

CONGREGATIONAL SELF-STUDY AND VISIONING

In parishes where the former rector was well loved and appreciated, the instinctive response is to say, "All we need is another rector like our former rector." Conversely, in conflicted situations the instinctive response is to seek the opposite of the former rector. Both responses ignore the current reality of the congregation and the future reality to which God is calling the congregation. To engage in a search, a congregation needs a clear, shared understanding of who they are and where they are going. Only with that clear self-understanding will they know who to call as their next rector.

From our experience, very few congregations have a clear sense of their God-given purpose, and so this will be the major focus of the self-study work. Where congregations do have a clear sense of their purpose, the self-study will focus on affirming that purpose and creating a vision of how they want to manifest their purpose in the coming years.

The Parish Self-Study

The primary goal of the self-study is to define a realistic understanding of the congregation's preferred future. To create an understanding of the future, we first need to discover their best in their current experience. In our **A** ⇒ **B** model, we are describing the best of **A** and what the congregation values. Within this best are the seeds of the future, and the resources that the congregation can use to co-create with God their preferred future **B**.

Simply describing the congregation's current state is only the start. The search process is about preparing for the future. What does the congregation want to become, and what types of ministry do they want to be engaging in? This question is not simply engaged in as exercise in fantasy. From an appreciative perspective, the answers to these questions are contained in the stories that people tell about their congregation. Rather than simply having a small group answer these questions or creating a survey, we will engage the congregation in a series of appreciative conversations to identify their self-understanding.

On the following page is a basic outline of the categories for the self-discovery. In the beginning, the congregation may not be able to answer some of these questions; at the end of the self-study, the congregation will be able to describe not only their current reality but also what they want to become.

*Alone we can do so little;
together we can
do so much.*

— Helen Keller

*How can we be whole
if we don't
include the whole?*

*You can't expect to meet
the challenges of today
with yesterday's tools
and expect to be in
business tomorrow.*

— Unknown

God the Source of Life

How is God understood and experienced in the congregation?

How is God's transcendence experienced?

How is God's immanence experienced?

What type of worship does the congregation enjoy?

Purpose

What is the congregation's life-giving purpose?

How is that purpose experienced and manifested?

What is the congregation's vision for manifesting their purpose in the future?

Identity

What is the congregation's role or mission?

How does its mission fulfil its purpose?

Values

What are the congregation's core values?

What does the congregation value on a day-to-day basis?

Expectations

What is the mood of the congregation?

How successful are they in accomplishing their ministries?

How confident are they of achieving their desired future?

Skills

What are the congregation's ministries?

How do they manifest their God-given talents for the benefit of themselves and the world?

Environmental Context

What are the congregation's environmental assets?

What environmental resources do they rely on?

Establishing a Self-Study and Visioning Team

There are many facets of the self-study process and the final written documentation. Our experience over the years suggests that people are less inclined to read substantial reports or profiles. What is needed are well-written, succinct executive summaries that highlight key points. With the advent of web sites as a primary means of communication, including someone who can prepare written material for web production is important. The self-study team will need people who have one or more of the following abilities:

- At least one good organizer who can ensure that the self-study and visioning tasks are accomplished in a timely manner.
- People who can listen to the community and allow a vision to emerge, rather than people who believe they already know what the vision should be.
- Representatives from the major congregational sub-groups such as early and late services.
- One or two good writers who can combine all the material into a well written, succinct report.
- A photographer to take or collect images of parish activities.
- A graphic artist to arrange and lay out the final copy of the reports.
- Someone with computer expertise. With the advent of computers and web sites having this expertise on the committee is a plus.
- A liaison person from the vestry.
- A liaison with the search committee.

Why Use an Appreciative Summit and Not a Survey

As we have noted in the introduction, we no longer use congregational surveys as part of the self-study process. Our preference is to engage all of the congregation in an Appreciative Inquiry Summit²⁰, which is described in detail in the next section. Here are some of our key reasons for using an appreciative summit rather than a survey:

- While seemingly simple to construct, creating a survey that results in relevant and usable information requires extensive skill and expertise in social research methods. Very few parishioners have these resources. Tabulating the results of a survey can also take an enormous amount of time.

Leadership is not magnetic personality, that can just as well be a glib tongue. It is not "making friends and influencing people," that is flattery. Leadership is lifting a person's vision to higher sights, the raising of a person's performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations.
 — Peter F. Drucker

Christianity didn't flourish because eleven disciples took a survey and ten believed in the resurrection. Christianity flourished because people told their stories about how they had encountered and been transformed by the risen Christ.

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

Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.
— Albert Einstein

- A summit in most small and medium-sized congregations is easier and quicker to conduct than a survey. Summits for larger congregations create logistical challenges that may take longer to organize and conduct but are worth the effort, as they enliven people in ways most surveys cannot.
- Summits engage all the people in a way that a survey never can. In the shared interviewing and storytelling, community is built and strengthened. Surveys do not create community.
- The storytelling and shared visioning motivates people to action. Surveys don't motivate people to create a better tomorrow, they just give a brief snapshot of what is present.
- Summits unite people around shared values and purpose. Surveys often polarize people into yes/no factions.
- A summit actually leads to change in hearts, minds, and ways of seeing and doing. People form new connections with others. These connections are made at the place of what people love and find life-giving.
- Because all the stakeholders engage in visioning and designing their future they have greater ownership of the vision. They will be more committed to the shared vision and will welcome the change strategies.

If You Do Decide to Use a Survey

While we find surveys to be of limited value, there may be circumstances where they are appropriate, and in some cases, may be used simply to appease those who feel all the parishioners must be surveyed. One situation where a survey could be helpful is when the congregation has great seasonal fluctuation in attendance. If the self-study is conducted when many have returned back to summer or winter homes, a survey can be used to gather their opinions. When creating a survey consider the following:

- Do the survey after the summit. Use the survey to ask questions related to the material that arose during the summit. The survey can be used to confirm the findings of the summit.
- Keep the survey brief and focused on key areas that will help the congregation plan for its future.
- Use an online survey instrument such as Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). Provide paper and pencil

versions for those without computer access. The online services are often free and will tabulate all the results. If you do use a public online service, provide members with a security code so only they will take the survey. Remember with a public service there is no way to guarantee who has actually completed the survey – hold the results lightly.

- Create two types of questions:
 1. Direct, simple questions related to demographics, such as age, gender, occupation, and education.
 2. Narrative questions asking people what they value about the church, and what their wishes are for the church. While narrative questions take longer to collate and interpret, they provide richer survey material.
- Craft the narrative questions appreciatively. For example, one church whose previous rector had left after a conflict asked the question: “If the next rector fails it will be because _____?” This question is planting the seeds of future failure. A better question to ask would be: “When our next rector succeeds it will be because _____?”
- Avoid yes/no questions that polarize people or oversimplify complex issues.
- Be very wary of interpreting survey results as mandates for future action. For example, even if 55% of the survey respondents said they supported the building of a parish hall, a large number (45%) are still not in favor. Going ahead with a building project with such high levels of disagreement is foolhardy. Survey results with significant disagreement are mandates for further conversation regarding the goal and how it will help the congregation express its purpose, rather than mandates for action on the proposal in question.
- Take time as a congregation to discuss the results and their implications as the congregation prepares for its future. For example, after the survey has been completed, convene a “town hall meeting” or forum with focus groups to discuss the results under three broad headings:

Here is what the survey said.

Here are the implications for what we want to become.

This is what we need in a rector to help us create that future.

Many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.

— William James

All generalizations are false, including this one.

— Mark Twain

Love will go away if we stop talking to each other.

— Unknown

*In order to plan
your future wisely,
it is necessary that
you understand and
appreciate your past.*
— Jo Coudert

*When you begin to
touch your heart or let your
heart be touched,
you begin to discover
that it's bottomless,
that it doesn't have
any resolution,
that this heart is huge, vast,
and limitless. You begin to
discover how much warmth
and gentleness is there,
as well as how
much space.*
— Pema Chodron

Define Phase: Designing an Appreciative Inquiry Summit

An Appreciative Inquiry Summit is a gathering of all the stakeholders of an organization for a time of storytelling and envisioning the future. Within a congregation, the goal is to engage all the parishioners in the process at one time. A minimum of four hours is required to conduct a summit. In large congregations this may create considerable logistical challenges that we will explore in greater detail.

Other Large Scale Approaches

The Appreciative Inquiry Summit has a great deal in common with other large scale organizational interventions, such as:

- Open Space Technology²¹
- Future Search²²
- Asset Mapping²³
- World Cafe²⁴
- Town Hall Meetings or Forums

Aspects of these approaches can be used in the design of an Appreciative Inquiry Summit, or appreciative strategies can be used when engaging these approaches. Further information about these approaches can be found in the "References and Resources" section. The distinctive aspect of the appreciative approach is the use of interviewing and shared storytelling.

Regardless of which process you use, we strongly advise people to pay attention to the types of questions being asked in the process. Are the questions oriented to resourcing people for a life-giving future, or are the questions oriented toward describing what is wrong and who is to blame?

Using a Facilitator

We recommend that the congregation use a facilitator to guide the summit process. In many parishes this can be done by the transitional minister, if they have had training in the appreciative process. Associate clergy and other congregational leaders need to be part of the process which makes them less suitable for the role of facilitating the process. In large congregations where the reporting back and the plenary process becomes considerably involved, we recommend using a facilitator who has experience with large groups.

The Summit Outline

The following is a general outline of a summit process and time requirements. The plenary times will vary depending on the total number of participants.

All the parishioners will gather at one time in one place. Provide day care for younger children, who can also engage in an age-appropriate version of the process. We include teens with the adults in the summit process.

- Brief worship and introductory remarks. Time: 15 minutes.
- People pair up and interview each other using a prepared interview protocol. Time: 30 minutes per person per interview, including personal breaks. Time: 60 minutes total.
- The interview pairs gather in groups of 6-8 and introduce each other to the wider group using the information from the interview. Time: 45-60 minutes.
- Groups discuss their findings to synthesize their experience. Time: 20 minutes.
- Groups prepare brief presentations to all participants. Various strategies are provided for reporting the discoveries depending on the numbers present. Time: 20 minutes for preparation.
- Presentations to the whole and plenary discussion. Time: 60 minutes.
- Dreaming of the future. Participants are led in a guided imagery process. Time: 20 minutes.
- Groups create shared dreams of the future. Time: 20 minutes.
- Presentations of the dreams to all participants and plenary discussion. Time: 60 minutes.
- Concluding worship. Time: 10 minutes.
- Self-study and visioning committee meet. Time: 2 hours.

After the summit closing, the self-study and visioning committees need to gather and begin to create summaries and word-smith the purpose statements. In addition to providing the basis of the profile, the findings of the summit need to be incorporated into the preaching and teaching of the congregation and utilized for goal development and implementation.

Australian Aborigines say that the big stories—the stories worth telling and retelling, the ones in which you may find the meaning of your life—are forever stalking the right teller, sniffing and tracking like predators hunting their prey in the bush.

— Robert Moss

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life.

It turns what we have into enough, and more.

It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity.

It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend.

Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

— Melody Beattie

*The greatest use of life
is to spend it for
something that will
outlast it.*

— William James

*It had long since
come to my attention
that people of
accomplishment rarely
sat back and let things
happen to them.
They went out and
happened to things.*

— Elinor Smith

Logistical Considerations

The previous schedule is for the “ideal” situation and will require approximately 6 hours, not including the committee meetings afterwards. This requires a suitable gathering place and the facilities to provide at least one meal. Initially, we endeavored to hold the summits on a Saturday, which required considerable lead time and marketing to ensure that most of the parishioners could attend.

While conducting a brief inquiry into how congregations were able to get maximum participation in their programs, we asked people what programs and events, such as homecoming dinners, were well attended and what they had done to achieve that attendance. One priest reported it was quite easy: they had good attendance most Sundays! We now schedule many summits on Sunday.

Sunday Summit

For many congregations, holding a summit on a Sunday (or over two Sundays) is an easier logistical proposition. Maximum participation can be achieved with minimum lead time and marketing effort. The following is a schedule that we have used for a Sunday summit.

Prepare the people well in advance. Inform them of changes to service times and provide a brief schedule for the day’s activity.

Advertise the changes on your web site to inform visitors.

Combine both morning services and begin the day with the liturgy of the Word. Explain to visitors what is happening and provide options for their worship.

Include teens in the process with the adults. Younger children can engage in age-appropriate storytelling and artwork describing their experience of the church.

- Participants form pairs and interview each other using a prepared interview protocol. Time: 30 minutes per person per interview, including personal breaks. Time: 60 minutes total.
- The interview pairs gather in groups of 6-8 and introduce each other to the wider group using the information from the interview. Time: 45-60 minutes.
- Lunch is provided. We prefer to use boxed lunches or in one instance a group from a neighboring church prepared a soup and salad lunch. This enables all the parishioners to focus on the summit and not be distracted by kitchen duties.

- Groups discuss their findings to synthesize their experience. Time: 20 minutes.
- Groups prepare brief presentations to all participants. Various strategies are provided for reporting the discoveries depending on the numbers present. Time: 20 minutes for preparation.
- Presentations to the whole and plenary discussion. Time: 60 minutes. Presentation materials can be left in the parish hall for people to peruse over the coming weeks.
- Dreaming of the future. Participants are led in a guided imagery process. Time: 20 minutes.
- Groups create shared dreams of the future. Time: 20 minutes.
- Presentations of the dreams to all the participants and plenary discussion. Time: 60 minutes.
- Conclude with the liturgy of the sacrament.
- Self-study team gathers to word-smith provocative purpose statements and summaries of the process. Time: 2 hours.

If time is an issue, the first half of the program could be concluded with the liturgy of the sacrament, before the dream exercise. On the following Sunday the dream phase could be completed using a similar schedule.

Give the Summit a Name

One of the major goals for the summit is to engage all the parishioners. Having a “marketable” name is helpful in focusing attention and engaging people. For example, the summit could be called “The Day of Discovery.” People can then use this in a succinct way to invite parishioners, such as: “Are you coming to the Day of Discovery?”

Create redundant forms of communication to invite participation. Personal telephone invitations, posters, newsletter and web site announcements, and sermons providing a theological perspective on the summit are all important ways to ensure full participation.

Designing the Summit Content

The heart of any appreciative process is the interviewing and shared storytelling. Asking questions of people influences and moves them in a certain direction, so we pay close attention to the framing of questions. The summit process can be used to develop and grow existing ministries simultaneously with using the summit to develop the congregation’s self-understanding.

*We need to be friends
of our future rather
than experts on our past.*

*Nobody can go back
and start a new beginning,
but anyone can start today
and make a new ending.*
— Maria Robinson

Instructions: Use the **A** ⇔ **B** design model to determine what you want to achieve during the summit and then reverse-engineer the summit goals to create the questions.

Starting at B (Picture of Success)

Leadership Expectations: Have the vestry liaison ask the vestry the following questions prior to gathering with the self-study team:

What does the leadership want as an outcome for the summit?

What would make this a great event from the vestry's perspective?

In addition to working on the self-study and the overall ministry of the church, is there any specific ministry or activity that the leadership wants to develop, such as worship or outreach? Make sure the area to be considered is specific.

Self-Study Planning: Have the self-study committee gather and discuss the following questions:

Take a moment and imagine that the summit has ended and people are saying that this has been the best church activity they have engaged in. What has made it such a great event?

Imagine overhearing members talking about the summit. What would they be saying made it such a great summit?

What is the desired outcome for the summit?

Create a Picture of B: Synthesize the expectations of the vestry and the self-study committee and create a picture of B — a successful summit.

Reverse Engineer B. What resources do you need to achieve the desired outcome? On the following pages are the steps to create the appreciative inquiry interview protocol which will be used to achieve the desired outcome.

Logistical Considerations: In addition to the interview protocol some other resources that you will need to consider are the summit location, and organizing food and refreshments.

Discovery Phase: Creating a Summit Interview

From the assumptions of appreciative inquiry, the way questions are asked will both determine the outcome and influence people to move in a certain direction. In the inquiry phase, we want people to begin moving toward their goal.

To be able to state a goal requires that you can imagine the goal. To imagine the goal requires that you have had some experience of the goal in the past. Therefore, the first part of the inquiry is into people's best experience of their goal.

When dealing with a problem situation, we need to first convert the problem statement into a positive goal statement, which we can then use as the basis of the appreciative inquiry.

Work Backwards from the Goal to Craft Questions

There are three typical areas of inquiry:

1. The "peak" or best experience of the area previously defined as the goal for the inquiry.
2. Values, both personal and related to 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 then we project that value into the future.

We want wishes for the future to be grounded in the best of the past. When people share their best experiences and what they value about themselves and the goal, they will move into a positive mindset that encourages positive and creative thinking regarding the future. Wishes will be reality-based and will also expand on their previous best. If we simply started with the wishes, they would be fantasies that were not necessarily connected to a reality that the people knew or could trust. When people share their stories of their best experience first, the wishes will flow from this known reality.

On the following pages are examples of creating the three basic questions for an Appreciative Inquiry interview protocol. It is anticipated that at the summit pairs of people would interview each other for 20-30 minutes per interview using the interview questions.

To "appreciate" means to: become aware of; grasp the significance of; value or admire; and recognize with gratitude. At the same time as we appreciate something it will "appreciate" or grow in value. We appreciate our best so our best will grow.

Facts and figures are forgotten. Stories are retold.
— Jeffrey Gitomer

I believe we can change the world if we start listening to one another again. Simple, honest, human conversation. Not mediation, problem – solving, debate, or public meetings. Simple truthful conversation where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well.
— Margaret J. Wheatley

*All humanity is divided
into three classes:
those who are immovable,
those who are movable and
those who move.
— Benjamin Franklin*

*The good in you is
like the water in a well.
The more you draw from it,
the more fresh water
will seep in.
If you do not draw from it,
the water will only
become stagnant.
— Deng Ming-Dao*

Interview Question Examples

When the Church Has A Clear Sense of Purpose

If a church has a strong sense of mission with a clear mission statement, we would inquire into the elements of the mission. We might also include a generic question to see whether parishioners' best experiences are still related to their core mission.

In the following questions, notice that they assume people have had an experience of the mission. If a person has actually had no experience of the mission, they will usually say so and move to another question. However, in most cases people will have had at least a brief experience of the question and will begin sharing that. As they do so, the experience will grow in their consciousness and they will be reinforced to do more of it in the future. The mission will be further reinforced in consciousness when they hear other people's stories.

Because the mission has two elements, we create "best experience" questions to cover each element. We also include a values question related to the outcome of the mission. In the example we also use the language of the mission and the congregation in crafting the questions. We explicitly used Jesus' name rather than "God" because the focus of the mission is discipleship.

Mission Statement: To Be Disciples Who Make Disciples.

Appreciative Questions:

- Tell me a story about your best experience of being a member here at our church, a time when you felt alive and glad to be a member. What made the experience memorable?
- Tell me a story of a time at our church when you really grew in your understanding of being a follower of Jesus. What happened? Who else was involved? What did you do as a result of the experience?
- Tell me a story of a time when you shared Jesus' love with someone and helped them grow in their faith. What did you do? What did the person do? As you reflect on the story what has the experience done for them and for you?
- What do you value about being a disciple of Jesus?
- What do you value about our church?
- If Jesus gave you three wishes for our church, what would they be?

When the Church Has No Clear Sense of Purpose

In this situation we would use generic questions about people’s best experience of their church congregation. We may ask for a global story of their best experience. If the people have a strong tendency to tell stories of a previous generation, then we may also add a time period, for example asking only for stories from the past five years.

Generic Appreciative Questions

- Tell me a story about your best experience of being a member of our church (in the past five years). Describe a time when you felt alive and excited and glad to be a member. What made the experience memorable? Who else was involved? What did you do as a result of the experience?
- What do you really value about our church?
- If God gave you three wishes for our church, what would they be?

Questions About Personal Interests

One of the standard appreciative inquiry values questions is: “Without being humble, tell me what you value most about yourself.”

We still use this question with small groups such as church boards or committees, but we have not found it particularly helpful in large church summits.

In large groups we have discovered that asking a question about what people love to do works very well. From our experience, the things that people deeply love to do are often metaphors for their personal, God-given, core purpose.

In the asset mapping process, things people love to do are assets that can be grouped in novel ways to create ministries to respond to the needs of the community. Ministries based on what people love to do, rather than what they “should” be doing, will have their own internal vitality and motivation.

Appreciative Question

- 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.

*I never worked
a day in my life.
It was all fun.*
— Thomas Edison

*Today you are You,
that is truer than true.
There is no one alive
who is Youer than You.*
— Dr. Seuss

*You can buy
a person’s hands but you
can’t buy his heart.
His heart is where
his enthusiasm,
his loyalty is.*
— Stephen Covey

*If children live
with criticism,
they learn to condemn.
If children live with shame,
they learn to feel guilty.
If children live
with encouragement,
they learn confidence.
If children live with praise,
they learn appreciation.*
— Dorothy Law Nolte

*Treasure the love you have
received above all.
It will survive long after
your gold and good health
have vanished.*
— Og Mandino

Denomination Question

When creating a survey interview protocol, we always include a question about what the parishioners value about their church denomination. Many denominations are in conflict over a variety of issues, and it is therefore important to find those core values that provide a foundation for resolving these conflicts.

Appreciative Question

- What do you value about being an Episcopalian? What is the most important thing the Episcopal church has contributed to your life?

Core Values Question

In addition to asking what the parishioners value about their congregation, we also ask a question about what they think is the core value, or life-giving quality of their church. Often what people value about their church is personal — a friendship, or an act of kindness in a time of distress — whereas the core value of the church is seen as something more global, such as its outreach or its worship or its quality of caring.

Appreciative Question

- What do you think is the core value of your church? What life-giving quality is distinctive in your church? What is the essential quality of your church that makes it what it is?

When a Goal Statement is Available

When a congregation has a specific goal, or a group within the congregation is working to develop a specific ministry, we inquire specifically into the people's experience of the goal. In the following example we also consider the purpose of worship, which for the people involved was to enter into the presence of God. The resulting question not only asks about worship, but the desired outcome of worship — entering into the presence of God.

Goal Statement: "We want to enrich our worship."

Appreciative Questions

- Tell me a story about your best experience of worship here at our church. Describe a time when you were very aware of the presence of God. What made the experience memorable? Who else was involved? What did you do as a result of the experience?

- What do you really value about the way we worship here?
- If you had three wishes for our worship, what would they be?

In some situations the goal may be to engage more people in an activity. This is often the case when people are seeking to grow an outreach program that only a few people are involved in. In this case the question could include an “observer” component to account for those people who haven’t directly participated in the activity.

- Reflect on your entire experience of our church. Recall a time when you or people from our church reached out and cared for people in the wider community that left you feeling proud of being a member of our church. Tell me about this memorable experience that you have had of the people of our church loving their neighbor. Describe the event in detail and how it left you feeling proud and inspired.

When Dealing with a Problem

Because it is impossible to work effectively on reducing the presence of a problem, the first step is to convert the problem statement to a positive desired goal statement. This statement then becomes the basis for creating the inquiry questions.

Problem Statement: “We have too much conflict here.”

Goal Statement: “We want to increase cooperation.”

Appreciative Questions

- Tell me a story about a time when you cooperated with someone who had differing views to you, yet despite your differences you were able to accomplish a common goal.
- Without being humble, tell me what you value about yourself when you cooperate with others.
- If you were to imagine cooperating like that on a daily basis, what do you imagine we would be doing in two years time?

Environment Question

In areas where the geography or the location is unique, or may cause distress (such as from isolation, or extremes in temperature), we include questions about the location and how it informs them about the nature of God. When calling someone to live in such a location, it is important to discover what the parishioners value about the location. Using these values in the candidate interview process will

There is no greater exercise for the human heart than reaching down and lifting someone up.

— Unknown

*For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,
I was naked and you gave me clothing,
I was sick and you took care of me,
I was in prison and you visited me.*

— Matthew 25:35-36

We want people to tell one or two stories completely and in a way that draws both the storyteller and the listener deeper into the life of the congregation.

Soul-mates are people who bring out the best in you. They are not perfect but are always perfect for you.
— Unknown

help determine whether the candidates can also value the location and find living there life-giving. This is also true when candidates will be moving from one distinct cultural area to another.

The following questions were asked of people living on the prairie in Canada. It led to a lively and profound discussion of how the wideness of the prairie and “Big Sky” informed the people of the wideness of God’s mercy that was also manifested in a deep caring for one another. The people learned that in order to survive the harsh winters they had to first ensure that their community would survive. It is interesting to note that Canada’s national health care system was created on the prairie and is an expression of this community caring.

Appreciative Questions

- What is your best experience of living on the prairie? Describe a time when you felt glad to live on the prairie. Who else was involved, what did you do, and what was the result of the experience?
- What do you value about living on the prairie?
- What does the prairie teach you about the nature of God?

Crafting Wish Questions

While the generic “If you had three wishes ...” question generally works well, there are times to tailor it to the needs of a congregation. The purpose of the wish question is to have the people begin the process of imaging a preferred future that is grounded in the best of the past. Wish questions that evoke the peoples’ creativity and imagination will be helpful in the dream phase. Rather than focusing simply on wishes, the future-oriented question can also be asked as an “Imagine what would happen if we did more of...” question.

Appreciative Wish Questions

- An evangelically oriented congregation may ask the wish question from within their theological perspective: *“If Jesus were to give you three wishes for your congregation what would they be?”*
- Another way of stating the wishes question would be to focus on the person’s hopes and dreams for the congregation: *“What are your hopes and dreams for our congregation? What are two or three things you would love to see our congregation doing in the community?”*

- For a congregation seeking to develop its outreach program: *“Imagine that our outreach program has become incredibly successful and we are given an award by the local television station. What do you imagine we would have done to receive the award?”*
- As a follow-up to the question “what do you love to do?” ask: *“Please take a moment and imagine what would happen to our church if you and others were supported to do more of what you and they love to do. What do you imagine the people would be doing and feeling?”*

Using a Two-Step Process to Create the Interview

In large congregations with multiple programs we have found it helpful to use a two-step process to create the summit interview protocol. We gathered the self-study and visioning committee, along with other leaders from the congregation, to complete the generic interview questions. From the generic interview results, several specific areas were discovered to inquire into more deeply at the summit.

For example, during the generic interview, people reported that they valued the welcome they received when they first attended the church. Upon further reflection it appeared that their welcome was highly individual and actually needed to be widened to include all who visited, and not just a few who visited. We created a specific follow-up questions to develop the congregation’s hospitality:

Appreciative Questions

- Tell me the story about how you were welcomed into the church. Who welcomed you? What did they do to welcome you and how did it make you feel?
- Tell me a story about a time when someone at the church welcomed someone who was very different from them and made them feel at home and a valued member of the community.

Creating Participant Interview Booklets

We have found it helpful to create an interview workbook with the interview questions, space to record answers, and space to synthesize the information from the introductions. Our recommendation is to print the interview on a folded sheet of 11”x17” tabloid paper for each participant. In the interview samples we provide an example of an interview booklet.

*If you want happiness
for an hour, take a nap.
If you want happiness
for a day, go fishing.
If you want happiness
for a month, get married.
If you want happiness
for a year, inherit a fortune.
If you want happiness
for a lifetime, help others.*
— Chinese Proverb

*Deep within humans dwell
those slumbering powers;
powers that would
astonish them,
that they never
dreamed of possessing;
forces that would
revolutionize their lives
if aroused and put
into action.*
— Orison Marden

The goal is to interview in depth, to explore the heart of the concern, rather than interview superficially across a broad range of questions, many of which may not be relevant to the person.

You don't lead by hitting people over the head—that's assault, not leadership.
— Dwight David Eisenhower

Field Test the Interview

Before using the interview at the summit, field test it amongst the self-study and visioning committee. If the committee is small you could also include several representatives of various church sub-groupings to field test the interview. Where necessary, modify the wording to clarify the questions if the field test indicates that a question has not "worked" as anticipated or achieved its goal.

While it is tempting to ask many questions to gather as much information as possible, the opposite is generally true. One or two good questions will allow time for deep storytelling. Just as Christianity is not simply information about God, but is a story about God's work in Jesus that invites us into relationship with Jesus, the same is true about the Appreciative Inquiry process. We want people to tell one or two stories completely and in a way that draws both the storyteller and the listener deeper into the life of the congregation.

Interview Samples

On the following pages are examples of interviews we have developed for a variety of situations:

- A "generic" interview guide, which is our standard guide when congregations have little sense of purpose or mission.
- A more specific guide that was developed by a visioning committee after they had used the generic guide with a pilot group.
- A guide for "Safe Church Training." This guide demonstrates the diverse ways the appreciative story-telling process can be used.
- A guide based on the Great Commandment. In addition to providing information for a search process, this guide was designed to encourage a community outreach focus.
- A complete interview booklet with synthesis pages. It was created for the Diocese of Oregon to use during their Diocesan convention as part of their self-study in anticipation of seeking and electing a new Bishop. The "imagine" statements were created from appreciative stories told in preliminary regional gatherings.

Instructions: In pairs, interview one another using the following questions. Take 30 minutes for each interview.

Be a generous listener. Do not have a dialogue, but rather take turns to actually conduct an interview. If you need more information or clarification ask 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 begin to interview the other person, take a minute to read the questions and decide how you would personally answer the question, and make a mental note of your response. Now proceed with the interview, paying full attention to the other person's story, setting aside your own for the moment.

1. **Best Experience:** Reflect on your entire experience with this 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 our 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, what are the things you value about yourself? about being a parishioner? about our church?
 - a. **Yourself:** Without being humble, what do you value most about yourself — for example, as a human being, or employee, or a friend, parent, or citizen?

(Note: From our experience, this question, which is a classic question in Appreciative Inquiry circles, often doesn't work well in large church groups. Instead, we now use question 1b.)
 - b. **Being a parishioner:** When you feel best about being a parishioner at our church, what about yourself do you value?
 - c. **Our church:** What is it about our church that you value? What is the single most important thing that our church has contributed to your life?
 - d. **Our denomination:** What is it about our denomination that you value? What is the single most important thing that our denomination has contributed to your life?
3. **Core Value:** What do you think is the core value of our church? What life-giving quality is distinctive in our church? What is the essential quality of our church that makes it what it is?
4. **Three Wishes:** If God gave you three wishes for our church, what would they be?

The following interview protocol was developed by using the generic interview with a leadership group of about twenty people. Specific questions were developed from the generic interview.

Instructions: *In pairs, interview one another using the following questions. Take 30 minutes for each interview.*

Be a generous listener. *Do not have a dialogue, but rather take turns to actually conduct an interview. If you need more information or clarification ask 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 begin to interview the other person, take a minute to read the questions and decide how you would personally answer the question, and make a mental note of your response. Now proceed with the interview, paying full attention to the other person's story, setting aside your own for the moment.

1. **Best Experience:** Reflect on your entire experience with this 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 at All Saints. 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. **Worship:** What is the best worship experience you have had at All Saints? Tell me a story about this memorable worship experience. Describe the event in detail. What made it a memorable experience? Who was involved? Describe how you felt. Describe what you did as a result of the experience.
3. **Service to others:** Tell me a story about a time at All Saints when you have served others and have felt inspired, enthusiastic, and enlivened.
4. **Being Welcomed:** Tell me about a time when you felt welcomed and included at All Saints. Who was involved, and what did they do that made you feel welcome?
5. **Values:** What are the things you value deeply? What do you value about yourself and All Saints?
 - a. **What do you really love to do?** Tell me a story of a time when you got to do something that you really love doing that left you feeling very satisfied.
 - b. **All Saints:** What do you think is the core value of this church? What life-giving quality is distinctive in our church? What is the essential quality of our church that makes it what it is?
 - c. **Core Value:** What do you think is the core value of All Saints? What values give life to our congregation? What is it that, if it did not exist, would make our church totally different than it currently is?
 - d. **Our denomination:** What is it about our denomination that you value? What is the single most important thing that our denomination has contributed to your life?
6. **Three Wishes:** If God gave you three wishes for All Saints, what would they be?

This interview guide was developed as a partial alternative to traditional child abuse prevention seminar materials mandated for Sunday school teachers and youth workers. Rather than growing child safety, many of the child abuse prevention seminars focus on the terrible things people shouldn't do to children, which frightens the participants and demotivates them from wanting to work with children. Rather than focusing on "what not to do" this interview guide seeks stories of participants' experiences of being treated with dignity and being safe as a child. This material is then incorporated into teaching participants how to increase the safety of children in church settings. The protocol is provided here as an example of the diverse ways the appreciative interviewing process can be used to meet specific organizational needs.

Safeguarding God's Children

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

Interview Guide for Teachers and Youth Workers

Instructions: In pairs, interview one another using the following questions. Take 30 minutes for each interview.

Be a generous listener. Do not have a dialogue, but rather take turns to actually conduct an interview. If you need more information or clarification ask 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 begin to interview the other person, take a minute to read the questions and decide how you would personally answer the question, and make a mental note of your response. Now proceed with the interview, paying full attention to the other person's story, setting aside your own for the moment.

- 1. Dignity:** Reflect on your entire experience with your congregation or school. Recall a time when someone respected your dignity or valued you as a human being. Describe how it made you feel, what you thought, and who was involved. Describe what you did as a result of your experience.
- 2. Safety as a Child:** Reflect on your life, and especially your childhood. Recall a time when you felt nurtured, safe, secure, protected, and free to be yourself. Tell me about this memorable time. Describe the event in detail. What made you feel safe?
- 3. Safety in Ministry:** Reflect on your work and ministry with children. Recall one of your best experiences working with children, a time when you felt accomplished, creative and effective in your work. What made you feel safe to work creatively with them? Tell me about this memorable time. Describe the event in detail. What made you feel safe?
- 4. Values:** Without being humble, tell me what you most value about yourself when you are working with children and youth.
- 5. Three Wishes:** If you had three wishes for your work with children, what would they be?

Instructions: In pairs, interview one another using the following questions. Take 30 minutes for each interview.

Be a generous listener. Do not have a dialogue, but rather take turns to actually conduct an interview. If you need more information or clarification ask 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 begin to interview the other person, take a minute to read the questions and decide how you would personally answer the question, and make a mental note of your response. Now proceed with the interview, paying full attention to the other person's story, setting aside your own for the moment.

1. **Best Experience of Loving God:** Reflect on your entire experience of St. Paul's parish. Recall a time when you felt most aware and spiritually touched by God's presence and love at St. Paul's. Tell me about this memorable experience of loving and being loved by God at St. Paul's. 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 Loving Your Neighbor:** Reflect on your entire experience of St. Paul's parish. Recall a time when you or people from St. Paul's reached out and cared for people in the wider community that left you feeling proud of being a member of St. Paul's. Tell me about this memorable experience that you have had of the people of St. Paul's loving their neighbor. Describe the event in detail and how it left you feeling proud and inspired.

3. **Best Experience of Loving Yourself:** What do you love to do? Tell me a story about a memorable time when you were able to engage in something that you really love to do and which left you with a feeling of deep satisfaction. What made it memorable? What was the outcome of the experience? What did you do as a result of the experience?

4. **Values:** What are the things you value deeply?
 - a. **Our church:** What is it about St. Paul's that you value? What is the single most important thing that St. Paul's has contributed to your life?

 - d. **Our denomination:** What is it about belonging to the Episcopal church that you value? What is the single most important thing that our denomination has contributed to your life?

5. **Core Value:** What do you think is the core value of our church? What life-giving quality is distinctive in our church? What is the essential quality of our church that makes it what it is?

6. **Three Wishes:** If God gave you three wishes for St. Paul's, what would they be?

IMAGINE THE DIOCESE OF OREGON...

Imagine a Diocese in which every congregation is valued as a welcoming place, where God's love shines in community, and lives are nurtured and transformed in Christ...

Imagine a Diocese in which every ministry, chaplaincy, and outreach to those who are hungry, sick, poor, down trodden, in prison, or victims of crime, is valued in the community as an expression of Christ's love, incarnate in the people of God...

Imagine a Diocese in which every parishioner is valued as part of one glorious, prophetic voice of Christ's peace, justice, and hope for the world...

Come, let us remember who we are, and whose we are, and imagine what we can become as the Diocese of Oregon...



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2 | Imagine the Diocese of Oregon

Appreciative Interview Guide For The Diocese of Oregon

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

Be a generous listener. *Take turns to actually conduct an interview rather than discuss the questions. 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 larger group.*

1a. Best Experience of Your Church: Reflect on your entire experience of your current parish. Describe your most memorable experience of being fed in mind, body, and soul to engage in the mission of Jesus Christ. Tell me about this memorable experience that you have had with your church as it cares for you and the wider community. Describe the event in detail. What made it exciting and memorable? Who was involved? Describe how you felt. Describe what you did as a result of the experience.

1b. Best Experience of Our Diocese: Reflect on your entire experience of our diocese. Recall a time when you felt connected, engaged, and supported by our diocesan community? Tell me about this memorable experience of collaborating with people from other churches within our diocese. Describe the event in detail. Who else was involved? Describe how you felt and what you accomplished.

2. Values: What are the things that are really important and that you value deeply?

(i) **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?

(i) **Our Diocese:** What is it about our diocese that you value? How does being a member of our diocese help you and your church engage in the mission of Jesus Christ?

(iii) **Being Episcopalian:** What is it about the Episcopal church that you deeply value. What is life-giving to you about being an Episcopalian?

(iv) **Oregon:** What is it about living in Oregon that you deeply value?

As you think of what you value about living in Oregon, how does our geography and culture influence your understanding of God and living as a follower of Christ?

3. Three wishes: If God gave you three wishes for your church and our diocese what would they be?

4. Imagining the Future: What do you imagine our diocese would become, if together we got to do more of the kinds of things that you shared in your stories and together we fulfilled your wishes?

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3 | Imagine the Diocese of Oregon

Appreciative Interview Summary Sheet

Instructions: In groups gather with the person you interviewed and take turns to introduce them to the group using the information from their stories. Share all of the person’s responses to the questions before moving to the next person. Pay particular attention to any common themes and stories that catch your imagination and make you go “wow.” Use this sheet to keep some brief notes of these themes and exemplar stories.

1a. Best Experience of Your Church:

1b. Best Experience of Our Diocese:

2. (i) **Your Church:** What is it about your church that you value?

(i) **Our Diocese:** What is it about our diocese that you value?

(iii) **Being Episcopalian:** What is it about the Episcopal church that you deeply value?

(iv) **Oregon:** What is it about living in Oregon that you deeply value?

How does living in Oregon influence your understanding of God and living as a follower of Christ?

3. **Three wishes:** If God gave you three wishes for your church and our diocese what would they be?

4. **Imagining the Future:** What do you imagine our diocese would become?

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4 | Imagine the Diocese of Oregon

Appreciative Interview Synthesis Sheet

Instructions: Use this sheet to synthesize the stories, themes, values, and dreams.

1. Core Essence of Our Congregations, Ministries and Diocese. What does your group think is the core essence of our diocese that is revealed when we are at our best manifesting our values in the world?

2. Stories: What is an exemplar story of our diocese at our best?

3. Values:

What does your group value about our diocese?

What does your group value about the Episcopal church?

What does your group value about living in Oregon?

4. Wishes and Dreams for the Future: What wishes does your group have for our diocese?

5. Metaphors and Images: What is a metaphor or image for our diocese when we are at our best?
On the sheet of newsprint create an image of the core essence of our diocese.

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Interview Process at the Summit

At the Summit, participants will pair up and interview each other. Allow 30 minutes per person per interview. While the selection of a partner is usually completely voluntary, give instructions on who to choose to interview. Here are some suggestions:

- The basic idea is to choose someone who is not like you. David Cooperrider called this the “pairing of unlikely opposites.”
- This is a good time to get to know someone you don’t know. Have early service people interview late service people, men interview women, young people interview old people, conservatives interview liberals, choir members interview outreach volunteers.
- Have the self-study, vestry, and search committee members interview parishioners not in these groups to widen the possible first-hand experiences shared with these committees.
- Encourage all people to engage in the interviewing, including leaders, associate clergy, and other staff.
- If there is an odd number create one triad, and have them adjust their time accordingly (20 minutes per interview).
- In most situations allow 30 minutes per interview. Most people include a refreshment break as part of the hour. If time was very limited you could allot 20 minutes per person, but we would not recommend doing it in less time.

Teach Appreciative Storytelling

Typically, a brief review of the instructions at the top of the interview schedule is all that is needed. Some points to emphasize:

- Interview, Not Dialogue: Use the questions as they are written. The interview is designed to allow deep inquiry into a person’s experience. Remind people to interview not dialogue. In a dialogue one person usually dominates the conversation. The interview is designed to allow both people to have equal time.
- Inquire Appreciatively: Gather stories, values, and wishes without judgment. Encourage people to state values and wishes positively. For example, “I am not afraid to take risks,” is negatively stated. Stated positively it becomes: “I am bold and courageous.”

*It is not restful,
it is not possible
to talk wholeheartedly
to more than one
person at a time.
You can't really talk with
a person unless you
surrender to them,
for the moment
(all other talk is futile).
You can't surrender
to more than
one person a moment.
— Anne Morrow Lindbergh*

*Wisdom is the reward
you get for a lifetime
of listening when you'd
have preferred to talk.
— Doug Larson*

*Never put a period where
God has put a comma.*
— Gracie Allen

*It takes a long time
to grow an old friend.*
— John Leonard

*Don't ever wrestle
with a pig.
You'll both get dirty,
but the pig will enjoy it.*
— Cale Yarborough

- **Inquire Deeply:** Encourage follow-up questions. If a person says their best experience was preparing a Thanksgiving meal for the homeless, ask: "What about that service was memorable? Who else was involved? What did you do as a result of the experience?" As an example of interview depth, the story is told to the depth that elicits the aroma and taste of turkey in the storyteller.
- Wishes should also be stated positively. Describe what the person wants "more of" rather than "less of" in the future.
- Pairs can find a quiet space or conduct their interviews in the same overall space. Be sensitive to people with hearing aids as the background noise in large groups can be very bothersome.

Responding To Negativity

Occasionally people will deviate from the interview questions and respond with a very negative story, or simply take the opportunity to vent their dislikes or the hurt that they have experienced in the congregation.

We avoid bringing this into people's awareness by not mentioning the possibility in the interview instructions. However, in the training with the self-study committee and the leadership prior to the summit, we teach people how to respond to a stream of negativity. The important thing is to acknowledge the comment so that people feel heard (and consequently accepted) and then transform what was said about the past into positive hopes for the future. The following is a three-step process we use to transform negative comments.

Three-step response to negativity:

1. Respectfully listen.
 2. Accurately reflect back to the person what you heard.
"You feel _____ because _____."
- Do this without judgment, blame, or trying to change the person's viewpoint. The reflection may elicit further comment and feeling. Keep reflecting until you sense you have heard the whole story.
3. Transform the complaint into a future goal.
"I understand you're hurt/angry/sad/afraid because _____ and I am wondering what it is that you wanted to have happen, and what you would like more of in the future."

The only thing to record for public presentation is what they wanted more of or what they want to happen in the future.

Introducing the Interview Participants

Following the interview, participants gather with their partners in groups of 6-8 people. Even in large gatherings, a maximum of 8 is optimal. If the groups are any larger than 8 the energy will wane before everyone is introduced. Groups larger than 8 also make gathering to be heard difficult with many groups working in the same room. Each person will introduce the person they interviewed to their small group using the information they gathered during their interview. Introductions typically take 7-8 minutes per person.

Listen for Commonalities and "Wows"

As the people are introduced have the listeners make brief notes in their interview booklet. Invite them to pay attention to:

- Commonalities and themes in several stories.
- Stories that make people go "wow." These are usually unique stories that captures the essence of the congregation at its best.
- Exemplar stories. These are often the "wow" stories or other stories that capture the imagination of the group. These stories become the "shorthand" anchors to the essence of the congregation. They are also inspiring and motivating.

Synthesize

After each person has been introduced the groups spend time discussing and synthesizing what they have discovered about their congregation in the stories that were told. In this process group members go from, "this is my story," or "that is your story," to "this is our story." Once each group has synthesized the material, they will create a group presentation to present their discoveries to the wider gathering at the summit.

Creating Presentations

The goal of this step is for the whole group to discover and own the things that have been discovered in the small groups. While there will be great overlap in what has been discovered, sharing these things amongst the whole group will make them more visible and reinforce their shared ownership.

Great variations and possibilities exist for creating presentations. One of the biggest constraints is the amount of time each presentation

*At the height of laughter,
the universe is flung
into a kaleidoscope
of new possibilities.*

— Jean Houston

*A true friend is one
who thinks you are
a good egg
even if you are
half-cracked.*

— Unknown

*Laughter is the
shortest distance
between two people.*

— Victor Borge

*When people
are laughing,
they're generally
not killing each other.*
— Alan Alda

*Did you know America
ranks the lowest in
education but the highest
in drug use?
It's nice to be number
one, but we can fix that.
All we need to do is start
the war on education.
If it's anywhere near as
successful as our war on
drugs, in no time we'll all
be hooked on phonics.*
— Leighann Lord

takes to create and how long it will take to present. The presentation time will also be impacted by the number of groups in a room.

Some presentation examples include:

- written posters
- drawings or other artwork;
- a short skit or song
- a combination of media, if time allows

Artwork is beneficial because it can be left on exhibit in the parish hall, perhaps for several months, as a reminder to the people of their identity and their hopes and dreams for the future. It is also helpful to have the artwork to refer to during the rest of the summit.

Skits or songs have the benefit of creating an energy boost during the process, especially in large summit gatherings.

Both skits and artwork help people transition from an analytic mode to a creative mode that will be used in the Dream phase.

Ensure that you have a wide variety of poster pads (we use the "post-it" pads with a glue strip for their ease of mounting on walls), colored markers, scissors, glue, and other art supplies to assist in the presentations.

We have seen some very elaborate artwork and beautiful collages created. However, they do take a considerable amount of time that is not really available in a typical congregational summit. In the time available, we have usually found colored markers and large pads to be sufficient.

Notes about values and passions can be written on 5"x8" cards to be gathered and placed on a wall. Putting them on cards can allow different values and interests to be grouped. When grouping interests, don't just combine them by similarity, but experiment with different pairings that could lead to new ministries. For example, some may love working with children, others love organizing events, and still others may love working with computers. Together they could organize an after school computer program for young people in the neighborhood.

Strategies For Presentations

The biggest challenge is managing the time required for each group to make its presentation. In large groups much of the information will become repetitive, which will quickly tire the listeners. One approach is to have a set time for the presentations and to clearly announce that not all groups will be heard from specifically. After several groups have shared their findings, groups that have "something additional" are invited to make their presentation.

One strategy that we have found very helpful in large groups is for each group to create a poster or piece of artwork and hang them on the walls of the building. One person from each groups stays with the poster to answer any questions while the rest of the group members go "window shopping" to look at the presentations from the other groups. After people have had sufficient time to browse, a plenary session can be held to gather and further synthesize the stories.

Plenary Session

In smaller groups an open conversation with the entire group can be held to gather the stories and values. As in the synthesis process, the conversation needs to be focused on what the commonalities are and what made people go "wow." Of particular interest are those activities that people find life-giving. Have someone record what is discussed to help the self-study committee in their follow-up work.

In larger groups we have developed a process we call the "Amen Strategy" that has worked well. The facilitator uses a remote wireless microphone and goes down onto the floor of the gathering room after the people have browsed the art presentations. The facilitator asks people what they have discovered about the congregation when it is at its best. People will share with the facilitator, who then repeats it over the microphone so everyone can hear the discovery. The facilitator then asks the people that if they heard the same thing, or agree with what was said, to say, "Amen!" When there appears to be considerable energy behind a statement the facilitator can ask if anyone has a story, an exemplar story of the activity being talked about, that they can share with the entire group. A quick-thinking facilitator can also improvise and reframe some of the comments to explore the deeper life-giving significance of an activity. Once the best experiences have been discussed, the same "Amen!" process can be used with the values and wishes.

I've always thought that a big laugh is a really loud noise from the soul saying, "Ain't that the truth."

— Quincy Jones

Imagine what would happen to your church if it stopped doing what it should and simply became a place to support people to do what they really love to do...? Wouldn't you like to be a member of that church too?

*Those who do not create
the future they want
must endure
the future they get.*
— Draper L. Kaufman

We have found people readily engage in the process with a lot of laughter and enthusiasm. This process allows the community to celebrate their common life together while also synthesizing the information. While the plenary is occurring and people are sharing, we have found it helpful for a recorder to be typing the proceedings into a computer connected to a large screen projector. People then have a real-time record of the proceedings which can be used in the planning activities that follow the summit.

Discerning the Energy and Interest

During the plenary session, key areas of interest that are clearly life-giving to people will typically emerge. From an appreciative perspective these are the areas that the congregation needs to pay particular attention to. In many cases these life-giving activities are often overlooked as people struggle with problem areas or things that they “should” be doing.

One way to discover what people really value and find truly important is to give each person 6 sticky colored dots that are available from stationary stores. Each person is invited to put their dots on words or posters that resonate deeply with them. People may put all six dots on one value or spread their dots over several words or posters. This will provide a measure of what is important to the participants. This information will be particularly important in the Dream phase of the Appreciative Inquiry Summit, which is discussed in the next section.

Dream Phase: Exploring What Might Be

The Discovery phase of the summit focuses on the best of the past and what is valuable in the present. In the Dream phase we turn our attention to the future and begin to imagine what the future would be like if the congregation used their strengths and talents to do more of what they valued and found life-giving.

The Dream phase challenges the congregation's current status quo by envisioning a preferred future. This future visioning is not simply a fantasy or wishful thinking, because it is based on the best of what has been accomplished in the past, and is thus grounded in what people know to be possible.

The dream phase is the time for dialogue around the following questions to create a vision of the congregation's preferred future:

- What is the positive inspiration or life-giving reality that is sustaining your congregation?
- What would happen to your church if you used your strengths and talents to do more of what you value and find life-giving?
- What is God calling your congregation to be and do?

Discerning God's Call

God's will for a congregation is not miraculously prayed out of the heavens but is discovered in those times when you have been your God-given best — those times when you have been in the Spirit or "in the zone" and life has flowed forth both from you and to you. By discovering and reflecting on these times, you can prayerfully imagine what your church would become if you did more of that best.

Imaging the Future

Since the future hasn't happened, the only way we can think of the future is through our imagination. In the Dream phase, we use the collective imagination of the congregation to create a clear, compelling, realistic yet stretching, image of the congregation's preferred future and what they believe God is calling them to become.

We base the imagery on the stories and values that were gathered in the Discovery phase, paying particular attention to commonalities and things that were collectively inspiring. Because the images of the future are based on the best of the past, they will be both reality-based and stretching since they focus on what we might become as a church

*We need a renaissance
of wonder.*

*We need to renew, in our
hearts and in our souls,
the deathless dream, the
eternal poetry,
the perennial sense that life
is miracle and magic.*

— E. Merrill Root

*Dreams make you click,
juice you, turn you on,
excite the living
daylights out of you.
You cannot wait to get
out of bed to continue
pursuing your dream.
The kind of dream I'm
talking about gives
meaning to your life.
It is the ultimate motivator.*

— Jim Collins

*I am enough of an artist to
draw freely
upon my imagination.
Imagination is more
important than knowledge.
Knowledge is limited.
Imagination encircles
the world.*
— Albert Einstein

*This 'telephone' has too
many shortcomings to be
seriously considered as a
means of communication.
The device is inherently of
no value to us.*
— Western Union internal
memo, 1876

if we were consistently at our best. Such images are empowering. In contrast, non-reality-based images are often idealized versions of what we “should be” and lead to feelings of failure, judgment, and guilt, and demoralize rather than empower.

Creative Strategies to Imagine a Preferred Future

There are many ways to engage people in creative processes that lead to a collective understanding of the congregation’s preferred future. Creative writing, drawing, or story-telling are some of the possibilities. Regardless of the process, the one common requirement in helping people to move into a creative realm where they can consider future possibilities is the presence of a positive emotional space. The sharing of stories about the congregation at its best in the Discovery phase creates a very fertile, positive emotional environment for people to imagine their future. We have found using a guided imagery exercise, followed by discussion and group drawing, to be the most efficient and effective way to help a group to imagine and come to consensus about their preferred future.

Creating Metaphors and Similes

Like the nature of God, the essence of who we are is a mystery. Likewise, the essence of our churches, the body of Christ, is a mystery. While the essence is a mystery, it is not unknowable, but it is often difficult to put into words. Because of this difficulty, we rely on metaphors to convey the essence of the mystery.

The same is true for our images of the future. Mentally, we summarize them as metaphors, similes, symbols, or images. These icons create quick, accessible reminders of our purpose and identity. As reminders they can be used to guide and shape planning and future action.

Guided Imagery Exercise

On the following pages is a script for a guided imagery exercise. Here are some tips for leading the imagery exercise:

- Depending on your timing, you may want to give people a brief comfort break before the exercise as it is difficult to relax and focus inward when one’s bladder is full.
- This is a guided imagery exercise, not a visualization. While most people can visualize, some can’t, yet all can imagine. Worry is an example of pure imagination. If a person can worry, they can use the same internal “machinery” to imagine their preferred future.

- If you are doing the imagery on a different day from the Discovery phase, takes some time before the imagery to have a brief plenary session so the people can collectively remember what they had discovered in the interviewing process. This will re-ground the people in their best and seed their imaginations.
- For those unfamiliar with leading a guided imagery exercise, we encourage you to practice with others before the session. For most people the key is to slow down and allow the participants to actually take the time to remember and to imagine. Repetition and pauses are often helpful ways to create the space for imagination.
- Although a script is provided, we encourage you to adapt it to use your own language and the language of the participants. The basic elements are:
 - Remembering the best of the past.
 - Being aware of what is valued in the present.
 - Imagining what we could become, by being our best, and manifesting our values, to achieve our wishes.
 - Going into the future when those dreams have been realized and looking back and seeing what we did to fulfill them.
 - Creating a metaphor for the congregation at its best to remind people of who they are and what they can become.
- The language of guided imagery is provocative. We invite the participants to remember, we don't ask them to "try to remember." Likewise we invite a metaphor to form in their minds, rather than saying "try to create a metaphor of you at your best."
- Don't worry if people go to sleep. Because of timing, this activity is often done just after lunch, and it is not uncommon for some people to go to sleep during the imagery exercise. From our experience many of these people will actually dream of images of the church and be able to creatively contribute to the following discussion.
- If there are noises outside or disruptions during the imagery, blend them into what you are saying: "And as you are imagining your future you may hear lots of noise outside. You can allow that noise to drift on by and let your attention return to the image of you at your best..."
- Allow the participants plenty of time to "return" to the room. You may have to repeat the final instruction to "return to the room bringing with them their metaphor" several times.

People grow toward their images of the future
 — David Cooperrider

Creativity is a type of learning process where the teacher and pupil are located in the same individual.
 — Arthur Koestler

A guided imagery exercise following the discovery interviews and presentations.

I invite you to get comfortable. If you like, put your feet flat on the floor with your hands open in your lap. You may want to take a couple of slow deep breaths and allow yourself to feel fully supported by the chair as you prepare.

If you like, you may want to close your eyes if it allows you to use your imagination. At the same time as you close your eyes, allow your mind to be open to the Holy Spirit. You may find that interesting, that closing your eyes helps open the mind, but that's the way it seems to be for many people.

And you may be aware that you have your own way of imagining. Some people imagine things like looking at pictures, others imagine sounds, while others just have this sense or feeling of something, like you have in a dream. Whatever way you imagine things is right for you.

Now, I invite you to wonder what kind of church you would imagine if you were to imagine a church.

You could imagine a church where people gather to:

(add elements from peak experiences, especially those that the people fixed their colored dots to or seemed to express considerable energy toward) ...

and you could imagine a church filled with people who love to:

(add elements from what people love to do) ...

and you could imagine a church where people value:

(add elements of what the people value) ...

and as you imagine this church where people experience these things,

(summarize peak experiences) ...

and is filled with people who have/are, *(summarize interests/activities) ...*

and hold these values, *(summarize core values) ...*

You can imagine the people working on their goals and making their wishes come into being by being at their best and manifesting their values in the world...

and you can imagine the things they achieve, *(add wishes) ...*

by living consistently with their values, *(summarize values) ...*

and you could imagine walking around this church and seeing these people

(summarize best experiences and what people love to do) ...

and hearing them talk, and sing, and pray, and care for one another...

and you could imagine what you would feel as you were in this church with these people...

and as you feel what it would be like to be in this church, you realize that this is the church you belong to and these are the people that you belong to...

As you imagine this church you belong to, you could imagine going into the future, perhaps in five year's time when the wishes have been fulfilled by the people being at their best doing what they love and manifesting their values in the world.

As you wander around in this church that you have helped create you meet a friend who you haven't seen for 10 years. Perhaps it's an old parishioner who moved away, or an old school friend, and they ask you what you have been doing.

You get into a conversation about your church and what a neat place it is, and what the people experience there, *(add best experiences)* ...

and the people who go there, *(add what people love)* ...

and what the church stands for, *(add core values)* ...

and what it is working to accomplish, *(add wishes)* ...

and you can tell your friend all these things about your church and what makes it neat and exciting for you to be a member of it.

You can imagine your friend sensing your excitement and asking, "Wow, this is really great! How did you all do this? What was the first thing you and the congregation did?"

and you remember back to the time when the congregation began to build this future *(reference this summit date)* ...

and how the people came together and the things they began to do *(add what they love)*...

and how together with the Spirit you have created a church that lives authentically sharing with the world, *(add core values)* ...

and how people's lives are transformed in the presence of God's love...

Now as you remember the church and all that it has become, allow a metaphor for the church to form in your mind...

allow a symbol or an image or a sound to come into your mind, something that catches and conveys the deep essence of your church at its best, co-creating with God...

and you can hold that image as a fragment that holds within it the truth of what you imagine, like a photograph captures an image of some event... or like a metaphor holds within it the truth of an image... like a tree can be tall and strong... or a rose fragrance can call to mind a special valentine... or just a few sounds can call to mind a whole song... or a cross reminds you of Jesus... or an altar reminds you of God's radical welcome and acceptance...

and you can use this image of the church that you enjoy and find deeply life-giving to remind you of who you are... and whose you are...

Holding the metaphor in your mind allow your attention to come back into the room. As your attention comes back into this room, bring with it the image or symbol of your church. Open your eyes and look around, and you can see that some of that church is right here in the room with you.

*I am not afraid
of tomorrow,
for I have seen yesterday
and I love today.*
— William Allen White

*When the summit is used
as part of a search process
it doesn't include anything
about the next rector.
The summit is all about
who and what
the congregation
wants to become.*

Creative Drawing Exercise

Following the guided imagery exercise the people are invited to share their images and metaphors in their groups. Each group then creates one picture or representation that synthesizes their collective experience. One creative variation would be to have each group design a T-shirt with words and/or pictures that crystallizes the essence of the congregation at its best.

The same process of “window shopping” used in the Discovery phase can be used to allow all the participants to share in the thoughts and ideas of others.

Plenary for the Dream Phase

We use a similar plenary process, without the “Amens!” that we used in the Discovery plenary, to have an open conversation about commonalities and specific exemplars in the Dreams and metaphors. In large groups the proceedings are recorded and projected onto overhead screens to provide a record of the conversation.

We have found it helpful to ask people for one or two words that describe the themes of a collection of the pictures. These words can be recorded and then used by the visioning committee as part of writing purpose statements for the congregation.

Concluding the Summit

When the summit has been conducted on a Sunday, the process can be concluded with the Eucharist. One church movingly placed their metaphors and images of the future on the altar as symbols of their community, and celebrated communion in the midst of their hopes and dreams.

- Inform the people of the next steps, which typically are that the visioning committee and vestry will use the gathered information to create a vision and strategic plan for the future.
- After the summit the self-study committee will need to gather promptly to create at least one provocative purpose statement and to complete some of the self-study summary. Consider planning on meeting for two hours beginning with a meal break.
- Note that even if the summit is being used as part of a search process, nothing has been said about the new rector. The summit is designed to help the congregation discover who they want to become. This vision will form the basis of the search process.

Creating Provocative Purpose Statements

A provocative purpose statement (also known in Appreciative Inquiry literature as provocative propositions) is a statement that bridges the past and present with the future. We use the term provocative purpose statements because they call people to their core purpose and because we have found that in many church settings people just stare blankly when we talked about provocative propositions. These bold, aspirational purpose statements bridge “what is” and “what will be.”

To provoke means to call forth or evoke. A provocative purpose statement is used to remind the people of their purpose and to call forth that purpose from them. They describe the congregation at its very best, a best that they have known in the past, remembered in the present, and will know more deeply and fully in the future. The provocative purpose statements are written by imagining the future when they are fully manifested and writing the statement as though that reality has already been realized in this present moment. For example, they are written from the perspective of “We are...” rather than “We will become...”

One of the most provocative aspects of Jesus’ ministry was his preaching on the Kingdom of God. The perceived reality of the people was that they were under the Kingdom of Rome, yet Jesus never preached about this kingdom. Instead he preached about the Kingdom of God, that was among them, and that they already knew in part; a Kingdom that was coming in its fullness in the future — and that even though it was still to come in its fullness, it was already fully present within them. Provocative purpose statements are written from this same perspective, and like Jesus’ use of the Kingdom of God, the more the provocative purpose is used, the more it calls the people into its reality. The use of the statement is a way of “re-membering” the congregation into its purpose.

To ensure that the statements are provocative, we eliminate all waffle words such as “seeking” or “aspiring” (as in “We aspire to be the people of God”). Notice how provocative Jesus’ language is when he says, “I am the light of the world” (*John 8:12*). Jesus doesn’t say he is trying to be the light of the world, or he is aspiring to be the light of the world, he is the light of the world. Likewise, he did not tell us to “try” to be perfect, he said, “Be perfect, therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect” (*Matthew 5:48*). Provocative purpose statements are written in the same manner.

That business purpose and business mission are so rarely given adequate thought is perhaps the most important cause of business frustration and failure.

— Peter Drucker

It is important that an aim never be defined in terms of activity or methods. It must always relate directly to how life is better for everyone... The aim of the system must be clear to everyone in the system.

— Edwards Deming

*Our deepest fear is not
that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that
we are powerful
beyond measure.*

*It is our light, not our
darkness, that most
frightens us. We ask
ourselves, "Who am I to
be brilliant, gorgeous,
talented and fabulous?"
Actually, who are you
not to be?*

*You are a child of God.
Your 'playing small' does
not suit the world. There is
nothing enlightened about
shrinking so that other
people don't feel insecure
around you.*

*We were born to make
manifest the glory of God
that is within us.
It is not just in some of us.
It is in everyone.*

*As you let your light shine,
you unconsciously give
other people permission to
do the same.*

*As you are liberated from
your own fears, your
presence automatically
liberates others.*

*— From 'A Return to Love'
by Marianne Williamson*

Human Beings and Human Doings

Some participants in our training programs ask, "Are the provocative purpose statements vision statements or mission statements?" Our response is usually that they often combine a bit of both. Sometimes they include values, or go beyond either a mission or vision statement. As we noted in the discussion on the Spiral of Life, some people are oriented to describe themselves from the perspective of their being while others focus on their doing.

Vision Statements: Primarily relate to human being, and are often aspirational.

Mission Statements: Primarily relate to human doing, or action.

From our perspective, we are not concerned that we have a purpose statement, a vision statement, and a mission statement, because in the day-to-day life of a congregation, people don't have time to read through such lists to find inspiration. While we can separate out domains of life such as Purpose and Identity to understand their significance, they are interrelated organically and are not simply discrete hierarchies. What we are looking for is a practical, memorable statement about who we are at our best, and that calls us to be that best, to manifest our purpose in the world. For that reason, the provocative purpose statement may combine elements of mission and vision statements. Here are some additional guidelines for writing provocative purpose statements:

- It needs to be provocative. Does it stretch, challenge, and interrupt the status quo?
- Is it grounded? Has the ideal been demonstrated as a possibility?
- Is the outcome desired by the congregation?
- Is it brief, memorable, affirmative, and stated positively?
- Will it guide future action and at the same time expand the range of possibilities?
- Does it eliminate waffle words: such as "aim to," "striving for," "aspire to," etc.?
- If the congregation already has a mission or purpose statement, does it need to be modified or updated to reflect the congregation's current passion and context?

Be creative! Write some that are “off the wall.” Individual ministries may also develop their provocative purpose statements to guide and inspire their ministry within the overall ministry of the congregation.

Seeking Greatness

Some workshop attendees have found writing a provocative purpose statements to be an act of arrogance or wanting to be great. In the passage from Mark’s Gospel on greatness (*Mark 9:33-37*), Jesus never rebuked the disciples for wanting to be the greatest. What he did was tell them how to be great: by humbly serving others.

Your congregation’s provocative purpose statement is not a statement about how your congregation is better than others, it is a statement about your congregation at its best, and who and what God has called it to be. What other congregations are is none of your business. Your congregation needs to be true to its God-given best and not measure itself according to other congregations’ best or their expectations.

Examples of Provocative Purpose Statements

Jesus of Nazareth: I am the light of the world.

All Saints’ Staff: We are the staff of All Saints-by-the-Sea, serving our community as the embrace of Christ.

Epiphany Church: We are the hands of God’s heart in our community.

All Saints’, Beverly Hills, Catechesis Program: We open doors for children to fall in love with Jesus.

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

Diocese of Eastern Michigan reworked their mission statement:

Old: The Diocese of Eastern Michigan is becoming an apostolic community of miraculous expectation for grassroots mission.

New Statement:

The Diocese of Eastern Michigan
Is a diverse community where:

- All are called by Christ,
- In One Baptism, as One Body, to One Table,
- And all are sent in Christ to restore all Creation to unity with God
- Through grassroots mission.

And Jesus asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”

— Mark 9:33-35

The glory of God is a human being, fully alive.

— St. Irenaeus

Everybody can be great because anybody can serve... You only need a heart full of grace and soul generated by love.

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Using the Provocative Purpose Statement

Once a congregation has developed its provocative purpose statement, the leadership needs to become proactive in ensuring that it is continually in the congregation’s consciousness. Despite having mission statements, most parishioners do not know their congregation’s mission because the statements are rarely used. As we have previously noted, this is a failure of leadership, not a failure of the congregation. Here are some strategies for memorably using the provocative purpose statement:

- On the first Sunday after the Appreciative Inquiry Summit, make the provocative purpose statement the focus of the sermon.
- Regularly use the provocative purpose statement in all preaching.
- Reflect on the preaching, is it about “You as an individual and your response to the Gospel,” or “We as a congregation and our response to the Gospel”?

At least once a month the sermon needs to be about “we as a congregation” that intentionally relates the Gospel to the congregation’s purpose.

- At the announcement time, when expressing gratitude, or inviting people to engage in a ministry, preface the remarks by reminding the people of the purpose. For example:

“As you know here at St. Paul’s our purpose is to ‘feed the poor’ and I want to thank Bill and Mary for the work they did in preparing last Thursday’s meal for the Transition House folk.”

A similar process can be used to grow values. For example: “One of the things we value here in our congregation is our freedom to think and use our minds, and we are starting a new adult study class...”

Each time a value or purpose is used explicitly it will grow in consciousness and value.

- At vestry meetings, use the provocative purpose statement as part of the devotions. Write prayers and blessings that embody the purpose statement.
- When making decisions, reflect on how the decision will help the congregation manifest its purpose. If the activity being discussed

If you can't find the congregation's provocative purpose statement at least once a month in the Gospel for the Sunday service, either get a new statement or a new Gospel

Always be a first-rate version of yourself, instead of a second-rate version of somebody else.
— Judy Garland

The problem with communication... is the illusion that it has been accomplished.
— George Bernard Shaw

will not further the congregation's purpose then don't engage in the activity. It will just be a distraction. Notice that some recreational activities may not appear to further the purpose; however, they do re-energize people to engage in the purpose.

- In times of conflict, use the provocative purpose statement to mediate between positions. As a community, commit to your purpose as a guide for tough times.
- In times of stress and frustration, reflect on how your purpose is being thwarted. We will feel stress when we are prevented from manifesting our purpose.
- Structure vestry meetings around the purpose. Regularly check to see how you are doing on manifesting your purpose. Celebrate your successes. Know the deep joy and satisfaction that comes from co-creating with God as you manifest your purpose.
- Stay appreciative. When you fail, make good use of your failures by asking and discovering what else you need in order to succeed. In that way you will never be afraid of failing, as it will be just another step in learning the wonders of manifesting your God-given purpose.
- Include the provocative purpose statement on your stationary, web site and other publications. Never be afraid of redundant forms of communication.
- In newsletters, include stories of people fulfilling aspects of the congregation's purpose.
- Make the purpose the focus of your newcomer membership program. Invite people to join the community of people who are engaged in manifesting their purpose, rather than simply inviting them to join the congregation.
- Ministries within the congregation may find it helpful to create their own provocative purpose statements as sub-statements of the congregation's overall purpose.
- If the statement is too long or complicated, summarize it to several key words that can be used as "anchors" to the full statement.
- Make the provocative purpose a significant part of your search process. You are looking for someone to help you manifest your purpose and not simply waiting for someone to come and inflict their purpose on you.

*When you fail,
stay appreciative,
make good use of
your failures by asking
and discovering what
else you need in order
to succeed?
In that way you will never
be afraid of failing as it
will be just another step
in learning the wonders
of manifesting your
God-given purpose.*

*When you discover
your mission,
you will feel its demand.
It will fill you with
enthusiasm and a burning
desire to get to work on it.
— W. Clement Stone*

*Climbers aim for the summit because it is there.
Bungee jumpers dive off the top because they aren't all there.*
— Jessica Seigel

*Like anybody, I would like to live a long life.
Longevity has its place.
But I'm not concerned about that now.
I just want to do God's will.
And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain.
And I've looked over.
And I've seen the promised land.
I may not get there with you.
But I want you to know tonight,
that we, as a people, will get to the promised land.*
— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Alternative Summit Strategies

In the preceding sections we described a fairly typical Appreciative Inquiry Summit to engage all the stakeholders in the Discover and Dream phases of the 5D organizational development model.

In many churches, time constraints and other logistical concerns may prevent the gathering of the entire congregation to engage in the Discover and Dream process. There are several alternative strategies that may be used to engage the congregation in the storytelling. When designing any alternative process, the important thing to include is some form of shared storytelling using a predetermined set of appreciative questions.

When physical space is limited.

When a large enough space is not available to gather all the congregation and staff on the church property, it is possible to “move off campus” and rent a facility. However, when using a summit as part of a search process, there is often insufficient time to develop the logistical plans to conduct the summit.

Assuming that a suitable space was available, the biggest consideration will be the lead time necessary to “market” the summit and develop the enthusiasm and commitment for all the congregation to participate. Here is the outline of an alternative approach to hiring a large facility when space is limited:

- Create an appreciative inquiry summit interview workbook as previously discussed in the Discovery section.
- Invite every church gathering (such as altar guild, Bible studies, prayer breakfasts, ministry teams, etc.) during one month to devote their gathering to interviewing one another and sharing stories using the same interview questions and introduction process. Have each group complete a summary for the self-study committee.
- Small gatherings can also be held on Sundays “between the services” to allow people who did not participate with a group to share in the storytelling process.
- Include at least one member of the self-study committee at each meeting to hear the stories and personally bring back the summaries to the committee for their synthesis.

- One way to improve the process would be to have several of the groups, such as a Bible study group and a ministry team, meet together and interview one another. This would allow an opportunity for cross-group sharing, rather than simply sharing within a group.
- Conclude the month of story telling at a Sunday service with a plenary session and the "Amen!" strategy in place of the sermon. People could also be provided with cards to write what they value about the church and their wishes. These cards could then be offered at the Eucharist and subsequently put on a wall so that all can be aware of the hopes and dreams of others.
- On the following Sunday, in place of the sermon, engage in the "Imagine a Church" exercise and conversation. Briefly recall the values from the previous Sunday service and invite the congregation to imagine what would happen to their church if they intentionally grew and lived these values.

If people respond that the church would grow in membership, invite the people to imagine what they and all these new people would be doing. Take some time to have the people imagine what the church would look like in five year's time. How would it be different, and how would it be the same?

One other alternative approach to the small group gatherings, that has been used in some places, asks the members of the self-study committee to do the interviewing of the congregation in various locations over a period of time. The self-study committee gathers the stories to synthesize them.

While this an effective way to gather information, this approach will do little to energize and motivate the congregation toward its shared purpose. While the self-study process needs to gather information, we are very interested in developing an appreciative culture in the congregation. This will enhance the spiritual and emotional motivation needed to engage in the Design phase and the development of future ministries.

A better approach to this procedure would be to have members of the self-study committee gather cluster groups together to interview one another and use a process similar to the first alternative.

Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall.

— Stephen R. Covey

We want the congregation's stories spread and known throughout the hearts of the congregation and not just known by a few.

Conversations about what we love are like great fishing stories, where the fish gets bigger and bigger with each retelling. The more you talk about what you love and value the more the love grows and becomes more valuable.

When you ask people what they delight in they will become delightful.

When time is limited.

Sometimes congregations find it very difficult to gather in community for extended periods of time. One of the time-consuming activities in a summit is the interviewing and shared story-telling. This is a powerful part of the appreciative approach because it has a profound impact on the underlying culture, of the congregation and we are hesitant to eliminate it from the process. However, if time is very short, such as at a forum after the Sunday service, the following strategy could be used:

- Invite the participants to turn to the person sitting beside or behind them and share with them what they love and appreciate about their congregation. Pre-arrange for the self-study committee to be scattered throughout the gathering so they participate with parishioners in these conversations. Let the conversation continue for a few minutes, while monitoring the energy and focus of the conversations.
- Conduct a plenary session using the "Amen!" strategy to hear what the people value about their church. When it is clear that a specific event, or ministry, is an enlivening value shared by many in the congregation the facilitator can ask for a story that captures the essence of that activity.

For example, if many people referenced a mission trip, the facilitator could ask: "Tell me about this trip. What did you do? Who was involved? What was the outcome?"

An additional follow-up question could be: "I am wondering if someone has a story about how they saw someone's life transformed as a result of the mission?"

In this way we have moved from a shared value to an exemplar story that is likely to touch and connect the hearts and minds of the gathered community.

- The same process of starting with a shared value can be used to explore the life-giving elements of a general category. For example, people may say they all value their worship. However, the activity of worship is so broad that they need to explore more deeply into the specifics of their worship.

The facilitator can ask questions like: "Tell me about your worship. What about your worship do you really value?"

If they were to respond with things like “preaching,” additional follow-up questions could be asked. “What kind of preaching do you enjoy? What do you do as the result of hearing preaching like that?”

- If the brief summit is being used as part of a search process, we would also include a similar conversation with the people sitting next to them and a plenary about what they value about their denomination. A congregation is calling a pastor from the denomination at large, with all its diversity, to their specific expression of that denomination. Knowing what the people value about their denomination will become an important aspect of the search criteria.
- Following the plenary on values, the participants can be invited to engage in a similar process of conversation with each other about their hopes and dreams for the future. When conversing about the future, always ground the conversation in the best of the past and what the parishioners value about their church.

*A dream is just a dream.
A goal is a dream with a
plan and a deadline.*

— Harvey Mackay

*The discovery process is
only a beginning.
All too often we hear,
“we did all that
visioning work
but nothing changed.”
A strategic vision needs
a strategic plan,
and strategic action.*

*Never doubt that a small,
group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can
change the world.
Indeed, it is the
only thing that ever has.
— Margaret Mead*

Design Phase: Determining What Needs to Be

In many non-church and business settings, an Appreciative Inquiry Summit may be scheduled for two or three days, with the second and third days being used to engage in Design work. In this phase, specific plans are developed to ensure that the organization is able to manifest its purpose and create its preferred future.

In many congregations, it is not feasible to access the additional time required to do a community-wide Design phase. In this case, the Design work is done over a period of time and often with smaller sub-groups working on specific Design projects. The danger of this approach is that the Discovery and Dream work becomes the end of the development process and not the beginning.

Note: While the Design strategies are presented here in a linear sequence, this work is ongoing and will continue after the entire search process.

Self-Study Summary

In addition to creating a provocative purpose statement, the self-study committee needs to begin organizing all the information that has been gathered. This will also help in determining what specific Design work needs to be accomplished to enhance current ministries or to begin new ministries. On the following page is a summary sheet with headings that can be used to organize the information and ideas that arose during the summit.

- If it is not possible to convene immediately after the summit gathering, then schedule time within the first week after the summit while the ideas and thoughts are still fresh.
- If it is possible, leave artwork in public places, where people can reflect on them over the coming weeks.
- If a large group is present, invite participants to form sub-groups on the basis of what excites them, to complete and share one element of the summary.
- Create the provocative purpose statement first. Allow it to “sit” if you get stuck and move on to the summary. The final statement may take some time to crystallize.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate. Keep the congregation informed and seek their continued input as the work unfolds. Use forums or town hall meetings to say and ask, “This is what you said; have we got it right?” And “Is there anything else?”

Present Reality

The best of what is:

God the Source of Life

How is God understood and experienced in the congregation?

Purpose

What is the Congregation's purpose?

Identity

What is the Congregation's role or mission?

Values

What are the Congregation's core values?

What is important to the congregation?

Expectations

How successful are we in accomplishing our ministries?

Skills

What are the Congregation's talents?

Environmental Context

What are the congregation's environmental assets?

Preferred Future

What we want more of:

God the Source of Life

How do we want to understand and experience God in the congregation?

Purpose

What will the Congregation's purpose be?

Identity

What will the Congregation's role or mission be?

Values

What values do we want to grow?

Expectations

How successful will we be?

Skills

What new talents do we need to develop?

Environmental Context

How do we want to develop our facilities?

*You have heard it said,
"if its not broken
don't fix it."
We say,
"if it's working well,
do it better."*

*The task of leadership is
to create an alignment
of strengths and make
people's weaknesses
irrelevant.
— Peter Drucker*

*Each person's talents are
enduring and unique.
Each person's greatest
room for growth is in the
area of his or her
greatest strength.
— Marcus Buckingham and
Donald Clifton*

Other Sources of Information

Additional information for the self-study and for designing ministry developments can be gathered from other sources.

- **Parish Statistics:** Review the worship attendance and financial history of the parish. Plot these statistics on a series of graphs to explore performance trends over the last ten years.

Avoid getting distracted by issues of blame and cause when looking at your performance trends. Use the information to focus attention on what needs to be developed.

- **Community Statistics:** Review the demographics of the community in which the parish is located and how the demographics have and are projected to change.

This information will be important when creating or developing ministries that reach out into the community.

What Shall be Designed?

As we have noted, the Design phase is likely to be conducted over a period of time by sub-groups within the congregation. At this point the self-study committee's responsibility is to synthesize the summit experience to determine the specific areas where there is energy and vision for change, and where there is a critical need for development. The "gap" or distance between the current reality and the preferred future in the self-study summary will indicate areas that need to be developed, and for which specific plans will need to be designed to achieve the preferred future. There are four main areas to focus on:

- Successful, core ministries that need continual development.
- Current ministries in need of a major overhaul.
- New ministries that need to be started as expressions of parishioners' passion or as a response to a community need.
- What needs to be stopped. Some ministries may no longer be life-giving and need to be discontinued.

Determining Priorities

The most important ministries to attend to are those closest to the core life-giving purpose of the congregation. Too often we see congregations neglect vital ministries by being enslaved to the tyranny of the urgent. Successful, core ministries are in continual need of development to stay vibrant and relevant.

When Shall We Design?

There is nothing like the present moment to get started. The danger during transitional times is for people to say, "We will need to wait for the new rector before we start." Remember, clergy come and clergy go, but this is your congregation.

Are you looking for a priest to join you in your ministries, or are you looking for a priest to do ministry to you and for you? If you want a rector who will join you in your ministries, then start now. It is only as you engage in those ministries now that you will attract the kind of priest who would be interested in partnering with you in God's vineyard. On the other hand, if you want your rector to do ministry to you, wait and don't do anything.

Who Should Design a Ministry?

The self-study and visioning committee is responsible for leading the study and visioning process, but is not responsible for creating the designs or ensuring that they are acted on. That responsibility lies with the vestry and congregational leadership. The self-study committee's task is to report to the vestry what needs to be developed. The vestry's responsibility is to engage the right people in creating the design.

We like to use Harrison Owens' question from Open Space Technology when inviting groups to design a ministry:

"What are you passionate about and are prepared to accept some responsibility for?"

This question combines two important elements that are essential to creating the commitment for sustainable action: passion and responsibility. When we are deciding who should engage in designing or developing a ministry, we need the people who both have the passion for the work and the responsibility to ensure that it is accomplished. When looking for the right people, remember:

- Nothing will sap the life out of an organization or a specific ministry faster than engaging with people who have no passion, energy, motivation, or commitment to the ministry.
- It is life-sapping to work with people who have high interest in a ministry, often expressed as complaint, but no willingness to accept responsibility to work to improve the ministry.
- Working with people who have high commitment but no passion will turn a life-giving ministry into life-sapping obligation.

Are you looking for a priest to join you in your ministries or are you looking for a priest to do ministry to you and for you?

If I were running a company today, I would have one priority above all others: to acquire as many of the best people as I could. I'd put off everything else to fill my bus... And the single biggest constraint on the success of my organization is the ability to get and to hang on to enough of the right people.

— Jim Collins

*This is your life!
You can't wait for
someday to enjoy it!
You can't wait for a
big break, for a better
economy, warmer weather
or until you feel like it.
As someone wisely said,
don't wait for your
ship to come in,
swim out to meet it!*

— Phil Humbert

*You must ask,
"What do we mean by
great results?"*

*Your goals don't have to
be quantifiable, but they
do have to be describable.
Some leaders try to insist,
"The only acceptable goals
are measurable,"
but that's actually an
undisciplined statement.
Lots of goals – beauty,
quality, life change, love
– are worthy but not
quantifiable. But you do
have to be able to tell if
you're making progress.*

— Jim Collins

Creating a Design

All the steps of the **A** ⇒ **B** change model are applicable when designing a ministry or the elements of a ministry. The first resource you will need to create the design is the right people. As we have noted, this means identifying the people who have the passion for the ministry and a willingness to accept some responsibility for the ministry.

One question in particular that arises is how large the design team should be. To create or develop a ministry that is relevant and life-giving, we need to engage all the stakeholders in the process. However, while global ideas can be created in a large-scale summit, the specific detailed plans and steps need to be done in smaller groups or by individuals. In the following examples of developing ministries, a combination of large scale group work, small committee work, and individual work doing continual design on a ministry are presented.

When designing a ministry or developing a current ministry it is important to keep these questions in mind:

- How will this ministry help us manifest our purpose?
- How is this ministry aligned with our values?
- Are there any objections to the ministry or the plan?
If there are objections, what would satisfy the objections?
- Have all the stakeholders been heard from?
- When the ministry is directed to a specific group, does that group want the ministry? To the extent possible, it is best to engage the recipients of a ministry as stakeholders to be part of the design process.
- What resources do we need to be successful?
- What are the specific steps we will need to initiate and complete? While the overall vision may be bold and audacious, the steps to achieve it need to be small and manageable.
- Who will be responsible for each step?
- When do we expect to reach each step?
- How will we know when we have been successful?

Developing Current Ministries

Worship Design Scenario

As an example, let's say that at the summit a large group of people shared their passion and interest in worship, and people expressed deep valuing and appreciation for the innovative liturgies and music used in their worship. In this case, it would be clear that providing worship is a core life-giving aspect of this congregation's purpose. The steps to creating an ongoing design and development process might include:

- A small 6-person worship committee comprised of key staff and passionately interested parishioners is gathered to oversee the design work.
- All the people interested in being part of the development of the congregation's worship ministry are invited to a town hall meeting following a Sunday service.
- At the town hall meeting a specific appreciative inquiry process of inquiring into people's best experiences of the worship is conducted. Depending on the numbers, the process may be less formal with people moving directly from interviewing one another to a plenary session.

This is an example of the iterative nature of the appreciative inquiry approach. In essence we have a smaller summit nestled within a larger summit.

- The worship committee gathers the information and creates specific plans to develop the ideas raised with the whole group.
- Sub-committees are formed as necessary to study the feasibility of larger scale ideas such as a sanctuary renovation.
- Additional people who express the passion and responsibility for worship are invited to serve on a committee or sub-committee.
- A separate provocative purpose statement for the worship ministry is created.
- Some tasks are assigned to specific people. For example, the head of the acolytes is assigned the task of training the acolytes to improve their service.
- Staff and worship planners use the information of what is working well to innovate new worship services.

Creativity is a type of learning process where the teacher and pupil are located in the same individual.

— Arthur Koestler

If at first you don't succeed, skydiving is not for you.

— Arthur McAuliff

*Open your arms
to change,
but don't let go
of your values.*
— Dalai Lama

*There are many things
in life that will
catch your eye,
but only a few will
catch your heart.
Pursue those.*
— Unknown

- The plans, especially those that will impact the entire congregation, are formally shared with the wider community.
- Staff and worship committee members meet regularly to assess outcomes and make continuous improvement. They ask:

What was valuable about what we did?

What would make it more valuable?

What shall we keep and what shall we do differently next time?
- The following year the congregation is invited to a mini-summit following a service to look back on what has worked and to look forward to what would make it work better. At the mini-summit people are invited to specifically focus on their experience of the worship in the past year. The mini-summit is also used to celebrate successes, thank people for their participation, recognize volunteers, and even includes fundraising for a special project.

Designing a Ministry To Share What We Love

The passion question is raised during the summit when each person is asked "What do you love to do?" People who have a shared love could be invited to participate in a brainstorming session to determine if there is sufficient interest to work on a specific ministry. For example:

- People who love reading may decide to create a book club for members, and also for the members to invite their non-member friends and acquaintances who also share a love of reading and literature.

Members of the book club may also decide to share their love of reading with the community by creating an after school literacy program to mentor children from the neighborhood.

- A group of people who have a great love of nature and commitment to caring for the environment may decide to develop a three fold program:

A Celtic spirituality group to provide theological reflection for their environmental interests.

A quarterly community forum on environmental concerns.

A vacation environmental studies program for children in the neighborhood to share their love of being faithful stewards of God's creation with the next generation.

Designing a Ministry to Serve a Community Need

Ministries can also be started because members have a deep concern or compassion for a group within the community. In these situations the passion is not a love for the activity, as in the previous examples, but the outrage that arises in the face of an injustice. The Old Testament prophets were often outraged over the way the people abused and mistreated those who were unable to take care of themselves. Owens' question about passion and responsibility is still important. There are many things in our world that are fundamentally wrong, yet they do not arouse much energy within us to do something about it. Similarly, if we were to respond to every need and injustice we would quickly be overwhelmed and burn out.

What we need to do is create ministries that focus passion and responsibility and not just create a ministry because we "should." In addition to outrage, people may be motivated to engage in a ministry because of pain they have experienced, as in a victim of crime creating a victims' advocacy program. When creating a ministry motivated by outrage or suffering, it is important to ensure that people are not simply engaging because of their anger at what happened to them in the past, but are motivated by a fierce determination to bring about a just future for all of humanity. This type of fierce determination can be heard in Dr. Martin Luther King's sermon, "I have a dream." The dream is about a future that is just and equitable and not simply an angry rail against the past injustice.

Humanity's anger rarely expresses the righteousness of God, especially in a just and sustainable way. People who have not experienced the past injustice will not feel inclined to share in the ministry based on a past hurt. On the other hand, a fierce determination to pursue God's justice is fueled not by a past hurt but by a desire to create a just future. While the inspiration for the program may be one individual's experience, others will likely share in the ministry because they can also look forward to a just future.

An example of a congregation starting a ministry to meet a community need:

- A congregation decides to develop a community meal to respond to the growing program of hunger in their community.

Within the ministry several parishioners who have a passion for child welfare engage with other churches in the town to create a hot breakfast program for children in the local elementary school.

*Those who bring sunshine
into the lives of others,
cannot keep it
from themselves.*

— James M. Barrie

*There are some people
who live in a dream world,
and there are some
who face reality;
and then there
are those who turn
one into the other.*

— Douglas H. Everett

*It's easy to say "no!"
when there's a
deeper "yes!"
burning inside.*
— Stephen R. Covey

*Efficiency is
doing things right;
effectiveness is
doing the right things.*
— Peter Drucker

Stopping a Ministry

When a ministry is no longer life-giving, or if it takes more life and energy from people than it provides, it needs to be stopped. Persisting with ministries that are not sustainable will rob other ministries of essential resources and dilute the congregation's ability to manifest its purpose. Continuing a ministry because of guilt and false commitment, motivated by guilt, is soul-destroying and will take even more energy from the community. The first step is to ask this important question:

***"How is this ministry related to our purpose?
Is it essential to our purpose?"***

If the ministry is essential to the congregation's purpose, then an alternative to stopping it will need to be found. If it is essential and it stops, then perhaps it is time to close the entire church.

We don't make this statement lightly. However, we are aware that many churches find themselves in this predicament. The steps to closing a church are more involved than this section warrants, but the principles for closing a church are the same as those for stopping a ministry.

If the ministry is not essential to the life of the church, then the following steps can be taken.

- Publicly announce the decision and invite all interested people to gather for one last time to give thanks and to stop the ministry. At the gathering, invite people to share what they valued of the ministry in the past.
- Discover what, if anything, continues to be of value.
- Discuss how those values will be available in other ministries, while acknowledging that things will be different. Can that which is valuable be transferred to and included in another ministry?
- Seek and satisfy any objections to stopping the ministry.
- Allow people to grieve if necessary.
- Redirect blaming, accusations, and resentments if present. Some people may resent that others no longer support the ministry that they still value. The reality is that life moves on and what people once found life-giving and enjoyable may no longer serve that purpose. If the people want the ministry to continue,

then they need to find new participants and resources rather than being angry with those who no longer value the ministry.

- Some may feel guilt and a sense of failure. While guilt is a waste of time and energy, failure is a wonderful opportunity to learn what to do differently in the future. Edison failed over 2,000 times before he invented the incandescent light bulb.
- Allow people to be grateful that the ministry is ending. Some will possibly find great relief that they no longer have to support a ministry that has become a burden rather than a source of life.
- Take time to thank God for the good that people experienced and to thank the people who served in the ministry.

Deliver/Destiny Phase: Innovating What Will Be

The Deliver/Destiny phase is beyond the scope of this manual, which in essence is concerned with “delivering” a successful clergy search, rather than going in depth into the ongoing, iterative process of growing a particular ministry. For our purposes, the main concern in the Deliver/Destiny phase is that as the ministry is engaged, it needs to be both appreciatively reflexive and creatively forward-looking. Outcomes need to be appreciated and plans for the future modified to ensure continual development and success.

One of the simplest forms of continual development is to use the following set of questions:

- What was valuable about what we did?
- What would make it more valuable?
- What shall we keep?
- What shall we do differently next time?
- What else do we need in order to be successful?
- What else has our success inspired us to?

Creating the Parish Profile

The final step in the self-study and visioning process is to create the parish profile. This will require getting information back from the vestry with regard to the specific goals, search criteria, and compensation. Creating a profile will be discussed at the end of the search criteria section. In the next section we will look at how to use the results of the self-study, visioning, and design process to create the search criteria, starting with a brief discussion of clergy compensation.

You just need to be a flea against injustice. Enough committed fleas biting strategically can make even the biggest dog uncomfortable and transform even the biggest nation.

— Marian Wright Edelman

The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say ‘I’.

And that’s not because they have trained themselves not to say ‘I’. They don’t think ‘I’.

They think ‘we’; they think ‘team’.

They understand their job to be to make the team function.

They accept responsibility and don’t sidestep it, but ‘we’ gets the credit...

This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done.

— Peter Drucker
