

ENSURING CHANGE IS A BLESSING: THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY BASED WAY OF LEADING TRANSITIONS.

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Ensuring Change is a Blessing: The Appreciative Inquiry Based Way of Leading Transitions.

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

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

Since its beginnings in the mid 1980s¹ Appreciative Inquiry has become a preferred method of whole system interventions in the organizational development world. It has been successfully used in both large and small corporate and not-for-profit organizations including church and para-church organizations. The word appreciate means to recognize and value the worth of something, to express gratitude for something of value, or to grow in value. To inquire means to explore or to ask questions of something. When put together in the process known as “appreciative inquiry” all these meanings are operative. People are invited to explore what is valuable in their organizations and the very act of inquiry causes what is valuable to grow.

Appreciative Inquiry may be viewed in two different ways. One simple approach is to view it as a positive organizational development tool that uses a “5D” method of Define, Discover, Dream, Design, and Deliver² process to facilitate strategic planning or respond to organizational needs. This approach is best known for its use of community wide interviewing into best experiences of the organization. However, this simplistic view of appreciative inquiry will result in a process that offers minimal assistance in many transitional ministry settings.

An alternative approach is to see appreciative inquiry as a way of being and acting in the world in a life-giving manner. This appreciative perspective seeks to discover and grow the life-giving core of an organization rather than simply work to reduce the presence and impact of problems. David Cooperrider, the founder of Appreciative Inquiry, describes it this way: “*Appreciative inquiry is based on a reverence for life... It is an inquiry process that tries to apprehend the factors that give life to a living system and seeks to articulate those possibilities that can lead to a better future. More than a method or a technique, the appreciative modes of inquiry is a means of living with, being with, and directly participating in the*

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life of human systems in a way that compels one to inquire into the deeper life-generating essentials and potentials of organizational existence.”³

In my work helping congregations in transition I have integrated the appreciative inquiry perspective with the resource, based strategies of psychiatrist Milton Erickson⁴ and his students, together with contemplative spirituality as found in the mystical traditions of Christianity and Buddhism in order to create the Appreciative Way.⁵ This lifts Appreciative Inquiry out of the realm of simply being a positive, strategic development tool to an incarnational way of being and living in the world that offers a transformational perspective and approach to any individual or organization’s life experience. It is from this Appreciative Way perspective that I will address leading during transitions.

Life-Giving Focus

While positive in its orientation this appreciative approach goes beyond simply being positive to focusing on what is life-giving and then growing that which is life giving. Positive and negative are judgments that depend on a person’s value system. Some may consider something positive while others might consider it negative. To transcend the possibility of positive-negative judgments and arguments, Appreciative Inquiry identifies and focuses on the life-giving realities in the congregation rather than simply focusing on what is considered positive. Once these life-giving realities have been discovered the congregation is invited to wonder corporately what would happen if they were to focus on and grow these life-giving qualities. This corporate focus on growing what is life-giving protects against a naive optimism that unrealistically hopes things will get better without developing strategies to ensure that life-giving change will actually take place.

This life-giving focus of Appreciative Inquiry radically contrasts many organizational development approaches based on the medical model that assesses, diagnoses and treats problems. These pathology or problem reduction approaches are based on the assumption that organizational development occurs through the elimination of problems or threats to the organization’s life.

However, difficulties often arise when these approaches are used with organizations because diagnosis is essentially a sophisticated form of judgment and blame. While diagnosis may be helpful in the medical context of treating physical ailments, its use with human organizations often results in defensiveness, judgment, and blame

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

We seek what is life-giving and not just what is positive. For that which is life-giving transcends ideas and value judgments of positive and negative.

Guided by the belief that good is the opposite of bad, mankind has for centuries pursued its fixation with fault and failing. Doctors have studied disease in order to learn about health. Psychologists have investigated sadness in order to lean about joy... This advice is well-intended but misguided. Faults and failings deserve study, but reveal little about strengths.

— Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton

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

In the end it is important to remember that we cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are.
 — Max de Pree

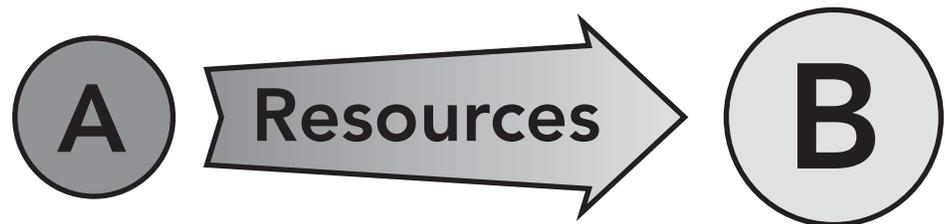
You've got to be very careful if you don't know where you are going, because you might not get there.
 — Yogi Berra

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

with increasing levels of alienation. This leads to organizational problems becoming worse despite the best of intentions of all involved. Jesus rejected this blame-based approach to change when he was asked whose sin caused a man to be blind. "Was it his sin or was it his parents?" (John 9:1-3) Rather than entertain the notion of cause or blame Jesus saw it as a transformational opportunity for the glory of God to be manifest.

At its best the medical model approach results in incremental change but not in transformation. Transformation occurs primarily when the organization is able to view itself in a very different light. The appreciative approach with its life-giving focus rather than problem-reduction focus opens the possibility of organizational transformation. This life giving approach is consistent with the transformation to the realm of abundant life that Jesus offers. Jesus did not come that we might have less death or less problems, he came that we might have life and share it abundantly with our neighbors.

The Appreciative Model of Change



Basic A ⇨ B Change Model

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 to B is achieved by discovering, accessing, and utilizing resources. A resource is anything an individual or group needs to make the change. Resources may be tangible such as material, equipment, and money or intangible such as love, motivation, commitment, and a sense of purpose. This basic change model of discovering and using resources to transition from A to B is an elemental pattern for making changes. Large scale changes are actually a series of nested and chained sets of the basic A to B pattern. For example building a church hall is a large A to B that is made up of a series of smaller A to B steps such as securing the plans and permits, raising the funds, hiring contractors, purchasing materials etc. Even within these smaller steps additional steps from A to B may be needed, such as hiring subcontractors to perform the construction tasks. Each step is achieved through accessing and using resources.

Intentional transition ministry began as a response to congregations making a change between Rectors or Senior Pastors, especially in settings of congregational turmoil where a subsequent successful ministry was likely to be difficult to achieve. In these situations the transitional minister's task was to help the congregation secure the resources to create a stable foundation for a successful ministry. Over time stable congregations also found benefit in having an intentional period of ministry to help them manage their transition between clergy.

The skills and strategies learned in helping congregations make these transitions are the same for congregations making other transitions such as building new buildings, implementing strategic plans, developing ministries, or responding to growth. Rather than limit this understanding of transitions to the change of clergy the Appreciative Way looks at responding to all transitions from the perspective of the A to B change model and how it may be used to create desired outcomes that efficiently use resources and are sustainable over time.

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

- (i) Knowing where you are starting from
- (ii) Knowing where you are going, and
- (iii) Locating the resources to achieve the goal.

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.

Most organizational development processes put considerable emphasis on understanding the cause of problems, yet, it is interesting to note that Jesus does not require people to have insight into the nature of their problems before he embarks on a healing process with them. In the story of the woman at the well Jesus was not distracted by trying to help the woman understand why she has had several failed relationships. Rather he used the strategy of ambiguity and confusion to lead her to a place of transformation that resulted in her acknowledgment that Jesus is the Messiah. (*John 4:7-30*)

*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

*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

*The challenge of this life
is not to stay alive,
rather the challenge of
this life is to stay in love.*

— Chris Rankin-Williams,
9-16-01

*Darkness cannot
drive out darkness;
only light can do that.
Hate cannot drive out
hate; only love can do that.*

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

*The man who really wants
something finds a way; the
other man finds an excuse.*

— E. C. Mckenzie

In addition to rejecting ideas of cause and blame the appreciative approach is very intentional in deciding what about this starting point is important to know. 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.

Equally important as knowing your starting point is discovering the goal or the preferred future (B) you want to achieve. You and your 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. Planning for and co-creating that preferred future is imperative or you will simply become the victim of external forces beyond your apparent control.

For many congregations having a goal related to their core purpose needs to be their first step. From my experience of congregational consulting, very few congregations know their core purpose.⁶ In fact, in the past twenty three years of church consulting I have found parishioners from only two congregations that have been able to clearly articulate their congregation's purpose. Without knowing their God-given purpose and grounding their goals in their purpose, change processes are likely to be random, life-sapping distractions that mire the congregation in mindless mediocrity.

Once the goal has been determined the resources to achieve the goal need to be located and accessed. As previously noted, these resources may be both tangible and intangible. 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 engage in a process of blame 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 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 on the basis of blame and fault finding.

Goals Must be Positive and Imaginable

In leading people through these three steps of change, I find that goal formulation is critically important. Goals must be positively stated and imaginable. It is impossible to work toward a negative goal such as 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 grace of God in Jesus that already is. When confronted with a problem or negative goal people need to transform it into a preferred alternative. Being less depressed becomes growing in happiness. Managing conflict becomes collaboration building.

In order to accomplish something you must also be able to imagine the desired outcome. Negatively stated goals are actually impossible to image and hold in consciousness. Many social programs fail because they are negatively stated goals that are impossible to realistically imagine. When people are unable to image 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 the goal is often negatively stated and unimaginable. Consider the goal to reduce poverty by fifty percent. Most people, when asked about their sense of the starting point A, 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 the goal the preacher is calling them to engage in. Because they cannot create that image they will not commit to 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

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

One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time.
— Andre Gide

Since we will spend the rest of our lives in the future we need to ensure that the future we imagine is one we would prefer to live in.

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

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

The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths to it are not found but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination.
— John Schaar

People do not want to be changed, they want to be blessed.
— Stephen Gilligan

in the world being well fed. So the picture needs to be reduced in size through a series of steps until it is imaginable. "Can you imagine every child in America being well-fed?" And if you can't do that, and many people can't, then how about in your city, or in your town, and for those who cannot do that they may need to get down to "Can you imagine every child in your street being well fed?" Most people can get down to a place where they can imagine being engaged in ensuring that some 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. Having created that realistic image in their minds, it can be expanded to include some other parts of the world. "So you can imagine every child in your street being well-fed... Can you imagine being part of a program to ensure that every child in a street, in a city, or a town, of Haiti, or Darfur, or some other place, where every child would be well-fed?" Most people can create that picture in mind, having achieved the first picture. Now the person has two imaginable and realistic goals that a group of people doing outreach in a church, could actually work toward.

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."^{7,8} 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 than they would if the goal was imposed from an external authority. 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 Blessing

Contrary to popular opinion I believe people do like change, especially when it is a blessing. What they do not like, and will strongly resist, is any change that steals something of value from them. In its simplest form a blessing is receiving something that is

of value. For a change to be perceived as a blessing, state B must be of greater value than state A, plus the cost of the resources to achieve the final state. If B is perceived as being of lesser value than A then the people will resist the change and the outcome will be unsustainable.

In the change literature considerable emphasis is given to dealing with resistance to change. In most understandings, resistance is a pejorative term used against people who are reluctant or hesitant to embark on a change. I find most of these understandings unhelpful in actually helping people to make changes. From my experience, resistance occurs because part of the congregation is unable to perceive the benefit of the change. In many cases the part that is resisting is actually a wise part that knows the outcome is a curse rather than a blessing. Responding to resistance requires helping the part that is resisting perceive that the change is a blessing. If this is not done the change will be resisted because it is experienced as an act of violence being inflicted upon them.

In addition to gathering stories of the peoples' best experiences of their congregation I also inquire what they value about their congregation and gather stories of when they have experienced these values. One of the reasons I spend time understanding what is valued by the congregation is to ensure that any change is taking the people to a place of greater value and therefore will be perceived as a blessing. Several Biblical narratives demonstrate the nature of resistance and the benefit of knowing what people value.

The rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked, "What must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus told him, "Sell everything, give to the poor, and follow me." Here the final state B was following Jesus without his possessions. But the rich young ruler could not perceive that following Jesus was more valuable than having all of his possessions. And so he resisted following Jesus, and walked away full of sorrow. (Mark 10:17-22) On the other hand, when Jesus is talking to James and John, he said, "Leave your nets and come follow me." (Matthew 4:19) For whatever reason, James and John understood that following Jesus was more valuable than being fishermen. So they willingly followed Jesus.

The other thing that Jesus did with James and John was embed following him into their core value of being fishermen. Jesus transformed the nature of being a fisherman from simply fishing for fish, to fishing for people. As James and John followed Jesus they would continue to experience the core essence or value of fishing.

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

People resist change when their fear of loss is greater than their hope for blessing.

— Linda Robinson

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

The greatest resource is love. Do you have enough love to do what you love?

You cannot make something happen, but you can create a space in which what you want is more likely to happen.
— Chinese Proverb

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

It would be manifested differently, but the core value of fishing, and whatever joy and pleasure that they got from fishing would continue to be theirs as they made that change to following Jesus.

Transforming the Congregation's Narrative

When leading congregations in transition leaders must ensure that the congregation's narrative is transformed to be consistent with the desired goal. Individuals and organizations know themselves by the meaning they create from the stories they tell about themselves. These personal and corporate narratives become self-confirming labels. Some congregations may have a narrative that says, "We are poor and can't achieve anything," So 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.

If the narrative remains inconsistent with the goal the outcome will not be sustainable and the people will return to living and manifesting their former narrative. This is the struggle for Moses in leading the people out of Egypt. The people came out 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 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 live into manifesting 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 wanting to overthrow 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. Now Jesus and the Kingdom of God was 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 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 sharing 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 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 helpful narratives 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 wants to call forth the best from people rather than try 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. I ask people to tell stories of their best because I want to bring their best to their endeavors. For it is when people are at their best that they are most closely manifesting the image of God that God created them to be. Just as Jesus found the coming Kingdom of God in the people’s past and present, we use the 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

Appreciative Inquiry is the art of discovering and valuing those factors that give life to an individual, a group an organization or a community.

In faith we have the power to change our narrative from a script that we’re doomed to live by to one that liberates us for a life-giving future.

— Karl Ruttan

We seek to be friends of the future rather than experts on the past.

You can not change one iota of your past. You can only change what you will allow from your past to inform your future.

*Show me your face before
your mother was born.*

— Buddhist Koan
or put another way:

*Show me your God given
face before the world
tore it apart.*

*The world needs dreamers
and the world needs
doers. But above all,
the world needs
dreamers who do.*

— Sarah Ban Breathnach

*Individuals and
organizations thrive when
people see the best in
themselves, share their
dreams and concerns in
a positive way, and when
they join their voices in the
same direction in order
to create, not only new
worlds, but better worlds.*

— David Cooperrider

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 who is to blame for it will actually reinforce the narrative rather than liberate the congregation into collaborative relationships with clergy. Unless 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 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.

In contrast to the clergy-killer narrative, 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.

The final step of creating a new narrative is to discern the congregation's purpose and imbed the new narrative in their larger purpose narrative. As noted earlier many congregations have little understanding of their purpose and consequently one of the first steps will be to help the congregation discern their purpose. This is achieved through the intentional use of the appreciative inquiry process of discovering the congregation at their best. The organization's life-giving purpose will be revealed within the common themes of these stories.

Conclusion: The Power of Remembering

In the Gospels Jesus invites us to remember him in the breaking of bread and sharing the cup of wine. The word remember means to "re"- "member" or put back together in consciousness. In the Eucharist we tell the Jesus story and are put back together in him. Similarly the remembering and telling of stories of people's best in appreciative processes re-memembers or puts them back together at their best. It is this best that leaders need to evoke and call forth as their communities engage in the process of transition and transformation, for it is only from their collective best that they can ensure that change will be a life-giving blessing.

About the Author:

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Along with his wife, Dr. Kim Voyle, Rob is the author of:

Core Elements of the Appreciative Way: An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry for Work and Daily Living.

Yes!3 *Creating a Purpose Centered Life in Which You Can Say: Yes! to God, Yes! to Your Neighbor, and Yes! to Yourself.*

Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls (Appreciative Inquiry Edition): A Comprehensive Guide to the Clergy Search Process.

Additional information about these resources, appreciative inquiry training programs, and the use of appreciative inquiry in coaching and church settings can be found at www.clergyleadership.com

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

If we want a better church we don't need to find better people. We just need to help the people we have be their God-given best.

Vision without action is an empty dream,

Action without vision is mindless chaos,

Vision manifested in loving action is purposeful living.

Endnotes

1. For a more extensive description of the origins of appreciative inquiry and its application in organizations please see: Watkins, J. & Mohr, B. (2001). *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination*. San Francisco, CA. Jossey Bass/Pfeiffer.

A briefer, readily accessible description of appreciative inquiry in organizations can be found in: Hammond, S. (1996). *The Thinbook of Appreciative Inquiry*. Bend, OR. Thinbook Publishing.

2. See the description of the 5D process on the following page. Some variation occurs between authors in the number of Ds and their descriptions. Early models and some authors refer to a 4D model of discover, dream, design, and deliver. Because the discovery process is dependent on the choice of inquiry topics I prefer to include “define” as an essential element in appreciative processes.

3. Cooperrider, D. (1999). *Positive Image, Positive Action: The Affirmative Basis of Organizing*. In S. Srivasta & D. L. Cooperrider (Eds.), *Appreciative Management and Leadership (Revised Edition)*, page 121. Euclid, OH. Williams Custom Publishing.

4. Milton Erickson, MD (1901 - 1980) was a psychiatrist who developed numerous strategies for creating change. People who studied with him went on to develop, strategic family therapy, solution focused therapy, neuro-linguistic programming, self-relations therapy and also teach his resource, focused way of joining with people to co-create desired outcomes. To learn more about Milton Erickson and his student see www.erickson-foundation.org.

5. An expanded understanding of the Appreciative Way can be found in: Voyle, R. J. & Voyle, K. M. (2006). *Core Elements of the Appreciative Way: An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry for Work and Daily Living*. Hillsboro, OR. Clergy Leadership Institute.

6. To help individual members of congregations describe their personal purpose and to transform congregational culture I created **Yes!³**. Voyle, R. & Voyle, K. (2006) *Yes!³ Creating a life in which you can say Yes! to God, Yes! to your Neighbor, and Yes! to Yourself*. **Yes!³ is a small group study program designed to grow an appreciative congregational culture by having people discern and live their God-given purpose.**

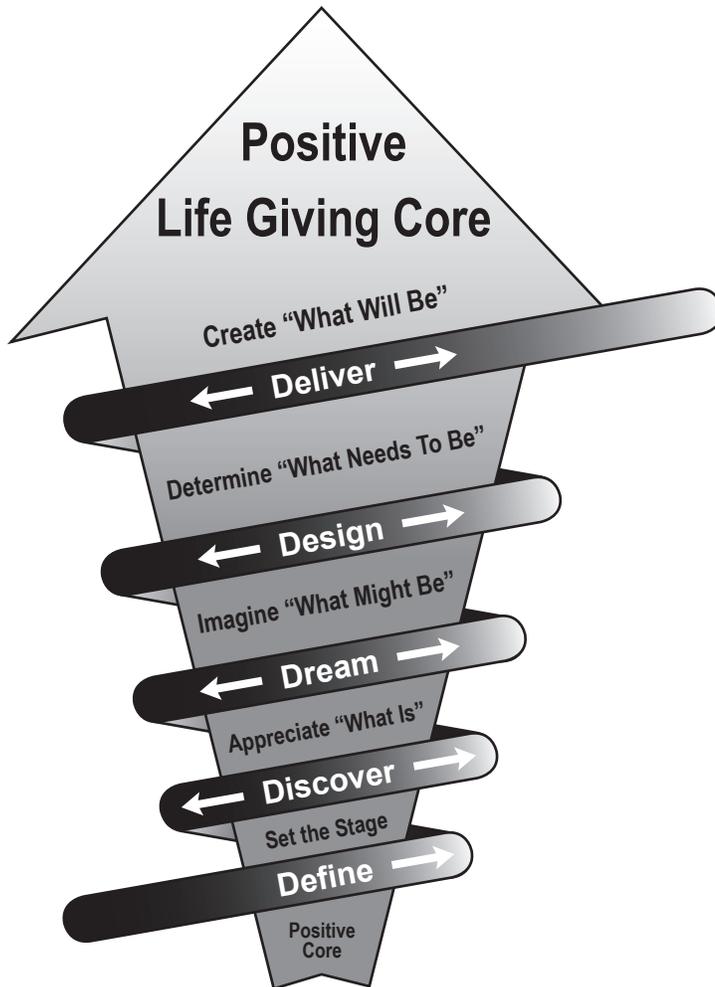
7. See Voyle, R. & Voyle, K. (2008) *Assessing Skills and Discerning Calls (Appreciative Inquiry Edition): A Comprehensive Guide to the Clergy Search Process*. Hillsboro, OR. Clergy Leadership Institute.

This Search manual provides extensive resources to design an intentional transitional ministry to provide an appreciative foundation for the clergy search process. Resources are also provided to: conduct an appreciative inquiry summit, establish congregational mission and goals; convert these understandings into search criteria; and to move the interviewing process from an adversarial inquisition to a mutual exploration of gifts, strengths, and compatibility.

8. See Ludema, J. D., Whitney, D., Mohr, B., & Griffin, T. J. (2003) *The Appreciative Inquiry Summit: A Practitioners Guide for Leading Large Group Change*. Berrett-Koehler. This is an excellent guide for designing and facilitating large scale, whole system appreciative inquiry processes. If you can't imagine doing AI with hundreds or thousands of participants then this is a good place to start re-imagining.

Appreciative Inquiry 5D Spiral of Organizational Development

An iterative, generative, process that uses collaborative inquiry, and strategic visioning to unleash the positive energy within individuals and organizations



The Five Phases

5: Deliver

Doing Christ's Work in the World.
Also known as the Destiny Phase
Co-creating a sustainable, preferred future.
Who, What, When, Where, How?
Innovating What Will Be.

4: Design

Aligning values, structures and mission with the ideal.
Developing achievable plans and steps to
make the vision a reality.
Dialoguing What Needs To Be

3: Dream

What is God and the community calling us to be?
What would our church look like in 5 years time?
Developing common images of the future.
Visioning the Ideal

2: Discover

What in God's name is going on in your church?
Interview process and gathering of life-giving
experiences within the congregation.
Valuing the Best of What Is

1: Define

Awareness of the need for development.
Preparing for an appreciative process.
Committing to the Positive

Comparison of Empirical and Appreciative Processes Applied to Organizational Consultation

Empirical Process

Define the problem
Fix what's broken
Focus on decay
What problems are you having?
Learning from our mistakes
Who is to blame
Basic Assumption: People and organizations are problems to be solved.

Appreciative Process

Search for solutions that already exist
Amplify what is working
Focus on life giving forces
What is working well around here?
Learning from what works
Who is to affirm?
Basic Assumption: People and organizations are mysteries to be embraced.

*Adapted from Sue Hammond,
Thinbook of Appreciative Inquiry*

We don't want to explain yesterday's world, what we want to do is articulate tomorrow's possibilities

We are not interested in explaining or excusing yesterday.

We are interested in discovering the best of the past and the present in order to fuel our imaginations and gather the resources we need to build the future.

If you try to motivate people by lighting a fire under them, all you will get is burnt butts.

A much more enlightened way to motivate people is to find the fire within them and fan it.

Appendix: Designing An Interview Protocol

The following guidelines and interview protocols are provided as resources for the critical process of creating questions. Additional interview protocols and resources can be found at www.clergyleadership.com

Work Backwards from the Goal: Three typical areas of Inquiry:

1. Peak or best experience of the area previously defined as the goal for the inquiry.
2. Values: Both personal and the area being inquired into.
3. Wishes for the future for the goal under consideration.

The Sequence is Important

Past, Present, Future

We inquire into the best of the past, we explore the present by going inward to discover what is of current value about the past and projecting that value into the future.

We want wishes for the future to be grounded in the best of the past. Having the people share their best experiences and values will move their mindset into a positive frame that will encourage positive and creative thinking for the future. Wishes will be both reality based and expansive of that previous best.

Crafting Questions

Create initial and follow-up questions that discover in depth the person's best experience of the goal. These questions should enable the person to "relive" the experience.

The entire interview should take at least 20-30 minutes/person

Generic Questions About "A"

If the church has no clear purpose or specific goals then ask generic questions about their best experience of their congregation.

From the A⇒B change model perspective we are inquiring into their best experiences of A to create a foundation for B

Specific Questions About "B"

If the organization has a clear sense of purpose or specific goals in mind then inquire specifically into these areas. From the A⇒B change model perspective we are inquiring into their best experiences of B.

For example: If the mission is to: Worship, Educate and Serve.... Craft specific questions about parishioners' best experiences of their worship, learning, and service and what they value about them.

Appreciative Interview Guide For Congregations

The Four Initial Questions

This generic guide is often used with congregations that have little sense of purpose or established goals.

Instructions: In pairs interview take time to interview one another using the following questions.

Be a generous listener. Do not dialogue, rather take turns to actually conduct an interview. If you need more information or clarification ask additional follow-up questions. Use this sheet to record the results of your interview. When your interviews are completed you will present the results to the wider group.

Before you conduct the interview take a minute to read the questions and decide how you will personally answer the question and make a mental note of your response. Now proceed with the interviews, paying full attention to the interviewee rather than to your story.

1. Best Experience: Reflect on your entire experience with your congregation. Recall a time when you felt most alive, most involved, spiritually touched, or most excited about your involvement. Tell me about this memorable experience that you have had with your church. Describe the event in detail. What made it an exciting experience? Who was involved? Describe how you felt? Describe what you did as a result of the experience?

1b. (Optional) What do you really love to do? Tell me a story of a time when you got to do something that you really love to do that left you feeling very satisfied.

2. Values: What are the things you value deeply: specifically, the things you value about yourself, being a parishioner, and your church:

(i) **Yourself:** Without being humble, what do you value most about yourself- for example; as a human being, or employee, or a friend, parent, citizen, and so on?

(Note from our experience this question often doesn't work well in large church groups. Instead I now use question 1b)

(ii) **Being a parishioner:** When you feel best about being a parishioner at your church, what about yourself do you value?

(iii) **Your church:** What is it about your church that you value? What is the single most important thing that your church has contributed to your life?

(iv) **Your denomination:** What is it about belonging to your denomination that you value? What is the single most important thing that your denomination has contributed to your life?

3. Core Value: What do you think is the core value of your church? What values give life to your congregation. What is it that, if it did not exist, would make your church totally different than it currently is?

4. Three Wishes: If God gave you three wishes for your church, what would they be?

Appreciative Interview Guide For Church Councils

This interview can be used as part of a Church Council Retreat. The goal for the interview is to incorporate new members into the council, and to identify the committee and teamwork gifts that they bring. The final goal is to create a Council that affords its members the opportunity to have their most creative and rewarding year as a member of the congregation.

Instructions: In pairs take time to interview one another using the following questions.

Be a generous listener. Do not dialogue, rather take turns to actually conduct an interview. If you need more information or clarification ask additional follow-up questions. Use this sheet to record the results of your interview. When your interviews are completed you will present the results to the wider group.

Before you conduct the interview take a minute to read the questions and decide how you will personally answer the question and make a mental note of your response. Now proceed with the interviews, paying full attention to the interviewee rather than to your story.

1. Best Experience: Reflect on your entire experience with your congregation. Recall a time when you felt most alive, most involved, spiritually touched, or most excited about your involvement. Tell me about this memorable experience that you have had with your church. Describe the event in detail. What made it an exciting experience? Who was involved? Describe how you felt? Describe what you did as a result of the experience?

2. Best Experience of Serving on the Council: Reflect on your entire experience of serving on the Council. (If you are new to the Council, reflect on your experience of serving on another committee or working with a group of people to accomplish a goal.) Recall your best experience of serving on a Council or committee. What made it memorable and rewarding? Who was involved? What did you accomplish and how did you feel?

3. Values: What are the things you value deeply: specifically, the things you value about yourself, being a parishioner, and your church:

(i) **Yourself:** Without being humble, what do you value most about yourself?

(ii) **Being a member of the Council:** When you feel best about being a member of the Vestry what about yourself do you value?

(iii) **Your church:** What is it about your church that you value? What is the single most important thing that your church has contributed to your life?

(iv) **Your Denomination:** What is it about being a member of your denomination that you value? What is the single most important thing that being from your denomination has contributed to your life?

4. Core Value: What do you think is the core value of your church? What values give life to your congregation. What is it that, if it did not exist, would make your church totally different than it currently is? *Please note that the core value of the church may be different from what you specifically value about the church.*

5. Wishes: Imagine that the next year serving on the Council is the most creative and rewarding year you have had at your church.

(i) What would you have accomplished?

(ii) What would the Council have accomplished?

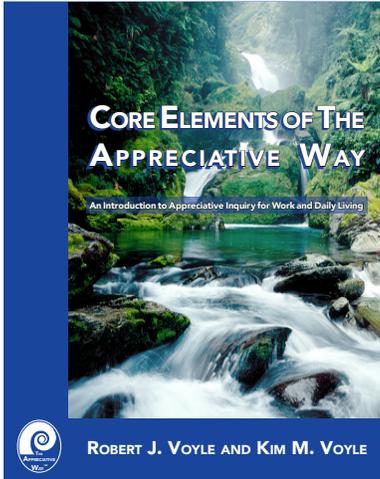
(iii) If you had three wishes for your church, what would they be?



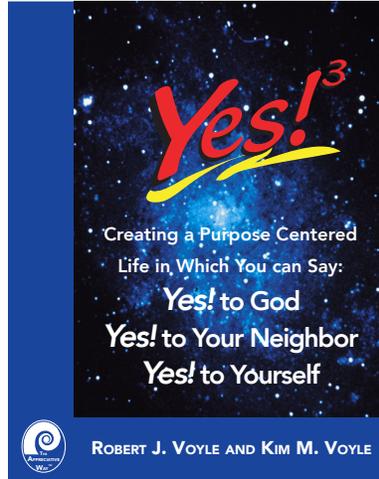
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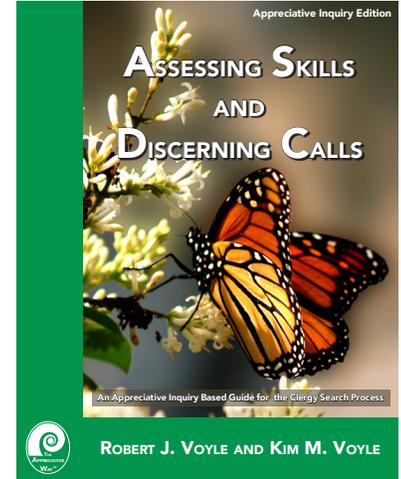
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An appreciative manual for the clergy search process.

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- ◆ Use an incarnational process to join a congregation
- ◆ Respond appreciatively to issues of grief and conflict
- ◆ Lead congregations through times of change

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A leader is someone that other people choose to follow

- ◆ Why would someone follow you?
- ◆ Where would they end up if they did follow you?
- ◆ How would they be treated on the way?

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