation. Attempting to resolve this conflict without reference to a deeper purpose is futile. Consequently, most of the initial work in the search process is designed to help a congregation discover their core purpose.

Without knowing their God-given purpose and grounding their goals in this purpose, change processes are likely to be random, life-sapping distractions that mire the congregation in mindless mediocrity.

Great Minds have purposes, others have wishes.
— *Washington Irvine*

When you see what you're here for, the world begins to mirror your purpose in a magical way. It's almost as if you suddenly find yourself on stage in a play that was written expressly for you.
— *Betty Sue Flowers*

Future-Oriented

In the world of transitional ministry, considerable emphasis is placed on helping a congregation come to terms with its past, especially any problematic aspects of the congregation's past. We think this emphasis is often counterproductive. Rather than coming to terms with their past, congregations need to come to terms with their future. This future will be informed by our past, and while we cannot change one iota of our past, we can choose what we allow from our past to inform our future.

A central theme in the Gospels, and especially the Easter story, is the restoration of hope to a people who live in oppression. Hope is all about the future. It says we do not have to be limited by the past — that new life is available. Jesus didn't spend much time talking about the past. Most of his preaching was about the future and the coming reign of God. It was the coming of this future Kingdom of God, that was partially known in the present, which gave people hope despite the trials of the present and memories of the past.

Since the congregation will spend the rest of its life in the future, the *Appreciative Way* is focused on co-creating with God the congregation's preferred future. While very future-oriented, we understand that the path to the future is found by living fully in the present moment. We pay particular attention to discovering what is purposeful and life-giving to the congregation in the present moment, and then explore with the congregation how to increase this as they grow into their future.

While diagnosing and treating the difficulties of the past is not part of the *Appreciative Way*, we do not ignore the past. Rather, the past is viewed as a treasure trove of resources that the congregation can use as a foundation for building their future. Just as we pay attention to what is valuable and life-giving in the present moment, we also look for these realities in the congregation's past to strengthen their current consciousness. Specifically, parishioners are asked to tell stories about times when their congregation was at its best, or of their personal best experience as a member of the congregation.

From a theological perspective what we are doing is "remembering" the congregation. The act of remembering means to "re-member" or "put back together" in consciousness. Jesus used this understanding of remembering at the Last Supper. When we take bread and wine to remember Jesus, we are putting Jesus back together in our

You have to go and fetch the future. It's not coming towards you, it's running away.
— *Zulu Proverb*

You can't change the past, but you can ruin the present by worrying about the future.
— *Unknown*

Wherever you go there you are.
— *Jon Kabet-Zinn*

consciousness. The past memory becomes a present reality. We use the process of appreciative storytelling to help the congregation remember itself at its best. We deliberately choose to remember the best, because when we are at our best we most closely approximate the image of God that God intended us to be. It is from within this God-given best that the congregation can discern its purpose. This purpose then forms the basis of the search process.

Solution-Focused

When responding to an individual's pastoral concern, Jesus did not waste time worrying about the causes of problems, nor did he spend time trying to get people to have insight into their problems. For example, in the story of the man born blind, the disciples asked, "Whose sin, his own or his parents, caused him to be blind?" Jesus refuted these notions and instead saw in the man's blindness an opportunity for God's glory to be manifested *(John 9:1-3)*.

Likewise, in the story of the woman at the well, Jesus never explored why she had multiple husbands, nor did he require that she gain insight into her interpersonal problems. Instead, he used a strategy of ambiguity and confusion to help the woman come to a whole new understanding of the nature of life *(John 4:7-30)*. Since learning and developing the **Appreciative Way** we have become fascinated with the strategic way Jesus engaged people to help them find transformational solutions for their lives.

Congregations often find themselves in search processes because of problems with their former rector. Conventional wisdom suggests that these congregations will need to gain insight into how they were also part of the cause of these problems before they can have a successful relationship with their next rector. It is not uncommon for these congregations to pay considerable sums of money to expert consultants to perform an analysis of the problem. From this analysis a report is written that describes the problem in great detail but does little — if anything — to actually change the system or create a solution.

From our experience, it is all too easy to come up with eloquent theories as to what is wrong and who is to blame, and at the same time have no strategy to resolve the problem. We can recall one example where a consultant had several theories as to why a congregation was conflicted and under-performing. When asked which of the theories told him what to do next to solve the problem he looked very

The man who really wants something finds a way; the other man finds an excuse.
— E. C. McKenzie

If we fall, we don't need self-recrimination or blame or anger – we need a reawakening of our intention and a willingness to recommit,
to be whole-hearted once again.
— Sharon Salzberg

Beware of eloquent descriptions of problems masquerading as solutions to problems.

puzzled and then said, "none of them." Sadly, the recommendation that he find a theory that led to solutions was met with astonished resistance.

The *Appreciative Way* is focused on finding solutions to problems not ignoring or avoiding them. We respond to problems from the perspective of the solution, not from the perspective of the cause. We view problems as situations that have insufficient resources devoted to them. Finding solutions means finding the resources we need to achieve the desired outcome. We do not work to have <u>less</u> of a problem, we work to have <u>more</u> of the desired outcome. Developing strategies to achieve these desired outcomes often has little to do with the presenting problem.

Solutions also need to be incarnationally developed. Just because something has worked in one congregation does not mean that it will work effectively in another. We pay attention to the results of actions, continually modifying the action or strategy until it achieves the desired outcome. The incarnational approach to both the congregation in transition and the search process requires this solution-focused approach.

Values-Informed

As previously stated, people will resist change if they perceive that the change means they are losing something of value. Conversely, they will readily embrace a change if it is perceived as a blessing. A blessing is something of value. For change to be perceived as a blessing, the change must result in a final state that is perceived to be of greater value than the starting place. On the *Appreciative Way*, we discover what the congregation values in order to ensure that any change results in an enhancement of these values, or leads to something of greater value.

Congregations will readily embrace their future when they know that it will contain what they value and find life-giving. During the search process, we spend considerable time helping the congregation discover and articulate their core values, and then develop strategies to find candidates who share these same values. The congregation's core values are also important when developing search strategies, because the path to the future needs to be consistent with the desired future. We cannot use strategies that violate our values if we want to have sustainable outcomes. If we want to find a loving rector then we will need to use loving strategies in the search process.

A problem is nothing more than a situation with insufficient resources associated to that situation.

It's not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are.
— Roy Disney

Congregations will readily embrace their future when they know that it will contain what they value and find life-giving.

Love-Inspired

We believe that at the heart of the universe is a Heart of Love that is the Source of our existence, both as individuals and within congregations. The search process needs to be first and foremost an engagement with the Heart of Love. Loving and being loved by God, and extending this love to the congregation, are essential ingredients of a search that will result in a life-giving outcome for you, your congregation, and your next rector.

The opposite of love is fear. Fear-based decisions are often uncreative, restrictive, and generally not sustainable. For the search process, we will want to ensure that decisions are made from a place of love rather than a place of fear. This means that the congregation needs to have a shared purpose and an image of a joyful and sustainable future. A shared purpose also means that no individual or group within the congregation is coercing or threatening a negative outcome if their particular desires are not accepted. We cannot use fear to motivate others and expect positive results. Motivating others with fear is the path of terrorism. The appreciative strategies for the transitional time and the search process are designed, in part, to help move people to a place of love, so that the process and outcome will reflect the Heart of the loving God.

In the following section we present several models of understanding change processes, based on the *Appreciative Way*. These models are the building blocks that we use to design specific steps in the search process.

At the heart of the universe is a heart of love that embraces us and accepts us unconditionally. This heart of love is the source of our existence and life. This loving heart created us for a purpose and has given us every resource we need to fulfill that purpose.

The A ⇨ B Appreciative Way Change Fractal

To be alive means to be in a constant state of change. While many changes are imposed upon us, we also have the ability to create changes that we desire. The *Appreciative Way* focuses on the design and implementation of desired, sustainable change.

Basic A ⇨ B Change Fractal

Any intentional change can be understood as a process of going from an initial state **A** to a preferred state **B**. The transition from **A** ⇨ **B** is achieved by discovering, accessing, and utilizing resources[11]. A resource is anything an individual or group needs to make the change. Resources may be tangible (material, equipment, or money), or intangibles such as love, motivation, commitment, and a sense of purpose.

From a change perspective it doesn't really matter why or how you got to where you are.

What matters most is knowing where you are, where you want to go next, and knowing how you are going to get there.

Discover and appreciate what is valuable about where you are and use that as the foundational resource to create your desired future.

A fractal is an elemental pattern that, when repeatedly replicated, will create a large complex design. The **A** ⇨ **B** basic change model is a fractal for making changes. Large-scale changes are actually a series of nested and chained sets of the basic **A** ⇨ **B** pattern. For example, building a church hall is a large **A** ⇨ **B** pattern that is made up of a series of smaller **A** ⇨ **B** steps, such as securing the plans and permits, raising the funds, hiring contractors, purchasing materials, and so on. Even within these smaller steps, additional steps from **A** ⇨ **B** may be needed, such as hiring subcontractors to perform the construction tasks. Each step is achieved through discovering, accessing, and using resources.

The search process can also be seen as a set of nested and chained **A** ⇨ **B** steps. The profile is a precursor to setting the criteria for assessing candidates' skills and abilities. Within the profile **A** ⇨ **B** are a series of smaller steps, such as gathering the committee, engaging in an Appreciative Inquiry Summit, writing and publishing the results, etc. Throughout the entire search process we use the **A** ⇨ **B** model to design the strategies for each step of the search. We want each step, and the process overall, to be an efficient and economic use of resources, and result in a desired and sustainable outcome.

The three steps of leading transitions in this **A** ⇨ **B** model are:

1. Knowing where you are starting from
2. Knowing where you are going, and
3. Locating the resources to achieve the destination.

The first thing you need to be able to make a change is to know where you are starting from. One of the fundamental differences between Appreciative Inquiry and other organizational development processes is that you do not need to know or have insight into why you are starting at this place (or who is to blame for you being at this place) in order to create change. This is a radical, counterintuitive idea in a culture that believes gaining insight into antecedent causes is an essential precursor to creating change.

You do not need to know or have insight into why you are starting from some place or who is to blame for you being at this place in order to create change.

Most organizational development processes put considerable emphasis on understanding the cause of problems, yet as we have already noted, Jesus did not require people to have insight into the nature of their problems. In the parable of the wheat and weeds Jesus directs attention away from engaging the evil sower of the weeds or attempting to solve immediate problems such as pulling the weeds, and focuses attention on the desired outcome of the Kingdom of God *(Matthew 13:24-34).*

As effective gardeners know, the easiest way to prevent weeds in a garden is to grow healthy plants of their choosing, which will choke out the weeds. If we take care of growing our desired outcome, the "weeds" will be taken care of. Direct attempts to solve problems, rather than create solutions, will lead to bigger problems rather than permanent solutions.

We need to study the art of happiness rather than the cause of misery.

In addition to rejecting ideas of cause and blame, the appreciative approach does not ignore the starting point. The change process starts by using shared storytelling to discover the best of the congregation at this starting point. Within these best experiences the life-giving core and values can be discerned. Using the life-giving best and what is valuable to the congregation as the starting point ensures that there is a solid foundation for creating change and that the changes will be in the direction of greater life and value.

Everything works except when it doesn't.
— Unknown

Equally important as knowing your starting point is discovering the goal, or the preferred "future **B**" you want to achieve. You and the congregation are going to spend the rest of your life in the future. Ensuring that it is your preferred future is essential to creating vital, life-giving communities. This preferred future, based on what is life-

giving to the congregation, becomes the basis for setting the criteria for the search process.

Once a goal is established, the process for achieving it involves discovering and accessing the resources, both tangible and intangible, necessary to achieve it. When an obstacle occurs or the congregation fails to achieve the goal, the task is to remain in the appreciative mode and ask, "What other resources do we need?" rather than engaging in a process of blaming and exploring why the goal was not achieved. Understanding why a goal was not met is simply an exercise in excuse-making and does not help achieve the goal. As the group explores the additional resources needed to achieve the goal it may be appropriate to decide that the goal is not achievable because there are insufficient available resources. Such decision-making based on the availability of resources is inherently different from making decisions based on blame and fault-finding.

Goals Must be Positive

In leading people through these three steps of change, we find that goal formulation is critically important. Goals must be positively stated and imaginable. It is impossible to work toward a negative goal — for example, "being less depressed" or "having less conflict." This is typified in St. Paul's great conundrum in the book of Romans. The harder he tries not to do something he despises, the worse it actually gets *(Romans 7:15).* The solution for St. Paul is to stop focusing on what he doesn't want and to reorient to the omnipresent grace of God in Jesus.

When confronted with a problem or negative goal, we need to transform it into a preferred alternative. "Being less depressed" becomes "growing in happiness." "Managing conflict" becomes "collaboration building." In addition to being positive, goals must also be oriented in the direction of growing what is life-giving, if they are to be sustainable over time. If something is life-giving it will be life-giving for all the community and not just for part of the community. We cannot take life from one group and give it to another group if we wish to have sustainable outcomes.

Goals Must be Imaginable

In order to accomplish something, we must also be able to imagine the desired outcome. Negatively-stated goals are actually impossible to imagine and hold in consciousness. Many social programs fail because they have negatively-stated goals that are impossible to

Some of the world's greatest feats were accomplished by people not smart enough to know they were impossible.
— *Doug Larson*

The reason most people never reach their goals is that they don't define them, or ever seriously consider them as believable or achievable. Winners can tell you where they are going, what they plan to do along the way, and who will be sharing the adventure with them.
— *Denis Watley*

realistically imagine. When people are unable to imagine a goal, they will disengage emotionally and simply view the program as an activity for someone else to engage in.

For example, many congregations are working on the United Nations millennial development goals as part of their outreach efforts. While their intention is honorable, many preachers have been frustrated in their efforts to motivate their congregations to engage in these outreach efforts. One of the reasons is that the goal is often negatively stated and unimaginable. Consider the goal of reducing poverty by fifty percent. Most people, when asked about their sense of the starting point **A** for this goal, will conjure up a picture in their minds of hungry children. When preachers talk about poverty they will evoke these images. When preachers call people to work toward reducing the poverty by fifty percent, the people balk. "What does a picture of fifty percent less hungry children look like?" Most people are unable to create a realistic picture of this goal the preacher is calling them to engage in. Because they cannot realistically create the goal image in their minds, they will assume that the sermon is being addressed to someone else, and they will offer minimal support for the task.

What the preacher needs to do is ask the question, "What would we have if we did not have poverty?" Most people will imagine well-fed happy children. The next step is to ensure that this goal is imaginable in a way that the parishioners can see themselves realistically working to ensure that children are well-fed and happy. Most people, when asked, cannot realistically imagine every child in the world being well-fed. So the picture needs to be reduced in size through a series of steps until it is imaginable. The next question might be "Can you imagine every child in America being well-fed?" And if they can't do that (and many people can't), ask "Then how about in your city, or in your town?" And for those who cannot do imagine that, the preacher may need to reduce it further: "Can you imagine every child on your street being well fed?" Most people can get to a place where they can imagine being engaged in ensuring that children are well-fed.

Once people have that picture in mind, and they know they have the resources to achieve it, they will be more willing to engage in the task of ensuring the children in their image are well-fed. With this realistic image in their minds, it can be built on to include some other parts of the world. "Now that you can imagine every child in your neighborhood being well-fed, can you imagine being part of a program to ensure that every child in a neighborhood in Haiti, or

If you want to build a ship, then don't drum up people to gather wood, give orders, and divide the work. Rather teach them to yearn for the far and endless sea.
— *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*

Crisis is not always bad; it can become a turning point in your life for the better. Yes, it can bring danger and upset, but it also carries with it opportunity for growth and change. As you try to discover a way to cope with crisis, you could discover a new and better way of living.
— *H. Norman Wright*

Darfur, or some other place is well fed?" Most people can create that picture in their mind, having achieved the first picture. Now the person has two imaginable and realistic goals for outreach and achieving the United Nations millennial goals.

Once the goal has been established, the Appreciative Inquiry process of shared interviewing and storytelling about best experiences is used to discover the resources needed to achieve the goal. This process is iterative, as the storytelling can also be used to help the congregation create new goals and vision. The preferred approach is to engage all the congregation or stakeholders in the storytelling and visioning process. These events are typically referred to as an "appreciative inquiry summit." By engaging all the stakeholders in the storytelling and visioning process, the community as a whole will own the outcome and be more motivated to engage in achieving the goal. If the goal seems imposed from an external authority, it is less likely to be embraced and more likely to result in resistance. Basing the preferred future on the collective best of the past also ensures that the images of the future are realistic, because they are based on what the community has known to be true in the past and are not based on the disconnected fantasies of a few in the congregation.

Ensuring Change is a Sustainable Blessing

From the perspective of the **A** ⇨ **B** model, a blessing is a change where the outcome **B** is more valuable than **A** plus the cost of the resources to achieve **B**. One of the reasons for spending time understanding what people value at **A** is to ensure that any change takes the people to a place of greater value. People will resist when they perceive that the outcome is of lesser value than the starting point.

To ensure that the change is sustainable we need to seek and satisfy any objections to the goal. Objections which are overcome rather than satisfied will often lead to sabotaging behaviors.

Does Getting to "B" Make You Lovable?

Think of a positive goal that you would personally like to achieve to overcome something that you dislike about yourself. When you imagine achieving your goal state **B**, do you feel more lovable than you are at **A** with the problem? If you do feel you will be move lovable, or that you would love yourself more if you achieved the desired outcome, the likelihood is that you will not achieve your goal. Hating yourself will actually lead you to do more of what you hate about yourself. The Gospel is clear, as articulated by St. Paul in his letter to

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You don't have to be a fantastic hero to do certain things - to compete. You can be just an ordinary chap, sufficiently motivated to reach challenging goals.
— Edmund Hillary

Too many decisions about changes are made by people untouched by the change process.
— Peter Block

And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful then the risk it took to blossom.
— Anaïs Nin

the Romans, that it is only in the light of the fact that we are loved at **A**, regardless of what **A** is, that we have the power and resources to journey to **B**.

The first step in making a change is accepting where we are. If we can't accept where we are, we will be in denial and unable to change. The second step is accepting that being in this state does not have the power to stop God loving you. This does not mean that we have to like being in this current state, but creating goals needs to be an expression of the love that we already have, not solely motivated by something we hate. Hate leads to negative states of enfeeblement. Hate begets hate and does not give us power to create a sustainable life-giving future. This is also true for our congregations. We don't create goals to become lovable, we create goals as an expression of the infinite love that already exists. It is only in the light of this love that we have the power to access the resources we need to journey toward and achieve **B**.

We don't create goals to become lovable, we create goals because we are already loved. It is only in the light of the love we already have that we have the power to journey to where we want to be.

The Path to the Goal Must Be Consistent with the Goal

The path to the future must also be consistent with the future. For example, it is impossible to fight for peace. Wars simply plant the seeds for future wars rather than producing lasting peace. If a congregation in the midst of conflict tries to engage in a search process, parishioners are more likely to engage in conflicted and adversarial ways with respect to the search criteria and their choice of candidates. Their distrust of each other is likely to flow over into a distrust of clergy, which will be communicated to the candidates in the interviews. Questions will be framed to "trap" the candidates into revealing their flaws or create controversy, rather than creating an open conversation about the opportunities the congregation provides for the candidates to manifest their God-given talents.

Fear is what we experience when we do not believe we have the resources to meet a current demand or need.

If your congregation values integrity, honor, love, and faithfulness, and desires a future with these qualities, then each step of the search process must be expressions of, and be consistent with, these values. Deviousness, deception, and trickery have no part in a search for a caring leader. If you use these strategies in a search, you will either end up with someone who is even more deceptive and devious than you are, or is so naive to your wiles they will be ineffective in dealing with the day-to-day challenges the world presents.

If you want to find a loving priest then you will need to use loving search strategies.

On the following page is a summary of the important elements for creating goals to ensure that they are achievable and sustainable.

To our most bitter opponents we say: "We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws because noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Throw us in jail and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory."
— Dr. Luther King, Jr.

Creating Achievable and Sustainable Goals

The following elements are essential to achieving sustainable goals.

Goals must be positive.
We cannot become happy by being less miserable.

Goals must be valued.
We cannot put effort into an outcome that we don't value. The value of **B** must be greater than the value of **A** plus the cost of the resources to get there.

Goals must be imaginable.
We cannot achieve what we cannot imagine.

Goals must be resourced and perceived as worth the resources.
We cannot achieve our goals if we don't have the resources.

Goals must be ecological.
We must satisfy our objections to the goal rather than merely overcoming them for our goals to be sustainable.

Goals must be just.
Others can't be disadvantaged as our goal is achieved.

Goals must increase freedom.
We will resist goals that limit choice and options.

Goals must be sold.
In group situations all the members need to "own" the goal. When people can't agree on **B**, go back and first agree on **A**.

Goals must grow the love and respect that already exists.
If you think you'll be more loveable at **B** than you are at **A**, you probably won't get to **B**. The love you already have at **A** is the power to get you to **B**.

We must be able to say Yes! to the goal.
We need to authentically affirm our goals and actions.

The path to the goal must be consistent with the goal.
We cannot fight for peace. Both the journey and the outcome must be consistent with the our values and core purpose. We need to use loving strategies to find a loving pastor.

We must be incarnational when helping others achieve their goals.
Externally imposed goals will be resisted. For change to be sustainable it has to be an "inside job." Join together at **A** and journey to a shared **B** that you both value, rather than dragging someone to your **B**.

I do not believe that you should devote overly much effort to correcting your weaknesses. Rather, I believe that the highest success in living and the deepest emotional satisfaction comes from building and using your signature strengths. — Martin Seligman

Instructions: *Below is a series of negative statements or negative goals. Notice as you reflect on each statement how they hold in your consciousness the very thing you don't want. For each negative statement, create a positive alternative that creates an image in your consciousness of what it is you would like to see, instead of the negative statement. On the following page we have provided some alternative statements.*

Alienation

Judgment

Criticism

Sin

Child Abuse Prevention

Crime Prevention

Conflict Management

Deficit Reduction

Eliminating Poverty

Anti-Racism Training

Non-Violent Communication

Non-Anxious Presence

War On Terror

Fighting For Peace

No Child Left Behind

Unconditional Love

It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory. — W Edward Deming

The Appreciative Way

We decided that it was no good asking what is the meaning of life, because life isn't an answer, life is a question, and you, yourself are the answer. — Ursula K. Le Guin

Transforming Negatives Into Positive Alternatives

Here are some suggested alternatives. Notice that there might be several possible alternatives that you could pursue depending on your context and your personal experience of the language.

Alienation — Acceptance

Judgment — Wise Discernment
We don't want to give up the faculties of acute observation and decision making. Instead, we want to transform them from being a servant of alienation to a servant of grace.

Judgment — Curiosity
Rather than going down the path of "that's stupid, or bad, or evil" when we find ourselves becoming judgmental, we can transform the judgment by becoming curious and wondering what value the person is trying to achieve by their behavior. We may need to go through several steps of discovery until we find a value that we can also affirm.

Criticism — Praise

Sin — Love

Child Abuse Prevention — Safeguarding God's Children

Crime Prevention — Community Safety

Conflict Management — Cooperation Management

Deficit Reduction — Increased Revenues

Eliminating Poverty — Every Child is Well Fed and has its Own Bed
Note how difficult it is to create in consciousness a picture of the elimination of poverty, or even reducing poverty by 50%.

Anti-Racism Training — Seeing the Face of God in Each Other: Cross Cultural Cooperation

Non-Violent Communication — Compassionate Communication

Non-Anxious Presence — Confident or Assured Presence

War on Terror — Justice And Safety For All

Fighting for Peace — Loving And Serving For Peace

No Child Left Behind — Every Child Raised Up

Unconditional Love — Infinite Loving Acceptance

When we are motivated by goals that have deep meaning, by dreams that need completion, by pure love that needs expressing, then we truly live life. — Greg Anderson

Locating Resources to Modify Performance

An individual's performance on any task is dependent on multiple interrelated factors that are both external and internal to the individual. External resources are resources located in the environment. They may be tangible things like money or material, or intangibles such as location or community attitudes. Internal resources are the person's skills to perform the task and the person's motivation to engage their skills to achieve the goal.

When the external environment remains constant, the performance of two individuals can be compared by a mathematical formula.

Performance = (Skill) x (Motivation)

To improve performance, the person can work to improve their skills and/or their motivation. These factors are neither discrete nor independent. For example, we are usually more motivated to use well-developed skills that are likely to result in successful outcomes.

Congregational Performance

The overall performance of a congregation can be either more or less than the product of individual skills and motivations, because parishioner interactions may positively or negatively impact the motivation of other parishioners. Environmental factors such as location, building resources, and denominational and social issues may also enhance or degrade a congregation's performance.

These factors are not simply linear but impact each other in an interactive or systemic way. Graphically they are best represented as follows:

Performance =

Environmental

Skill ◄► Motivation

Context
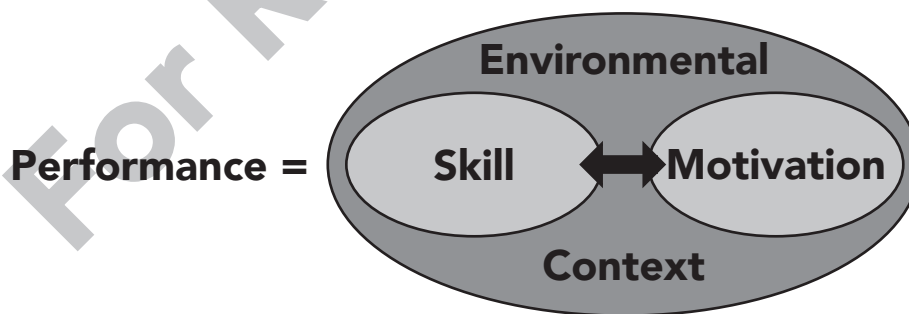
When seeking to improve a congregation's performance on any task, we can identify which areas need to be developed. Does the congregation need to change or upgrade its buildings (environment), develop a new ministry (skills), or focus on increasing the congregation's desire to achieve the goal (motivation)? Optimal performance requires that these three areas are synergistically enriching each other.

Deciding to commit yourself to long-term results rather than short-term fixes is as important as any decision you'll make in your lifetime.
— Anthony Robbins

You can't jump a chasm in two bounds.
— Chinese proverb

Fires can't be made with dead embers, nor can enthusiasm be stirred by spiritless men. Enthusiasm in our daily work lightens effort and turns even labor into pleasant tasks.
— Stanley Baldwin

Motivational Factors

Many factors determine our specific motivation to engage in any behavior. For the purposes of understanding congregational performance, we will consider five factors that influence both individual behavior and the overall performance of a congregation. Take a moment and consider a goal that you would like to achieve.

Expectations: *How successful do you expect to be?*

Can you imagine achieving the goal? If you have difficulty imagining achieving the goal, or don't believe you will be successful, you will probably not be very motivated to engage in the task. One strategy is to ask yourself: "What else do I need in order to be successful?" Another strategy to increase your expectation of success is to practice imagining all the steps in your mind and seeing yourself achieving the goal. We use Walt Disney's term "imagineering" to describe this role rehearsal process.

Values: *How important to you is the outcome?*

The more you value the outcome or the process of achieving the goal, the more motivated you will be to pursue the goal. You will also be demotivated if the process or goal violates your personal values such as integrity or honesty. As you consider your goal, ask yourself whether you need to modify the goal or your strategy to align them with your values. Also ask yourself whether there is something that is more important to you, and check whether you need to prioritize your goals and activities.

Identity: *How does the outcome relate to who you think you are?*

Complete the following sentence: "I am a..."

As you think of the goal, how consistent is the goal with your identity or sense of who you are? Our sense of identity is made up of many elements that relate both to our "being" and our "doing." We may say "I am a Christian" and be motivated to care for the poor, or be demotivated if the task involves cheating the poor. We will be more motivated when the task is aligned with our sense of who we are.

Purpose: *Will the outcome help you manifest your purpose?*

When we think of our lives we can see that we are not simply individuals, but that we are part of something bigger which will continue even after we are gone.

Life's up and downs provide windows of opportunity to determine... [your] values and goals... Think of using all obstacles as stepping stones to build the life you want.
— Marsha Sinetar

Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed.
— Mohandas Gandhi

Strong lives are motivated by dynamic purposes; lesser ones exist on wishes and inclinations. The most glowing successes are but reflections of an inner fire.
— Kenneth Hildebrand

We are part of a family, and organizations such as the church. We are citizens or residents of a country, and part of the universe.

Our spiritual understanding of life also teaches us that we are not simply individual random accidents of the universe, but that we are part of something greater than ourselves, and within that greater reality we have a purpose or a part to play. As consultants, the authors have found very few congregations that can readily describe their mission and purpose. We have also found that very few individuals are able to clearly articulate their own personal purpose. This creates a real problem for both individuals and congregations, because it is impossible to create and achieve realistic plans for our lives and organizations if we don't know why we are alive. How can a church prepare a budget if it doesn't know what its purpose is? Before we embark on any change process we need to ensure that the change will be an opportunity for us to manifest our purpose here on earth. We will be more motivated and empowered to engage in behaviors that are closely aligned with our purpose.

Source: *How does the outcome express your understanding of God, the Source of your existence?*

As you think of your goal, do you have to hide it from God, or do you imagine God delights in you as you seek to achieve the goal? Not all gods are created equal. The New Testament scholar N. T. Wright[12] tells the story of a student saying that he didn't believe in God. Wright said, "Tell me about this God you don't believe in." After the student shared his thoughts, Wright responded, "Well, I am not surprised you don't believe in that God; I don't believe in that God either."

As you think about your goal, what does it say about your understanding of God? Does the behavior reveal your belief in the God of love or the God of fear? Do you delight in the God you believe in or do you feel oppressed by your God? You will be very demotivated if you are afraid of your God and are conflicted in your sense of your God's will in relation to your goal. On the other hand, you will feel empowered and motivated when you are in the "zone" or in the "flow" when life seems to flow from the very depths of your being and the goal you are working toward is an expression of that life flow. It is at these times we experience the sense of being one with God and all the life in the universe. These flow states occur when all the elements of your motivation are aligned with your skills and the environmental resources, and the result is that both you and your environment are blessed and transformed.

Before we embark on any change process we need to ensure that the change will be an opportunity for us to manifest our purpose here on earth.

What you have to do and the way you have to do it is incredibly simple. Whether you are willing to do it, that's another matter.
— *Peter Drucker*

The place God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world's hunger meet.
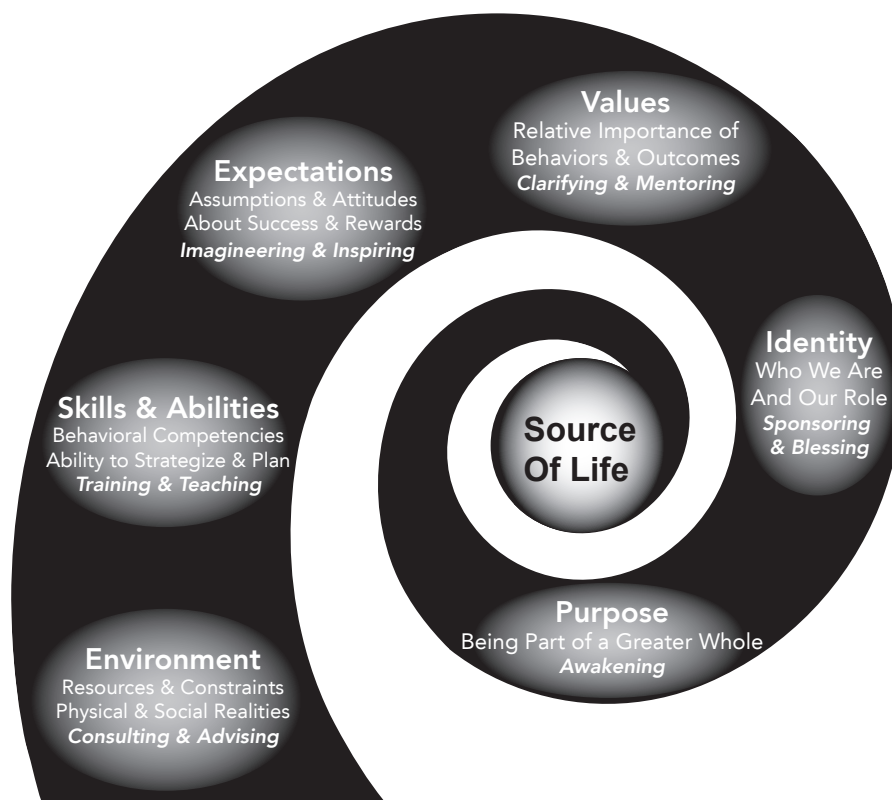— *Frederick Buechner*

Locating Resources on the Spiral of Life

Seven domains — Source, Purpose, Identity, Values, Expectations, Skills, and Environment — are important factors influencing how we live and experience life, both as individuals and in community. These domains are not discrete and may have considerable overlap with, and be organically interrelated with, the other domains. One way to envision the domains and their characteristic elements is to place them on an unfolding spiral of life[13].

Problems exist in a linear, "either/or" world. Solutions exist in the spiral world of "both and" and "more".

The Unfolding Spiral of Life

Jesus did not impose the Kingdom of God on us, he awakened us to the Reign of God that already is.

Each domain provides a set of resources that we can use to help improve our performance on any task. The words in italics in each domain describe the type of helping a facilitator or coach needs to offer to help people access their resources in that domain. Notice that assistance in the Environment and Skill domains can be very directive. In contrast, a coach cannot direct someone to have a purpose, they can only help a person awaken to the purpose that is already present and within them. For example, many of the processes in this manual which relate to your search skills, such as interviewing, will be very directive. On the other hand, we provide open-ended strategies to help you awaken to your congregation's purpose — we do not tell you what your purpose should be.

Likewise, in this model we use the language "Source of Life" as a generic expression for God, rather than imposing our view of God, Jesus, Spirit or Trinity upon you. Your congregation's understanding of the Source of Life will be an important aspect of your self-study.

Each domain becomes an organizing principle for the domains further out from the source. There may also be a strong element of a specific quality, such as caring or creativity, that runs through several domains as a life-giving thread. Ministries that express these life-giving threads are likely to be successful and intrinsically sustainable.

As you work on your congregational goals, it is important to ensure that the domains are congruent with each other and the goal. Life cannot unfold and flow from God, the Source of Life, in generative ways if there are disconnects between these organically-related domains. When there are disconnects, the domains further out from the Source of Life will be deprived of life. For example, if a congregation is working in violation of its values, no amount of changes in its environment (such as remodeling the liturgical space) will result in a sustainable life. Instead, people will become increasingly frustrated and conflicted.

Incremental and Transformational Development

There are two primary ways that organizational development occurs. One is incremental improvement, where small steps are added to previous steps to produce a gradual change. Incremental change happens when the focus and impact of the change occurs within one domain. As a group develops their skills to perform a task, each new skill is incrementally built on other skills they already have.

In contrast, when transformation occurs there is a leap of understanding that brings in a new order or way of being. Spiritually speaking we call this being born again, or enlightenment, or an awakening. St. Paul's experience on the Damascus road was a transformational experience. He did not learn any new skill, but everything about him was transformed, and that in turn transformed everything he did.

When a change is made in one domain of the spiral, all the domains further out from the Source from that domain will be transformed. However, any change in a domain will have minimal impact on the domains closer to the Source of Life. This is why changing environments rarely impacts the way we fundamentally think about ourselves or how we act in the world. This also shows that the most powerful place to intervene in a congregation's life is in their understanding of God and their purpose.

If the things we believe are different than the things we do, there can be no true happiness.
— Dana Telford

This we know; all things are connected like the blood that unites us. We do not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.
— Chief Seattle

Resolving Conflicts

As we create goals, we are likely to encounter conflict between or within the elements of the domains. Einstein once said, "We cannot solve a problem from the same level of consciousness that created it." To resolve conflicts we need to go to a domain closer to the Source of Life to find a point of common agreement. For example, if we are conflicted in the realm of our values, such as having two potentially competing values like "freedom/individuality" and "belonging," we would need to go to the domain of Identity to find a common foundation to resolve the conflict. If we cannot find a point of agreement at Identity, then we will need to find a common point of agreement in the domain of Purpose. In the Transitional Ministry section we will explore using the spiral to resolve conflict in greater detail.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Qualities of Each Domain

Each of the domains has an intrinsic and extrinsic quality. The intrinsic correlates with *kairos*, the eternal story. The extrinsic correlates with *chronos*, the temporal linear story. For example, the domain Source of Life describes what we find life-giving. We may understand this from the existential or *kairos* perspective of how we experience God, and we may also understand what is life-giving from a temporal or *chronos* perspective — for example, the immediate interpersonal relationships we find fulfilling or the shared creativity in a group that is inspiring and enriching. These temporal experiences, such as creativity, point to the eternal Creator but may not be recognized in many situations. This is especially true in secular business situations, but we have also observed this in church settings where the sublime presence of the Spirit goes unrecognized.

When describing themselves, some people may have a natural tendency to prefer intrinsic descriptors, and others may prefer the extrinsic descriptors. A good example of this is our self-identity. Some will understand their identity from the perspective of their being or who they are, whereas others will understand their identity from the perspective of what they do. From our experience, there is no right or wrong way to understand these factors. What is most important is to have a clear understanding of what we find life-giving, and to find ways to manifest that life in the world.

On the following page is a more detailed chart of the domains and their intrinsic and extrinsic qualities.

We cannot solve a problem from the same level of consciousness that created it.
— Albert Einstein

And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.
— Abraham Lincoln

Domains of Life and Living

The following domains and sub-domains apply to both individuals and organizations.

Spiritual

Source Of Life
Type of Coaching or Helping: Enlightening

Existential: *How is the Source experienced?*
God, Infinite Loving Acceptance,
Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit
Creator, Redeemer, Life-Giver

Temporal: *What is Life-Giving?*
creativity, fellowship, caring
hospitality, outreach

Purpose
Type of Coaching or Helping: Awakening

Vision: *How are we connected to that which is greater than ourselves?*
Our destiny, the Kingdom of God.
What we aspire to become.

Blessing: *How are we a blessing to others?*
Our unique reason for being
on the face of the earth.

Psychological

Identity
Type of Coaching or Helping: Sponsoring and Blessing

Being: *Who are we?*
I am... We are...

Doing: *What is our mission?*
What is our role in the community?

Values
Type of Coaching or Helping: Clarifying and Mentoring

Virtues: *What qualities do we esteem?*
honesty, integrity, faithfulness,
patience, peacefulness

Attitudes: *What is important to us?*
The relative importance of things,
activities and outcomes.

Expectations
Type of Coaching or Helping: Inspiring and Imagineering

Outlook: *What do we look forward to?*
Are we naturally inclined to be
optimistic or pessimistic?

Confidence: *How successful do we expect to be?*
What resources do we need to
improve our possibility of success?

Physical

Skills & Abilities
Type of Coaching or Helping: Teaching and Training

Talents: *What natural skills were we born with?*
Our physical and mental capacity
to accomplish tasks.

Abilities: *What skills have we learned/practiced?*
Techniques to plan and strategize.
Programs we have developed.

Environment
Type of Coaching or Helping: Consulting and Advising

Geography: *What is the natural landscape?*
Mountains, rivers, plains, valleys.
The flora and the fauna.
Weather and climate.

Architecture: *What have we developed or built?*
Buildings and grounds.
Organizational systems.
Procedures and policies.

We Want to Grow

Many congregations create or have a goal of growing numerically. This goal is often raised during the transitional time and becomes a significant criteria in the search process. Despite having this goal, many congregations fail to grow. Often efforts to grow result in conflict. We can use the goal of church growth to further develop our understanding of how the Spiral can be used as a way to identify and locate the resources a congregation needs to improve their performance to achieve a goal.

The basic resource model provides three places to intervene if we are to improve the congregation's performance in growing: environment, skills, and motivation. Within the realm of motivation we can also identify five domains in which to intervene. We will explore the resources to grow from the perspective of the seven domains.

Environment

- *Is the physical environment conducive to church growth?*
  Churches in areas of declining economies and population are not likely to grow numerically. Is the goal to grow numerically realistic? Rather than focusing effort on growing, these congregations in declining communities may need to focus not on trying to survive as a church, but on being servants of the wider community's survival.

- *Is the physical plant conducive to church growth?*
  Congregations are not likely to grow if their buildings and parking are already at maximum capacity. Conversely, large churches with very small congregations can feel cold and alienating to newcomers. Removing pews may improve the "warmth" of the community.

- *Is the church environment cared for?*
  The physical environment tells a newcomer a lot about how they will be treated if they were to become a member. Some buildings look tired and depressed and give visitors the sense that no one cares — which in turn communicates that no one will care about them. If you want to grow your church, pay attention to how your buildings communicate a sense of welcome, hospitality, and caring.

There are no such things as limits to growth, because there are no limits to the human capacity for intelligence, imagination, and wonder.
— Ronald Reagan

I started out with nothing. I still have most of it.
— Michael Davis

The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership.
— Harvey S. Firestone

- *How does the denominational environment impact growth?* The denominational and social culture also creates environmental factors that influence growth. Some churches have found that recent "liberal" decisions by national church bodies has caused opportunity for growth amongst those looking for an open and inclusive church. Others have found these same decisions have caused a decline in membership as people have sought more conservative expressions of faith. Our point at this time is not to debate the merits of these decisions, but to note how these external or environmental events can positively or negatively impact a goal such as church growth.

Addressing this goal from an appreciative perspective, we would take time to inquire into people's best experience of being welcomed, specifically with respect to the environment. If the environment is not effectively welcoming, we would not spend time trying to determine why the environment is the way it is or who was to blame for it being this way; rather, we would have people think of environments that they do find welcoming, and consider how those elements could be incorporated into their church.

Skills

If we want to grow a church, then the members need to become skilled at evangelism. The real challenge for most people in the main-line denominations is that very few parishioners are skilled at evangelism. In fact, most main-line church parishioners abhor the word "evangelism" as it conjures up images of judgmental, coercive, attempts to impose a religious perspective on someone. In these congregations, the first step in developing the skill of evangelism is redefining it in terms that members can engage in. One congregation we know intentionally dropped the word evangelism and created and funded a "marketing program." Members are trained and very intentional about how they "market" their congregation to their friends and members in their community.

In its essence, evangelism is sharing what you value with someone you care about. Many Episcopalians are more comfortable telling a friend about a new movie or a restaurant than they are about their church. We can use the appreciative approach to discover what it is about the movie or restaurant that makes the person want to share it with a friend. We would then ask what we would need to do at church to create the same quality of experience. Notice that we

Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.
— George Carlin

When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, "I used everything you gave me."
— Erma Bombeck

would be looking for the same <u>quality</u> of experience, and not trying to replicate the experience itself.

Because evangelism is about sharing or marketing what is valuable, the appreciative approach of exploring shared values and building programs around these values will be essential to raise in consciousness the value of membership in the congregation. It is unlikely that learning skills of evangelism without reference to values and purpose will be of any significant benefit.

Expectations

How successful does the congregation expect to be in their efforts to grow? Because most Episcopalians are not skilled at evangelism, or church growth in general, they are not likely to expect to be successful in any growth endeavor, and consequently they will be poorly motivated to engage in any growth-related activity.

Often the hopes of growing are created without any real reference to a specific plan or strategy. In these situations, the desire to grow will simply be a fanciful dream. If the goal has no tangible program related to it, people will have little expectation of success and will be very poorly motivated to get involved in growth-related activities. Creating specific observable strategies that parishioners can engage in is essential to increasing expectations of success.

Creating realistic expectations for growth also requires taking into account the environmental context. What kind of growth will the neighborhood support? Suburban churches probably have great potential for numerical growth, whereas many rural communities have limited opportunity to grow. One church we know of in a declining rural community gave up expectations of growing and surviving, and turned their efforts to helping the local community survive. They became active in supporting local volunteer programs such as the firefighters, and community service organizations such as the schools. Since the time they began their outreach efforts, they have had three building programs to increase the size of the church hall so they could feed and minister to larger numbers of people.

The issue of realistic expectations will become critical in the search process, as many congregations are looking for their new rector to come and grow their church without any reference to a plan for growth. Such unrealistic plans will simply sow the seeds of future disappointment and frustration. Creating specific, realistic, imaginable plans is essential to engaging a congregation in growth.

Goals without strategies to achieve them remain nothing more than fantasies.

Blessed is the man who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed.
— Alexander Pope

If we did the things we are capable of, we would astound ourselves.
— Thomas Edison

Values

When congregations say they want to grow, we often ask them, "Why would growing be valuable to you as a congregation?" It is very rare that the answer is anything we would heartily want to endorse. Most of the time people respond that they need more people to increase the income so they can survive. Such a motivation is unlikely to result in growth. Why would someone want to join an organization so they could have a share in their debt?

To find an alternative reason to grow, we explore what people value about their church, which in turn could be perceived as a blessing by potential newcomers. To discover that value may require asking "and why would that be valuable?" several times until we are able to find a shared value that others would find motivating. In the repetitive questioning, we mine into what is valuable to discover what is truly valuable. These deeper values are often existential values that all people share. For example, they may initially find some value in a temporal connection with others, and subsequently discover that connection is a sign and expression of the infinite value of connection with God in Jesus. When experienced and lived, this deeper awareness is a powerful motivator and resource for helping people to share their faith and help their community grow.

Many people don't value what they have in their faith sufficiently to want to share that value with others. They have not learned that the best way to keep a deep existential value, such as freedom, is to share that freedom with others. Rather than condemning people for their failure, the appreciative approach inquires into those rare occasions when they have experienced that existential quality and invites them to ask, "What would it be like to be more aware of this quality? How would this awareness impact my life? What would I need to share it with others?"

To be truly resourceful, our values need to be in alignment with our goals. As individuals, we often find ourselves in situations where we have values that may be in conflict. For example, part of us may value time spent alone, while another part of us values socializing with others. In a congregation the potential for conflict between competing values increases geometrically with the number of people involved. Some parishioners may value intimacy and want their church to feel like a family. Others may value a looser connection with a diversity of people, and want their church to be a community rather than a family. Efforts to engage in church growth may founder because

Values are like pearls. At the center of a value is often a profound irritant. Violating a value is like turning a pearl inside out and living in the reality of the irritant.

Wanting to grow to increase the membership to increase the income so you can survive is not likely to succeed. Why would someone want to join your church so they could have a share in your debt?

To work in the world lovingly means that we are defining what we will be for, rather than reacting to what we are against.
— Christina Baldwin

part of the congregation is unable to perceive any value or positive benefit in growing. Some may fear that as they grow they will lose their sense of intimacy or their connection with the rector. People will naturally resist growing if they perceive that the final outcome, a bigger church, would result in their losing something they value. Often these people are judged and labeled "resistant," which hardens their attitude — which in turn creates a negative spiral of conflict, increasing alienation, and decline in numbers rather than growth.

Before embarking on a goal of growth, a congregation needs to inquire deeply about what it values, both temporally and existentially. To ensure that growth is a blessing, the strategies for growth need to ensure that those things that people deeply value and find life-giving will be maintained or enriched. Having a clear vision of the desired outcome and why it would be valuable will also increase people's motivation to engage in the strategies for growth.

The strategy of seeking and satisfying objections, rather than overcoming them, is very helpful in aligning goals with values. It is profoundly respectful and accepting of others, which ensures that the path to the future is consistent with the desired future. As goals and values are aligned, and the future is perceived as more valuable than the present, people will own — and be motivated to engage in — the plan for growth. Growth will then be incarnationally experienced, rather than something inflicted upon unwilling people.

Identity

When we raise the idea of evangelism with congregations, one of the common responses we hear is "We don't do that, we're not Baptists." People are not likely to engage in a practice that is not consistent with their identity. No efforts at training people to evangelize will be successful unless the underlying identity of the people is transformed to one that can include sharing with others what they find life-giving about their congregation.

When a congregation has little shared sense of who they are and what their mission is, their sense of identity will be fragmented with potentially competing sub-identities. Since people's sense of identity is associated to the stories they tell about themselves, we use the appreciative approach of shared storytelling to transform the congregation's identity and create a unified understanding of who they are. We can't tell a congregation what their identity should be, but we can help people, through their shared story-telling, to discern their life-giving identity, and bless that identity into being.

I am only one;
but still I am one.
I cannot do everything,
but still
I can do something.
I will not refuse
to do the something
I can do.
— Helen Keller

Growth for the
sake of growth
is the ideology
of the cancer cell.
— Edward Abbey

Success is blocked by
concentrating on it
and planning for it...
Success is shy –
it won't come out
while you're watching.
— Tennessee Williams

Purpose

Over the past forty years many main-line churches have experienced a significant decline in membership. Many formerly successful congregations now find themselves in a survival mode. The focus on survival, however, becomes counterproductive. It causes the congregation to turn inward and become self-absorbed. At the same time, the congregation loses all sense of its core purpose. Congregations in this state do not search for leaders to lead them into fields of mission, but rather they search for chaplains who will come and take care of them. Chaplaincy is an important ministry, and providing pastoral care to one's members is a very important part of congregational life, and is a value that can be offered to the community. However, providing pastoral care to one's members can never become the sole reason for a congregation's existence, because it is inherently unsustainable. A congregation can only be sustainable if it has and manifests a life-giving purpose that is bigger than itself.

To be life-giving, this purpose needs to be a positive statement of what the congregation truly stands for, not what it is opposed to. An organization based on what it is against or what it is not will ultimately prove lifeless. Nor can a life-giving purpose be only inward- or outward-looking. It needs to be a way for the congregation to integrate the ways they simultaneously say Yes! to God, Yes! to their neighbor, and Yes! to themselves.

As we have noted, it is extremely rare for members of most congregations to be able to describe their purpose or their mission. This is not a failure on the part of the members, it is a failure of leadership. We once met a Navy Captain who skippered a cruiser which had a crew of about three hundred. He told the story of how he would tour the ship and, on encountering a sailor doing his task (such as washing the deck) he would ask, "Sailor, what is your mission?" And then, "Sailor, what is our mission?" The Captain believed that if the sailor could not answer either question he, the Captain, had failed the sailor. One of the primary tasks of leadership is to hold and communicate a shared vision and purpose for the people. As with identity, we cannot simply tell people what their purpose is. We use the appreciative approach to help people awaken to the purpose that is within them. In the book of Jeremiah, God says, "Before you were born I knew you." We were known by God before we knew ourselves, and it is in God that we have a divine purpose to manifest in a human world.

Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you.
— Parker Palmer

Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.
— Howard Thurman

We were known by God before we knew ourselves and it is in God that we have a divine purpose to manifest in a human world.

*Growing or growth
can never be
our purpose or goal.
Growth is simply
the by-product of
manifesting a
life- giving purpose*

*Strong lives are motivated
by dynamic purposes;
lesser ones exist on
wishes and inclinations.
The most glowing
successes are but
reflections of an inner fire.*
— Kenneth Hildebrand

*Love is life.
All, everything that I
understand, I understand
only because I love.
Everything is, everything
exists, only because I love.
Everything is united
by it alone.
Love is God,
and to die means that I,
a particle of love,
shall return to the general
and eternal source.*
— Leo Tolstoy

Growth is not the purpose. Growth is simply the byproduct of manifesting a life-giving purpose. Rather than focusing on growth, we need to focus on living our God-given purpose. No attempt to engage in a plan of growth is likely to succeed unless it flows from and is aligned with the life-giving purpose of the congregation. In our experience, congregations need to discern their own unique purpose rather than relying on doctrinal statements of purpose, in order for their purpose to be truly energizing and motivational.

While doctrinal statements are true in a general sense for the Church as a whole, at the local level the congregation's purpose needs to be an incarnational expression of who they are in their particular community. Inviting people to join the church at activities such as newcomer gatherings is not simply an invitation to join the local "Episcopal Club" but is an invitation to join a unique group of the people of God on a mission from God.

Source

We have explored the understanding of church growth "from the outside in" with respect to the Spiral of Life. In many cases, this is what we observe congregations doing with their plans for growth. They focus on making their environment more welcoming and implementing activities such as newcomer gatherings. Such attempts at growing are radically under-resourced. The reality is that if we really want to engage in church growth, we need to begin at the core, at the Source of Life. All revivals begin with a fresh experience and understanding of God.

Because a change in one domain transforms all the domains further out from the Source of Life, the most powerful place to intervene in congregational life is in their understanding of God and their purpose in God. Helping people to awaken to a new understanding of God, and their purpose in God, is essential if we want people to share what they deeply value about their church and their faith with others.

What we have observed in churches that have developed consistent cultures of growth are substantial programs of Christian formation for all ages. We have found this to be true in both liberal and conservative churches.

In the field of psychotherapy, considerable emphasis has been placed on discovering which type of psychotherapy is the most effective. What the research has shown is that the type of therapy

is less important than the therapist's commitment to the type of therapy they offer. This commitment is related to the therapist's confidence in their ability to create a desired outcome, which in turn engenders hope. The restoration of hope is one of the core aspects of all healing and transformation. We think the same thing is true in churches. People may argue over whether a "liberal" or "conservative" theological perspective is really true or really helpful, but the really important issue is their degree of commitment to the life-giving quality of the God they know, regardless of whether they express that in liberal or conservative terms. Creating programs that deepen people's awareness and knowledge of God will be the most important resources for equipping people for the work of growing the church.

A realistic hope, that together with God they can make a difference in the world and create a future that would be good for them and the community around them, is an essential resource for a church that wants to grow. To ensure that the hope is realistic, rather than a fantasy, we need to reflect on the times, however few they may be, when the people have made a difference with God. By using these times to re-member themselves in God the congregation can be resourced to create ministries that confidently express their purpose in valuable life-giving ways. In manifesting their purpose they will join with St. Paul in saying, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" *(1 Corinthians 3:6).*

I have one life and one chance to make it count for something...
I'm free to choose what that something is,
and the something I've chosen is my faith.
Now, my faith goes beyond theology and religion and requires considerable work and effort.
My faith demands
— this is not optional —
my faith demands that I do whatever I can,
wherever I am,
whenever I can,
for as long as I can
with whatever I have to try to make a difference.
— Jimmy Carter

Appreciative inquiry is an iterative, generative, process that uses collaborative inquiry and strategic visioning to unleash the positive energy within the Church to enable Christ's work to be done in the World

Appreciative Inquiry 5D Spiral of Development

Consultants who use Appreciative Inquiry in their organizational development work often refer to using a "4D" or "5D" process of development. Early Appreciative Inquiry literature described a circular or iterative 4D (Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver) process of organizational development. Some authors and consultants also referred to the Deliver phase as the Destiny phase. Practitioners using this process began discovering that the way the process was defined and initiated had a huge influence on the outcome of the process. For this reason, we and many other practitioners began using a 5D model by adding "Define" to the list of steps.

In contrast to the traditional organizational SWOT process (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), Appreciative Inquiry practitioners also created SOAR[14] (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) as a process that embodied the fundamentals of the appreciative approach.

Regardless of the specific labels applied to the stages, at its heart the appreciative process of organizational development involves creating a positive goal, community-wide inquiry and storytelling of best experiences, imagining a shared preferred future, and creating plans to bringing that future into being. We will use the 5D model specifically in designing the Appreciative Inquiry Summit as part of the self-study and visioning process in preparation for conducting the search for a new rector.

The Five Phases

1: Define: Committing to a positive plan.

For many churches the first goal is to get a goal.

In this phase we are creating an overall **A ⇨ B** plan for the Appreciative Inquiry intervention. All the guidelines for creating goals are applicable in the Define stage. While being quite specific in defining a desired successful outcome, the process is also open to the possibility that the Discovery phase may generate alternative outcomes that are more aligned with the needs of the organization as it seeks to fulfill its purpose. In many churches, one of the core needs is to clearly establish the church's unique purpose and to envision what the church wants to become as it manifests its purpose. In essence, the first goal — is to get a goal.

The Define phase is also a time to invite and prepare all the stakeholders to be part of the appreciative process. In some situations it may be

appropriate to educate the people about some of the fundamentals of the appreciative approach in order to develop their commitment to working appreciatively. In creating the appreciative commitment, the biggest objection we encounter is the impression that by using appreciative inquiry we will be ignoring or overlooking problems. We assure people that we take problems seriously by working from the perspective of their solution rather than from the perspective of developing a theory of their cause. We specifically invite people to present their problem, and then ask what they want in its place. We can then design the appreciative inquiry process to achieve the desired outcome or goal.

Appreciative inquiry doesn't ignore problems, it just looks at them from the perspective of their solution rather than their cause.

The Define phase is also the time to create the self-study team and to engage in all the logistical preparation for the rest of the 5D process. In large congregations the logistical preparations can be considerable, and may require significant time to invite and ensure the participation of all the stakeholders in the process. We can think of this phase as: ***Setting the stage***.

2: Discover: What in God's name is going on in your church?

At the heart of the appreciative process is shared storytelling using a pre-defined questions. This process invites the congregation to discover the Godly, life-giving things that are occurring in the congregation. The Discovery phase is a time of "re-membering" the congregation at its God-given best — those times when it has manifested what God intended it to be. There are three general areas of inquiry: best experiences of the congregation, what is valued about the congregation, and wishes and dreams for the congregation. We can think of this phase as: ***Valuing the best of what is***.

When we seek to discover the best in others, we somehow bring out the best in ourselves.
— William Arthur Ward

3: Dream: What are God and the community calling us to be?

With the shared stories in mind, the people are invited to imagine what the church would become if it focused its efforts on doing more of its best. While the Discovery phase focuses on the past, the Dream phase focuses on the future, and specifically by imagining a preferred future. By imagining what more of our God-given best would look like, we are discerning what God is calling us to be. Because the Dream is based on the best of the past, it will be reality-based rather than an unrealistic fantasy. The goal is to create a shared vision of the congregation's purpose and what it desires to become. We can think of this phase as: ***Visioning the ideal***.

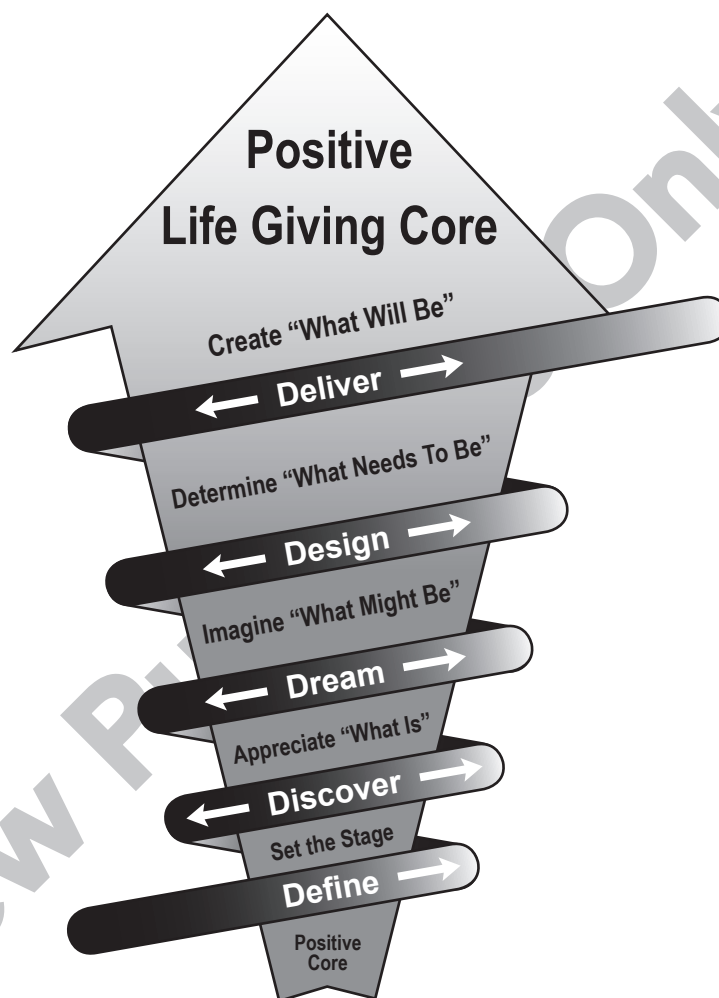*There are two great days in a person's life – the day we are born and the day we discover why.*
— William Barclay

Appreciative Inquiry 5D Spiral of Development

The questions we ask of one another will determine whether we live in generative spirals of creativity or negative spirals of enfeeblement.

You must be the change you want to see in the world.
— Mohandas Gandhi

4: Design: What strategic action will go with our strategic vision?

A vision without a plan and subsequent action will remain a fantasy. The congregation's preferred future will only be achieved through their intentional activity. In this phase, practical plans are created to achieve the preferred future. Each plan, and steps within a plan, need to be designed according to the **A ⇨ B** model. To discover resources to achieve the plans, it may be necessary to return to the Discover phase to identify specific resources that are needed for success. Each step in the Design phase must be positive, imaginable, manageable, and achievable.

Plans may include very tangible development of environmental resources or changes to systems and processes. In addition, values and systems may need to be aligned with processes to ensure that the path to the future is consistent with the desired future. We can think of this phase as: *Determining what needs to be*.

5: Deliver: Are we doing Christ's work in the world?

In Appreciative Inquiry literature, this phase is also known as the "Destiny" phase. It is through the implementation of the Design phase that the congregation "Delivers," or does Christ's work in the world, and in so doing manifests its Destiny.

It is important to stay appreciative in this phase as there is often a tendency to revert to old patterns of cause and blame when a plan is not achieved. When a failure occurs, or an obstacle is discovered, we need to ask what else we need to achieve our desired outcome?. We also need to build into the process ways of monitoring outcomes, such as conducting regular mutual ministry valuations, to continue to innovate in a continuous process of growth and development. We can think of this phase as: *Innovating what will be*.

Although the process is presented in 5 specific phases, the process is organic and iterative. At times we may loop back to discover additional resources to achieve the desired outcomes. We also expect the process to be expansive and generative, unleashing creative energy that grows the life-giving core of the organization. The final outcome may be very different from what was anticipated — yet still very familiar, as it is based on what we have known in the past.

Conclusion to the Appreciative Way

On the following page are several summaries of appreciative thinking, contrasted with current patterns of thinking, as they relate to individual and organizational development. These summaries and contrasts show that the *Appreciative Way* is a substantially different method of perceiving and engaging with the world. Because the underlying paradigms are different, care needs to be taken when transferring a skill learned in one arena to another. I (Rob) can recall at least one occasion in my early days of learning the Appreciative Way that I created considerable and unhelpful confusion in a group by inadvertently changing the paradigm without either their or my awareness. All we were aware of was a growing sense of confusion and frustration that something wasn't working.

The *Appreciative Way* of thinking will provide a foundation for and permeate all the steps of the search process and the ministry that occurs during the transition from one rector to another. In the next section we will provide an appreciative understanding of conducting an exit interview and the tasks of the transitional ministry as they relate to providing a firm foundation for conducting a search.

Great spirits have always found violent opposition from mediocrities. The latter cannot understand it when a man does not thoughtlessly submit to hereditary prejudices but honestly and courageously uses his intelligence.
— *Albert Einstein*

The moment you have in your heart this extraordinary thing called love and feel the depth, the delight, the ecstasy of it, you will discover that for you the world is transformed.
— *Jiddu Krishnamurti*

Comparison of Historic Epistemologies and Social Constructionism

Historic Epistemologies	Social Constructionism
Truth exists and can be known. Plato's *a priori* truth.	We co-create what is considered true.
"Careful observation will reveal the truth." — *Aristotle*	Participation is all that is possible. To observe or ask questions is to participate.
Adversarial perspective is taken for observation: "We should torture nature to give up her secrets." — *Francis Bacon*	Cooperative position is natural form of participation.
Observers are separate from what is observed. — *Descartes*	Observers are in the system they observe.
Reduction of larger parts into smaller will enable the truth to be revealed. "Man as a machine." — *Newton*	Human experience is arbitrarily punctuated.
We live in a linear and hierarchical world.	We live in a circular world of relationships.
Individuals operate independent of environment.	Individuals and environment form an ecosystem.
Causes are inside the individual.	Problems are reciprocal interactions between and within parts of the system.
Pathology focused, disease identification.	Health focused, lifestyle enhancement.
Problem-oriented: identifying causes.	Goal-oriented: seeking solutions.
Experts "give" treatment.	Change agents create a context for problem solving.

Adapted from Steve Lankton[15]

Epistemologies Applied to Individuals and Organizational Consultation

Empirical Process	Appreciative Process
Define the problem.	Search for solutions that already exist.
Fix what's broken.	Amplify what is working.
Focus on decay.	Focus on life giving forces..
What problems are you having?	What is working well around here?
Learning from our mistakes.	Learning from what works.
Who is to blame?	Who is to affirm?
Basic Assumption: People and organizations are problems to be solved.	**Basic Assumption:** People and organizations are mysteries to be embraced.

Adapted from Sue Hammond,
Thinbook of Appreciative Inquiry[16]

Darwinian and Post-Darwinian Thinking

Darwin	Post-Darwinian
Life is an accident, one of many random events.	Life organizes systems so that more life may flourish.
The world is hostile, with problems to solve.	Life is abundant and self-sustaining.
Life is a constant struggle for survival (win-lose).	Life is about cooperation and innovation.
Error leads to death.	Life is a constant process of discovery and creating.
Leadership must dominate and control.	We're here to co-create, not defend.
Things exist outside of me in a fixed, independent state.	I am part of and influence the system I am in.
Organizations operate in fixed mechanistic patterns.	Organizations are living, organic systems.

Adapted from the Appreciative Inquiry Commons[17]