

An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry

2012



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

~Eric Hoffer

David K. Popham
973-558-0620
davidpopham@live.com

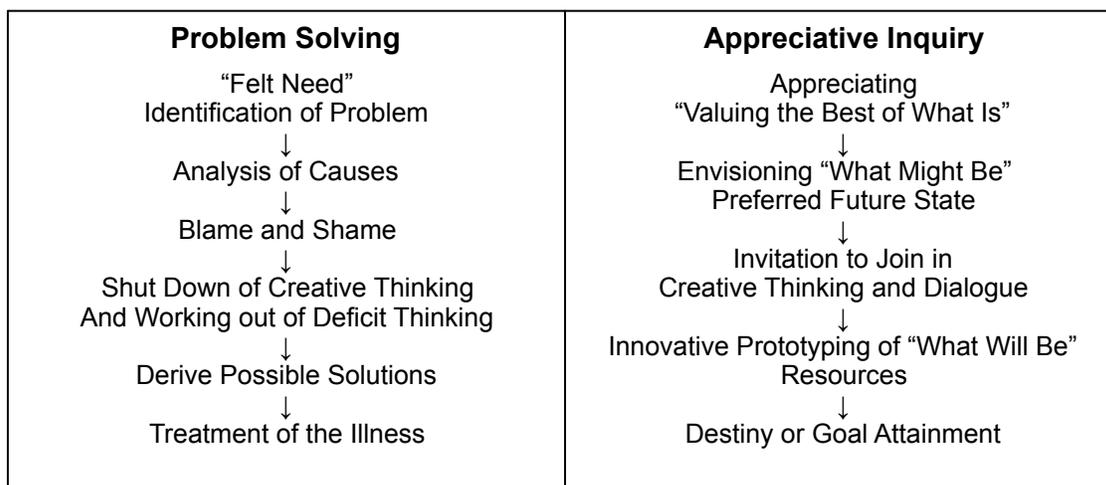
Table of Contents

Appreciative Inquiry	3
Five Principles of AI	4
The Constructionist Principle	4
The Positive Principle	4
The Simultaneity Principle	5
The Poetic Principle	5
The Anticipatory Principle	6
The Role of Assumptions	6
The Ten Assumptions of an Appreciative Approach	7
Five-D Appreciative Inquiry Cycle	8
Phase 1: Define the Affirmative Topic and Other Preliminaries	8
The Four Characteristics of Affirmative Topics	8
Preliminary Agreements	9
Phase 2: Discover-Inquire-Explore: The Positive Core	9
Questions for Discovering the Positive Core	10
Phase 3: Dream-Imagine-Envision: The Preferred Future	10
Questions for Discerning Your Preferred Future	11
Phase 4: Design-Innovate-Construct: Resources A – Discerning Outcomes	11
Social Architecture and Outcome Thinking	11
Options for Discerning Outcomes	12
Directions of Change: Away From and Toward	12
Phase 5: Destiny/Deliver-Implement-Sustain: Resources B – Achieving Outcomes	13
Smart Questions about Outcomes and Action Plans	13
Attributes of a Proper Action Plan	14
Establishing the Action Plan	14
Conversational Leadership	15
The Magic in the Middle	16
A Note on Personal Logistics and Style	16
Example Appreciative Inquiry Process	17
Resources Cited	18
Appendix	19
First Phase Generative Questions	19
Appreciative Interview Summary Guide	20
Provocative Purpose Statement	21
Second Phase Generative Questions	22

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Appreciative Inquiry is a strengths-based organizational change model which focuses on the positive qualities already existing in an organization. “Appreciate” means to value or admire highly; to judge with heightened understanding; to recognize with gratitude. “Inquiry” means to search into, investigate; to seek for information by questioning. Put simply AI is the study of what works well. ***In religious terms, AI is the discernment of where God is already at work in your congregation and how you might join that work.***

Traditionally we tend to work from a deficit-based approach to problem solving of which the underlying assumption is that congregations are problems to be worked on. From the perspective of the strengths-based appreciative approach congregations are mysteries that should be embraced as centers of infinite imagination, infinite capacity, and infinite potential.



Appreciative Inquiry starts with the assumption that how we begin, how we first approach a topic - where we place our focus - will determine whether we grow more of what is working or grow more of the problem. In the deficit-based model we look from problems, we find them, and by giving them our attention we amplify them. In an appreciative model we look for energizing moments of success in the life of the congregation and by giving them our attention create new energy that is positive and synergistic.

For example many fine organizations have given themselves to alleviating world poverty. Yet it is impossible to grow less poverty - what does it mean to have less of a negative? You can, however, grow economic bases and cottage industries. You can grow educational systems and medical care.

People are embolden when they are afforded the time to speak about their triumphs and victories. People shrink when they feel a microscope has been placed upon them to examine their weaknesses and failures. AI, by placing the focus on strengths and capabilities, allows churches to tap into their own wisdom born of success and achievement. By providing for the celebration of what has been accomplished, not only does AI allow for strengths to be articulated and carried forward, but AI also allows for sheer joy to be turned into the positive energy that will carry the congregation through planning, implementation, and action.

Five Principles of AI*

Underlying the appreciative approach are five principles which form the core philosophy of the AI method.

THE CONSTRUCTIONIST PRINCIPLE: Mapping Reality

Humans create reality by the way we talk about reality. How we communicate, create symbols, construct metaphors and use language creates our experience of reality. Once congregations and their leadership understand that their language and metaphors generate their reality, they can use this as a catalyst for change.

For example which church would you rather be active in:

- “We’re a small and poor church. God only knows why we’re still around.”
- “We’re a small church but God has blessed us with rich relationships and continues to transform lives in this place.”

Both churches experience the same dynamics and issues faced by all smaller churches. The first church, however, lives in a reality far different from the second one.

A congregation’s self-awareness and preferred future are interwoven. An important leverage for change is the examination of what the congregation is now in its present life and how congregants talk about themselves. Self-awareness is about what the congregation pays attention to and is curious over. This self-portrayal forms the foundation for how the congregation takes action in creating their preferred future.

THE POSITIVE PRINCIPLE: Best Selves

Momentum for change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding such as hope, inspiration, and the sheer joy of creating with one another. Congregations are largely affirmative systems and respond to positive thought and positive knowledge. In short, positive attitude, actions, and connections influence long-term change.

Positive emotions open up the soul for creativity and play. Negative emotions shut down the soul making it small and anemic. Positive emotions broaden the thought-action repertoire, allowing persons to turn away from automatic responses and to pursue novel, creative, often unscripted paths of thought and action.

Here are some examples of the work of positive emotions in our lives:

- Joy or happiness creates the urge to be playful. Play involves exploration and invention. When people are in a joyful state their mental abilities are sharper, and they are more willing to try new things.
- Interest (curiosity, intrigue, excitement, wonder) is closely aligned with challenge and intrinsic motivation. Interest sparks a person’s desire to explore, increase knowledge, and to discover new things.
- Contentment (tranquility, serenity) arises in situations where a person feels safe, such that they expend little to assert themselves and have a high degree of certainty thus broadening their worldview. The effect is to increase one’s sense of resources and resourcefulness to take new actions.
- Love builds and strengthens connections and attachments between individuals within communities of faith and between a congregation and its field of missions.

Which excites you more – a sermon on overcoming low moral or a sermon on empowerment?

THE SIMULTANEITY PRINCIPLE: The Future is Now

Inquiry and change happen in the same moment... the future happens in and as a result of the present. We sow seeds of change with the very first questions we ask. The kinds of questions we ask set change in motion in a particular direction.

~Appreciative Coaching

This principle recognizes that inquiry and change are not truly separate moments... Inquiry is intervention. The seeds of change are the things people think and talk about, the things people discover and learn, and the things that inform dialogue and inspire images of the future. They are implicit in the very first questions asked. One of the most impactful things a change agent ... does is to articulate questions.

~Appreciative Inquiry Handbook

Change occurs the moment you ask your congregation a question. Our inquiries spark and direct attention. Selecting the *affirmative topic(s)* of choice is crucial. If inquiry as intervention is to be leveraged for constructive and helpful change the topics under review need to represent what your congregation wants to discover or learn more about. While the topics will likely invoke conversations about the church's preferred future, topics should emerge from the constructive discovery and narration of your congregation's positive core.

THE POETIC PRINCIPLE: Narrative Reframing

The appreciative approach uses the power of metaphors and images, drawn from stories of best or peak experiences, to capture human potential. A congregation's remembering when they were at their best is a powerful incentive when struggling to achieve positive change under challenging circumstances.

The *Poetic Principle* reminds us that churches are not machines with fixed working parts (that no longer work?). Rather a church is a story that is constantly being coauthored by drawing from the past, present, and future of its members and friends.

Since a congregation is a story its past can be reinterpreted or reframed in light of the present life and future hope of those involved. Just as any number of new realities can flow from a single poem. A story, one even including negative reports, can be reframed, reimagined, or refocused to free resourcefulness and expand ingenuity. In religious terms God is able to redeem a congregation's past and enfold it into a more inspiring present and inventive future.

Once I pastored a church where the previous minister was an alcoholic. On arrival the church operated under a victim narrative. "That SOB of a pastor did us wrong!" "Yes, the former person was an SOB but it appears you survived. I'm curious how you weathered the former pastor?" (Or at least that's how I might have responded if I had been acquainted with AI at the time.)

Some churches and individuals within churches will have invested large amount of energy into their narrative self-understanding. As leaders who are also change-brokers, our application of the *Poetic Principal* gives these churches and individuals the choice to reinterpret or reframe their self-identifying stories and the way they view and understand themselves. Just remember to:

- Give churches and individuals the freedom and permission to see themselves in a holistic way.

- Help congregations and individuals connect to their own “inner flow.”

THE ANTICIPATORY PRINCIPLE: The Future Shapes Us Now

A congregation’s image of the future is what guides their current actions and behavior. Like a movie projected on a large screen, human organizations are projecting a horizon of expectations that brings the future powerfully into the present as a mobilizing instrument.

Our job as leaders is to engage the congregation in drawing forth and shaping their dreams of the future and helping them to discover the embedded future in their current images and metaphors as well as actions and conduct. Remember:

- Positive images create a positive future.
- Vision is fateful; congregations create their future in the present.
- We create vision before we make decisions.
- What we believe is what we will conceive.
- A grand vision starts with small parts.
- We have more confidence and feel more comfortable journeying to the future (the unknown) carrying forward what is best about the past (the known).

By applying the *Anticipatory Principle*, you can help you congregation to create positive self-fulfilling prophecies.

The Role of Unconscious Assumptions

Assumptions are the set of beliefs shared by a group, that causes the group to think and act in certain ways...The longer the belief is in effect, the harder it is for the group to see any new information that contradicts the belief

...

The beauty of assumptions is they become a shorthand for the group. When faced with similar situations, a group just acts and doesn’t re-evaluate each time. Groups have a large number of assumptions operating at an unconscious level.

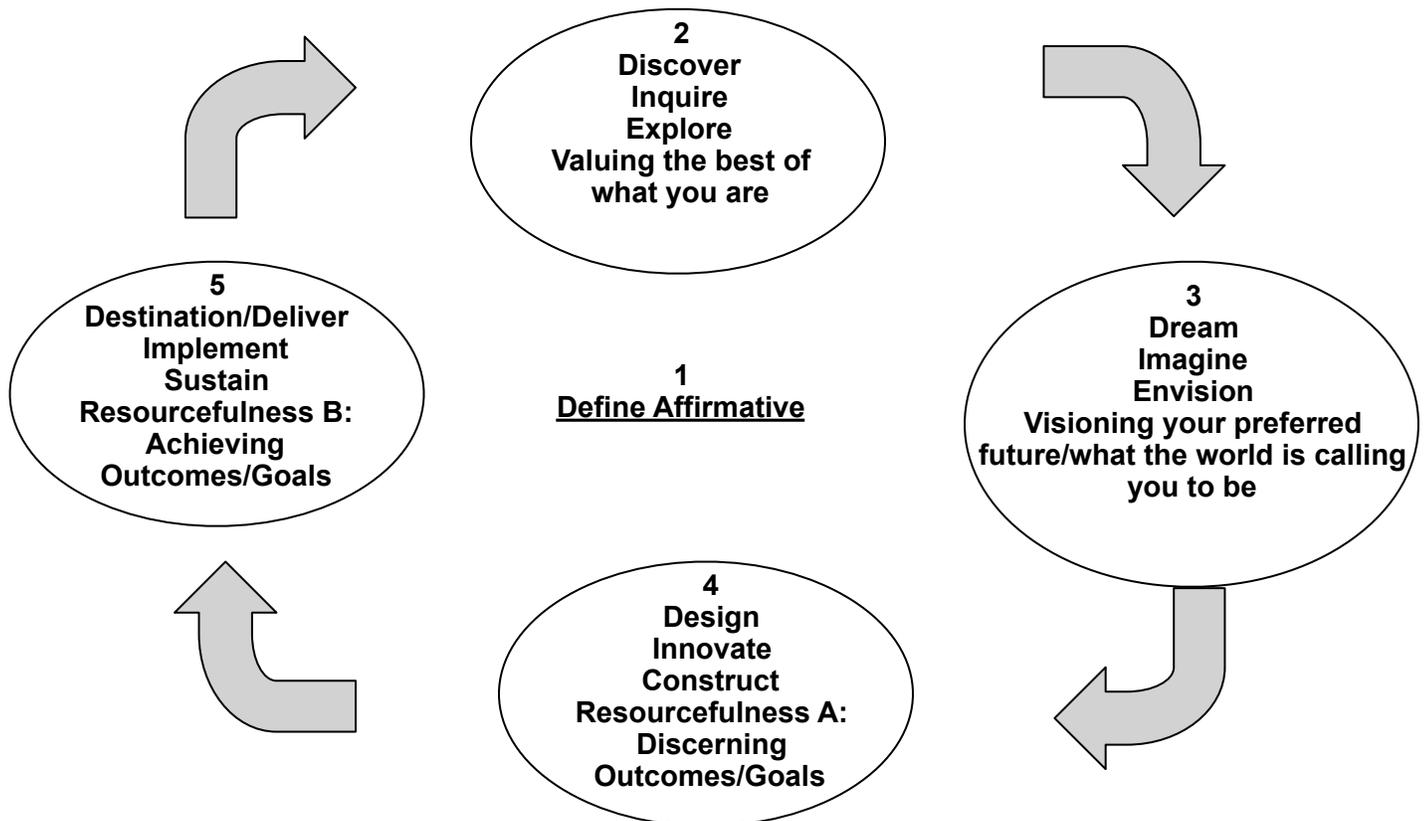
~ Sue Annis Hammond

Assumptions are statements or rules that explain what a church generally believes. They explain the context of a congregation’s choices and behaviors. They are usually not visible to or verbalized by church members and friends. The congregation must be made cognizant of them and discuss them before anyone can be sure of the church’s beliefs. “Belief” is understood not as theological confirmation of one notion or another about God, but rather the rules by which the congregation acts out being a church.

TEN ASSUMPTIONS OF AN APPRECIATIVE APPROACH

1. In every society, organization, or group, something works. Every congregation has a positive core – if it did not it would not exist. The discovery of this positive core is what AI is about.
2. What we focus on becomes our reality. If we focus on what is wrong or what is missing, we tend to see everything through that filter. The filter is our unconscious set of assumptions.
3. Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities. Unlike other processes which may be more akin to a recipe, where the results are pre-determined, AI is generative, organic, and emergent. There is a certain creative going-with-the-flow as congregations name their positive core and build on it.
4. The act of asking questions of a congregation influences the group in some way. There are no neutral observers. Our very presence or the very act of using AI affects the congregation in some way.
5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward part of the past with them (the known). AI assumes (see Assumption 1) that God is alive in every congregation and that the congregation has had success in responding to God's presence in the past. This past experience of success becomes the model for future experience of success.
6. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past. Congregations succeed in the future by enacting the success of the past.
7. It is important to value differences. Without this value AI cannot move forward.
8. The language we use creates our reality. Some words have emotive impacts beyond their simple dictionary definition. The emotional meanings associated with words affects how people think and react as assumptions are often triggered by key vocabulary.
9. The deepest longing of the human heart is for acceptance. The only change outcomes that will be sustainable are those that result from greater self-acceptance and acceptance of others.
10. At any give moment people are doing the best they know how to do, in that context, at that time.

Five-D Appreciative Inquiry Cycle



Phase 1: Define the Affirmative Topic and Other Preliminaries

The first step in leading change from an AI perspective is accomplished when we begin to define the topic of choice by stating the topic in a positive, or *Toward* manner (e.g. “To grow self-sufficiency among all economic levels” vs. “To have less poverty in the world”).

THE FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF AFFIRMATIVE TOPICS

1. Topics are affirmative or stated in the positive.
2. Topics are desirable. They identify the objectives people want.
3. The congregation is genuinely curious about them and wants to learn more.
4. The topics move in the direction the group wants to go in a *Toward* pattern.

Topics should address critical growing edges of a congregation so the conversation will prove of interest and worthwhile for those involved. Once the topic has been agreed upon then a provocative and inviting name should be given to the conversation.

A Green City by a Blue Lake – Cleveland, Ohio

La Foret for Generation Next – Rocky Mountain Conference, UCC

Day of Visioning or *Day of Claiming* – generic

PRELIMINARY AGREEMENTS

During this time you will want to come to agreement on the following:

- The purpose of the effort
- A statement of desired outcomes (not matter how sketchy)
- Steps in the process and the way feedback and learning will be accomplished
- The form and timing of reports – if any
- The role and functions of the organizational top leadership in relations to the effort
- The role, function, and membership of the planning team
- A general sense of how stakeholders will be engaged over the course of the process
- A sense of how avenues of information sharing will be utilized, including technical avenues (internet, etc), and traditional avenues.
- The likely requirements for success
- Any important limitations or boundaries on the effort
- Commitment of resources necessary to proceed with the effort
- Identifying organizational mandates: formal and informal mandates are the “musts” or expectations placed on an organization: requirements, restrictions, pressures, constraints

Phase 2: Discover – Inquire – Explore: The Positive Core (Deliberation)

The positive core of a congregation’s life is one of the best, yet least acknowledged resources in the experience of change. By positive core it is meant ***that which gives life to the congregation***. Often the positive core includes both the values and the identity of the church.

While “where a church is presently at” always has a positive core, some congregations find they are no longer in touch with what has given them life. Some churches may develop a sense of shame and guilt about where they are presently at.

The tendency is to spend a large amount of time and energy to seek out those (or the one) who is to blame for us being where we are at. Remember that we don’t need to know why or who to blame for our being where we are at in order to create a desired change. Blame leads to shame and shame shuts down a person’s ability to be creative and imaginative.

Unfortunately a negative assessment of where a congregation is at can result from the stories or narratives that a congregation tells of itself, or sister churches may tell, or even negative stories told by regional or national entities. Such stories might include the “clergy-killer” narrative, or the “forever-disorganized” narrative, or the “dominant-laity” narrative, etc.

We cannot change what we cannot accept. The best course of action is to accept that at this given moment your congregation’s present state is the best they know how to do, under the present circumstances. We also need to acknowledge that the Source of our existence has not rejected us for being where we are presently at. Rather God has nourished us all along. It is the rediscovery of this nourishment which is at the heart of the positive core for any congregation.

By inquiring into the stories of best experience, self-valuing, and future orientation AI helps to either reinforce existing positive narratives or helps to establish positive narratives where only negative stories persist. ***There is no traveling to our Preferred Future until the positive core***

of “where we are presently at” can be affirmed and brought with the congregation into their Future.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCOVERING THE POSITIVE CORE

1. What would you describe as being a peak experience or high point in your congregation? This would be a time when you were most alive and engaged.
2. Without being humble, what is it that you value about yourself, the nature of your spirituality/discipleship and your church?
3. What are the core factors/values that give life to your congregation without which it would cease to exist?
4. What three wishes do you have to enhance the health/spirituality and vitality/discipleship of your church?

Phase 3: Dream - Imagine - Envision The Preferred Future (Visioning)

Appreciative Inquiry posits that congregations grow in the direction of their focus. AI builds the cycle around an affirmative topic of choice so that groups will grow towards the positive instead of towards the negative.

It follows that as living human organizations, congregations grow toward their images of the future. What does your church imagine its future to be? Are these images of the future joyful or glum, buoyant or pessimistic, successful or full of frustration?

We are often told that we need to “come to terms” with our past in order to have a happy future. Actually, what we need to do to have a happy future is to come to terms with our future rather than our past. We come to terms with our future by having in consciousness a positive preferred future that we would freely choose to live in. A future to which we can wholeheartedly say YES!

~ Rob & Kim Voyle

As an appreciative approach to change, AI invites us to explore the good times in the past and to use them, rather than the bad times, as a basis of imagining our preferred future. Envisioning the future is the time to push the creative edges of positive possibilities and consciously seek after the God who invites us to co-create. A congregation’s preferred future must be a world in which others want to belong. If their preferred future is not larger than where they are presently at your church will not be motivated to set goals and outcomes that will help them achieve their preferred future.

Outcome setting and envisioning is a time to wonder about your congregation’s greatest potential and then to realize this potential by articulating a meaningful picture of the future.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCERNING YOUR PREFERRED FUTURE

The articulation of a preferred future begins with the “three wishes” question of the Discover Phase. These wishes can be gathered and reflected upon for the images which they present. Questions building upon the “three wishes” and aimed at articulating the future are:

1. What is the world or God calling you to be?
2. What possibilities are presented in the “images of the future” from your wish list?
3. The Miracle Question: “Suppose tonight, while you are sleeping, a miracle happens and the problem that has been troubling you sorts itself out. What do you see and experience upon waking that lets you know the miracle happened? What do you find yourself doing, your organization doing?”

NOTE: Answers to the miracle question may not represent well-formed, realistic outcomes; rather they help point the way to the preferred future.

4. What future is God inviting you to co-create?

To determine whether this is indeed a “preferred” future, perform this ecology check supplied by Sue Annis Hammond:

- It is provocative? Does it stretch, challenge, or innovate?
- Is it grounded in examples from the past?
- Is it what the congregation wants? Will people defend it or get passionate about it?
- Is it stated in affirmative, bold terms and in present tense (as if it were already happening)?

Phase 4: Design – Innovate – Construct: Resourcefulness A Discerning Outcomes (Decisions)

Human organizations are both the designers of their reality and the product of their designs. Churches co-create their own destinies by making choices and acting in ways that reflect their most positive core and their preferred future.

SOCIAL ARCHITECTURE AND OUTCOME THINKING

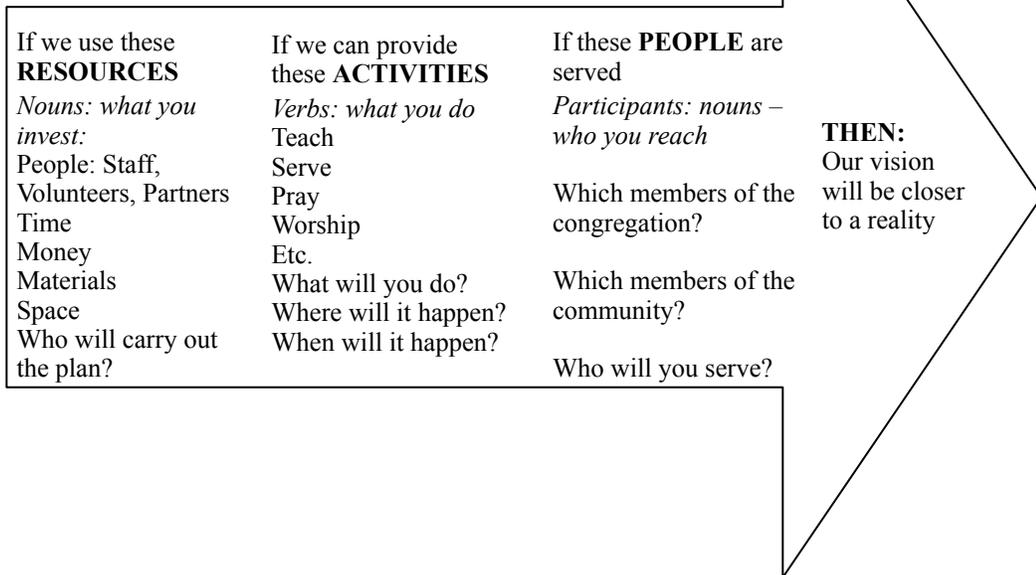
By the time we arrive at designing or co-creating our future it is time to begin moving wishes, dreams, and wonderings into a more concrete arena with goals, deadlines, kick-offs, fundraising and celebrations. As noted, we need to pay attention to the particular articulation(s) we give our vision.

In organization development lingo how we articulate the future is referred to as the “social architecture” of an organization. It addresses the elements critical for an organization to support its positive core. AI refers to these articulations as *provocative propositions*. In more common language social architecture is the mission, vision, or purpose statements of your congregation – both formal and informal.

By crafting the congregation’s social architecture, those involved define the basic infrastructure to their preferred future. When these statements are composed, the desired qualities of the church and the church’s life are articulated. ***The design phase involves the collective construction of positive images of the preferred future. In turn these images are stated as goals or outcomes based on the congregation’s understanding of its vision. These goals help move the congregation to positive action and intended results.***

OPTIONS FOR DISCERNING OUTCOMES*Social Architecture*

1. Who will be involved in writing the statements describing your ideal faith community?
When will this occur?
2. How will these statements be shared with and validated by your church? When will this occur?

Outcome Thinking

Directions of Change: Away From (don't-want) & Toward (do-want)

As a general rule, congregants invest time, energy and resources either moving toward something they find pleasing or away from something they find threatening. What they use in deciding whether to move towards or away from an action or object is their values, which determine if something is good or bad.

Consider the story of a man who, when asked by a cabdriver where he wanted to go, answered “just get me away from here.” This story illustrates the pitfalls of not knowing where you’re going: “away from” may be worse off than “here”. Like the famous scene from *Alice in Wonderland* when the Cheshire cat inquired of Alice where she wanted to go, Alice replied she didn’t know, and the cat answered “If you don’t know where you’re going then any road will take you there.” What the man in the taxi and Alice share in common is the *Away From* pattern for developing outcomes to their situations.

Motivation and action comes down to one’s level of discomfort or inspiration. Those dealing with discomfort will move away from the source of irritation. Mother Theresa is quoted as saying that she began a life for others when she realized there was a little Hitler in her heart. This negative

image of cruelty and egoistic aggrandizement was a major motivator. Why don't you put your hand on a hot stove? Simple, you want to avoid the pain of third degree burns. These are examples of the usefulness of avoiding things we don't want and moving *Away From* them. *Away From* motivation helps us to identify and solve problems

A *Toward* pattern is outcome or goal oriented and allows us to articulate what it is we want, how we'll know when we get it, and keeps us motivated until the desired preferred future is achieved. Those who move *Toward* an outcome are usually those who feel inspired to implement changes which benefit the community. A *Toward* person will enter a cab and tell the driver the exact address. Should the cabbie inquire, "Why this place?" the *Toward* person will answer "because what I want is there."

Smart goals or outcomes take into consideration both what we don't want and what we do want. For example your church may come into a half million dollar gift. Absent *Away From* or "don't-want" thinking those responsible might place the money into all sorts of investments that perpetuate injustice around the globe. Absent *Toward* or "do-want" thinking the money might languish in a bank account making no difference in the life of your church.

CONSEQUENCES FOR BROKERING CHANGE

While both filters are needed in the dialogue of change the preferred future and outcomes that move a congregation forward must be stated in a *Toward* manner. If the outcomes and preferred future simply exists to move people away from a difficulty the congregation as a whole will be driven by crisis management. The *Away From* congregation tends to gravitate to problems and often is distracted from other priorities and trajectories of movement. The *Towards* congregation gravitates to confidence and out-of-the-box thinking.

Phase 5: Destiny/Deliver – Implement – Sustain: Resources B – Achieving Outcomes (Actions)

The objective of this last phase of the AI Cycle is to ensure that you are realizing your goals and moving toward your preferred future.

Churches with goals are nervous shorts of organizations. They know goal achievement and action plans await them. What they don't know is if the goals will be worth all the sacrifice and tribulations entailed. To motivate leaders and followers for goal achievement and action plan implementation the congregation needs to keep focus on their preferred future.

SMART QUESTIONS ABOUT OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS PLANS

The Voyles asks these questions when discerning outcome and action plans:

- Is the outcome positively stated?
- Why is the outcome valuable? Why does the congregation desire this outcome?
- Is the outcome a desired outcome and not just the elimination of an undesired state? Does the goal move you toward a preferred future instead of away from what you fear?
- Are the church's purpose, identity, and values aligned with the outcome and active in the action plan?
- Which of the congregation's values will the outcome manifest and the action plan carry forward?

- Is the action plan specific? While the outcome might be grand the steps need to be specific and achievable.
- How will the congregation know when the outcome has been achieved? How will those involved know when the future becomes a present reality?

As the congregation moves out on the journey from where they are presently at to their preferred future and comes to understand some of the obstacles along the path they may begin to raise objections. Smart change-brokers seek to satisfy the objection by asking those involved what values they feel are being violated by this particular path (goal or action plan). By working to satisfy the objection we honor that part of the church which is having difficulty in achieving the goal.

ATTRIBUTES OF A PROPER ACTION PLAN

1. An effective action plan names a specific action to be done. It describes the **WHAT**.
2. An effective action plan names **WHO** will be doing the “what.”
3. An effective action plan names **WHEN** the specific action will be completed.
4. An effective action plan names **WHERE** the specific action will take place.
5. An effective action plan knows **WHY** the action is being done.

Suggested form for writing a Proper Action Plan:

In order to achieve our **outcome** of _____ : _____
Who

will _____ by _____ at _____
What When Where

Because _____
Why

ESTABLISHING THE ACTION PLAN

Creating the Plan

1. Establish the goal or outcome and the value behind it.
2. Establish a time line:
 - Where is your present?
 - Where is your future?
 - When do you want to achieve your goal or make the outcome a reality?
 - How far into the future is the goal or outcome achieved?
3. Put a piece of paper on the floor in the future with the goal or outcome written on it. The paper represents the moment when your organization will achieve their goal.
4. Invite leadership to step on this piece of paper in the “future.” Now help your leadership to see, hear, and feel their achievement:
 - Take joy in all the things that your outcome brings
 - Everything you have planned for has come to fruition
 - How do you feel having reached your goal or made your outcome a reality?
 - How does the organization feel?
5. After the leadership has closely associated with achieving the goal ask them to take a step back from their preferred future.
6. When the leadership has taken a step back into that action immediately before the goal or outcome, associate them into that moment:
 - What are they doing here?
 - See, hear, and feel exactly what this step is like.

- Make the experience as real as possible.
7. After you are sure the leadership has explored their present position on the time line ask: “What did you do immediately before this moment to make it possible? Record their answers.
 8. Ask your leadership to step back.
 9. Repeat the process until your leadership arrives in the present moment. Make sure there are at least six action steps (to ensure manageable planning), and each step described by a verb in the present tense: “I am doing X.”

Reviewing the Plan

1. After your leadership has worked their way back to the present moment, ask them to step to the side of the time line and to evaluate their plan:
 - What do you feel about this plan?
 - Is there anything that you would like to change in the order of the steps?
 - Is there anything important that seems to be missing?
 - Are there any unnecessary steps?
2. Ask your leadership to put a date to each step. Check that these are realistic deadlines.
3. Once your leadership is satisfied with the steps and the deadlines, ask them to re-enter the time line at the present moment and walk towards their preferred future and the outcomes that will help them arrive in it. Invite them to imagine as fully as possible each step as they go. In doing this your leadership is not only exploring each step again, but also rehearsing the plan and making it more real. This also helps to crystalize the action plan as a series of manageable steps.
4. As you rehearse the steps pay attention to the purpose, identity, and values of your organization. How is each step manifesting your organization’s purpose, identity, and values.
5. Now your leadership has an action plan. Give them a task that will set them on their way and will help them accomplish the first step.
6. Build in celebrations! Celebrations along the way are more motivating and keep your congregation in touch with their goals and preferred future, as well as the “common script.

Conversational Leadership

Appreciative Inquiry falls under the umbrella of *conversational leadership* with such noted group processes as World Café, Open Space Technologies, U-Shape, and others. The underpinning assumption of conversational leadership is that the resourcefulness and the wisdom to attend to a congregation’s growing edges already exists within the congregation. With this rubric there are no “leaders” but rather “hosts” who ensure time, space, and generative questions around affirmative topics.

The power of Conversational Leadership occurs when the congregation becomes engaged and excited:

“Group-will creates the synergy that results in a group achieving more than the sum of the individuals. Group-will occurs when the group shares a clear goal that all members believe will happen and accordingly

behave to make happen. This occurs only if the entire group is a part of the process..."

~ Sue Annis Hammond

AI generates raw data from asking generative questions; questions that touch something important to those who are gathered. From the answers to these questions common themes develop and patterns emerge which provide the areas of inquiry for future exploration as congregations move toward their preferred future.

THE MAGIC IN THE MIDDLE

As noted Conversational Leadership embraces, among others, the principal that all the wisdom we need to resolve our issues already resides within us – we just need to tap into it. Conversations create natural wells for tapping. In dialogue we discover what we know, share it with one another, and in the process create new understandings and insights. Every conversation around strategic and substantive issues invites us into the dance of discovering, sharing, and creating out of the wisdom present among those gathered.

The collective wisdom becomes visible as we engage in conversations. We cross-pollinate ideas, make unexpected connections, develop new perspectives and appreciations, and, create action opportunities. We also begin to understand our churches less as distinct pockets of people and more as webs of conversations reaching out sharing, discovering, creating.

The magic in the middle which allows for this environment is a simple reality: conversations support personal relations. When we converse together, sharing and responding to insights, we create a communal wisdom which follows us – indeed is a part of us. Our commitment to results (however you may define them) is born from our conversations which in the process are transformed from merely information sharing to points of sustenance.

So powerful is the connection binding the group, that its absence can be palpable when those not-connected to the conversations seek to interject an opinion. Under an older paradigm it is expected that people can drop in and out of discussions in which they have piqued interest. Under the Conversational Leadership paradigm this behavior becomes starkly silhouetted against the soft glow of relationship inviting us to be one body. When we are in conversation the oneness emerges without losing the distinction of diversity.

The beauty of the AI approach is that as we enter into discussions we experience the magic in the middle: conversations which support personal relations, and personal relations which support efforts to achieve the congregation's preferred future.

A PERSONAL NOTE ON LOGISTICS AND STYLE

In the area of "group discussion" I deviate from the AI model and employ a modified World Café style with small and intimate groups listening and responding to each other and then sharing these insights with the larger group for the purpose of understanding emerging themes and patterns.

Strictly speaking, the AI process recommends a dyad-interview model whereby two people "interview" one another and then join with a group to explore the themes and patterns of the interviews.

Example Appreciative Inquiry Process

VALUES & IDENTITY: Appreciating the Best of What Is:*

AI Summit to discover the positive core of the congregation

VISION: Imagining the Best of What Might Be*

Four to six weeks after above

AI Summit to explore patterns arising from the positive core and to prioritize potential goals or outcomes

NOTE: this is to gather information and ideas only; the actual writing should be done by a small group.

OUTCOMES: Determining What Should Be**

Four to six weeks after above

AI Summit to develop goals with specific details including dates, budgets, and resources needed to achieve each goal.

ACTION PLAN: Creating What Will Be**

Simultaneous with above or shortly thereafter

Back before the full organization within six weeks

What is the Action Plan – this part may be accomplished by leadership and then presented to the full congregation.

*Strongly suggest outside facilitator.

**May be done "in house."

Written Resources Cited

Bryson, John M., (2011) *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, Fourth Edition, Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Imprint.

Charvet, S. R. (1997) *Words That Change Minds: Mastering the Language of Influence*, 2nd Edition. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

Cooperrider, D. L., Whitney D., & Stavros, J. M. (2008) *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook for Leaders of Change*, Premium Edition, 2nd Edition. Crown Custom Publishing, Inc.

Hammond, Sue Annie (no date) *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*, 2nd Edition, Thin Book Publishing Co.

O'Connor, J. & Lages, A. (2004) *Coaching With NLP: How to Be a Master Coach*. Element.

Orem, S. L., Binkert, J, & Clancy, A. L. (2007) *Appreciative Coaching: A Positive Process for Change*. Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Imprint.

Voyle, R. J. & Voyle, K. M. (2006) *Core Values of the Appreciative Way: An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry for Work and Daily Living*. Clergy Leadership Institute.

Internet Resources Cited

<http://www.anglicancoach.com>: *The VIVA Church Renewal Process*

<http://www.clergyleadership.com>: *The Clergy Leadership Institute*

APPENDIX

The following design and questions come from The Clergy Leadership Institute and are used by permission: www.clergyleadership.com

First Phase Generative Questions

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 a wider group.

1. Best Experience: Reflect on your entire experience of your church. Recall a time when you felt most alive, most involved, spiritually touched, or most excited about your involvement. Tell about this memorable experience which 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. Valuing: What are the things you deeply care about?

A. Your Church: What is it about your church that you value and care about?
What is the single most important thing that your church has contributed to your life?

B. Your Community: What do you value about living in/around Loveland?

3. Core Essence: What is the core essence of your church? 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 Summary

(This form to be used in groups of 4 or 6 to summarize the themes being expressed)

Use this page as the participants are introduced to summarize the stories and responses. Pay particular notice of commonalities and unique stories that catch your imagination.

1. Best Experiences:

2. What do people value about their church? About the city their community?

3. Core Essence: What do people think is the core essence of their church?

4. Three Wishes: What are the three wishes (or more) held in commonality? Is there a single wish that once shared was agreed to by all?

Provocative Purpose Statement

A provocative purpose statement describes the church at its very best and is written as though the desired future is a reality. They are bold aspiration statements grounded in the best that the congregation has already been and call forth the best of what the church can be.

The statement is to be provocative, stretching, challenging, and interrupting the status quo.

The statement is to be grounded allowing the congregation to live and manifest the best of its past into the future.

The statement is to be stated positively so as to expand the range of possibility for the congregation.

Watch for waffle words: “we aim to,” “we will strive for,” “we aspire to.”

The more off the wall the closer to God’s calling.

A provocative statement “provokes” or calls forth the best in a congregation. Vision statements relate to human being-ness. Mission statements relate to human doing or action.

Examples:

Jesus the Christ: I am the bread of life... I am the light of the world.

Sylva Leduc: I coach executives caught between a rock and a heart place.

Rob Voyle: I am helpful, humorous, and healing.

Morgan Star: I am the river that connects mountain with ocean, while laughing eternally, that is constantly changing and moving forward, yet simultaneously is always there with you.

David Popham: I prod the generative energies of life through wonder and discovery.

All Saint’s Catechesis: We open doors for children to fall in love with Jesus.

St. James: Ancient Worship, Open Minds
Come Inside, Make a Difference

Appreciative Inquiry Group, Dioceses of Penn: Appreciative Companions in Christ: Calling Forth the Best.

Rocky Mountain Conference, UCC, Outdoor Ministries: We provide a sanctuary, a place where it is “safe” for people to harmonize their lives with the vision of the Gospel.

Second Phase Generative Questions

Opening

Provide a “report back” concerning the data amassed in Phase 1. Have handouts so all those who want may have a full copy of the data. During this time raise up a suitable metaphor ending with a focus on the “three wishes.”

Round 1:

What images of the future percolate from the three wishes?

What future possibilities do you want to develop based upon the three wishes?

Bullet list of answers

Round 2:

Invite the groups to prioritize the list of bulleted possibilities

Round 3:

Invite the groups to develop one or two goals for the top 3 or 4 priorities