

**APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS A RESOURCE FOR
POSITIVE CHANGE IN A CHURCH MINISTRY**

A Research Project

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of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

in

Organization Development

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this action research study was to understand the contribution of an appreciative inquiry (AI) intervention to a church ministry. Twenty-three ministry stakeholders participated in a 9-hour, 2-day AI process. Immediate post-event survey results indicated participant agreement that the AI intervention created a shared vision for the ministry. Survey data were analyzed using content analysis to identify four areas of opportunity for ministry growth and development. All participants reported interest in supporting these opportunities in the ensuing 3 months. Participants rated seven potential factors to support the implementation of opportunities. Recommendations are offered for the study organization and churches considering the use of AI. This study was intended to contribute to the continuing development of AI practice and theory for churches. The principles, practices, and the results generated from it are hoped to provide value in planning AI interventions within other congregations.

Acknowledgments

In Philippians 4:8, the Apostle Paul advocated a focus on things that offered life and hope to a church facing challenges:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Paul’s words are consistent with the spirit of appreciative inquiry, a powerful methodology for organizational change based on equipping an organization for collective inquiry into “the best of what is in order to imagine what could be” (Bushe, 2013a, p. 41). Among the many ways in which God has enriched and blessed my life, I am grateful for the opportunity to study the use of appreciative inquiry for positive change in churches.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Nearly 50 years ago, Toffler (1970) foresaw challenges in keeping pace with an accelerated rate of transformation in our society. The change that has materialized in the intervening years has proven to be of a magnitude so large that it is seen only every couple hundred of years (Drucker, 1992).

As a result, organizations of all kinds operate in an environment marked by a significant amount of flux and uncertainty. For example, 90% of respondents to a recent global survey expect disruption of their industries by digital trends (Kane, Palmer, Phillips, Kiron, & Buckley, 2016). Consistent with these trends, the volatility of corporate operating profits has more than doubled since 1980 (Reeves & Deimler, 2011). In these circumstances, “change is seen as necessary merely to survive; transformation is required to thrive, and a constant need for reinvention is needed to secure long-term success” (Keene, 2000, p. 15).

Like other organizations, American churches are experiencing disruptive change. The Christian share of the U.S. population is declining (Pew Research Center, 2015). Christianity’s loss of traction as the dominant religious and cultural force in American life is evident in declining church attendance, reduced confidence in the institutional leadership of churches, and the shrinking numbers of Americans who self-identify as Christian (McCormack, 2012).

Mead (1991) found that a major church paradigm shift is underway. He likened the current era to the period wherein Christianity shifted from a persecuted fringe movement to the official religion of the Roman Empire. That transition involved “such a complete upsetting of the old paradigm that life was disrupted and structures were

reordered to form a new one” (p. 9). Adaptation to a changing environment clearly represents a similarly large challenge for churches in the U.S. today.

American churches face a particular test with what Pew Research (2015) calls the younger Millennials (those between the ages of 18 and 24) and older Millennials (ages 25–33). Fewer than 60% of these groups identify with Christianity, compared to 70% or more among older generations. Addressing the lower engagement levels within these age groups is a natural focus for churches seeking to adapt to changes in today’s society. Young adults in this age group represent a significant percentage of the church ministry that is the subject of this study.

The challenge for church leaders in today’s environment has been described as the pursuit of “prospects for coherent theological reflection and faithful action amidst . . . a fracturing of certainties” (Graham, 2006, p. 845). Redmond (2005) found that institutions (e.g., churches) can be susceptible to incremental and gradual responses that produce “insensible but incessant” change over time, and these shifts coincide with the larger changes occurring in the social environment (p. 501).

It is typical to focus on finding and fixing problems as the means of adapting to change. Although such deficit-based approaches may be helpful to a degree, they also bring with them the potential to overlook inner strengths (Della Santina, 2008) in favor of an excessive focus on issues concerning people, money, or influence (Dietterich, 2004). Consequently, a problem-centric approach to organizational change and improvement can be myopic as it leverages the momentum created by existing organizational norms without effecting substantive change to them (Boyd & Bright, 2007). Moreover, deficit-based approaches tend to undervalue many available resources (Branson, 2004).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) emerged more than 30 years ago as an alternative to problem-based approaches to organizational transformation. AI is future-oriented and focused on an organization's areas of strength and opportunity. It is *open* (Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007) in that it asserts that achieving the best results requires widespread engagement by those who will ultimately implement change, in contrast to traditional top-down approaches (Bushe, 2013a). AI is designed to improve organizations through the collaborative identification of current strengths, the articulation of opportunities for change and growth, and the associated realignment of organizational structures and processes to meet the challenges of the present and the future (White, 2012).

When applied in a church context, AI seeks to use the most positive, life-giving resources available to move toward a vibrant and energized vision of God's intended future (Della Santina, 2008). As one church leader wrote in her account of her favorable AI experience: "I was not looking for corporate processes for strategic planning but for something that could help congregations ' . . . dream new dreams, and . . . see new visions'" (Hamel, 2014, p. 61). In acknowledging the skepticism of many in the church to any *new* [emphasis added] approach that offers to deliver the truth, in any form, Chaffee (2005) describes AI as "not so much a new truth as a new way of approaching the truth" (p. 79).

Study Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand the contribution of an AI intervention to a church ministry. The Singles Ministry of the South Bay Church served as a case study example. Four research questions were examined:

1. To what extent, if any, did participants think the AI intervention helped to create a shared vision for the future of the Singles Ministry?

2. To what extent, if any, did participants think the AI intervention helped to identify opportunities for future Singles Ministry approaches?
3. To what extent, if any, did participants feel able to implement provocative propositions developed during the AI intervention?
4. What factors, if any, did participants identify as being most helpful in supporting efforts to implement provocative propositions developed during the AI intervention?

These research questions focus on early indicators of the success of the AI intervention. Early indicators of success are useful in providing a sense of whether “things are moving in the right direction” (Donnan & Shaked, 2010, p. 8) after an AI intervention. Although objective outcome measures constitute lagging but better indicators of the long-term impact of the AI intervention, evaluating these were beyond the scope of this study.

Study Setting

The Singles Ministry is one of a number of age- and stage-related ministries within the South Bay Church. Other ministries include the Marrieds and Family, Teens, Preteens, and Kingdom Kids ministries.

The Church worships in Manhattan Beach, California, and is one of five churches within the Coastal Los Angeles Region of the Los Angeles International Church of Christ. The Los Angeles International Church of Christ, in turn, is part of a global church movement known as the International Churches of Christ. The Church conducts worship services in English. Other English-language congregations in Coastal Los Angeles Region worship in Culver City (West Los Angeles Church) and Long Beach (Greater Long Beach Church). Coastal Los Angeles Region’s Spanish language ministry, known as the Ministerio Latino Americano, has congregations that worship in West Los Angeles and Carson. A married ministry couple leads each of these Coastal Los Angeles Region

church congregations. There are currently five elder couples in Coastal Los Angeles Region responsible for oversight of the region and its churches.

The Los Angeles International Church of Christ was established in 1989 as a small church “plant” by a team of members from affiliated International Churches of Christ churches in Denver, San Diego, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Seattle who relocated to Los Angeles with the intention of establishing a major church presence in Los Angeles. The Los Angeles International Church of Christ has since grown to more than 6,000 members in eight geographical regions. The Coastal Los Angeles Region, located along the Pacific Coast between Long Beach and Santa Monica, has the largest membership of these regions (approximately 1,200 members).

The eight regions of the Los Angeles International Church of Christ operate as a loose confederation overseen by a council consisting of an evangelist and an elder from each of the eight regions. Although strong relationships exist among leaders of the respective regions, most ministry leadership responsibility and authority is at the regional level. The eight regions share the cost of centralized financial and human staff resources.

Significance of the Study

Mead (1991) makes the case that churches (and other religious congregations) are, with the exception of the human family, the most important source of a major element of life—human community. Not only do people tend to gravitate to congregations at critical times involving death, loss, birth, marriage and hopelessness, but in the U.S. congregations also are an important part of the so-called social glue that de Tocqueville described as characteristic of this nation. In this time of disruptive change, it is important to me that congregations continue to play their important role as communities of faith connected with God.

AI provides a framework for a church to rediscover the abundance of God’s gifts and clarify what God has called it to be:

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” ~ Romans 12:2 (New International Version)

A literature review of AI and its application in churches found multiple sources on AI and churches. For those interested in doing similar research, the following have been of particular value for the researcher in this regard: Blades, (n.d.), Branson (2004), Chaffee (2005), Cooperrider (2003), Della Santina (2008), Dietterich (2004), Ditzler (n.d.), Hamel (2014), Harder (2013), Hyatt (2012), Marzluft (2009), McCormack (2012), Paddock (2003), Smith (2003), Weller (2015), Wethman and Arp (n.d.), and White (2012). Nonetheless, information regarding the process of conducting an AI intervention within a church appears to be limited. An assumption of this research is that churches can benefit from the use of AI to help them adapt to challenges of these times. This study documents the process of designing and delivering an AI intervention within one church ministry—specifically concerning the context in which it occurred, observed outcomes, and survey results from participants. AI principles, practices, and the results shared here are intended to be of value in planning similar interventions in other congregations.

Almost 30 years after his original articulation of the principles underlying AI, David Cooperrider (2013) observed that the “gift of AI . . . [is] still in its infancy and perhaps always will be” as the number of AI authors and so-called co-creators multiplies (p. 6). Although study findings are limited to the early indicators of the success of the AI, the findings are intended to contribute to the continuing development of AI practice and theory by identifying how successful activities can be conceptualized and developed. Additionally, the study contributes to a growing body of work that may make AI, as an

organizational change resource, better understood and more widely used by congregations, their leaders, and the organizational development practitioners who serve them.

Researcher Background

Although I have served alongside my wife in the Church as a small group leader and peer counselor, I have never been part of the Singles Ministry and had no preconceptions about outcomes of the AI process that is the subject of this study. The AI intervention associated with this research for me represents an opportunity to study the use of a positive approach to strengthening a ministry of a church that is important to me, to provide an opportunity for others to benefit from the experience—and to glorify God in the process.

Methodology

This qualitative study used an AI approach based on a case study on using AI to strengthen a church ministry. The research included a weekend meeting on a Friday night and Saturday. Data collected included the collective contributions of participants in the AI meeting based on appreciative questions and interviews, as well as written answers provided by individual participants to a survey following the AI intervention. Findings from the data were used to respond to the research questions.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provided the context and purpose of this study, including a discussion of the factors that can contribute to a church's adaptation to changes in its environment. The study setting, significance of the study, researcher background, and methodology also were briefly described.

Chapter 2 presents a review of literature, including an overview of AI, a discussion of its benefits as a methodology, critiques of AI, and approaches for measuring its impact.

Chapter 3 describes the methods and design used in this study. The chapter outlines the research design, participant selection, protection of human subjects, researcher's role, the AI intervention, and data collection and analysis procedures.

Chapter 4 presents the study results. A report of the intervention is provided first, followed by a presentation of the survey results.

Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and draws conclusions from the research. Recommendations, study limitations, and suggestions for further research also are included.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to understand the contribution of an AI intervention to a Singles Ministry. Four research questions were examined:

1. To what extent, if any, did participants think the AI intervention helped to create a shared vision for the future of the Singles Ministry?
2. To what extent, if any, did participants think the AI intervention helped to identify opportunities for future Singles Ministry approaches?
3. To what extent, if any, did participants feel able to implement provocative propositions (action statements) developed during the AI intervention?
4. What factors, if any, did participants identify as being most helpful in supporting efforts to implement provocative propositions (action statements) developed during the AI intervention?

This chapter provides a review of literature relevant to this study. First, the topic of AI is examined, including an overview of its history, principles, orientation to change leadership, and approach to change. The method of AI also is discussed. Benefits and criticisms of AI are outlined, along with a discussion of evaluation approaches that could be used to measure the effectiveness of AI interventions.

Appreciative Inquiry

AI has been described as the most recent innovation in the “social technology of organization development” (Burke, 2011, p. 143). Grounded in the theory of social constructionism, AI proponents argue that many aspects of how the world functions are based on “patterns of social interaction that have become institutionalized” (Lant, 2013, p. 715). AI is, therefore, a method for changing social systems such as groups, organizations, and communities in a way that “advocates collective inquiry into the best of what is in order to imagine what could be” (Bushe, 2013a, p. 41). In this way, AI seeks to attain the best outcomes possible within organizations based on the assumption that

“ways of organizing are limited only by human imagination and the agreements people make with each other” (Bushe, 2013a, p. 41). Thus, after inquiring into the existing system and envisioning what could be, participants are engaged in collaboratively designing a compelling desired future state. Bushe adds that because AI unleashes participants’ positive energy, this approach “does not require the use of incentives, coercion, or persuasion for planned change to occur” (p. 41).

AI began as a study conducted by Case Western University doctoral student David Cooperrider regarding what was wrong with the human side of the Cleveland Clinic (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011). Cooperrider soon replaced his problem-based focus with a strengths-based strategy for organizational change, which ultimately formed the basis for his doctoral dissertation and became a seminal work in the development of AI and its theoretical underpinnings.

Cooperrider and his dissertation advisor, Suresh Srivastva, published “Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life” based on the dissertation in 1987, which marked the first time the term AI appeared in a professional journal. Cooperrider and Srivastva initially proposed AI as an alternative for generating “new ideas, images, and theories that would lead to social innovation” (Bushe, 2011, p. 5). Since then, ample articles and books have been published on the theory and practice of AI. A Business Source Premier database search on April 6, 2016, for the term AI produced 576 search results. De Jong (2016) has suggested that AI’s impact on theory and research has been “enormous” (p. 35).

Principles of appreciative inquiry. Cooperrider and Srivastva initially identified three principles underlying AI, partly as a reaction to the perceived shortcomings of conventional action research based change methods at the time. They asserted that AI

should (a) focus on understanding the forces and factors that heighten an organization's potential, (b) lead to actionable knowledge, and (c) engage organization members in a collaborative and provocative process of shaping the organization according to their own imaginative and moral purposes.

Cooperrider and Whitney (2001) later expanded these three assertions into a set of five principles that reflect the theory of change central to AI:

1. Positive principle. Momentum and sustainable change require positive affect and social bonding.
2. Constructionist principle. The purpose of inquiry is to stimulate new ideas, stories, and images that generate new possibilities for action.
3. Simultaneity principle. Questions are fateful and never neutral. Social systems move in the direction of the question they most persistently and passionately discuss.
4. Poetic principle. Words and topics chosen for inquiry have an impact beyond the words themselves. In all phases of the inquiry, words must be carefully chosen to highlight, enliven, and inspire the best in people.
5. Anticipatory principle. What people do in the present is guided by their image of the future.

These five principles provide the theoretical underpinning for AI's espoused purpose of "uncovering and building upon the most positive, life-giving features of an organization as the key to generating constructive change or improvement" (Marzluft, 2009, p. 50). Although other sets of AI principles have been proposed (Kelm, 2005), these five principles enumerated by Cooperrider and Whitney have been the most widely accepted throughout the AI community (Bushe, 2011). The next section examines the implications these principles have for how and from where change efforts are driven within organizations.

Orientation to change leadership. Initiating, designing, and driving organizational change traditionally have been considered the responsibility of leaders

(Branson, 2004). Relevant to the present study, churches traditionally gave control of nearly every change to those who are “older and wiser” (Walrath, 1979, p. 248).

Although leaders may consult with various stakeholders to get their perspectives during this top-down change process, the final analysis and sensemaking of what has been gathered are performed by leaders (Bushe, 2011, p. 12).

For this top-down approach to be successful, however, certain worldviews underlying this approach—namely, the scientific paradigm (Branson, 2004) and what Stacey (2012) called the *dominant managerial discourse*—need to be accurate. Table 1 outlines what these worldviews assert about the composition, dynamics, and path to change for organizations.

However, critics argue that these traditional worldviews errantly take what Ganko (2013) called a linear and additive approach by assuming that a system can be understood by studying their individual building blocks in isolation. Complexity theory has emerged as an alternative to the traditional systems view. Complexity theory asserts that social behavior and organizations can only be understood by studying the system as a whole (Pascale, 1999; Stacey, 2015). Thus, the organization as a machine metaphor has been replaced by the view that the organization is a “living, socially-constructed human system in which we all participate” (Cantore & Cooperrider, 2013, p. 267). As a result, the conventional approach of “set a vision–plan–execute” has been discredited because the cause-effect relationships between all variables that will affect the outcome will not be understood except in retrospect (Bushe, 2015, p. 8). Table 2 outlines the worldviews underlying the new management paradigm.

Table 1***Worldviews Underpinning Traditional Approaches to Change***

Element of Change	Scientific Paradigm	Dominant Managerial Discourse
Anatomy of the Organization	Organizations are machines and operate according to Newtonian mechanics.	Organizations are systems or “things.”
How Change is achieved	Change is achieved through hierarchy.	Wise, heroic leaders steer their organizations to success through vision and acumen.
Elements and Dynamics of the Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizations consist of parts, their differences, and their interactions. • Parts are connected through sequences of distinct causes and distinct effects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizations are subject to impersonal forces (e.g., “drivers” of change). • Organizations are comprised of independent, autonomous, rational individuals making choices and taking action. • Leaders and teams make choices, intentions, and strategies that lead to results.
How Success is Achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving predictability from accurately describing and understanding enough of the parts. • Order and continuity are needed and achieved through control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success is achieved through rational, analytical, and increasingly automated decision making using big data. • Organizational improvement is attained by applying generalizable tools and techniques of management and leadership. • Certainty, predictability, and control are possible through action and demanding that others act.

Note. Based on material from *Memories, Hopes and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (p. 36), by M. L. Branson, 2004, Herndon, VA: Alban Institute; *The Difference Between the Dominant Managerial Discourse and What Managers Actually Experience*, by R. Stacey, 2012, New York, NY: Routledge.

Table 2

Worldviews Underpinning New Management Paradigms

Element of Change	New Science Paradigm	Postmodern Management Paradigm
Anatomy of the Organization	Self-organizing systems.	Organizations are conversations: What happens is influenced by who talks with whom, when, and how.
How Change is Achieved	Discerns and affirms “order at the edge of chaos” where new images and forces are discovered (complexity theory).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No one can control what everyone else is choosing and doing. • Leaders often feel powerless to influence their organizations. • Situations are uncertain. Local contingencies are so important that generic tools are of very limited value.
Elements and Dynamics of the Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Randomness, unpredictability. • Discover the connectedness in the invisible whole (quantum theory). • Discontinuity (chaos theory). • The invisible whole features interdependence and instantaneous multiple effects (simultaneity). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdependence: We constrain and enable each other. We can’t get much done without others’ consent. • People are emotional rather than purely rational. People are often unconsciously driven by the anxieties aroused by organizational life.
How Success is Achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Order arises out of intricate patterns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results emerge from the interplay of all the choices, intentions, and strategies of all the stakeholders in both intended and unintended ways. • Sometimes we are surprised, and sometimes we are not. • We have very little control, and we can never be certain about what will happen next.

Note. Based on material from *Memories, Hopes and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (p. 32-37), by M. L. Branson, 2004, Herndon, VA: Alban Institute.

AI is consistent with the new management paradigm and its social constructionist assumption that organizational life is constructed through the interactions and involvement of the people who constitute the organization (Holman, 2015; Makino, 2013). As a result, AI engages large numbers of stakeholders in the process and encourages widespread participation in the overall change design and implementation process by members of the system (Barrett & Fry, 2005; Bushe, 2011). “Ideally, all stakeholders participate in gathering and making sense of the ideas and views of other

stakeholders and participate as theorists, dreamers, and designers” (Bushe, 2011, p. 12). Proponents of AI elaborate that by involving functional and operational staff into the process of formulating policy and strategy, AI helps to create “an interpretive community that can . . . perceive, think and create with the most life giving resources” (Branson, 2004, p. 23) rather than being limited by the defensive routines that result from traditional approaches of designating small groups of upper-level leaders to make strategic decisions (Barrett & Fry, 2005). The next section discusses AI’s approach to organizational change in more detail.

Appreciative inquiry as an approach to organizational change. Due to its theoretical underpinnings and orientation to change leadership, AI is typically referred to as an alternative to the many traditional deficit-based change approaches available, such as total quality management, continuous quality improvement, the balanced scorecard, future search, and open space (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003). These approaches also have been referred to as embracing disease-based models of human nature (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). Such approaches endeavor to achieve improvement by identifying and resolving the organization’s problems (Cummings & Worley, 2015).

Weick (1984) posited that the problem with problem-based approaches is that “social problems [may] seldom get solved because people define these problems in ways that overwhelm their ability to do anything about them” (p. 40). Cooperrider and Sekerka (2006) noted that an unintended consequence of deficit-based approaches is that results are limited by the way scholars frame and commonly make sense of the world. For instance, a problem-centric approach to sociological issues can have the unintended impact of increasing reliance by so-called needy segments of society on external

solutions and providers, thereby perpetuating problems rather addressing root causes with sustainable solutions (Hyatt, 2012).

In contrast, the foundation of AI is a focus on what an organization does best (Peterson & Seligman, 2003). Researchers and practitioners have developed applications of AI that endeavor to “increase the options for change and the probability that change will occur” (Bushe & Paranjpey, 2015, p. 310). Egan and Feyerherm (2005) explained that lasting personal change must be initiated by an appeal to emotion as well as reason and that the appeal must be grounded in positive (rather than negative) emotions, as described in dramatic fashion by Deutschman (2005).

Hammond (2013) summarized the difference between deficit-based and positive approaches to change as a focus on doing less of something we do not do well (deficit-based approaches) versus doing more of what works (AI-based approaches). It follows that in the former approach, organizations are problems to be solved, whereas AI approaches conceive of organizations as mysteries to be embraced. Table 3 further contrasts traditional problem-solving approaches to change and AI. It must be noted, however, that problem-solving involves a methodical series of steps whereas AI involves “a more comprehensive mode of organizational life” (Branson, 2004, p. 126).

In the realm of organizational research, AI has been described as a contemporary adaptation of action research, which is the most commonly used approach to change within social systems in recent decades (Newman & Fitzgerald, 2001). Action research is distinct from traditional academic research, which purports that distance and noninvolvement are essential for maintaining researcher objectivity and guaranteeing high-quality work (Reed, 2007). “In contrast to the ideas of inquiry for its own sake and building knowledge for its own sake, action research aims to design inquiry and build

knowledge for use in the service of action to solve practical problems” (Punch, 2014, p. 136). The objective is to “inform and change practice and develop an understanding of the particular context in which it takes place” (Reed, 2007, pp. 63–64).

Table 3

Comparison of Problem Solving and Appreciative Inquiry Approaches

Problem Solving	Appreciative Inquiry
“Felt Need” Identification of Problem	Initiate AI by introducing leaders to theory and practice, deciding focus, and developing initial steps to discover the organization’s “best”
↓ Analysis of Causes	↓ Inquire concerning “the best” of the organization’s narratives, practices, and imaginations
↓ Analysis of Possible Solutions	↓ Imagine “what might be” by interpreting the interviews, taking the risk of imagination, and building toward consensus concerning “what should be”
↓ Action Plan and Treatment	↓ Innovate “what will be” through discourse, commitment, and equipping, with the largest possible level of participation

Note. From *Memories, Hopes and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (p. 22), by M. L. Branson, 2004, Herndon, VA: Alban Institute. Copyright by Alban Institute, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Although both action research and AI share an interest in observing and promoting change, action research has been criticized for being overly focused on problem-solving (Egan & Lancaster, 2005). It follows that AI is focused on broadening the scope and impact of action research work (Newman & Fitzgerald, 2001), with the potential to “reframe and dramatically shift organizational and community norms,” while “theory on social norms suggests that problem-centric approaches work with the momentum of norms without substantively changing them” (Boyd & Bright, 2007,

p. 1019). AI potentially challenges action research to “move beyond an over-concentration on problems and to engage with more growth-oriented and creative initiatives and opportunities” (Edmonstone, 2014, p. 25).

Through the work of various researchers and practitioners, AI has become a legitimate framework for organizational intervention, having been used to guide change within individuals and complex human systems alike (Watkins et al., 2001). The fields in which AI has been utilized are as disparate as violin instruction, community development, curricular reform, organizational governance and strategic planning, therapy, leadership development for clergy, and interfaith relations, in addition to a range of private sector applications (Chaffee, 2005). Egan and Lancaster (2005) found in their literature review that organizations utilizing AI have included Verizon, Avon, Nutrimental, the MYRADA project in Southern India, the Manitoba Skowman First Nation Project, the United States Navy, Roadway Express, McDonald's, John Deere, Green Mountain Coffee growers, Lafarge North America, and Benedictine University, among others. World Vision, a federation of approximately 200 relatively independent organizations, utilized AI for a global strategic planning event using face-to-face and Internet-based communications (Branson, 2004). de Jong (2016) asserts that “the embrace of AI by increasing numbers of individuals, and the ‘full spectrum’ of organizations—for-profit, not-for-profit and government” (p. 36) is anecdotal evidence of AI’s impact and acceptance. The next section describes the AI method in more detail.

The appreciative inquiry method. Cooperrider reportedly resisted writing a how-to book on AI for more than 10 years because he wanted people to focus on the philosophy and not see it as a technique (Bushe, 2011). Moreover, no rigid definition or formulaic design exists for conducting AI-based research because AI is fundamentally an

inquiry into human systems (Reed, 2007), and numerous approaches are available (Kelm, 2005). Thus, although no two AI processes are exactly the same, common elements include (a) definition of a compelling topic, (b) creating questions to explore the topic, (c) conducting inquiry interviews, (d) sharing information to uncover themes, (e) creating provocative propositions, and (f) transforming the propositions into actions (Pollard, 2008).

These elements often are implemented by choosing an affirmative topic and then following what has come to be called the AI 4-D Cycle (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008), consisting of (a) Discovery, appreciating the best of what is; (b) Dreaming, imagining what could be; (c) Designing, determining what should be; and (d) Delivering, creating what will be (Serrat, 2011). These basic building blocks of Affirmative Topic Choice, Discovery, Dream, Design, and Delivery are constantly being “transformed, redefined and used in creative ways” (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 69) in different situations involving AI based on the circumstances of the change situation. The following sections describe these elements in more detail.

Affirmative topic choice. The AI process begins with the thoughtful identification of what is to be studied. Commonly referred to as an *affirmative topic*, this step has also been referred to by the Clergy Leadership Institute and others as the first stage of Define in the 5-D AI model (Bushe, 2012). The affirmative topic is considered to be fateful because it “become[s] the organization’s agenda for learning and innovation” (Bushe, 2013b, p. 96). Thus, the affirmative topic reflects the focus of the inquiry and should be related to a subject that is

of strategic importance to the organization. [It] may be an aspect of the organization’s positive core, that if expanded would further the organization’s success. [It] may be a problem that if stated in the affirmative and studied would

improve organizational performance. Or, [it] may be a competitive success factor the organization needs to learn about in order to grow and change. (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p. 7)

Moreover, the affirmative topic should depict the focus in lively, inspiring language, such as “inspiring fanatically loyal customers” (Bushe, 2013a, p. 42). Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2003) added that effective affirmative topics are (a) positive and stated in the affirmative; (b) desirable, meaning the organization wants to grow in the stated direction; (c) stimulating, in that the organization is genuinely curious about them, and wants to become more knowledgeable and proficient in them; and (d) generative, in that the topic ignites discussion about the organization’s desired future.

The power of being deliberate in defining the topics to be addressed in a positive way is exemplified by a case study referenced several times in the literature. A Fortune 500 company was frustrated after a 2-year effort to abate sexual harassment resulted in accelerating rather than reducing harassment. The focus was shifted to “We want . . . high-quality cross-gender relationships in the workplace” (Chaffee, 2005, pp. 67–68). The result was a great deal of energy on a project to identify male-female pairs with stories to tell about fair and healthy work relationships. A program evolved from these stories that reportedly transformed the corporation. Avon Mexico heard of the project’s success and adopted a similar approach. After some time, the company was recognized as the best place in Mexico for women to work. Table 4 illustrates the difference between affirmative topics and more traditional, deficit-based topics (Stratton-Berkessel, 2010, p. 50).

Table 4

Topics of Inquiry

Affirmative Topic	Traditional Title
Valuing Time	Time Management
Creating Change Positively	Change Management
Respectful Relationships	Conflict Management
Peak Performance	Performance Management
Magnetic Customer Connections	Customer Complaints
Exceptional Arrival Experience	Lost Baggage Complaints
Stories of Passionate Enthusiasm	Low Morale

Note. From *Appreciative Inquiry for Collaborative Solutions: 21-Strengths-Based Workshops* (p. 50), by R. Stratton-Berkessel, 2010, San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer. Copyright 2010 by Pfeiffer. Reprinted with permission.

Discovery. After the selection of the affirmative topic(s), interviews are conducted with and by primary stakeholders to uncover success stories from the organization's past and present. The task is to "uncover, learn about, and appreciate the "best of what is" (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 104). These can relate to the "life-giving properties of the organization," the "positive core" strengths of the organization, or a specific capacity or process (Bushe, 2012, p. 88). A significant innovation has been to have organizational stakeholders act as both interviewers and interviewees so as to fully engage them in the act of inquiry itself (Carter & Johnson, as cited in Bushe, 2012).

Southern (2015) and Zandee (2015) both emphasized the need to design efficient and powerful questions. Southern elaborated that great questions support "continuous learning and bringing people into a space where values, aspirations, and dilemmas can be shared" (p. 269). Table 5 presents five types of powerful questions. Southern urged designers of AI interventions to craft questions that generate stories, create new thinking rather than quick conclusions, focus on what is desired, and are difficult to answer. Additionally, the questions should be developed through a discovery process with those involved in the inquiry.

Table 5

Southern's Five Types of Inquiries

Type of Inquiry	Purpose of Inquiry	Sample Inquiry
Informative	Surface information and generate common ground	What metaphor would describe your vision of the desired future state?
Affirmative	Identify the “best of what is” and what is possible	What makes us and our work distinctive?
Critical	Support a systemic understanding of the current reality and the need for change	What role can you and others take to help build the organization’s capacity for change and innovation?
Generative	Support creative thinking and new approaches to how we organize	If we could organize in new ways to support our desired future, what would that look like?
Strategic	Define a path forward and how to take action	How do the changes taking place in the world, related to our work, affect our mission and purpose?

Note. From “Framing Inquiry: The Art of Engaging Great Questions” (pp. 274–280), by N. Southern, 2015, in G. Bushe and R. Marshak, (Eds.), *Dialogic Organization Development: The Theory and Practice of Transformational Change*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler. Copyright 2015 by Berrett-Koehler. Reprinted with permission.

Cooperrider et al. (2005) use *sense-making* as an umbrella term to explain the process of understanding the themes and patterns discovered in the interview process as a means for generating momentum for organizational success. The ultimate aim is to work toward a desired future “based on the best stories told (continuity) and the best of what will come (novelty)” (p. 117).

Dream. The Dream phase of the 4-D Cycle is designed to create a dialogue among stakeholders in which they imagine the possibilities for the future that have been generated by the Discovery phase (Cooperrider et al., 2008). An attempt is made to identify the common aspirations of system members and symbolize this in some way. The result often is something more symbolic, like a graphic representation, than a mission statement (Bushe, 2012).

Design. In the Design phase, the focus shifts to creating the ideal organization so that it might achieve its dream. The Design phase of the 4-D Cycle involves creating what has come to be known in AI practice as provocative or possibility propositions, which are written in the present tense. These propositions attempt to bridge “the best of what is” from the Discovery stage with “what might be” (imagined in the Dream stage). The overall objective is to fully integrate the best of past and possibility in a way that is consistent with the aim of the inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Participants often self-select into small groups to develop proposals within a particular category. Rapid prototyping processes also are increasingly common during this phase (Bushe, 2012).

Delivery. The final phase of the 4-D Cycle (also referred to as Destiny) seeks to ensure that the dream can be realized. The design team publicly declares intended actions and asks for organization-wide support from every level. The common focus is on measures to be taken (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Bushe (2012) says there has been “the most confusion and the least consensus among AI advocates” about exactly what ought to happen in the Delivery phase, noting that using the Design process to create “new targets, gaps to fill and objectives to achieve” is counter to the philosophy of AI (p. 88). He argues that improvisation rather than implementation is needed in this phase. Improvisation would begin with seeking widespread acceptance of the Design statement. Rather than establishing action plans or committees, everyone would be authorized to take those measures they believe will bring the design to fruition. Leadership’s role then becomes uncovering and amplifying those innovations they want to support, and creating events and processes to energize momentum that is self-organizing.

The role of the consultant or facilitator. Given AI’s unique approach to change, it is important to specify the approach change leaders take in AI-based change. Rather

than managing and controlling, the AI facilitator's role is to give team members the lead and to continually seek ways to give the process away and support organization members in making the process their own (Cooperrider, 1996; Reijerse & Domburg, 2010).

Consistent with the principles and worldviews underlying AI, Cooperrider (1996) asserts that facilitators also need to create a high energy level in the team and to keep appreciating the system, even in hard times. To do so, facilitators must work in the affirmative, continually seeking to discover what gives life to the organization and its members. In this way, possibilities, hope, and inspired action are brought to life. A characteristic that appears to distinguish successful AI practitioners from those who are less successful is their ability to work with participants to evoke images that are powerful enough to motivate people to ignite action (Bushe, 2012). The intended effect is that the team itself takes the initiative and responsibility, performing actions and taking care of follow-up (van Ginkel, 2010). Through these various mechanisms, facilitators treat organizations as living spiritual–social systems—mysteries of creation to be nurtured and affirmed, rather than as mechanistic or scientific operations with problems to be solved.

The role of the participants. In effective AI interventions, participants engage fully in the process and play important roles in understanding their past, envisioning their future, and delivering on the vision. To do so, participants need to experience and embrace their personal and collective power (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). Whitney and Trosten-Bloom described an effective AI process as involving “liberating power” that “creates a self-perpetuating momentum for positive change” (p. 235). They added that this personal and organizational power emerges when at least six conditions of power (the so-called Six Freedoms) are present: freedom to be known in relationship, freedom

to be heard, freedom to dream in community, freedom to choose to contribute, freedom to act with support, and freedom to be positive.

Benefits of appreciative inquiry. Numerous case studies and anecdotal research have extolled the virtues and beneficial results of AI interventions (de Jong, 2016; Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Notably, most of these are qualitative claims, although a few quantitative studies exist. The primary benefits noted in these accounts have included unleashing positive energy, shifting organization members' thinking and behaviors, igniting widespread participation, and achieving superior results.

First, AI has been credited with releasing substantial amounts of positive energy (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, 2001) and “generat[ing] a lot of hope and high energy as well as aspiration for change” (Donnan & Shaked, 2010, p. 5). Cooperrider and Whitney (2001) explained that AI could achieve this when participants' aim is to search for excellence, for positive deviations from the norm, and for the extraordinary in the ordinary. They outlined a vision for AI where positive energy, reverence for life, and the ability to search for things that give life, breathe life, harmonize life, and energize meaning and connection can be unleashed—even during moments of tragedy. In such times, participants aim to search for the meaning or good that can emerge from the event. Messerschmidt (2008) observed, “Many AI practitioners appear almost evangelical in their belief in the ‘positive affirmation theory’” (p. 455).

Second, AI has been credited with disrupting established patterns of thinking and interaction (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, 2001; Sharp, Dewar, & Barrie, 2016) and with elevating these (Cwiklik, 2006) so that personal agency, kindness, relationships, risk-taking, and innovation are enhanced (Sharp et al., 2016). Cwiklik (2006) added that organizational capacity is increased by transforming the organization's internal dialogue.

Moreover, Bushe and Kassam (2005) concluded based on their examination of AI interventions that changing how people think is important to its transformative potential.

Third, igniting widespread participation and opening opportunities for co-creation are considered endemic to AI (Cwiklik, 2006). Doing so requires a shift in management style away from a command-and-control model toward an appreciative management approach (Cwiklik, 2006) as well as engaging more people in the design and testing of new methods in the workplace and community (Sharp et al., 2016). In turn, organizational members are engaged and energized in new ways. Bushe and Kassam (2005) concluded in their research that AI is more likely to be transformative when it focuses on supporting self-organizing change processes that flow from new ideas.

Fourth, AI has been associated with achieving superior results, such as putting innovative changes in motion and changing organizational cultures (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, 2001).

Criticisms of appreciative inquiry. Despite the favorable results reported from AI interventions, questions remain about AI, its application, and outcomes (de Jong, 2016). For example, Carter (2006) described AI as an “interesting, stimulating and creative way of researching . . . [but which] is not a panacea and will not provide a ‘cure all’” (p. 48). Bushe and Kassam (2005) systemically compared 20 cases of AI interventions to determine the extent to which they were transformational. The researchers concluded that all the cases were successful applications of AI based on comparison to AI’s foundational principles, but that only seven (35%) were transformational, defined as producing change beyond what would be expected from a traditional change management effort. Additionally, Bushe (2012) argued that AI has a greater impact when it helps a somewhat dysfunctional organization move toward

functionality and is less effective when trying to shift a well-functioning organization toward extraordinary functionality.

Criticisms about AI have concerned a potentially excessive focus on positivity and concomitant avoidance of the negative, ignoring constraining factors within a system, and the frequent lack of facilitator competence. Questions have arisen about the appropriate limits of AI's characteristic positive focus (Grant & Humphries, 2006; Rogers & Fraser, 2003). Rogers and Fraser (2003) compare AI's exclusive focus on the positive to a plant growing lopsided in its reach for the light. Critics have expressed concern that the focus on positive stories and experiences during discovery can invalidate participants' negative organizational experiences of participants and preclude potentially important and meaningful conversations (Bushe, 2011). Bushe clarified that the purpose of AI is to generate an improved future rather than to have a positive focus for its own sake. Nevertheless, concerns about AI's positive-only approach remain (Bushe, 2011; Clouder & King, 2015).

A related concern voiced by critics is avoidance of the negative in AI. Egan and Lancaster (2005) concluded based on their survey of 12 organizational development professionals experienced in AI that the failure to address problems of real concern to organization members can obstruct change. Research findings indicated that AI participants often experience challenges dealing with difficult interpersonal situations, voicing anger or frustration, and identifying problems in a system by focusing on the positive. In AI, instead of identifying problems, participants are encouraged to explore what they would like to see more of and where the gap is between what they aspire to and what they see (Bushe, 2011). Theories of autopoiesis, chaos, and complexity emphasize the need for both negative and positive feedback, as negative feedback is important in

accounting for the stability of systems, while positive feedback is important in accounting for escalating patterns of system change (Maruyama, 1963). Grant and Humphries (2006) thus advise integrating critical theory with AI.

Another criticism lodged at AI is its systematic underestimation of the constraints that power and hierarchy, access (or lack of access) to resources, and resistance to change can have on the AI process and its outcomes (Koster-Kooger, 2016). Despite the egalitarian and participative nature of AI, these constraints may affect dialogue and AI's change potential. These potential limitations are particularly concerning given AI's emphases on creating dialogue among different perspectives and avoiding the imposition of one view of reality on participants who may have a different opinion or perspective (van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Dematteo and Reeves (2011) additionally found in their research that the AI process can overlook some structural factors within organizations that ultimately limit the ability to secure meaningful and lasting change. In particular, they warned of the potential for insufficient critical analysis of the broader social, economic, and political context to "implicitly support the current organizational structure and functioning" (p. 204).

A final criticism regarding the AI method is the common lack of competence among its facilitators. In particular, Bushe (2013b) asserted that AI practitioners often are blinded by positivity and overemphasize the focus on a system's positive core, failing to understand "the importance of *generativity* [author's emphasis] as an input and outcome of AI" (p. 90). Bushe elaborated that generativity requires conversations that challenge the organization's status quo. Such conversations are sparked by generative questions that he states (a) are surprising, (b) touch people's hearts and spirits, (c) serve to build relationships among participants, and (d) force people to view reality a bit differently.

Thus, AI is inherently transformational. Moreover, when transformational change is not the need or objective, Bushe and Kassam (2005) advise selecting an intervention other than AI.

Criticisms also have been lodged at AI as a body of knowledge—namely, that it has been subjected to little self-reflection or critique as an action research method (Grant & Humphries, 2006). Messerschmidt (2008) found “an amazing lack of rigorous assessment of AI methodology or techniques” (p. 455). Rigorous outcome research related to AI interventions also is missing (Donnan & Shaked, 2010, p. 8). For example, although case studies exist, selection bias precludes generalizability of the findings (Makino, 2013). Moreover, neither the facilitator nor the study organization has an incentive to report on interventions that produce disappointing results. More broadly, there is a general lack of AI-related research (Makino, 2013), as AI functions more like an intervention than a research method (Reed, 2007). Cooperrider (2013) similarly noted this tendency and the subsequent failure to develop AI-related knowledge and theory.

Measuring the impact of appreciative inquiry. Lewin (1946) pointed out that that there must be some criteria for determining the relation between effort and achievement to judge whether “an action has led forward or backward” (p. 35). Because AI has been utilized and reported as being effective and transformative in many different aspects of organizational change and change management (Carter, 2006, p. 48), the basis for measuring the impact of AI will vary from situation to situation depending on the context and its application.

The key to measuring the impact of an AI process likely lies in determining the success of the implementation effort that follows. Regardless of the size and nature of the organization, Donnan and Shaked (2010) advised tracking the conversations that take

place, small improvements, visible and leading performance metrics, demonstrations of courage, the emergence of autonomous groups, changes in management behavior, different ways people are connecting to deliver outcomes, and the use and impact of appreciative approaches.

Early indicators of the success of an AI process include: “confidence, energy, hope, commitment, relationships, accountability, alignment, trust and empowerment” (Donnan & Shaked, 2010, p. 8). Although these can be difficult to measure, they can be “‘felt,’ ‘noticed,’ or captured in anecdotal stories” (p. 8). Tangible outcome measures tend to be lagging indicators and become apparent only with the passage of time. Donnan and Shaked suggest nurturing and supporting signs of success apparent in early indicators by

defining and implementing projects, allocating time and resources and making changes to leadership behaviors (e.g., letting go of control, keeping an honest dialogue with employees, working on the self, etc. are difficult to measure but can be “felt,” “noticed” or captured in anecdotal stories. (p. 8)

Van de Haar and Hosking (2004) have argued that traditional means of evaluating the impact of an intervention may not do justice to the long-term implications of AI. With a focus on statistical analysis of pre- and post-intervention measurements, such an approach can be characterized as “product evaluation” (p. 1028) and is, they argue, inconsistent with the principal AI assumptions. They make a case for “responsive evaluation” (p. 1029), an alternative concept more consistent with the principles of social constructionism that extends beyond the time-bound request to “show us the money” addressed by Donnan and Shaked (2010). This idea, if more fully developed, may in time demonstrate additional longer term benefits from the AI process through the ongoing impact of generative appreciative principles.

Summary. AI represents a valuable potential contribution to managerial and consulting practice by “identifying the power of possibility centric versus problem centric change strategies, forcing an examination of the impact of positive emotions on change processes, and offering generativity, instead of problem-solving, as a way to address social and organizational issues” (Bushe, 2013b, pp. 93–95). However, AI does not negate the requirements for effective leadership, resourcing, and skilled facilitation required in connection with any sophisticated change initiative. As Bushe (2007) says, “AI does not magically overcome poor sponsorship, poor communications, insensitive facilitation or un-addressed organizational politics” (p. 30).

Furthermore, AI theory and practice would benefit from continued research. Advancement is needed in both theory and empirical research to understand the power and potential contributions of AI, including potential benefits associated its integration with other organizational development interventions (Sorensen & Yaeger, 2004). Much of the current AI research focuses on “identifying moderating and mediating conditions that affect how AI is best done and under what conditions, opportunities and limitations” (Bushe, 2013b, p. 93). This study is intended to extend that research with the intention, as suggested by Reed (2007, p. 107), of contributing to knowledge and understanding in the areas of practice (how successful activities can be recognized and developed), theory (the way successful activities are conceptualized), and policy (ways successful activities can be supported and promoted) in a church context.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this study was to understand the contribution of an AI intervention to a Singles Ministry. Four research questions were examined:

1. To what extent, if any, did participants think the AI intervention helped to create a shared vision for the future of the Singles Ministry?
2. To what extent, if any, did participants think the AI intervention helped to identify opportunities for future Singles Ministry approaches?
3. To what extent, if any, did participants feel able to implement provocative propositions (action statements) developed during the AI intervention?
4. What factors, if any, did participants identify as being most helpful in supporting efforts to implement provocative propositions (action statements) developed during the AI intervention?

This chapter describes the methods used in the study. The research design is described first, followed by a discussion of participant selection, ethical considerations, the researcher's role, the AI intervention, and data collection and analysis procedures.

Research Design

This study used an action research design. Action research is a collaborative approach to investigation that seeks to engage subjects in the research process and provide a basis for “enacting local, action-oriented approaches to inquiry” (Stringer, 2014, p. 14). Its ultimate objective is to advance theory and practice by generating understanding of broader organizational dynamics while helping to improve specific situations (Buono, 2013).

Participant Selection

AI is based on the proposition that the best results come from a whole-system participative effort. This means identifying and involving stakeholders with a vested

interest in or a strong impact on the organization's future who can supply valuable insights into the area of AI (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

At the time of this study, membership of the Singles Ministry totaled 66 members (46 were women, 20 men), according to the Church's database (D. Kim, personal communication, March 9, 2017). All members of the Singles Ministry were invited to participate in the study. Invitations also were extended to other ministry stakeholders, including Church staff who work with the ministry, members of the Church's Marrieds and Family ministry who serve as mentors and counselors to members of the Singles Ministry, and former members of the ministry who are now married. A total of 19 individuals participated on Day 1, and 15 individuals participated on Day 2 (see Table 6). Altogether, there were 23 participants.

Table 6

AI Intervention Demographics

	Day 1			Day 2		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Member of Singles Ministry	3	11	14	2	8	10
Church staff	2	0	2	2	0	2
Mentors and counselors	1	1	2	1	1	2
Former member now married	0	1	1	0	1	1
Totals	6	13	19	5	9	15

Ethical Considerations

It has been the researcher's intent that all research involving human participants be conducted in accordance with accepted ethical, federal, and professional standards for research. The researcher's approach included disclosure to all participants of the purpose of the study, risks, and benefits associated with participation. Participants also were notified that any consent was not open-ended and could be withheld at any time, and that

confidentiality obligations were the responsibility of everyone participating in the research.

The researcher completed the Human Subjects Training Course sponsored by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative. Institutional approval to conduct the proposed research study was obtained through Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board on February 10, 2017. The Board determined that the research was exempt from its oversight, consistent with federal regulations.

Participation in the study was voluntary in that participants were volunteers and had the right to discontinue their involvement at any time without risk or penalty. Data collected in connection with the research was obtained confidentially. Reed (2007) noted that the two most important ethical issues in relation to AI are consent and confidentiality. *Consent* largely refers to the steps taken to inform people who agree to participate in a study about the risks, benefits, and nature of participation. *Confidentiality* relates to the idea that details about participants remain private, and that details that can identify individuals are not disclosed to anyone outside the study.

The survey data were not identifiable, and the researcher reported only aggregate data. Raw survey data were kept confidential and stored securely in a locked storage space in the researcher's office. The data will be retained for 3 years, after which time they will be destroyed. An abstract of the study results was provided to participants who requested it.

Informed consent from participants was attained immediately before the intervention took place. A copy of the information sheet was included in the AI guide (see Appendix A) for each subject to keep. This sheet described the study, the terms of participation and participant rights.

The Researcher's Role

A challenge in developing an AI approach for any given situation is finding a method “that will reveal the situation as it is and not one framed by the method,” where the inquiry is “neutral” and does not represent an “embedded pathway leading to an assured outcome” (Stowell, 2012, p. 16). A key part of accomplishing this objective is developing an approach where the “influence of the researcher and the method has the minimum impact on the outcome” (p. 16).

Having established that the researcher and the research method should not have undue influence, it should be understood that the premise of AI is that engagement between the researcher and the research participants is a fundamental part of the process. Indeed, AI has been described as a “relational and collaborative endeavor,” where the researcher and participants become “co-researchers and change makers in the process” (Bodiford & Camargo-Borges, 2014, p. 9).

In traditional (often quantitative) research models, researcher influence is viewed as “contamination” to be avoided or minimized (Reed, 2007, p. 69). In contrast, in AI research models, researchers are intended and acknowledged as having an effect on the study organization. Rather than conducting clinical observation, the AI researcher engages in “transformational social science,” wherein the researcher’s role is to facilitate change (Reason & Torbert, 2001). Reed (2007) described the resulting dynamic as follows:

The experience of AI shifts power dynamics through the simultaneous construction of data and meaning by participants and consultants. Meaning is created in the language and imagery of the participants, rather than being converted into statistics or other forms that require external interpretation. The process taps the collective wisdom, vision, and excellence already inherent in the group, and has the potential to resolve significant organizational problems as a

byproduct. Every voice is recognized and included. It is an approach that can liberate tremendous creativity. (p. 37)

The aim of this AI intervention was to liberate creativity through a participant selection process intended to engage diverse stakeholders in the Singles Ministry using a design that emphasized participant input. This was significant because some intervention participants may not have previously had a prominent voice in its leadership.

Appreciative Inquiry Intervention

The AI intervention was structured based on the 4-D cycle (see Chapter 2). Church-oriented AI interventions by Cooperrider (2003) and Ditzler (n.d.) were useful resources for designing the AI intervention, as were interventions by Boyle (2009) and Maegli (2014) on different topics. The following sections describe the initial step of selecting an appreciative topic and then conducting the four stages of the AI process.

Appreciative topic. A fundamental starting point for any AI intervention is to choose the subject of the intervention. Barrett and Fry (2005) explain that identifying a focus that is (a) of high interest to those leading the organization and (b) compelling to stakeholders is critical to designing a successful intervention.

Therefore, the first step of the intervention involved initial contracting with the Church's lead evangelist and the elder with oversight responsibility for the Church. They identified optimizing the future of the Church's Singles Ministry as a topic of particular interest. A planning committee of five lay leaders in the Singles Ministry then confirmed this topic was a priority for members of the Singles Ministry. The overall theme chosen for the AI intervention was "South Bay Singles: Visions for an Extraordinary Future." Selecting an appreciative topic occurred over the course of several discussions held July 2016-October 2016.

Intervention timing and schedule. The AI intervention was conducted on the premises of St. Peter's by the Sea Presbyterian Church in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, on February 24–25, 2017. The intervention began at 6:45 pm on Friday night and ended at 3:30 pm on Saturday. Three meals were served to participants.

The Friday evening meeting began with a brief introduction to the AI intervention (Appendix B), a review of the Informed Consent Information Sheet, and a short video introduction of AI (Kelm, 2011). The AI intervention then commenced. The total time commitment of participants was 9 hours, including meals and completing the survey. Table 7 presents the detailed agenda. The following sections describe the phases of the AI intervention in detail.

Discovery. Discovery was conducted in two phases—conducting interviews and generating themes. These steps are discussed in the following sections.

Conducting interviews. Participants were encouraged to partner with an individual with whom they were less connected than others in the room. They were then instructed to conduct discovery interviews using the AI Guide (see Appendix A) participants received at registration. Interview questions focused on strengths of the interviewee, strengths that were special or distinctive to the Singles Ministry, and images of an exceptional future for the Singles Ministry. The AI Guide also contained interview instructions and tips, as well as a page for writing interview notes. The researcher informed interview partners that each person would have 20 minutes to interview his or her partner. Participants were advised that they would be asked to share interview results with the entire group, and each interviewee should be careful to notify the interviewer of any information he or she wanted to remain confidential during any subsequent group sharing or conversations.

Table 7

Intervention Agenda

Timing	Activity	Stage
Day 1: Friday, February 24, 2017		
6:45	Registration, dinner, and fellowship	
7:30	Welcome and getting started	
8:00	Appreciative interviews (pairs)	Discover
8:40	Share stories, identify common themes (groups)	Discover
9:20	Post themes	Discover
9:30	Adjourn	
Day 2: Saturday, February 25, 2017		
8:45	Breakfast and fellowship	
9:30	Sharing (small group reports) and prioritizing themes	Discover
10:15	Create visual images	Dream
11:00	Break	
11:15	Create provocative propositions/action statements	Dream
12:00	Lunch	
12:45	Sharing images and propositions/statements	Dream
1:15	Making the vision reality	Design
1:45	Innovate next steps	Destiny
2:15	Closing circle	Destiny
2:45	Survey	
3:00	Adjourn	

Determining themes. After the discovery interviews had been completed, participants formed small groups consisting of two or three partnerships (yielding 4–6 participants in each group). Four groups were formed: two with six members, and two with four members. These groups were asked to assign roles to group members (discussion leader, timekeeper, recorder, and reporter) as outlined in the AI Guide. The researcher described the purpose of this portion of the meeting, which was sharing interview results and identifying common themes. Each interviewer reported a summary of his or her partner’s interview to the group. Group members were asked to take note of themes from the individual interviews with particular consideration to what they found to

be important, significant, or original from their own perspective in each of the stories, as outlined in the AI Guide.

Each group then identified which of its themes it believed represented the most important factors for an exceptional South Bay Church Singles Ministry. After identifying the top 3–5 themes, each of the four groups wrote these on a piece of easel pad paper at their table and posted their themes on a section of the meeting room wall designated as the “gallery.”

Friday night ended with a process in which all participants gathered in a circle and each shared a word to describe how he or she was feeling. The planned activities ended with a prayer, and the intervention adjourned until Saturday morning.

Saturday morning, after the overall group reconvened, each small group shared its findings from the previous night, and the overall group prioritized themes per the instructions in the AI Guide. To do so, each small group first reported out its written theme sheet, which was created and then posted in the gallery the previous evening.

Each individual then received three dot stickers. Participants examined the charts in the gallery and placed the red dots next to the theme or themes they would most like to have as part of an exceptional Singles Ministry. This multi-voting technique provided a visual display of the overall group’s interest in each theme.

The researcher facilitated a group discussion about the four themes receiving the most votes. The overall group reached a consensus concerning how the themes could be consolidated. New groups were formed around each of the four themes (one group per theme), and each participant choose the small group that corresponded to the theme that most interested him or her.

Dream. Each group sat at its own table. The groups were instructed to discuss the significance of the various themes and then, as creatively as possible and using those themes most important to them, create a visual image of an exceptional Singles Ministry. The visions were recorded on pieces of easel paper. The groups were then asked to write a provocative proposition/action statement that converted their visual images into words. Recommended processes for creating the visual image and writing the provocative proposition/action statement were included in the AI Guide, along with samples of provocative propositions/action statements from other organizations. Each small group then presented its visual image and provocative proposition/action statement to the entire group.

Design. The groups were asked to decide what they considered the top four or five best ideas for the Singles Ministry to pursue, and to recommend first steps to make these priorities happen. Based on the envisioned changes, each group wrote an imaginary headline about the Singles Ministry that would appear in the community newspaper 5 years in the future. Each group summarized its results on easel paper and designated a spokesperson to present the results to the entire group.

Destiny. The overall group reconvened in a circle. Each small group presented its results from the design phase. The researcher explained that the intent of the weekend was not to develop a detailed plan for the ministry but to envision the ministry and rediscover God's calling based on fresh thinking. He said the success of the process going forward would be a function of (a) participants' ongoing commitment to the principles of positive thinking and AI and (b) continued development of the ideas developed during the weekend. The researcher led a discussion about a few key follow-up items from the weekend and invited individuals to take leadership roles for each idea.

The intervention ended with a simple team development exercise. Each participant in attendance shared a step he or she planned that would have the biggest impact in bringing exciting changes ideas from the weekend to life for the Singles Ministry. The Church leader then led the assembled group in prayer.

Data Collection

Study data were collected using a survey (see Appendix C) administered immediately after the end of the AI intervention. The survey consisted of 19 items related to six subject areas:

1. New opportunities (1 item): Item 1 asked the participant to identify the opportunities, if any, that emerged from the event. This question was asked to help answer Research Question 2 of this study.
2. Shared vision (1 item): Item 2 asked participants to report the extent to which they agreed that the AI intervention helped create a shared vision for the Singles Ministry. Answer choices ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” This question was asked to help answer Research Question 1 of this study.
3. Interest in the idea(s) (1 item): Item 3a asked participants to list the provocative propositions/action statements they were most interested in working on or supporting during the next 3 months. This question was asked to help answer Research Question 2 of this study.
4. Likelihood of implementation (1 item): Item 3b asked how likely participants were to implement the ideas in which they had expressed the greatest interest, with answers ranging from “not likely” to “extremely likely.” This question was asked to help answer Research Question 3 of this study.
5. Impact on personal knowledge and engagement (7 items): Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which the AI intervention increased their knowledge of and engagement with the Singles Ministry in seven areas, including knowledge about the Singles Ministry and positive beliefs about the Singles Ministry. Answer choices ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” This question was asked to help answer Research Question 3 of this study.
6. Important personal support factors (7 items): Item 5 asked how important the various seven specific factors would be in supporting the participant’s efforts to implement ideas from the AI intervention. These factors included church leaders’ support of efforts to implement the ideas and the extent to which the

participant would be recognized or rewarded if successful in applying the idea. This question was asked to help answer Research Question 4 of this study.

The survey contained a closing question regarding whether participants wanted to make additional comments to clarify their survey responses or describe their experiences with the AI intervention.

Data Analysis

Results and themes emerging from the AI intervention were reported back to participants periodically as the intervention process progressed. Following completion of the AI intervention, survey data were analyzed by the researcher using content analysis, a technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics within the text (Stone, Dunphy, Smith, & Ogilvie, 1966). Analysis of the data followed a simplified version of the general steps of qualitative data analysis described by Creswell (2014), including reading through the data, organizing the data into discrete chunks or segments of text before attempting to bring meaning to them, and then interpreting the meaning of the themes that emerge.

The objective was to identify and describe patterns and themes from participants' perspectives, with major ideas that surfaced being chronicled (Creswell, 2014, p. 210). Content analysis of survey results involved identification of recurring themes with a particular focus on the frequency of their incidence. The researcher actively incorporated a validity strategy to determine the accuracy of the resulting themes using member checking. This validation strategy involved sharing the final themes with participants to determine whether they believed the themes were accurate.

Summary

This chapter described the methods used in the study. The research design was described first, followed by participant selection, ethical considerations, the researcher's role, the AI intervention, and data collection and analysis procedures. The next chapter reports the results of the AI intervention and survey.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to understand the contribution of an AI intervention to a Singles Ministry. Four research questions were examined:

1. To what extent, if any, did participants think the AI intervention helped to create a shared vision for the future of the Singles Ministry?
2. To what extent, if any, did participants think the AI intervention helped to identify opportunities for future Singles Ministry approaches?
3. To what extent, if any, did participants feel able to implement provocative propositions developed during the AI intervention?
4. What factors, if any, did participants identify as being most helpful in supporting efforts to implement provocative propositions developed during the AI intervention?

This chapter presents the results of the study. Findings from the AI intervention are presented first, followed by results from a participant survey after completion of the AI intervention.

Intervention

This section reports the data that emerged from the AI intervention for each of the four phases.

Discovery. Table 8 presents the themes the groups identified as being the most important factors for an exceptional Singles Ministry that emerged from interviews.

Table 8

Discovery Themes

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3		Group 4	
<p><i>Deep/Connected Relationships</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optional groups (stages of life) <p><i>Thriving Leadership</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing numbers • More faithful • Vibrant male leaders <p><i>Serving Atmosphere</i></p>	<p><i>Diversity</i></p> <p><i>Accountability</i></p> <p><i>Engagement Relationships</i></p>	<p><i>Family</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity • Unity • Community • Traditions • Authentic relationships • Building memories • Real • Approachable • Addictive <p><i>Visibly Immersed</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • Happening spots • Contagious enjoyment • Vulnerable • Approachable <p><i>Leaders!</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surplus • Trailblazers • Entrepreneurs • Strong character • Authentic and vulnerable <p><i>Serving</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big/strong households • Trusting • Welcoming • Warm • Appreciative • Fun • Raw • Vulnerable • Road trips <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addictive • Community service • Magnetic energy • Adventurous • Light <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constantly training • Thriving • Creating atmosphere • Refreshment • Draw out others 	<p><i>Sense of Community</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe haven <p><i>Dedication to Serving</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative ways to serve <p><i>Diversity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnicity • Life experiences • Gender <p><i>Visionary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy • Progressive thinking (spiritually) <p><i>“Teamwork makes the dream work.”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evangelism (light of the world) • Using God-given gifts to serve • Culture • Age • Progressive thinking (spiritually)

Table 9 summarizes the multi-voting results. Leaders! (encompassing the concepts like “trailblazers,” “entrepreneurs,” “strong character,” and “authentic and vulnerable”), and Family (encompassing the concepts like “diversity,” “unity,” “community,” “traditions,” and “authentic relationships) received the greatest number of votes.

Table 9

Results of Multi-voting process

Theme	Total Votes
Leaders!	8
Family	8
Relationships	4
Thriving leadership	3
Engagement	3
Sense of community	3
Dedication to serving	3
Visionary	3
Serving atmosphere	2
Visibly immersed	2
Deep/connected relationships	1
Diversity	1

After the multi-voting process, the researcher worked with the participants to identify the top themes evident in the voting data that were most important to be present in the Singles Ministry. Recognizing some overlap among the themes in the multi-voting process, the overall group agreed on the following top themes:

- Family/Relationship/Community/Diversity
- Leader (Leadership)
- Serving
- Visionary

Dream. Four new groups convened based on the four themes that emerged from the Discovery process. Participants self-selected which of these new groups to join based on which of the themes most energized them. Each group was invited to create a visual image and provocative proposition for what an exceptional Singles Ministry would look like based on guidelines in the AI Guide.

The participants who identified Family/Relationship/Community/Diversity as the most important theme to them as individuals described the future Singles Ministry as follows: “The South Bay Singles Ministry is an ever-growing family, connected to our community. We are building deep relationships that transcend barriers through diversity. This group’s vision is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1

Vision Created by “Family/Relationship/Community/Diversity” Group

The Leader theme group described the future Singles Ministry as follows: “We have an abundance of leaders who inspire & energize the singles ministry by helping

them to realize their strengths & gifts and who are ready & willing to go wherever GOD calls them.” This group’s vision is presented in Figure 2.



Figure 2

Vision Created by “Leader” Group

The Serving theme group described the future Singles Ministry as follows:

Serving in the South Bay Singles is sacrificing time and really looking to make a difference in the world, big or small. There is satisfaction for the soul, a warm encouraging feeling to be able to encourage others. South Bay Singles serve in a way that is pleasing to GOD.

We are simplifying serving opportunities by organizing and structuring works of service.

We have dedicated leaders taking ownership of specific areas such as event calendars, announcements, advertisements through social media, recruiting individuals with specific gifts.

A) Serving leadership team

B) Workshops/training

C) FUN-raising events to gather resources

This group's vision is presented in Figure 3.



Figure 3

Vision Created by “Serving” Group

The Visionary theme group described the future Singles Ministry as follows:

We, as the Southbay Church Singles Ministry, are committed to God, one another, and those in our communities. We are empowering & enriching people's lives by being visionaries with outward & forward thinking commitment. Being the change we want to be by pursuing excellence in . . .

- Life choices
- Career
- Spiritual
- Purposeful leadership
- Utilizing our God-given talents
- Impacting local communities
- Reaching other singles
- Achieve participation

By actively cultivating this progressive force ultimately allows us to embrace a purpose bigger than our own—God’s purpose.

This group’s vision is presented in Figure 4.



Figure 4

Vision Created by “Visionary” Group

Design. Following the development and presentation of visual images and provocative propositions in the Dream stage, the Design phase began. The same small theme-based groups reconvened to identify a limited number of priority ideas for the Singles Ministry to pursue in the near future, and first steps to make them happen. Each of the four groups, in turn, summarized its findings on easel paper. Those findings concerning priority ideas and related steps are summarized below in Table 10 (Note: it should be understood that Group 1 intended the same steps to apply to each of its four ideas, whereas Groups 2–4 created distinct steps for each of their three to four ideas).

Table 10

Small Group Designs

Group	Idea 1	Idea 2	Idea 3	Idea 4
1	Ideas: 1. Share the vision with the entire singles ministry 2. Encouragement ministry 3. Community Service 4. Reach-activity committee		Steps (applied to all ideas): First step → making singles aware of the vision for leadership Second step → identifying people who caught a personal vision Third step → follow-up and develop a plan of action	
2	1. Diversity is Strength ●Family, creating culture ●Celebrating monthly culture theme	2. Surplus of Leaders ●Recruiting, training, and mentoring by example ●Have an understudy to training informally	3. Serving/Planning ●Serving/leadership team ●Workshops to identify gifts	4. Visionary Dreams ●Focus on priorities, goal-oriented ●Realistic milestones, baby steps ●Brainstorm ideas
3	1. Family (Leadership) ●Opportunities: micro v. macro ●Training ●Structure ●Reflection ●Affirmation ●Delegation ●Awareness ●Time management	2. Diversity (Strength Finder) ●Embrace differences ●Celebrating inclusion ●Share faith and experiences	3. Engagement ●Consistency ●Accountability ●Vulnerability ●Nurture ●Connection to the “world”	4. Serving ●Outreach ●Partnerships ●Visual presence ●Awareness

Group	Idea 1	Idea 2	Idea 3	Idea 4
4	<p>1. Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● generate core leadership team ● generate a survey to expose individual talents ● communicate survey results ● determine action items and application ● generate the classifications and expectations ● pair talents with the classifications and expectations 	<p>2. Transcending Barriers/Maximizing Diversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● public immersion-taking our diversity to our communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦fun-outside activities ◦public service projects/classifications/team ◦group photos-posted to social media ● private immersion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦getting people in our homes and lives ◦the picture is worth a 1000 words ◦ability to see authentic relationships ◦hospitality, food, fun, friends, movie night, game night 	<p>3. Our family first</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● strengthen from within before we go out (Galatians 6:10) ◦serving one another with the talents God has blessed us with and the life experiences we encountered ◦fellowship first, recommitting to one another, discipling, elevate midweeks, Friday/Saturday nights ◦building memories—time together ◦finding and fulfilling one another’s needs 	

Based on their envisioned changes, each group also drafted an imaginary future newspaper headline for the community in which the Singles Ministry operates based on their vision for the ministry. These read as follows:

Southbay singles creating family while being single: Singles Ministry

“South Bay Church Everyday”: making waves that bring the community together

Southbay Singles Have Transcended All Barriers

Singles Ministry dedicated to leading, serving and building communities in need~*LA Times*, January 1, 2022

The Design phase ended with a group process in which a spokesperson for each group summarized the findings regarding actions and steps and headline for the overall group.

Destiny. Participants identified six key follow-up actions to carry out after the intervention:

- Determine next steps for this group/ownership of other ideas from this event
- Message out (including potential testimony in church)
- Singles app/branding
- Singles vision/reach out workshop with overall ministry
- Meeting notes out to participants by March 3rd
- Ongoing organizational support to singles

These actions relate to the broad themes of identifying the individuals responsible for each area, communicating the results of the intervention to the larger Singles Ministry and Church, and building on and supporting the momentum created by the intervention.

Survey Results

This section reports the survey results. Findings are reported by research question.

Creation of shared vision. Participants were asked to report the extent to which they agreed that the AI intervention helped to create a shared vision for the future of the Singles Ministry. Analysis of the responses indicated that 13 of 14 respondents (93%)

strongly agreed with this proposition (see Table 11). One respondent's response indicated strong disagreement with this assessment. Notably, this reaction was inconsistent with other data reported by the same respondent, who stated, "Loved the workshop . . . Felt/caught a vision for the singles ministry."

Table 11

Creation of Shared Vision

Response	n	%
Strongly Disagree	1	7%
Disagree	0	0%
Neutral	0	0%
Agree	0	0%
Strongly Agree	13	93%

N = 14

Identification of opportunities. Participants were asked to identify new opportunities, if any, that emerged from the AI intervention. Analysis of the responses indicated four major areas of perceived opportunity (See Table 12). By a factor of two, the most commonly cited opportunity was strengthening leadership and planning in the ministry (*n* = 12). This area of opportunity included growth in leadership, identification of related gifts of ministry members, and providing related training. One participant suggested that a focus on leadership would enhance member engagement. Another said, "Any single can be a leader." Another related these ideas to a commitment to "engage and organize to realize the new vision for the ministry."

The second most commonly cited opportunity was creating a sense of family among members (*n* = 6). This area of opportunity included "embracing diversity" and "creating deeper meaningful relationships" through "shared experiences."

Clarifying an overall vision for the ministry was another common theme (n = 5). One participant called this the opportunity to “be inspired, energized and prioritize/develop areas of focus and vision.”

The fourth and final most commonly mentioned opportunity was strengthening community service (n = 3), including “new ways to reach out to the lost.”

Table 12

New Opportunities Identified

Opportunity	n	%
Strengthening leadership in the ministry	12	86%
Creating a sense of family among members	6	43%
Clarifying the ministry’s vision	5	36%
Strengthening community service	3	21%

N = 14

Ability to implement provocative propositions. Participants were asked to list the provocative propositions from the AI intervention, if any, they were most interested in working on or supporting during the next 3 months. Analysis of the responses indicated four primary areas of interest (see Table 13). The most commonly cited opportunity was developing stronger leadership in the ministry (n = 11). One participant described this as, “We have an abundance of leaders who inspire and energize the singles ministry, and are really willing to go wherever God calls them.”

The second most commonly cited opportunity was creating a sense of family among members (n = 8). This area of interest included “embracing diversity” and “creating deeper meaningful relationships” through “shared experiences.” One response along these lines was, “Strengthening our ministry from within, building a ministry that is family-oriented, close, real, and authentic.”

Many of the replies incorporated one or more of the four themes. One response related to the idea of increasing community service (n = 5) and referenced leadership development (n = 11), describing a “Singles ministry dedicated to leading, serving and building communities in need.” Similarly, replies focused on aligning with God’s purpose (n = 3) were reflected in comments that included, “grow the family of believers,” “engage in a higher purpose-God’s purpose” and “serving, visionary.”

Table 13

Areas of Interest for Action and Support

Area of Action and Support	n	%
Developing stronger leadership in the ministry	11	79%
Creating a sense of family among members	8	57%
Strengthening community service	5	36%
Vision aligned with God’s purpose	3	21%

N = 14

Participants also were asked how likely they were to implement the provocative propositions they identified as being most interesting to work on or support during the next 3 months. Analysis of the responses revealed that all respondents indicated they were either very likely (46%) or extremely likely (54%) to do so (see Table 14).

Table 14

Likelihood of Implementation

Response	n	%
Not likely—It will be very difficult given other work demands and interests	0	0%
Somewhat likely—I am not sure, but will think about it	0	0%
Very Likely—I will put it on my to-do list	6.5*	46%
Extremely Likely—I will start on it as soon as possible	7.5*	54%

N = 14; *One participant’s split vote was treated as a 50% vote for each of the options checked

There was virtually unanimous agreement that the AI intervention increased respondents’ connections with the Singles Ministry as reflected in the areas examined

(see Table 15). All 14 respondents reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that the AI intervention increased their connection with the Singles Ministry as reflected in six of the seven dimensions. For “Knowledge about the Singles Ministry,” 13 reported agreement or strong agreement, with one respondent reporting neutrality for that dimension. The two dimensions that received the highest ratings were motivation to be involved with the Singles Ministry and commitment to the Singles Ministry, each of which were rated “strongly agree” by 93% of respondents.

Table 15

Increase in Connection with Singles Ministry

Dimension	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Commitment to the Singles Ministry		1 (7%)	13 (93%)
Motivation to be involved with the Singles Ministry		1 (7%)	13 (93%)
Desire to learn more about the Singles Ministry		3 (21%)	11 (79%)
Positive beliefs about the Singles Ministry		3 (21%)	11 (79%)
Enthusiasm to work with others on Singles Ministry related activities		4 (29%)	10 (71%)
Motivation to discuss the Singles Ministry with others		5 (36%)	9 (64%)
Knowledge about the Singles Ministry	1 (7%)	5 (36%)	8 (57%)

N = 14; No participants indicated a “Strongly Disagree” or “Disagree” response

Factors that support implementation. Participants were asked to what extent seven different potential influences would be important in supporting their efforts to implement the provocative propositions from the AI intervention (see Table 16).

Five of the seven potential influences were rated as important or very important in supporting their efforts by a majority of respondents. The importance of leadership support is particularly noteworthy, given the emergence of leadership as a theme in the Discovery process. Eight respondents (57%) indicated that recognition and rewards for their results were not important. Sufficient financial resources also were not important to

21% of respondents. It is possible that these two low-ranking items were important, but not as influential the other considerations.

Table 16

Important Potential Influences Supporting Implementation

Potential Influence	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Neutral	Important	Very Important
My excitement about the potential			1(7%)	2(14%)	11(79%)
Leaders' support of my efforts			1(7%)	3(21%)	10(71%)
Others with whom I can work		1(7%)		3(21%)	10(71%)
Ability to allocate my time			1(7%)	5(36%)	8(57%)
Knowledge and skills for me to contribute		3(21%)	1(7%)	4(29%)	6(43%)
Sufficient financial resources*	3(21%)	4(29%)	3(21%)	4(29%)	
Recognition and rewards for my results	8(57%)	2(14%)	1(7%)	2(14%)	1(7%)

N = 14; *One respondent commented, "There are ways to implement without money but the availability of resources is also welcomed."

Additional comments. Post-survey respondents were asked for any additional comments to clarify their survey answers or describe their experience with the AI intervention. Nine of the 14 post-survey respondents provided additional comments. Analysis of their responses revealed three key themes (see Table 17).

The most frequently reported theme (*n* = 6) was that that the AI intervention created value for the ministry. Among the related benefits cited were the diversity of the participants, the positive focus, and the opportunity to think proactively about ideas to help the ministry.

Another theme (*n* = 3) cited in the survey results was the inspiration the AI intervention provided for participants to become more involved with the Singles Ministry

and to “be part of the change.” Three survey respondents also cited the need to sustain the momentum created by the AI intervention, including staying “energized and refreshed and engaged in implementing and moving the ideas and actions forward.”

Table 17

Additional Comments from Survey Respondents

Themes	n	%
Created value for Singles Ministry	6	43%
Inspired greater member involvement	3	21%
Need to sustain momentum created by appreciate inquiry intervention	3	21%

N = 14

Summary

This chapter reported the results of the study. The next chapter outlines the study conclusions. Study limitations, suggestions for further research, recommendations for church leaders and organizational development consultants with whom they work also are included.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the contribution of an AI intervention to a church ministry. Four research questions were examined:

1. To what extent, if any, did participants think the AI intervention helped to create a shared vision for the future of the Singles Ministry?
2. To what extent, if any, did participants think the AI intervention helped to identify opportunities for future Singles Ministry approaches?
3. To what extent, if any, did participants feel able to implement provocative propositions developed during the AI intervention?
4. What factors, if any, did participants identify as being most helpful in supporting efforts to implement provocative propositions developed during the AI intervention?

This chapter presents a discussion of the study results. Conclusions are presented first, followed by recommendations, study limitations, and suggestions for further research. The chapter closes with a summary.

Conclusions

Ability to create a shared vision for the future. With one exception, all survey respondents strongly agreed that the AI intervention helped them create a shared vision for the future of the Singles Ministry. The process was described as involving “opportunities to be inspired, energized, and prioritize/develop areas of focus and vision.”

As expected, these findings are consistent with Hamel (2014), who described AI as a process that can help a congregation “dream new dreams, and . . . see new visions” (p. 61). In an era when churches (like other organizations) are challenged with adapting to disruptive environmental change, these results appear to validate White’s (2012) assertion that AI can be useful for a congregation in that it allows the collaborative

identification of current strengths and the articulation of opportunities for change and growth.

The present study findings are also consistent with a variety of accounts that credit AI with releasing substantial amounts of positive energy among participants (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, 2001) and “generat[ing] a lot of hope and high energy as well as aspiration for change” (Donnan & Shaked, 2010, p. 5). It follows that churches looking for an alternative to traditional problem-based approaches to organizational transformation may want to consider the use of AI, with its future orientation and focus on an organization’s areas of strength and opportunity. However, it should be understood that this study is based early indicators that should be considered exploratory rather than definitive. As Donnan and Shaked point out, tangible outcomes typically are not evident until lagging indicators can measure them (e.g., 3–24 months post-intervention).

Ability to identify future opportunities. Survey respondents reported that they identified four areas of opportunity for the Singles Ministry as a result of the AI intervention: strengthening leadership, creating a sense of family among members, clarifying the Singles Ministry’s vision, and increasing community service. As expected, these results are consistent with Cwiklik (2006), who asserted that AI often results in creative collaboration which, in turn, opens new opportunities for participants. White (2012) similarly reported that AI could be useful for a congregation, given the collaborative identification of current strengths and the articulation of opportunities for change and growth. Based on these findings, it may be concluded that AI is an effective intervention for churches looking to identify opportunities for change. Bushe and Kassam (2005) add that AI is most likely to be useful when transformational change is the objective.

Again, these findings should not be considered definitive, as they are based on early indicators of the impact of the AI intervention. Lagging indicators are likely to produce additional perspectives. Also, it should be noted that participants in the AI intervention were not asked directly about how effective the process was for identifying opportunities, nor were they asked about ways of improving the process of identifying opportunities. These may be useful areas for future research.

Ability to implement provocative propositions. All respondents surveyed reported interest in working on or supporting opportunities for action during the 3 months following the AI intervention. One respondent indicated that the process “really inspired me to be more involved,” while another expressed that it “encouraged me to be a part of the change.” All participants indicated they were either very likely (i.e., “I will put it on my to-do list”) or extremely likely (i.e., “I will start on it as soon as possible”) to implement progress in areas of opportunity identified during the AI intervention.

Survey respondents also reported feeling more connected to the Singles Ministry as a result of the AI intervention, especially regarding their motivation to be involved, their commitment and their positive beliefs, and desire to learn more about the ministry.

These findings are consistent with Barrett and Fry’s (2005) assertion that AI encourages widespread participation in the design and implementation of the overall change by members of the system. Similarly, Edmonstone (2014) noted the potential of AI to “move beyond an over-concentration on problems and to engage with more growth-oriented and creative initiatives and opportunities” (p. 25).

It follows from these early indicators that churches may find that benefits associated with the use of AI may extend beyond the development of a vision and

identification of opportunities to include increased energy and commitment among involved members.

Most helpful factors for implementing provocative propositions. Survey respondents rated seven specific factors that could support their implementation of the ideas created during the AI intervention. Four factors, in particular, were considered important or very important by more than 90% of respondents: excitement about the potential, ability to allocate time, leaders' support of individual efforts and others with whom to work.

Several survey respondents additionally emphasized the importance of sustaining the momentum created by the AI intervention. One said, "I think it's very important to . . . stay energized and refreshed and engaged in implementing and moving the ideas and actions forward." Another said, "Regular follow-ups will be important . . . It's a continual growth process and everyone's input is totally necessary."

Based on these findings, leaders are advised to be intentional about their communications and leadership activities to promote the expected benefits from an AI intervention. For example, leaders should anticipate and plan for communication and leadership development support activities following an AI intervention.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the study organization. Blades (n.d.), a church leader with AI experience, reported that "the biggest challenge that . . . now lies before us is to keep the AI process and its storytelling values in front of the congregation until it becomes less a 'program' and more the fabric of our church's very culture" (p. 18).

Achieving this objective requires some actions, including four areas of follow-up actions identified by survey respondents:

1. Communicate results. To help sustain momentum from the AI intervention, an announcement about the AI intervention was included in a Church service in April 2017. Four study participants shared a brief explanation of AI, an overview of the Singles Ministry AI process and findings, and their personal experiences during the intervention. As of April 2017, the leadership of the Singles Ministry was planning a more detailed half-hour presentation regarding the AI intervention to be delivered to the entire Singles Ministry, including an announcement of a later meeting for all ministry members to discuss further action based on the results of the AI intervention. The importance of good communications about the AI philosophy and opportunities identified by the AI intervention is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.
2. Identify individuals responsible for the major leadership positions. The ultimate impact of an AI process is related to the quality of the implementation effort that follows. Leadership will be of particular importance in this regard. Donnan and Shaked (2010) recommend that leaders support the change associated with an AI intervention by defining and implementing projects, allocating time and resources, and making changes to leadership behaviors (e.g., letting go of control, keeping an honest dialogue with employees, working on the self). An initial approach for identifying key leaders is to form a core AI implementation team that focuses on communications and act as sponsors overseeing development of each of the four areas of opportunity identified during the AI intervention.
3. Build on and support momentum. Blades (n.d.) recommended that after an AI intervention, leaders should constantly reaffirm and highlight themes from the AI intervention, watch for innovative ideas that can be encouraged and nurtured, and emphasize the culture of appreciative storytelling and story hearing that lies at the core of AI. These actions help celebrate what is best about the organization and help reveal where opportunity lies. Blades said his church reinforces these approaches by scheduling a monthly presentation in church to reinforce AI values and report on the church's progress toward its appreciative objectives. After this presentation, members of the AI team invite people to tell stories of how the church has made a life-giving difference in their lives and to share their dreams for the future. Blades contends that churches make a big mistake when they drop an AI or similar visioning process as soon as the interviewing is over and the intended result is created. AI and its positive, forward-thinking approach to change can become part of the culture of an organization, useful for big issues and small. Along a similar line, Donnan and Shaked indicate that AI-related change can be further reinforced by “documenting and making progress visible to all, and celebrating successes by recognizing and rewarding the relevant teams and individuals” (p. 8).
4. Continue to utilize AI as a resource. From the start, David Cooperrider, the originator of AI, emphasized that AI was a philosophy and not a technique

(Bushe, 2011). Consistent with this perspective, the researcher advised participants in the AI intervention to remain committed to the principles of positive thinking and AI as well as to continue development of the ideas that emerged during the weekend (and any new ideas that may arise later). As an example, one Singles Ministry objective discussed during the AI intervention was to achieve a larger and more gender-balanced membership (currently, it is predominantly female). It could be beneficial to make this objective the focus of a future AI intervention. This future intervention might include single males who are not current members of the church or the Singles Ministry as an attempt to ascertain and incorporate their views and stir their desire to join. In the spirit of inquiry, it is also recommended that the Singles Ministry seek to identify and retain any additional learning that results from the AI intervention described here, including learning that may come from the remainder of the implementation of resulting ideas.

Recommendations for churches. The results of this study suggest that AI may be useful for a congregation interested in creating a shared vision and identifying related future opportunities. However, given the limitations of this study, AI may not be the best approach in all situations. Carter (2006) found that AI is not a panacea or cure-all. In evaluating AI as a potential tool for organizational change, the following perspectives should be useful:

1. Use for transformational change. Research suggests that AI is not as effective when incremental or gradual change is the objective (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). Bushe (2012) also suggested that AI has a greater impact when it helps a somewhat dysfunctional organization move toward functionality and is less effective when trying to shift a well-functioning organization toward extraordinary functionality.
2. Ensure leadership support of the change approach. Bushe (2013a) found that achieving the best results with AI requires widespread engagement by those who will ultimately implement change. In some organizations, this may require a pivot from a traditional, top-down leadership approach. Along similar lines, Koster-Kooger (2016) found that power and hierarchy, access (or lack of access) to resources, and resistance to change can reduce the potential of AI to effect change. Moreover, AI offers considerable potential benefits if managed well, underscoring the need for effective leadership, resourcing, and skilled facilitation. As Bushe (2007) explains, “AI does not magically overcome poor sponsorship, poor communications, insensitive facilitation or un-addressed organizational politics” (p. 30).

3. Support individual efforts to implement change. Survey results indicated that four factors were “most important” for implementation of the proposed change. These factors included excitement about the potential, ability to allocate personal time, leaders’ support of individual efforts, and others with whom to work. These findings suggest that leaders should be intentional about continuing to emphasize benefits associated with AI implementation work, regulating the related work so that it is not perceived as excessive, providing encouragement to individuals and teams involved in that work, and developing teams of like-minded people with which individuals can collaborate and connect. Several survey respondents additionally emphasized the importance of sustaining the momentum created by the AI intervention. One said, “I think it’s very important to . . . stay energized and refreshed and engaged in implementing and moving the ideas and actions forward.”

Limitations

A limitation of this study was the use of a small sample size. The survey following the end of the AI intervention involved 14 of the total of 23 participants. It is possible that inclusion of all participants would have resulted in differences in the overall data. Additionally, the survey respondents represented approximately 21% of the total reported membership of the Singles Ministry, and may not be representative of the perspectives of the overall membership. Future studies should include data collection from all or nearly all members of the system to generate more representative results.

Another limitation of this study was the short time frame, which prevented examination of tangible and longer term outcomes that become apparent only over time. Future studies should allow for the collection of post-intervention data at 6-, 12-, and 24-month intervals following the AI event.

Given that the researcher is a member of the church but not a member of the Singles Ministry, the possibility exists that some form of researcher or participant bias affected the study. Potential examples could have been the researcher asking leading questions or participants providing feedback consistent with what they believed the researcher, as a fellow Church member, wanted or expected to hear. Future studies could

include the use of an external facilitator and researcher to limit the amount of researcher and participant bias.

Suggestions for Further Research

A suggestion for further research related to the study organization would be to expand on the current study with a larger sample size—ideally, with the entire Singles Ministry membership. The benefits of such a study would be to generate results representative of the entire membership and to include and motivate the entire group to participate in bringing the vision to fruition.

Similarly, this study could be expanded to encompass a larger sample size and a broader range of congregations and ministries to allow for richer qualitative data and more comprehensive statistics to better understand the impact of AI on congregations.

Research on the use of AI in congregations also would benefit from a further focus on identifying AI best practices. This process could involve, for instance, obtaining feedback from participants about where they perceived the process to be most and least effective and where areas for improvement in future AI interventions may exist. Due to the importance of implementation in producing AI-related benefits, further research regarding approaches to maximizing the benefits of an AI intervention after its completion also would be useful.

Summary

The purpose of this action research study was to understand the contribution of an AI intervention to a church ministry. Twenty-three ministry stakeholders participated in a 9-hour, 2-day AI process. Immediate post-event survey results indicated participant agreement that the AI intervention created a shared vision for the ministry. Survey data were analyzed using content analysis to identify four areas of opportunity for ministry

growth and development. All participants expressed interest in supporting these opportunities for the following 3 months. Participants rated seven potential factors to support the implementation of opportunities. The study, which contains recommendations for the subject ministry and churches considering the use of AI, is intended to contribute to the continuing development of AI practice and theory for churches. AI principles, practices, and the results shared here are intended to be of value in planning AI interventions in other congregations.

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Appendix A: Appreciative Inquiry Guide

South Bay Church Singles *Visions for an Extraordinary Future*



An Appreciative Inquiry Workshop
February 24-25, 2017

“...forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus has called me heavenward” ~Philippians 3:13

“...if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, then think about these things” ~ Philippians 4:8

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will” ~Romans 12:2

“Congregations are where people come together, gathered by God to serve God’s intentions of renewing and redeeming the whole world in love... we must understand the underlying strengths of congregations that are most relevant to the enduring needs of our times. The precise way those strengths and needs intersect will constantly shift; and the precise activities, events, persons, and physical structures will shift with them. But if we understand our underlying strengths and move in faith toward our deepest sense of God’s hope, we can move in confidence” ~ Jimmy Carter, Sources of Strength

“See, I am doing a new thing...” ~ Isaiah 43:19

Workshop Objectives

- Envision a ministry centered in seeing and telling the “Good News” of the Gospels with the potential to transform lives
- Centered in God’s Spirit at work connecting us to Jesus Christ
- Rediscovering what God has called us to be in Christ, growing together in new, appreciative and creative ways

Themes From Planning Committee

- Seeking adventure and impact based on a close relationship with God
- A close and welcoming community committed to each other’s spiritual growth
- Unified with South Bay Church and its leadership
- Recognized as a “light” in our communities

Appreciative Inquiry Process

- **Discovery:** What gives life to our church, our church family and the church community—when we are most alive and vibrant as a church and ministry?
- **Dream:** What is our highest purpose – vision for our church? What are our most vivid images of the future? What is God calling us to be?
- **Design:** How will we do Christ’s work in the world as we have been called? Healthy transition—what does it look like? Small steps? Larger steps?
- **Destiny:** What actions will we commit to, to best move forward—to learn and grow and realize our higher and wider potentials?

[Consent form intentionally removed]

DISCOVER

FRIDAY

Appreciative Interviews (pairs) – 40 minutes ①

The first part of our process is *discovery* – asking questions to learn about the Singles Ministry at South Bay Church. We want to know what the Singles Ministry is like at its *best*, to what gives *life* to our ministry so we can do more of it. Everyone has an important view, regardless of how long they've been around the Singles Ministry. To gather this information, we will interview one another about our experiences.

1A. INTERVIEW INSTRUCTIONS AND TIPS

Instructions

- During the next 40 minutes, you and a partner will conduct appreciative interviews.
- Select someone who you don't know very well if possible
- Use whatever space you like. Please be back in this room at the time we indicate.

Tips

- Take a minute to read the questions on the following page. After you've thought about your own answer, you might be more relaxed and listen better to the other person.
- Take turns – each person should have about 20 minutes to speak. One person answers all the questions first, then switch roles so the other person can talk.
- Tell stories! Try to focus on one or two of your best experiences, something that demonstrates what you love most about the Singles Ministry. By describing in detail what was happening during a peak experience, we can gather better information about the life-giving forces in that situation.
- Be an active, curious listener. Show the other person you value their experience.
- Take notes on p. 7. Listen for great quotes and stories. You will need to explain highlights from the interview with others in a small group.
- Have fun!

1B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Distinctive strengths and special qualities: Every Church in today's dynamic times must change, transform and grow with God's radical call--constantly. But vibrant ministries also, in the midst of change, know how to preserve the "positive core" of their special qualities and enduring strengths.

1. **Strengths you bring:** *Without being too humble what strengths or best qualities do you bring to your church community? Please tell me about one example—one way that you have shared those strengths alone or in combination with others.*
2. **The South Bay Church singles ministry special or distinctive strengths:** When you think about your hopes and dreams for the future of this ministry, there are things you would want to see it keep and strengthen. What, in your view, are the 3 most important qualities or special strengths of this ministry—those precious qualities and practices from our past and present that you want us to keep and preserve, even as we move into a new and changing future?
3. **Images of an Exceptional Future:** Engaging in envisioning provides an opportunity to listen carefully to God's call and the call of our times. It is an opportunity to push the creative edges, to do new things, and to wonder and pray about our ministry's greatest potentials-- both internally as a church and externally in our ministry in the world.
 - a. Let's assume that tonight, after the meeting here, you go into a sound sleep and when you awaken it is five years into the future—the year is now 2022. While we were asleep many exceptional things happened—miracles happened-- and the singles ministry has become something you would most like to see for yourself and friends, for our church, for our community and for our world. Now you awaken. You go into the Singles Ministry of 2022 and you get a panoramic view. You are moved and proud in a heartfelt way. It's the kind of singles ministry and community you most want to be part of—one that is living God's call in fresh, vibrant, meaningful and powerful ways. So now, please share some highlights of what you see in this vision of 2010: *What do you see happening that is vital and good?* What is happening that is new, different, or better—things that "bring to life" our greatest potential.
 - b. What is it that most excites you about your vision of the singles ministry in 2022?

1C. INTERVIEW NOTES

Share stories and identify common themes (small groups) ② - 40 minutes

Stay with your partner and form groups of 4-6 (two to three pairs). Each small group manages its own discussion, data, time, and reports. Below are useful roles for self-managing this work. Divide up the work as you wish

2A. SMALL GROUP ROLES

- **DISCUSSION LEADER** – Assures that each person who wants to speak is heard within time available. Keeps group on track to finish on time.
- **TIMEKEEPER** – Keeps group aware of time left. Monitors report-outs and signals time remaining to person talking.
- **RECORDER** – Writes group's output on flip charts, using speaker's words. Asks person to restate long ideas briefly.
- **REPORTER** – Delivers report to large group in time allotted.

2B. IDENTIFYING THEMES

- First decide roles. The Reporter from your Themes activity below should be someone who will be attendance on Saturday morning when small groups are scheduled to share their themes with the entire group.
- Get newsprint and markers. One or more blank pieces for your notes; one page labeled "themes."
- For 10 minutes, go around the group asking each person to introduce their interview partner and share the highlights that they heard during the interview.
- As you go around, one person should be taking brief notes on newsprint –jotting down stories (and name of person), memorable quotes, wishes, etc. You may want to cluster responses around these headings: stories, values and wishes.
- Then, for 20 minutes, reflect and talk about what you heard. Try to identify themes that capture the positive core of the South Bay Church singles ministry, the elements that give life to the South Bay Church singles ministry, or the parts of our past that we want to carry forward into our future.
- Finally, in the last 10 minutes, pick your top 3 to 5 themes (and subthemes if they exist) and write them on easel paper labeled "Themes." (Be sufficiently descriptive to communicate the meaning to other groups).

2C. THEMES NOTES

Post themes ③ - 10 minutes

Post your sheet on the wall in the “Gallery” established for this purpose along with the sheets created by other small groups

SATURDAY**Sharing (small group reports) and prioritizing themes ④ - 45 minutes**

- The Reporter for each small group will briefly (2-3 minutes) summarize its themes posted in the Gallery.
- The whole group will then create a scatter-gram to identify the themes of highest energy.
- You will be given 3 “dots” to use on the lists of Themes listed on the charts displayed on the wall.
- Individually read the charts and decide on 1-3 of the themes that you personally feel you would MOST like to have as a part of an exceptional South Bay Church singles ministry. Place a dot (up to three) next to the theme(s) that you identify.

4A. MULTI-VOTING TECHNIQUE

When confronted with a number of good options, a multi-voting process helps to get a quick read of where a group has the highest energy. This method has the advantage of being quick and visual.

Be careful not to assume that the option with the most votes is, automatically, the preference of the group. The differences between 24 and 22 votes are not statistically significant, they simply show a roughly equal proportion of energy for those options. .

Source: Sure Fire Meetings, Valerie Uccellani, Global Learning Partners
globallearningpartners.com

DREAM

Create Visual images 5 - 45 minutes

- As a group, you will be creating a visual image of an exceptional South Bay Church singles ministry where the theme you consider important is fully present and fully expressed. You will be presenting your work to the whole group. (Your group can create a picture, create other images, “perform” an image, etc. Be as creative as you like!) Use materials at hand, and others you might discover.

5A. Why use a visual image?

Images are glue for ideas and concepts in the human brain. The act of creating an image taps into your creativity and demands the level of creativity necessary for the work in the Design phase, the work of co-creating the change within the organization. The conversations about the image are more important than the artistic quality of the visual.

5B. Recommended Process

- After gathering your small group, decide roles. (You don't need a recorder for this creative exercise.)
- Get your art materials, but don't use them yet.
- For about 15-20 minutes, reflect upon your chosen theme. Dialogue with each other about what this theme means for you.

Imagine the South Bay Church singles ministry if this theme were fully alive and realized. What would the singles ministry be like?

- Using the theme (and incorporating other themes as you wish), share your vision for the singles ministry's future.
- Once your group has come up with a vision, spend about 20-25 minutes creating it using your art supplies. You will be sharing this image with other groups.

Using the easel pad paper as your backdrop, illustrate your vision of the South Bay Church singles ministry when your theme is fully alive.

Create Provocative Propositions/Action Statements 6 - 45 minutes

- As a group, you will be creating a possibility statement, that converts your image into words. Review the guidelines and a few examples on the following pages. Write the provocative proposition on easel paper. Be prepared to present your statement to the whole group.
- Continue as the same group that created the image.
- Using your theme and creative image as guides, decide as a group how you will put your vision into words. Again, focus on:

Imagine the South Bay Church singles ministry if this theme were fully alive and realized. What would the singles ministry be like?

- Write your vision as a "Provocative Proposition."

6A. WRITING TIPS:

- ✓ Is it PROVOCATIVE— does it stretch, challenge, or interrupt the status quo?
- ✓ Is it GROUNDED—are there examples that illustrate the ideal as real possibility?
- ✓ Is it DESIRED – if it could be fully actualized, would we want it as a preferred future for St. Mary's?
- ✓ Is it stated in the AFFIRMATIVE and in bold terms?
- ✓ Does it provide GUIDANCE for St. Mary's future as a whole?
- ✓ Does it stimulate organizational and individual LEARNING?
- ✓ Is there BALANCE of continuity (the way things have been), novelty (something new), and transition (conversion between old and new)?
- Write your Provocative Proposition/Action Statement big and clear on one piece of easel paper
- One or two people from your group will share the creative image and Provocative Proposition/Action Statement with everyone else.

Remember: a provocative proposition/action statement is not a marketing slogan. It is a rich description of the South Bay Church singles ministry you will create.

6B. Overview of Provocative Propositions/Action Statements

A provocative proposition makes a bridge between the best of what is, and the vision of what could be. It is a positive description of a new future that challenges the status quo and inspires action. It is written in the present tense as if it describes the current reality.

As we create provocative propositions we clarify our shared vision of the future, we create a focus, a set of distinctive phrases that paint a picture of what this group imagines for its most desired future. This provides a clear and shared direction to guide activities.

Adapted from *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination*, Jane Watkins, Bernard Mohr, 2001

6C. Examples of Provocative Propositions/Action Statements

“To us, customer service means satisfying the internal customer. Purchasing is a service organization that must meet the requirements of all customers, whatever and however differently they might be from one to another.

“We encourage open communication with our customers and specifically ask them how we are doing. Our customers have a pleasant experience when they talk to us. We anticipate their needs and have the information available when they call. We work through the information in an uninterrupted sequence and they talk to only one person. The information we need to answer their questions is available to us with a touch of the finger. We devote time to learning more so we keep our expertise current. We do our best and know that our decisions are appreciated by others. We feel comfortable providing extraordinary service for our clients because we know that is why they choose us. We continually learn as we work. We feel the support of our other organizational members and are confident we all know extraordinary service is how we help people. Our business provides an important service to our customers. We are proud to be a part of this organization.”

Our company is poised for a positive future because partners at all regions share a basic common vision in relation to the firm's core missions, intent, and direction. It is an exciting, challenging, and meaningful direction that helps give all partners a feeling of significance, purpose, pride, and unity. The firm uses whatever time and resources are needed to bring everyone on board and thus continuously cultivates "the thrill of having a one firm feeling", of being a valued member of one outstanding national partnership.

"We have created an organization where everyone experiences themselves as owners of the business-- where everyone at all levels feels the organization is theirs to improve, change, and help become what it can potentially become. (Our company) recognizes there is a big difference between owners versus hired hands. Ownership at our company happens in three ways: (1) on an economic level it happens when everyone is a shareholder and shares in the profit; (2) on a psychological level it happens because people are authentically involved; and, (3) on a business level it happens when the "big picture" purpose is shared by all, and all take part at the strategic level of business planning."

"Walking into our facilities you can feel the energy.

a) We build upon each other's strengths.

b) We respond to the unpredictable with balance and passion. c) We nurture each other with challenge and understanding. d) We step out of defined roles to pursue the extraordinary. e) We seek places never imagined possible.

We build for the future while living in the present and being grounded in the past."

Source: OMEGA POINT INTERNATIONAL, Inc. info@omegapoint.net Adapted from training provided by The Taos Institute.

Sharing Images and Propositions/Statements 7 - 30 minutes

- Each small group presents its visual image and provocative proposition/action statement to the whole group.

Notes from discussion:

DESIGN

Making the vision reality ⑧ - 30 minutes

- Small groups will reconvene at four tables
- Groups will discuss all of the ideas they have just heard and how to integrate the best of the discussion
 - What are the top 4-5 specific ideas to pursue
 - What are the first steps to make each happen?
- Based on the change you envision, what will be the headline be for the community in which the South Bay Church singles ministry operates 5 years from now?
- Summarize your results on easel paper
- Designate a spokesperson to present your results to the entire group

8A. NOTE ON APPRECIATIVE OUTCOMES

In an Appreciative process, the most important thing to remember is that the plans are made and implemented by those who “are in the room” and engaged in the process. This ensures commitment and personal accountability for the future we have envisioned.

DESTINY

Innovate next steps ⑨ - 30 minutes

- Group reconvenes in circle
- Each group summarizes its results
- Opportunity for clarification and reconciliation of results

Closing circle ⑩ - 30 minutes

- Group remains in circle

Appendix B: Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry Intervention



SOUTH BAY CHURCH SINGLES: Visions for an Extraordinary Future

An Appreciative Inquiry Workshop

February 24–25, 2017

David Blenko, Kathy Blenko and May Roberts

A Faithful Approach to Reshaping the Future

- ◆ *“The church leaders wondered what else could possibly go wrong. Their conversations revolved around the problems they were facing, whose fault they were, and what steps they could take to solve the seemingly hopeless situation. It was so easy and natural to see what was wrong and be critical of themselves and others.” (Case study NOT involving South Bay Church)*
- ◆ Appreciative Inquiry invited them to consider a different way...

What is Appreciative Inquiry?

- ◆ To appreciate something is to value it.
- ◆ To inquire is to seek understanding by asking questions.
- ◆ Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a collaborative and highly participatory approach to seeking, identifying, and enhancing the life-giving forces present when an organization or system is at its best.

David Cooperrider

Spiritual Foundations of Appreciative Inquiry

- ◆ "...if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, then think about these things" ~ Philippians 4:8
- ◆ "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will" ~ Romans 12:2
- ◆ "See, I am doing a new thing..." ~ Isaiah 43:19

Appreciative Inquiry's Track Record with Churches

- ◆ Many books and articles
 - Renaissance: When Light Cuts Through the Haze (Staten)
 - Memories, Hopes and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change (Branson)
 - Discovering the Other: Asset-Based Approaches for Building Community Together (Harder)
 - Appreciative Inquiry in the Catholic Church (Paddock)

AI Involves a Shift and a Philosophy:

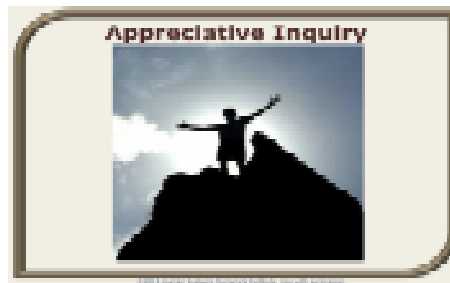
"No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world anew."

*"There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."
- Albert Einstein*

Objectives

- ◆ Envision a ministry centered in seeing and telling the “Good News” of the Gospels with the potential to transform lives
- ◆ Centered in God’s Spirit at work connecting us to Jesus Christ
- ◆ Rediscovering what God has called us to be in Christ, growing together in new, appreciative and creative ways

Thanks for your contribution!



Appendix C: Participant Survey

South Bay Church Singles: Visions for an Extraordinary Future
 Appreciative Inquiry Meeting Survey Form
 February 24-25, 2017

Confidential: This survey is confidential in nature to encourage candor and transparency. Please do NOT write your name on this form.

1. What new opportunities for the Singles Ministry, if any, emerged from the Appreciative Inquiry event?

Answer:

2. To what extent do you think the Appreciative Inquiry meeting helped to create a shared vision for the future of the South Bay Church Singles Ministry?
 (Check one.)

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

- 3a. Please list the provocative proposition(s)/action statement(s) from the meeting, if any, you are most interested in working on or supporting during the next three months.

Answer:

- 3b. How likely are you to implement the provocative propositions (action statements) you listed above, if any? (check one)

- Not likely – It will be very difficult given other work demands and interests
- Somewhat likely – I am not sure, but will think about it.
- Very likely – I will put it on my “to do” list.
- Extremely likely – I will start on it as soon as possible.

4. To what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements? (Check your responses).

The Appreciative Inquiry meeting increased my...

● Knowledge about the Singles Ministry

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

● Positive beliefs about the Singles Ministry

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

● Motivation to be involved in the Singles Ministry

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

● Commitment to the Singles Ministry

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

● Desire to learn more about the Singles Ministry

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

4. (continued) To what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements?
(Check your responses).

The Appreciative Inquiry meeting increased my...

● Motivation to discuss the Singles Ministry with others

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

● Enthusiasm to work with others on Singles Ministry related activities

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

5. To what extent, if any, will the following be important in supporting your efforts to implement provocative proposition(s)/action statement(s)? (Check your responses).

● The leaders in this organization will support my efforts to implement the provocative proposition(s)/(action statement(s))

- Not Important
- Somewhat Important
- Neutral
- Important
- Very Important

● I will be recognized and/or rewarded if I implement the provocative proposition(s)/(action statement(s))

- Not Important
- Somewhat Important
- Neutral
- Important
- Very Important

● I will have sufficient financial resources for implementing the provocative proposition(s)/(action statement(s))

- Not Important
- Somewhat Important
- Neutral
- Important
- Very Important

5. (continued) To what extent, if any, will the following be important in supporting your efforts to implement provocative proposition(s)/action statement(s)? (Check your responses).

● There will be others with whom I can work on the provocative proposition(s)/action statement(s)

- Not Important
- Somewhat Important
- Neutral
- Important
- Very Important

● I will be able to allocate time toward the provocative proposition(s)/action statement(s)

- Not Important
- Somewhat Important
- Neutral
- Important
- Very Important

● I have the knowledge and skills necessary to implement the provocative proposition(s)/action statement(s)

- Not Important
- Somewhat Important
- Neutral
- Important
- Very Important

● I am excited about the potential of implementing the provocative proposition(s)/action statement(s)

- Not Important
- Somewhat Important
- Neutral
- Important
- Very Important

6. Please add any additional comment(s) to clarify your answers above or describe your experience this weekend.

Answer: