

Appreciative Inquiry

Church Leadership Coaching & Consulting (CLC&C) uses a methodology known as “Appreciative Inquiry” (AI). It is a methodology that was developed by David Cooperrider during the 1980s while he was a student at Case Western University. Since then, AI has become a methodology that has revitalized or transformed literally hundreds of organizations around the world.

Yet, according to Cooperrider, AI is more than a method or technique. “The appreciative mode of inquiry,” he says, “is a means of living with, being with and directly participating in the life of a human system in a way that compels one to inquire into the deeper life-generating essentials and potentials of organizational existence.” Instead of looking for what is wrong in or about the organization (problem focused), the appreciative approach inquires into what is right and has worked well (solution focused). Its approach is to inquire into what people appreciate and value about themselves and their organization rather than into problems to be fixed – not that problems are ignored altogether, but that they do not become the major focus.

In our coaching of pastoral and lay leaders in churches, CLC&C inquires of them what their strengths are and what they have going for them. We are particularly interested in what they perceive God to be doing in their lives, personally and professionally. We encourage them to appreciate where they are in the present and to envision where they wish to be in the future. We help them identify resources that will enable them to reach goals which they set for themselves and which will help them grow in spiritual maturity and ministry as Christ’s disciples.

In our consulting with congregations, we encourage an appreciative environment by helping them to reframe complex, difficult issues in such a way as to discover how God is working in their midst to enable them to utilize their best resources to transform their expressed problems into opportunities for building up the body of Christ and for providing a stronger spiritual witness to the community they serve. Church members are asked to think beyond their problems by discerning their positive core values. When congregations are committed to doing this, their problems tend to become of little or no importance.

A recurring theme throughout the Hebrew and Christian scriptures is thanksgiving – the expression of gratitude and appreciation for what God has done for us. Such an expression causes us to focus on being at our best. It is the goal of CLC&C to help church leaders help the church to focus on being at its best through appreciative inquiry, in order that they and the people they serve may actualize good dreams and a positive future.

Submitted by John Wilkerson, Director
Church Leadership Coaching & Consulting
February 2007