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Dell'Erba, Franco. "A Model for Fostering Relational Growth by Using Appreciative Inquiry at New Life Adventist Church in Oshawa, Ontario." D. Min., Tyndale University College & Seminary, 2018.

Tyndale University College & Seminary

A Model for Fostering Relational Growth

by Using Appreciative Inquiry at

New Life Adventist Church

in Oshawa, Ontario

A Thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

Tyndale Seminary

by

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Toronto, Canada

March 2018

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ABSTRACT

This project introduced the Appreciative Inquiry process to the New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church in Oshawa for the purpose of fostering positive change towards increased loving relationships with one another. The objective was to deepen relationships and create a more united vision in Christ in a hard-working church that was very focused on tasks and programs but where growth had been limited.

The project used Appreciative Inquiry, incorporating the Action Research cycle, and expressed it through a four-phased approach called Initiate, Inquire, Imagine and Innovate. Data collection tools involved interviews, collaborative inquiry group discussion and ethnographic observation. Through these research instruments, there was evidence of some positive change towards increased loving relationships with one another in the church and space created for discussion and exploration of a more united vision. There were also provocative proposals resulting from the process that have been implemented since the end of the project.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful first and foremost to God for seeing me through the joys and challenges of this journey. He makes all things possible. I am grateful to my wife Irene and children Nicholas and Sofia for being the centre of my life on earth, providing me with the stability and rest to see me through.

To the wonderful New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church thank you for your beautiful hearts, patient endurance during my preaching absences, and unfailing trust that has humbled me and made this project possible. A special thank you to the New Life Church elders Noel Thompson, David Bouwmeester, Dr. Leroy Clarke and Ellen Bailey for their input, guidance and support. Thank you Ontario Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for your generosity and for taking a chance on me.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Sereivudh Ly for believing in me, taking the time to hold me accountable and for helping me see this project and thesis was possible. Thank you to the “Monday Morning at McDonald’s” groups of pastors: Dr. Sereivudh Ly, Dr. David Schwinghammer, Dr. David Baker and Dr. Campbell Page for their friendship and encouragement in the DMin journey.

Thank you Dr. Peter Dickens for the paradigm shift your teaching, coaching and friendship sparked in my life. You are sorely missed. Thank you Dr. Mark Chapman for your patience and insight in your teaching and in the answers you provided to my onslaught of questions. So grateful for you Dr. Bill Thornton for the way you guided me as both scholar and pastor and encouraged me to the finish line as my advisor. Thank you hearing committee: Dr. Michael Krause as

well as Dr. Chapman and Dr. Thornton, for scholarly acumen, herculean patience and gentle encouragement that saw me through the last leg of the journey. Thank you Dr. Paul Bramer for your wisdom, encouragement and generosity both pre- and post-retirement. Thank you Dr. Maria McClean and Dr. Reynold Hazelwood, fellow Tyndale sojourners who encouraged me along the way.

Thank you to the best little cohort at Tyndale, Cohort 5, for camaraderie and wonderful memories shared. Thank you Dr. Albert de Goias for your friendship and effective peer review. Thank you Paul Newman for your excellent scribing skills in all three Appreciative Inquiry meetings, your observations were so important to the project.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ESV: English Standard Version (2016)
- NIV: New International Version Bible (2011). Unless otherwise indicated all Bible quotations in this paper are from the NIV.
- NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
- NLT: New Living Translation Bible (1996)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Appreciative Inquiry is not just a process, it is a way of seeing. Appreciative Inquiry focuses on what is life-giving, positive and effective in the organization, seeks to identify positive core values, and then leverages that positive base to inspire vision and change. It sees human beings and the relationships between them as a mystery and cooperative existence in a community as a miracle. Appreciative Inquiry has been found to promote positive change in the business world since its inception in 1987 (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987). The phased approach of Appreciative Inquiry is a process that relies on input from the members of a community rather than just its leaders. Appreciative Inquiry was determined to be a better approach to fostering greater health in church relationships than a deficit-based model that focused only on what was wrong. The process was structured to give direction while free enough to encourage change to develop naturally.

This project used the Appreciative Inquiry process and worldview to create a positive environment for the participants to share their experiences and stories within the New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church. It then drew core values from those shared experiences, invited exploration of imagined futures

from those values, and provided opportunity to implement those futures in provocative proposals. It was hoped that these relational experiences could help the church heal from a difficult past, and clarify its God-given identity. Ultimately the objective was for the Appreciative Inquiry process to encourage the church to a new level of relational health and a more united vision in Christ.

Ministry Opportunity

The core members of New Life Church had strong faith in God, but struggled with trust relationships between one another; this inhibited the church's unity in identity and mission. The fostering of loving relationships among the membership would hopefully result in discovering a united vision as a church family. Appreciative Inquiry was determined to be a way to encourage deeper relationships with one another as a Christ-community in the following ways:

Firstly, the church needed healing from the past. Appreciative Inquiry offered the church a way to look back at a past that had some painful memories but in a way that was positive and celebratory and fostered encouragement and healing. Some of the elders had noted that past experiences had injured trust and hindered the church from being a close community. A healing process was needed to address this. For too long the church's past was a taboo subject that members feared to broach because of the potential for eruptions of negative emotions causing still greater damage. Appreciative Inquiry encouraged the church to look at the past from a different perspective. While the members could not ignore the pain, they could learn from it, forgive, reconcile, and move forward in Christ.

Secondly, Appreciative Inquiry provided a format for participants to share together and hopefully improve relationships. New Life Church was a hard-working church with strong commitment from the core members and many of the leaders had multiple responsibilities. However they did not often share together or even pray together intentionally. A methodology was needed to foster relational closeness and trust and address long-hidden hurts and resentments.

Thirdly, Appreciative Inquiry was chosen in order to foster unity. The process brought out positive core values and stories and encouraged greater trust to build the future together. Instead of members just focusing on their particular task, opportunity was made to share in the life that was generated in our love for God and each other because we were together in a safe space created by the process. The church could agree or disagree and still be family.

Fourthly, Appreciative Inquiry was utilized to clarify our identity, to help us better understand who God called us to be. As the participants came together and shared positive stories of the past, they would see more clearly what God's vision was, not just as individuals, but as a church community.

Lastly, Appreciative Inquiry was selected in order to renew hope and commitment. Through the positive exploration of what God had already accomplished at New Life Church, the church could see itself not as a church in decline but one with vast potential as we lovingly submitted to God and one another.

Historical Context

My observations of the historical context are based on these sources: First, documentation from a member who recorded his perceptions in a series of letters between the original pastor and the member. Second, the account of a person who was a former member in the past and left after the church split. Third, from conversations over the last four years with current church members and leaders. Lastly, my own observations over the last four years in my tenure as pastor, as well as some first-hand experiences in visiting the original church a few times in 1995 and 1996.

The New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church is a church that was birthed out of a split in the membership in February of 1997. From my observations this was an important factor in making the church both tenacious yet wounded in its DNA. The core members are dedicated Christ-followers who want to see their church be a place of welcome and spiritual growth, yet there has also been a significant loss of membership since the church's inception. Members have reported that there was not much time spent in community with one another outside of church services. Among the leadership and members was a growing sense that "business as usual" was not going to be enough. There had to be change if the church was going to survive and grow.

The church was originally called the North Oshawa Seventh-day Adventist church in 1992. Under the leadership of Pastor Ladd Dunfield the church grew very quickly to over three hundred people attending, with a membership of two hundred. It had a distinctly contemporary worship style that

contrasted with the more traditional approach of most churches in the denomination and attracted members who were looking for something different and relevant. In 1996 Pastor Dunfield became ill and had to resign, and the church was without a pastor for some time.

The church encountered some controversy from two sources. First, according to correspondence between one member and the former pastor, there was a decision made by some of the leadership to create a “governance board” that would oversee the church board and operations. The report alleges that this governance board was not voted in by the church at large, it was imposed. It was made up of some of the elders but not others. The perception of some outside this board was that there was a clique running the church with little input from the rest of the members; ultimately, this caused an erosion of trust in the congregants.

The other issue that is most frequently referred to as the cause of the church schism had to do with the acceptance of two members in leadership who had revealed themselves to be in a gay relationship. One group wanted the gay leaders to remain in office. The other group felt that as a denomination the church had a theological understanding of homosexuality that precluded leadership. In February of 1997 these tensions boiled over in a rancorous church business meeting that included not just the church members but the leadership from the provincial governing body of the church. Of the two hundred members, an estimated thirty to forty people left the church, with significant wounding on both sides. The members who remained prayerfully looked for a new place of worship, since the previous place they had rented was no longer available. Through

miraculous circumstances, a church building was bought in downtown Oshawa in March of 1997, which they named the New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church (New Life Church henceforth). Since 1997 the membership has declined to about forty of the original members.

The church building is located in a low-income neighbourhood with significant challenges, such as poverty, homelessness, substance abuse and prostitution. The needs in the community gave rise to one of the most prominent ministries of the church, the New Life Neighbourhood Centre (NLNC or Neighbourhood Centre). The Neighbourhood Centre provides food bank services through continental and pancake breakfasts, meal boxes of food and hygiene products, cooking classes, care packages, toy and hamper distribution, Thanksgiving and Christmas Dinners, and the annual Community Barbecue. The church continues to have a contemporary worship style markedly different from the more traditional approach in the majority of churches in the denomination. Since 2014 the kitchen facilities, sanctuary, foyer, front walk, pantry and storage rooms have been upgraded with other areas still being renovated to make space for ministries and outreach.

I began my journey at the New Life church on November 23, 2013 and within the first few of months being there, began to see many of the strengths and possibilities of the church. As I spoke to the members and saw them in action, I saw a church strongly committed to working for God. The core members have a great capacity to focus on tasks and accomplish them, yet the consistent report of these same core members and my own observation was a difficulty in

relationships. I observed isolation in the leadership and membership where everyone had a call to do some task, but there was little sharing, vulnerability, and seeking the Lord together. Since then, the elders and the rest of the board have shared similar sentiments: a fear to trust, discord under a veneer of politeness, hidden pain, and a lack of spiritual growth and direction. There was a sense that change was needed. Some members reported how every leader had their own ministry but there was little “cross-pollination” where leaders and members would come and support all the ministries of the church. There seemed to be an isolation where people had their own individual commitment to God and the ministry he had called them to, but little sense of common direction and unity as a church family.

When I arrived, the church had a membership of one hundred ninety-two members on the books, but only about forty core members still attended, with visitors coming and going. More than twenty years have passed since the split in 1997 until the writing of this thesis, and seven pastors have served in that time. In the spring of 2015 a self-assessment was done using Natural Church Development; it measures Eight Quality Characteristics that statistically are proven to increase church growth. Our church rated above the Canadian church average for Inspiring Worship Service, Need-oriented Evangelism, Passionate Spirituality and Gift-based Ministry. Two other areas, Empowering Leadership and Effective Structures, were average. We were lower than the national average in Loving Relationships and Holistic Small Groups—confirming this was an area of need we saw within ourselves (see Appendix I). Through this assessment and

by listening to the stories of both current and former members, I have been made aware of the need for a methodology that could bring the members together for positive collaborative discussion that would lead to stronger relationships and unity. There were some deep wounds that could not be addressed by just continuing the status quo.

Innovation

Appreciative Inquiry combines the words “appreciation” (a positive look at what is working and how that can be leveraged to move ahead), and “inquiry” (gathering data, often in the form of stories from all the stakeholders rather than just the CEO and other leaders). I saw the process as containing biblical principles that with God’s help could assist in effecting positive change in spiritual settings.

The Appreciative Inquiry process is embedded in Action Research. “Action research is a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems” (Stringer 2014, 8). It is expressed as an “interacting spiral” or cycle of “look,” “think,” and “act” (9). It has been expressed alternatively as “plan,” “act,” “observe,” and “reflect” in a cycle that repeats and improves. The Appreciative Inquiry process is described more fully in Chapter Three, but here in brief are the four steps as a mode of action research (Branson 2016, 27):

- 1) Initiate. Introduce leaders and then the church to the theory and practice of Appreciative Inquiry and develop initial steps to discover the organization’s “best.”

2) Inquire. Discover what is best in the organization's narratives, practices and imaginations through individual interviews.

3) Imagine. Imagine a preferred future by interpreting the interviews from the Inquire Phase, discovering core values and then building towards consensus.

4) Innovate. Create "what will be" through discourse, commitment and equipping with the largest possible level of participation.

Another area of the project was learning about complex, adaptive systems. This field of study helped me better understand relationships in an organization and how to facilitate positive change in those relationships through collaborative engagement rather than top-down directives. Complex, adaptive systems helped me see the church as a complex living organism that required God's leadership rather than just a problem to be fixed through human agendas, and I saw Appreciative Inquiry echoing this understanding.

CHAPTER TWO:
THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK:
A STUDY ON THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES
EMBEDDED IN FOUR SELECTED KEY
AREAS OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

There are five key principles considered to be central to the philosophy and methodology of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005, 49-53). From these principles I have chosen four Appreciative Inquiry tenets that resonated within the church's context and were seen to promote relationship transformation. This chapter will focus on these four key areas of Appreciative Inquiry and present evidence for alignment with biblical principles. The four key Appreciative Inquiry principles that will be explored are: 1) Positivity, 2) Narrative, 3) Community, and 4) Organicity.

The Power of Positivity in the Bible

While the word "positive" and "positivity" do not appear in Scripture, and in fact may have some pejorative associations in Christian circles today, the theme of being "constructive in intention or attitude" is prevalent in the Bible as will be shown. The biblical principles on positivity that will be explored are: 1)

focusing on God and what is good, 2) the role of remembering, 3) the law of the harvest and 4) the role of gratitude.

Positivity: Focusing on God and What is Good

The Bible commands an “in spite of” mentality where challenges, though not ignored, are to be seen in the greater context of God’s goodness, provision and will. The Apostle Paul spoke about this to the Philippian church while in prison, which would certainly not be an easy place to stay positive. He said to the church in Philippians 4:8, “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.” New Life Church has faced difficult challenges in their past: a split church, a decline in membership, difficulty in finding unity, a low-income neighbourhood, and the struggle to keep the church going. These, among other things, have contributed to creating an environment where the focus was often on surviving the deficits and problems. Little time or energy had been spent in reflection about God’s movement in the past, present and future, on what was excellent and praiseworthy already. Learning to focus on God and his goodness at all times, even in the most difficult of circumstances, was an important transition for the church.

The exhortation to look at the good in every situation is more startling considering Paul’s circumstances and the general challenges Christianity faced in the late first century when Paul wrote this epistle. Paul was not negating the fact

that there were challenges in the lives of his readers, but God's good purposes were happening all around them even in the midst of the challenges. In 2 Corinthians 4:18, Paul reminded believers to look at more than present circumstances to something beyond that is good, "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

This focus on God and his goodness is pervasive throughout Scripture. Proverbs 17:22 says, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." This passage shows that the condition of our heart matters. Whether cheerfulness or a broken spirit, it has a great influence upon the body. Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (NKJV) and Isaiah 26:3 says, "You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!" (NLT). Both speak of the choice humans have on where the thoughts dwell—which the Bible often defines as "heart." Jesus instructed in Matthew 12:35, "The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil." The Bible calls people to focus on God and his goodness—what he has already given rather than what God has not yet given—and this is a choice. Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13 when he said in Matthew 15:8, "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." God was constantly calling people's hearts to turn to him; and when they were, they received life and strength and encouragement.

Jesus used emphatic language to describe the centrality of his role in our lives. In John 15:5 he said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in

me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” When Jesus is the focus, and we remain in him, good results, but when we are apart from him, there is spiritual withering and death.

Seventh-day Adventists understand one of their founders, Ellen G. White, as being prophetically gifted, and she said,

As we make Christ our daily companion we shall feel that the power of an unseen world are all around us; and by looking unto Jesus we shall become assimilated to His image. *By beholding we become changed.* The character is softened, refined, and ennobled for the heavenly kingdom. The sure result of our intercourse and fellowship with our Lord will be to increase piety, purity, and fervor. (White 1928, 85 emphasis added)

The more we focus on Jesus, the more we become like him. Hebrews 12:2 calls us to focus on Jesus: “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Jesus knew of the human proclivity to focus on the negative, the problems, on what is lacking. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed this in Matthew 6:25-33,

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes

the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

The things Jesus asked us not to worry about are critically important to our well-being: life, sustenance, health, and clothing. Yet Jesus is teaching that God takes care of even these necessities. Rather than focusing on the lack of them, Jesus told us to put our attention on his kingdom, because out of that centre the rest of the blessings come.

This is key in Appreciative Inquiry. The process does not pretend that things are perfect in the organization but rather asks where our focus is and from where the energy comes. If the focus is on the “life-giving forces” (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2010, 1) then the reality of the present and future can be seen from a position of strength and hope garnered from the past. The Bible tells us to focus on God and his goodness. Appreciative Inquiry takes this same principle and applies it in the business world to develop a focus on what is working and gives life rather than seeing people and life as problems needing solutions.

With the advent of Positive Psychology, and Appreciative Inquiry as its corresponding philosophy in organizational theory, we can perceive a growing movement across psychology, sociology and organizational behavior to look at what actually happens successfully in life rather than looking at life only as a problem to be solved or an illness to be treated. (Lewis, Cantore, and Passmore 2011, 31)

The Bible goes further to state that focusing on God results in transformed lives and relationships being more and more like God. Romans 8:29 says that God’s intent is for us to be “conformed to the image of his Son.” In 2 Corinthians 3:18

the Apostle Paul said, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” When we look to God, we become more and more like him, and this is a powerful principle for relationship transformation in the church. In this sense, the Bible “one-ups” Appreciative Inquiry’s positive-based approach in that the ultimate source of all the good, God himself, is to be the ultimate focus of our inquiry.

Positivity: The Role of Remembering

One of the great narratives of Scripture is the deliverance of God throughout history and the continual call for God’s people to remember. Exodus 13:3 says, “Then Moses said to the people, ‘Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the Lord brought you out of it with a mighty hand.’” We are called not only to focus on him in the present but to remember him and his acts continually. This is an important concept in the life of the Seventh-day Adventist church where the Sabbath plays a central role in remembering. God called his people in the fourth of the Ten Commandments (in Exodus 20:8), “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy,” and the reason is given in verse 11, “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” Thus, week after week God’s people were called to remember the Sabbath because it was intended to remind them that their God was the Creator of the whole world.

The Sabbath is even a reminder of the Exodus, how God saved them: Deuteronomy 5:15, “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” The Bible gives permission to acknowledge the negative reality, but always draws the eye upward to how God delivered us from that reality and asks us to remember. Remembering God’s acts of the past provides a place of confidence for facing the challenges of the present and future. Appreciative Inquiry asks what has given life to the organization or group of people; it seeks to remember the good of the past. Psalms 77:11-12 says, “I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.”

The Psalms speak of the perils of forgetting the good of the past and only focusing on the problems:

How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert! They tested God again and again and provoked the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember his power or the day when he redeemed them from the foe, when he performed his signs in Egypt and his marvels in the fields of Zoan. (Psalms 78:40-43)

The charge that Israel had forgotten is repeated again in Psalms 106:21, “They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt.” There is a cause-effect relationship seen here where remembering God’s acts in the past results in staying faithful; not remembering results in discouragement that leads to rebellion. This forgetfulness of their past became their downfall as seen in Deuteronomy 8:19, “If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods

and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.” The destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel as well as the Babylonian captivity of Judah testifies of this. Jeremiah 2:5 says, “This is what the LORD says: ‘What fault did your ancestors find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.’” This is the principle of “you are what you think,” expressed as “you become what you follow.” In Chapter Three I will discuss complex, adaptive systems, but here in a nutshell there is a seeming “butterfly effect” where an initial thought or action leads to potentially large consequences down the road. As the focus is on God and his blessings, on remembering the good God has done, positive transformation should be the natural result.

Positivity: The Law of the Harvest

Another biblical theme that illustrates the correlation between focus and effect is the law of the harvest—the recurring theme of sowing and reaping.

Galatians 6:7-9 says,

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

In the previous two sections of focusing on God and the role of remembering, there is a cause-effect relationship of where we put our hearts and minds affecting our lives. The law of the harvest shows this cause-effect relationship in our actions. Our actions, whether towards good or evil, will cause a reaction. Proverbs

11:18, “A wicked person earns deceptive wages, but the one who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward,” and Proverbs 22:8a, “Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity” speak of the principle that good or bad actions yield a harvest in kind.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:17-18, “Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.” The Bible does not ignore that some have suffered unjustly, that the cause-effect seems to break down in cases like Job or Jesus himself at first glance, but in God’s timing, whether now or in eternity to come, there is always justice and a return to the good-producing-good and bad-producing-bad principle.

The law of the harvest also speaks of God’s role when good seeds are sown. This embracing of the mystery of growth in a people group that is out of our control is spoken of in the Appreciative Inquiry worldview, but in the Scriptures, it is explicitly stated. In Mark 4:26-29, Jesus talked of the farmer sowing good seed, but after that God took over:

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.

In other words, when good is sown, that seed grows and is transformed into a harvest that cannot be fully controlled or predicted—it is in God’s hands. When

good actions happen, like sowing good seed and watering good seed, then something only God can do occurs; that is the mystery of growth.

Positivity: Gratitude

Philippians 4:4-6 says,

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul, imprisoned for his faith, instructed the believers in Philippi to remain grateful and positive even in the worst of circumstances. This was not a positivity based on a denial of reality, but gratitude to God. Rather than concentrating on what they did not have, he encouraged them to talk to God about it. There is a shift from focusing on the problem to the Problem-solver. Right after this verse, Paul then said “finally” which signals a conclusion and then makes a list of what their minds should focus on: what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. Dwelling on problems takes away joy and creates anxiety; focusing in gratitude on the good that God has given fosters a transcending peace.

Gratitude is closely tied to remembering. Paul exhorted the believers to be thankful, not after God answers their prayers, but *before* he does. This may seem counterintuitive at first, for why should someone be grateful when imprisoned or enduring persecution? Paul remembered God’s faithfulness and promises of the past, and he chose to remain grateful to God in spite of present circumstances.

The letter to the Philippians was written after the letters to the Corinthian church, where Jesus said to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “But [Jesus] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” Paul knew that to be in a position of weakness was no barrier to God’s power but, in fact, only served to emphasize it more. Paul’s experience with God allowed him to say to the believers in Philippi, “For I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance” (Philippians 1:19).

The psalmist often calls God’s people to gratitude. In Psalm 95, God’s people are encouraged to come to God in gratitude and gives a list of reasons why: God is Israel’s King and above all other gods (verse 3), he is the Creator (verses 4-6), and we are under his care (verse 7). Gratitude is based on the good God has done. Psalm 103:1-5 gives another list:

Of David. Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:15-18, Paul emphasized the point of living a life of gratitude: “See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” As people focus on what is good and have an attitude of gratitude, this verse gives a hint of the transformative effects. The law of the harvest, of cause and effect when an

evil action is done, was broken. Now when someone did evil to a follower of Christ, they are to be repaid with good. This is a powerful principle in people groups to end cycles of bitterness and pain. As New Life Church focused on God's goodness, rejoiced in what he had already accomplished, prayed with hope, sowed good seeds and lived a life of gratitude, there was observed to be an increase in relationships as evidenced by positive sharing and imagining together of the church's future.

The Power of Narrative in the Bible

Stories are central to human experience. Appreciative Inquiry not only focuses on the positive, but seeks to gather the information and express it through narratives. Narratives are one of the primary ways the Bible conveys truth, and those stories remain relevant to the church today: "Congregations have observed, tasted, and claimed the narratives of God's presence and transformative power—and the remembering brings those stories into the present" (Branson 2004, 58). The narratives of the Bible are central to our understanding of truth. There are forty-six recorded parables in the Gospels that Jesus spoke; it was one of his primary methods for communicating and teaching. When Jesus was asked, "Who is our neighbour?" he could have just said, "Anyone who is in need." But this factual statement could not convey what the story of the Good Samaritan could: a principle fleshed out in a real-life situation in their society that worked transformation. Stories have a way of drawing out honesty. The Pharisees could prevaricate on who their neighbour was when discussing the law in Leviticus

19:18, but the story of the Good Samaritan circumvented intellectual argument and presented a situation that engaged their hearts. “We are critical and skeptical. But when we are absorbed in a story, we drop our intellectual guard” (Gottschall 2012, 152).

When Jesus desired to teach his disciples faith, he reminded them of real events. Mark 8:18-20 says,

Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” “Twelve,” they replied. “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” They answered, “Seven.”

Jesus did not simply say, “Have faith, I will provide.” He said, “Don't you remember?” and then proceeds to remind them of stories of how he had provided in the past. Stories inspire because they encapsulate principles and are often a retelling of a past event in which there are lessons. Stories inherently contain meaning; the listener automatically seeks for a point that is for the good. “We won't go along [with a story] if someone tries to tell us that bad is good, and good is bad” (Gotschall 2012, 129). As stories are told in community, shared meaning for the good of all begins to emerge as each member participates. The Bible encourages the sharing of our own stories as part of the grand story of salvation: Psalm 107:2, “Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story.” Mark 5:19-20 records what Jesus said to the delivered demoniac: “‘Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus

had done for him. And all the people were amazed.” The sharing of the story of one’s faith journey can be transformative.

Narrative in the Bible, especially as a reminder, is an agent for inspiration and change. Deuteronomy 6:12 is a command not to forget the Lord, set in the powerful narrative of what he did in bringing them out of Egypt: “Be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” That salvation narrative was to be re-lived year after year through their feast days. The retelling of these stories was to inspire hope and passion in present circumstances that may have been challenging and lead to positive action. Jesus does the same at the Last Supper. The Apostle Paul recounted the event in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26,

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

The act of retelling the story of Christ’s death through the symbols of bread and wine made the event relevant in the present and into the future. Thus, in the Old Testament with the retelling of the Exodus in the Passover, and in the New Testament with the retelling of Christ’s death in the Lord’s Supper, narrative was meant to be an agent of transformation in the people that did both the telling and listening.

1 Corinthians 10:6,11 says, “Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did” and, “These things

happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.” These verses illustrate that past experience in the form of stories are to be cherished and recounted because they served the community. As the stories are shared, the community is reminded and there is repentance and transformation towards God. The church is fundamentally a group of people gathered around Jesus and recounting the great stories of his love and redemption. “We as churches, are founded as people of stories” (Branson 2016, 22).

In the book of Acts, stories were a common way to lead people into positive action. In Acts 1:15-26, the Apostles faced the problem of the loss of one of their number in the betrayal and subsequent death of Judas Iscariot. Peter addressed the problem by first telling the story of what happened to Judas, how his story fit into the bigger story of Scripture and only then deciding on a plan of action. The past stories not only shaped their present and future course but also drew them together to work and make decisions. In Acts 9:26-28 Paul (formerly Saul) had met Jesus on the Damascus road and sought to join the disciples in Jerusalem, but they did not trust his sincerity. Barnabas took him in, brought him to the apostles, and told them Paul’s story. This retelling of Paul’s experiences helped establish his credibility as a true servant of God. Stories give a true portrayal of the person’s character and motives over time that a simple declaration cannot achieve. A statement of fact that Paul was trustworthy could not demonstrate what real experience could in the form of narrative. The sharing of the stories of the church in community establishes that God is trustworthy in his

dealings with his people and allows people to judge for themselves the progress God is making both in an individual's life and in the life of the corporate body of Christ. Likewise when the church recounts God's faithfulness in their past journey it fosters confidence for what God has in store now and in the future and can lead to community and ownership.

Narrative also encourages conversation, which is critical in the Appreciative Inquiry process.

“It's good to talk” is the slogan of the twentieth century, which put its faith in self-expression, sharing information and trying to be understood. But talking does not necessarily change one's own or other people's feelings or ideas. The twenty-first century needs a new ambition, to develop not talk but conversation, which does change people. Real conversation catches fire. It involves more than sending and receiving information. (Zeldin 2000, 1)

In the Seventh-day Adventist tradition “Sabbath Schools” are groups that study the Bible together Saturday mornings at church. The objective of the Sabbath School is for people to share what the readings of the Bible mean to them, and through that conversation and shared communion, there is growth and transformation. There is value in coming together and sharing our narratives and our testimonies, what God has done for us, how the biblical text engages us, and the challenges we face.

Stories, such as the many parables Jesus spoke, had a way of teaching truth that often engaged emotions beyond a mere exchange of data.

When we are engaged in dialogue we are expected to show a high degree of rational thinking and the willingness to weigh up arguments to determine the truth. Expressing strong emotions in dialogue is viewed as a distraction from this core activity. In conversation on the other hand, emotion expressed or otherwise is a vital aspect of the experience ... In

other words, conversation is by definition an emotional experience. It may involve dialogue, but, above all, it will move us as people to a different emotional place than that which we occupied before the conversation. (Lewis, Cantore, and Passmore 2011, 72)

Stories in Scripture often draw out emotional conversation that reveals truth in a way that factual dialogue cannot. When King David fell to temptation with Bathsheba, he attempted to hide his deed through manipulation, deceit and finally murder. When Nathan the prophet met him, he told the story of a man with one ewe lamb that he treated as tenderly as his own children. His neighbour was rich and owned much livestock and when someone came to visit him, he went next door and took the ewe lamb of his poor neighbour and slaughtered it for the feast (2 Samuel 12:1-10). David's reaction to the story was visceral; the story offended his sense of right and wrong. The Bible says he "burned with anger" (verse 5) against the man in Nathan's story, and of course David discovered the story was about him. Stories have power to circumvent our defenses and bring out honesty and a real possibility for progress. "When we read nonfiction, we read with our shields up. We are critical and skeptical. But when we are absorbed in a story, we drop our intellectual guard. We are moved emotionally, and this seems to leave us defenseless" (Gotschall 2012, 151-2). It was the prophet Nathan's story that caused David to drop his guard and finally see the truth of his own actions. David's repentance has inspired others to come to God with their sins. As the members of New Life shared the stories of their experiences in the church through the Appreciative Inquiry process, these narratives generated transformative conversations.

The Power of Community in the Bible

“So God’s mission is not simply to pluck souls out of the fires of hell one by one. God saves us *for* community—to *be* community. God saves us *by* the healing, faith-building work *cf* communities, *in* communities” (Harder 2013, 12 author’s emphasis). Community, being in relationship with others, is an important biblical principle. Genesis 1:26 says, “Let us make man in our image,” God is himself in community through the Trinity and we were created to reflect that image. “Only in our Spirit-produced corporateness do we truly reflect to all creation the grand dynamic that lies at the heart of the triune God. As we share together in the Holy Spirit, therefore, we participate in relationship with the living God and become the community of Christ our Lord” (Grenz 1994, 484). Although sin has marred community and made us selfish, God’s work is not just to save us but restore relationships: with him and one another because of who he is. Jesus said in John 13:34-35, “But I am giving you a new command. You must love each other, just as I have loved you. If you love each other, everyone will know that you are my disciples.” Of all things Jesus could have made as an indicator of discipleship to him, he chose loving each other, the act of relationship. He could have said “truth,” “justice,” “commitment” or many other important principles, instead Jesus emphasized how we treat one another in community as the litmus test of discipleship.

At the end of time, Jesus said the world would only consist of two groups of people: sheep and goats. The sheep receive eternal life while the goats do not, and what makes the difference is how people lived out love in relationship to one

another. Matthew 25:35-36 notes: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” When Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was, he answered with two in Matthew 22:37-40, “Jesus replied: ““Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ““Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”” Jesus connected loving God to loving each other.

1 John 4:20 says, “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.” Thus, for any follower of Christ community is not optional, for to the extent we love one another, we show Christ to the world. “The church is more than a loosely related group of people. We share a fundamental vertical commitment—loyalty to Christ—which shapes our very lives. But our common allegiance to Jesus, in turn, forms a bond between us that is greater than all other human bonds” (Grenz 1996, 212).

When Jesus began his ministry, he called twelve disciples and created a community. This community became the crucible in which their learning and transformation took place.

Jesus was not just concerned with souls. He wanted a changed society. That is precisely why he begins the new thing within a community of disciples whom he orders to quit acting as if they are superior, to forgive

one another seventy-seven times a day, and to turn the other cheek when someone strikes them. (Lohfink, Gerhard and Maloney 2012, 62)

Jesus chose to work with a group rather than just individually. He created a community in which he would work through them. This became the church. Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” Jesus intended his teachings to be lived out in a community where people loved and encouraged one another. Hebrews 10:24-25, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit manifested himself when the disciples were in united community. The book of Acts contains the Greek word *homothumadon* and of the twelve times it appears in the Bible, eleven are in Acts. It has been translated in a variety of Bible versions as, “one accord,” “one mind,” “single purpose,” “together,” “one impulse,” and “rushed in together,” among others. It is a combination of the Greek *homos* meaning “same” and *thumos* meaning “passion,” and it connotes a coming together in one desire, passion and purpose. Acts 1:14 says the disciples joined together in this way as they prayed and in Acts 2:1 as they were together again on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell among them. It denotes the passionate unity into which God had called his disciples around Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:46, “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.” They continued to “meet together”

(*homothumadon*), and the New Testament church was born. “The idea of salvation cannot be reduced to a personal relationship with Jesus. God’s plan is much more encompassing. God intends for salvation to be a community-creating event” (Hellerman 2009, 137). *Homothumadon* speaks of energy and passion, and it can be used both positively and negatively. In the negative, such as in Acts 7:57 when Stephen is being stoned, the verse says, “At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him.” It has the connotation of an angry mob that is out of control, rushing in a stampede. In English we use the phrase “mob mentality” where people lose their individuality and become part of the crowd, something bigger than themselves. In the positive sense though, it means a wonderful harmony, many minds becoming one mind, a desire to come together with great passion. Luke used this word to describe what the Holy Spirit was doing to them rather than the word “together” as some English translations do, such as the NIV and ESV versions of Acts 2:1. He wanted to express something deeper than mere physical proximity. One can be “together” in a crowd, a meeting, or church, but it does not mean that people are united in passion and of one mind. Life, and especially church, often brings people together physically, but Jesus had much more in mind for his followers. John 17:23 says, “I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Luke wanted to convey that the community was to come together with great passion as they united in Christ. For the early disciples, Jesus among them in

community was their overriding desire and any other agenda that was not building this, was discarded. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:10, “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.” So powerful was this passion for unity that it overcame ancient religious, cultural and social boundaries. Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” People from every walk of life were to come together in one passionate mind in Jesus Christ. New Life Church is very multicultural and has people from various socioeconomic backgrounds and temperaments, and there was a need for a way of seeing that could foster unity. “Appreciative Inquiry is a positive, strength-based action research approach incorporating narrative inquiry principles that is well suited to working with culturally diverse communities” (Hindsworth and Lang, 2009, 319). Appreciative Inquiry could help bring the church together in the kind of unity seen in the early church of the New Testament.

This togetherness manifested in how they prayed (Acts 4:24), how they shared everything (Acts 4:32), how the believers met together (Acts 5:12), how they made decisions (Acts 15:25) and how they worked as a church (Romans 15:6). God moved on the people’s hearts in community and the transformation of repentance happened (Acts 2:38), and God added numbers to their community daily (Acts 2:47). Later, the Apostle Paul described the vital importance of the community using the metaphor of the body: Romans 12:4,5, “For just as each of

us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” Paul spoke of the individuality of each person, yet describes how that individuality fits into a great whole of one body under Christ. “We are created for community, fashioned for fellowship, and formed for a family, and none of us can fulfill God’s purposes by ourselves” (Warren 2002, 130).

Community is central to the Appreciative Inquiry philosophy.

Appreciative Inquiry was created to work in organizations, by definition a community of people. It leverages the power of community to create positive change in the organization. In the Scriptures, loving community is not a means but an end where reconciliation takes place.

The fellowship of Jesus’ followers is not merely a loose coalition of individuals who acknowledge Jesus, however. Rather, it is a community of disciples who seek to walk together in accordance with the principles of the kingdom. As Christ’s church, we desire to live out in the present the final reality that will come at the end of history, namely, the reconciled community. This forms the ultimate reason why the goal of evangelism is disciple making. The Spirit directs his great creative work toward establishing the eschatological community, a people who are bonded together by their mutual obedience to the God revealed in Jesus. It is their commitment to living as Jesus’ disciples which facilitates the mutuality that characterizes the community they form. (Grenz 1994, 504)

When community is nurtured, it leads to positive things: Psalm 133:1, “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!”

The Power of Organicity in the Bible

The term “organicity” describes something that is characteristic of, pertaining to, or derived from living organisms. Some of these principles are also

seen in the discussion of complex, adaptive systems in Chapter Three. When describing his kingdom, Jesus often used organic language. As was previously mentioned in Mark 4:26-29, the farmer scatters seeds but the growth happens “though he does not know how.” Often Jesus used seeds as a metaphor for kingdom growth which well describes the natural process of growth that is outside our control. The farmer cannot dictate to the seeds when and how to sprout. “The kingdom of God is organic rather than organizational. Sowers sow. Seeds grow naturally, automatically and invisibly” (Guinness 2014, 110). Jesus said that the farmer did play a role: he sowed the seeds. Thus, in searching for a methodology of change, it was important that it would be one that allowed for change and growth to happen organically. And if we think of a farmer’s role in general, the farmer can create the best possible conditions for growth. However, how that growth happens is out of the farmer’s purview. Kingdom growth acknowledges what our role is and *what it is not*.

There is a stark contrast to what Jesus describes and the way churches often run today, specifically in the area of control. Author Os Guinness (1993) wrote about an alarming observation made by a Japanese businessman: “Whenever I meet a Buddhist leader, I meet a holy man. Whenever I meet a Christian leader, I meet a manager” (49). There is as penchant in our Western society to try to run things like a machine where all outcomes can be predicted. In my own denominational context, there is a known percentage of people that will respond to different types of advertising to bring people to an evangelistic effort, and how much money it will cost per baptism. Church Board meetings create

agendas and itemize what must be done in order for the church to grow. These are not bad things in themselves, but often God's role is relegated to a prayer to start and a prayer to close, hoping he will bless our plans.

What the church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but [people] whom the Holy Ghost can use, [people] of prayer, [people] mighty in prayer. The Holy Spirit does not flow through methods, but through [people]. He does not come on machinery, but on [people]. He does not anoint plans but [people], [people] of prayer. (Bounds 1989, 10)

God's Spirit flows through people in relationship with him and unlike an agenda, we cannot control that. "We have created trouble for ourselves in organizations by confusing control with order. This is no surprise, given that for most of its written history, leadership has been defined in terms of its control functions" (Wheatley 2006, 12). The process of Appreciative Inquiry resists attempts to control every aspect and in the context of my church, gave room for God's Spirit to flow. Jesus gave many metaphors to show how God's kingdom works outside of our control yet we still have a role to play in it: while believers plant seeds, growth belongs to God (Mark 4:27); the baker puts yeast in bread but how it spreads is out of the baker's control (Matthew 13:33); a net is thrown, but the fish that are caught is not up to the fisherman (Matthew 13:47).

It can be described as the difference between an organization and an organism. An organization is defined simply as something organized together. It can be people but it can also be structures, ideas, and other non-organic things. An organism is a discrete and complete living thing. In this context, an organization implies control of every aspect of it, especially when referring to

group of people such as a business or a church. But the Bible uses language that describes God's kingdom and church as an organism and something alive that is much more complex. Ephesians 2:19-22 describes it as members in a household, many parts being built up into a temple with Christ as the cornerstone. 1 Peter 2:5 describes each member as a "living stone" being built into a spiritual house by God. The building process is done by God, not us. In Ephesians 4:15-16 God's people are described as a body with Christ as the head and in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 describes the body in detail where each part is connected to the other, and the life of the organism is shared by all. Each part has a function, but like our natural bodies, millions of processes happen outside of our control that are governed by the brain. There is a role we consciously play, and there are processes that happen unconsciously. Appreciative Inquiry allows for structure and planning, but also for natural processes to occur when people meet and speak freely and share ideas and outcomes not planned or predicted. In the context of God's kingdom, prayer precedes each step of the process and God shapes the conversations and dreams that come out of the organism of the church.

In the New Testament church God caused the growth. Luke observes, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). Paul said in I Corinthians 3:6,7, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow." The Bible shows kingdom growth is caused by God as he works among his obedient church. We have a role to play and God has his role. I see Appreciative Inquiry as a method of

taking away the human proclivity to control all aspects of change and allowing room for God and his natural vine-branch relationship to happen. “Appreciative Inquiry stays away from the ‘grand design’ master plans, and consciously allows a more organic evolution” (Brabant 2015, 4).

Understanding the organic nature of the kingdom helps the church stop trying to “cut and paste” successful programs from other churches without any understanding of what naturally grows in its own context. The gardener can only plan for plants that will adapt to the given ecology and must allow for growth to happen naturally. The “mission” of the garden is to produce the desired growth, often for the sake of beauty, and that mission is shaped by those who tend the garden. Any group of people, and in this case the church, is like that garden. We are driven by mission, but how that mission is accomplished must be shaped organically by God’s leading in the natural environment in which the church finds itself. For example, olives and figs grew in Palestine to provide nourishment. If we simply tried to copy what was there and place it here, it would not work, olives and figs could not grow here. Rather than copying a method, God’s kingdom grows in the soil that supports it. In the context of Southern Ontario, it might be apples. Appreciative Inquiry does not ask what worked in other organizations. It asks what works in *our* organization, it examines our stories and life-giving forces, what grows naturally in our soil.

In the New Testament church, the mission of Jesus drove the church and the church changed and adapted as the Spirit led. One can see the adaptation in the way the church was at first “Jewish-only” but through persecution the Spirit

opened the way for the gospel to spread to Samaria and to the Gentiles and the acceptance of diversity. There was change in how the church understood the role of God's laws and what was essential and what was not. There was adaptation in the creation of new roles, such as the deacons, to deal with organizational issues. There was adaptation in the language used for the holy Scriptures from ancient Hebrew to the *koine* Greek. Appreciative Inquiry is a method of change that harkens back to the New Testament in the relinquishing of human control and partnering with God to foster positive change.

The organic nature of growth that Appreciative Inquiry espouses will also be explored in the next chapter in the theme of complex, adaptive systems. Embracing the principle of organic growth helped me see a far more biblical way of being the church: working together as a team, fostering relationships, trusting in God's Spirit to lead and move in ways I could sometimes see but often could not. I simply was not in control, God was, and that was the exactly right place for the church to be.

Summary of Chapter Two

Many of the central principles in Appreciative Inquiry are biblical. These biblical principles can assist in fostering transformation towards loving relationships resulting in greater unity in Christ. I believe the four principles seen in Appreciative Inquiry of positivity (change happens in the direction you focus on), narrative (transformation through stories, not rules or factual statements), community (change happens in relationship with God and each other), and

organicity (creating conditions for growth outside our control), will by God's grace assist the church in growing towards Christlikeness and loving one another.

The future is not engineered, delivered to us by God as a *fait accompli*. That would just turn it once again into *fate*, into something inevitable. We would be no more than passive observers, along for the ride. Rather, God stands upstream ahead of us, calling us, encouraging us to link hands as we wade through the rapids, to dodge the driftwood that appears suddenly around the corners, to learn to navigate the future together. Being able to face the future knowing that is it both a creation of our choosing and the work of a loving God is a gift of divine grace." (Harder 2013, 79-80 author's emphasis)

CHAPTER THREE:
PRECEDENT SOCIAL SCIENCE
LITERATURE AND CASES

Chapter Three of this thesis examines the literature and cases that relate to positive change in a people group. Two broad areas of research went into this project. First was the Appreciative Inquiry methodology itself seen through various authors who have used the process in spiritual contexts as well as in the business world. The second area is through the principles of complex, adaptive systems that helped me understand the dynamic forces at work in the human relationships that Appreciative Inquiry fostered.

Appreciative Inquiry

This section outlines the Appreciative Inquiry literature that was researched in order to shape the project and reasons why Appreciative Inquiry was the methodology of choice. Mark Lau Branson and Cameron Harder are Christian authors who have used Appreciative Inquiry in spiritual contexts while the third sub-section deals with the origins of Appreciative Inquiry and its prevalent use in the business world.

Mark Lau Branson

I was first introduced to the Appreciative Inquiry methodology in seminary, and I saw immediately the potential it had in any organization, but particularly the church. Mark Lau Branson's book *Memories, Hopes and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry, Missional Engagement and Congregational Change* was a case study of Appreciative Inquiry used at the First Presbyterian Church in Altadena, California. Branson's work outlined the church's journey and how Appreciative Inquiry was implemented phase by phase, gave the theological foundations of Appreciative Inquiry, and presented five other church case studies of the Appreciative Inquiry process in action. Branson fully embraces Appreciative Inquiry as an effective change agent for a church: "The thesis of Appreciative Inquiry is that an organization, such as a church, can be recreated by its conversations" (Branson 2016, xvii) and later after its implementation says,

As we had already known, Appreciative Inquiry is not managed. It is too broad and powerful. We had initiated conversations, and the congregation's best stories and traits were now the common discourse of the church. While we became aware of increasing expectations, we also noted deeper patience, more participation, and a real trust that God was continuing to author this story. (Branson 2016, 124)

Branson's vision of Appreciative Inquiry was more than just a research method or a way to get a church to change. Appreciative Inquiry is a way for a congregation to discern life amongst themselves: "Appreciative Inquiry provides an organization-wide mode for initiating and discerning narratives and practices that are generative (creative and life-giving)" (Branson 2016, 21). In a church like New Life that had a strong work ethic and many programs, Appreciative Inquiry

provided a chance to take a deep breath and, in the action research language, to observe and reflect, not just plan and act, on what was giving life. It was easy to fall into the pattern of seeing any new initiative as just one more program, the “plan and act” pattern that often led to exhaustion and a sense of mechanically doing church. Branson’s work outlines a process, perhaps even a culture or worldview, rather than a program that could bring us together to be the church, not just doing church. Being the church means listening and paying attention to what God was already organically doing among us and letting him guide through our honest and loving conversations rather than just trying to do what seemed like something a church should do and asking God to bless it. Branson’s book was a window to the use of Appreciative Inquiry as a powerful tool that other churches had been using since the 1990s and could be a way for New Life Church to move forward in God’s unfolding plan.

The first tenet of Appreciative Inquiry that he brought up is the dichotomy between problem-solving and appreciating strengths. This was an important factor in the use of Appreciative Inquiry at New Life because of the difficult history the church went through. After the split in 1997, the church was in an inner-city area of Oshawa, in an old building, and experiencing a decline in membership. It was easy to focus on what was wrong and try to fix problems. The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s organizational paradigm puts the church board (made up of elders and ministry leaders) as the governance of the church, under the authority of the church business meeting. This has created a focus that is constantly on the “doing” and what is inhibiting the “doing,” rather than on prayer, listening, vision,

and Spirit-led conversations. It was easy to focus on what is not working. Branson saw a parallel between this problem-based focus in the microcosm of the church and within society at large:

When this problem-solving approach dominates, most discussions are about problems and inadequacies. This is what is called the *deficit model* ... This is not dissimilar to Western medicine and its focus on illness, targetable causes, and invasive procedures. Only in recent years have physicians begun to pay attention to nutrition, the complex interrelationship of body systems, and other life-giving forces. (Branson 2016, 23-4 author's emphasis)

Branson identified a worldview in Western society exemplified by the medical establishment that highlights a tendency towards simplifying complex systems, something that will be discussed later in this chapter. But Branson recognized a key need in the church which was to understand the complexity within the human relationships of the church and to address it in a different manner than solving a problem.

Branson saw the concepts in the Appreciative Inquiry process as a lifestyle rather than a one-shot identification, analysis and treatment of a problem, and spoke of the “action-reflection cycle” that encapsulated this (Branson 2016, 25). This resonated as something that needed to be inculcated in the life and culture of the church. The action research model contained observation and reflection as well as planning and action, and they are done as a cycle. The church had a tendency towards focusing on the *action* part rather than the *research* part, and Appreciative Inquiry provided a way for both to happen. “Action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without research is meaningless” (Reason and Bradbury 2001, 2).

I saw Branson’s Appreciative Inquiry process embedded in this cyclical action research pattern. Phases 1 and 2, *Initiate and Inquire*, were for observing the Appreciative Inquiry process itself and the life-giving forces of the church. In Phase 3, time was to be spent in reflection. In Phase 4 there was time to make plans and then execute those plans. Once the cycle had happened, the desire was to see Appreciative Inquiry as a culture of taking time to debrief, observe and reflect with God, and then make plans and act. “Appreciative Inquiry is not something that is done once or every few years as part of strategic planning—it is a way of continually forming an interpretive community that can thereby perceive, think, converse, and create with the most life-giving resources” (Branson 2016, 24).

Branson diverged from the commonly used 4-D model as outlined by founder David Cooperrider (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005, 15), opting for a modification of the 4-I model (Watkins, Mohr and Kelly 2016, 90). The models can be compared as follows (Table 1):

Table 1: Appreciative Inquiry model comparison

4-D Model	4-I Model
Discover	Inquiry
Dream	Imagine
Design	Innovate
Destiny	Implement

The two models in the example above complemented each other, but Branson went with the Initiate Phase first, while both planning and implementation happened in the Innovate Phase. The Initiate Phase provided a means to prepare leaders and the church for the Appreciative Inquiry process, as it was a

completely new paradigm for most. The Innovate Phase combined both the planning and the implementation of the action items. Branson's model was deemed appropriate for use at New Life Church. Aside from Appreciative Inquiry, I had initially contemplated using a mediation model that was much more deficit-based in approach but decided that a more positive way was needed.

Branson suggested that the pastor should not be the primary guide to the Appreciative Inquiry process (Branson 2016, 27), but this view did not take into account the vast majority of churches that were smaller than 100 members that could not afford a consultant to lead the process or have the resources to have an internal team. However, the case studies he included with his book encouraged the use of Appreciative Inquiry with the pastor as the facilitator. The case study of New Covenant United Methodist Church in Cumberland, Maryland was facilitated by Pastor Christopher Gobrecht (Branson 2016, 129) and his experience was helpful in my own journey of implementation of Appreciative Inquiry at my church. Since the process was relatively new in the church setting and in my own denominational background, it was easy to feel overwhelmed and wonder if I could do this properly. Gobrecht said, "An imperfect Appreciative Inquiry process that gets buy-in from the congregation still seems preferable to me to a technically crafted one that takes the initiative out of the hands of the laity" (Gobrecht in Branson 2016, 131). This was another appeal of Appreciative Inquiry: that we could go as deep as we could handle. In a very busy church, a very complex process would have discouraged the members from even trying. But Appreciative Inquiry was both profound yet simple in implementation.

Appreciative Inquiry could be attempted, however imperfectly, and still see positive results as reflected in Gobrecht's results:

Prior to the Appreciative Inquiry processes, we faced an unsustainable decline in revenues and in attendance. We are now benefiting from a reversal of those trajectories. When I observe changes and listen to conversations, I am convinced Appreciative Inquiry was the intervention that made the difference. We had more confessions of faith and adult baptisms each year than were recorded as a combined total the preceding five years ... The percentage of worshippers engaged in ministry has risen from around thirty to ninety. There is more laughter, we are more prone to singing, and we smile more often. Appreciative Inquiry is a vehicle the Holy Spirit uses to reveal the heart of God already present at our church and context. (Gobrecht in Branson 2016, 143)

Branson's book not only encouraged me as to the process, but the possibility of its implementation and beneficial results.

Cameron Harder

Cameron Harder's book *Discovering the Other: Asset-based Approaches for Building Community Together* was another important resource in this project. Rev. Harder is a Canadian working out of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and his work gave a Canadian context to the use of Appreciative Inquiry in my own church. His book had a theme of God working through weakness and imperfections: "Appreciative Inquiry can help us see God graciously at work among an imperfect people through a history pockmarked with scars and struggle" (Harder 2013, 73). It was encouraging that churches with both great strengths and "scars and struggle" like New Life could benefit from the Appreciative Inquiry process and allow us to see God through the vicissitudes of our journey. Harder's view was that everything in a congregation—even

weaknesses—could be used by God for his glory. “I imagine it this way: the Spirit enters a congregation or community and *puts it on*—like a glove. All that those people are—their history, personality, resources, *even weaknesses*—becomes a tool of the Father, Son and Spirit for building a God-shaped community” (Harder 2013, 83 author’s emphasis). Harder encourages the use of Appreciative Inquiry in even the most difficult of circumstances.

Change was self-determined rather than left to the leader of the church imposing it upon others and it was focused on positive affirmation and sharing through conversations. Both the congregation and the pastor were part of the developing process, and as the sharing and conversations continued, patterns and themes emerged. “Change, then, doesn’t necessarily begin with either those who see from above or those who see from below ... congregational and community revitalization must begin with conversation among a broad spectrum of members” (Harder 2013, 78). Appreciative Inquiry acknowledged the contribution each member of the community made and the power of sharing those contributions in a safe, positive environment. This value-giving aspect of Appreciative Inquiry gave a voice to all who wanted to sit at the table and participate; it inherently built and fostered community.

Harder spoke of the intrinsic positivity in the Appreciative Inquiry process. “The most basic assumption for those who use appreciative inquiry in a faith setting is ... that *God is at work for good in every person and community at all times*” (Harder 2013, 86 author’s emphasis). Understanding this fundamental principle that God was good made the Appreciative Inquiry process attractive for

the New Life Church. The human tendency of focusing on what was wrong, exacerbated by the managerial business model adopted by the church in modern times, created a culture that was anthropocentric. What we could think of, what we could plan, what finances and other resources we have were the boundaries and limiters of what could be done. Appreciative Inquiry's focus on what was going well, what was working, and what gave life immediately drew the focus to the source of blessing and life in the faith community, and that was God. I saw Appreciative Inquiry as a means of not only bringing the church together in healthy fellowship but also of shifting our governance and culture to be more Christ-centric.

The positivity of the Appreciative Inquiry process drew people into a more positive frame of mind. "If we see ourselves as a problem congregation, we'll be one" (Harder 2013, 87). Harder's statement reflects the biblical principle of positivity: becoming more of what you focus on. In a church that experienced an emotionally-charged schism, there was a need to concentrate on how God had gifted us, what he was able to do through us, and how his kingdom would grow as we loved one another and lived out the core values he had given us. In a Canadian context where the church in general struggles to remain relevant, New Life Church had a times lost hope too. Specifically, the church had struggled with retaining members and making disciples long-term. Appreciative Inquiry was a means of reigniting optimism in God and in each other's calling. It was important for the church to change its self-image and see its relationships as a strength given by God rather than as an obstacle.

Harder also saw the potential problems of using a process first created for use in the business world and adopting it in the church. This was a valid concern that needed a response before Appreciative Inquiry could be implemented at New Life. I already saw too much of business culture and management paradigms being used in the church. “The church, however, walks a perilous path when it adopts any perspective or process without first asking how it may or may not serve the gospel” (Harder 2013, 84). Harder referred to Branson’s work as a positive way to use Appreciative Inquiry and saw the process as valuable to churches: “Appreciative inquiry used in a Christian context looks for evidence of the Spirit’s movement among us. It tries to teach us how to recognize God at work, to celebrate and get on board with God’s community-building mission” (Harder 2013, 97-98). Harder’s work made it clearer to me that Appreciative Inquiry was not just another program but a new way of thinking that could facilitate the Holy Spirit’s work among us.

Harder’s use of Appreciative Inquiry questions gave me insight into how the inquiry could be tailored to specific areas. For example, one of the possible areas of Appreciative Inquiry questions was in worship, which was an area of focus in my own Inquiry Phase questions. There were other areas of inquiry such as questions for youth ministry, homeless ministry and ministry to the sick. Appreciative Inquiry could be applied not only to the organization as a whole, but applied to specific ministries within the larger body (Harder 2013, 168-169).

Other Sources on Appreciative Inquiry

Understanding the origins of Appreciative Inquiry and its evolution since its inception in 1987 was important to this project. In studying Cooperrider and Srivastva's foundational work, it was a pleasant surprise to learn that Dr. Cooperrider was a Christian himself. "As an active United Church of Christ layman, David Cooperrider used Appreciative Inquiry to bring his own congregation through a remarkably successful journey" (Chaffee 2005, 73). This gave still further impetus on the potential for Appreciative Inquiry in a church setting.

As shown in the previous chapter, the use of Appreciative Inquiry in the church had potential for significant positive change and growth. However I was still interested in Appreciative Inquiry's use in the business world and what success looked like in that setting. Appreciative Inquiry in that milieu had many more case studies to look at and its validity among people in a non-faith situation could still give clues as to why the principles were so powerful and biblical. While there must be appropriate precautions as to what is accepted into the church, I wanted to be open to God's spiritual principles at work in all the world. Cooperrider and his co-author Diana Whitney, who also helped develop Appreciative Inquiry, cited one example of a company transformed with Appreciative Inquiry as the "backbone" (Cooperrider and Whitney 1999, 7).

Another concern I had is how the church would perceive Appreciative Inquiry. In a church, denomination, and society that were often problem-oriented, would Appreciative Inquiry appear to minimize problems and just appear to be a

way of insulating ourselves from reality or as a kind of self-deception? Tom White, then president of GTE Telecom said, “Don’t get me wrong. I’m not advocating mindless happy talk. Appreciative inquiry is a complex science designed to make things better. We can’t ignore problems—we just need to approach them from another side” (White 1996, 472-474). Appreciative Inquiry was not about ignoring problems but giving new tools that empower people, thus solving problems in an entirely different way. “Our real concern is with power, control and ways in which the problem-solving paradigm limits human potential” (Cooperrider and Whitney 1999, 21). Appreciative Inquiry built a grassroots ownership that freed creativity and conversations that attacked problems from a new perspective.

A comparison between the problem-solving approach and Appreciative Inquiry is seen in this table (Cooperrider and Whitney 1999, 23):

Table 2: Comparison of Problem Solving and Appreciative Inquiry

Problem Solving	Appreciative Inquiry
“Felt need” Identification of Problem	Appreciating and Valuing the Best of “What is”
Analysis of Causes	Envisioning “What Might Be”
Action Planning (Treatment)	Dialoguing “What Should Be”
Basic Assumption: An Organization Is a Problem to Be Solved	Basic Assumption: An Organization Is a Mystery to be Embraced

The problem-centric approach created a sense of “putting out fires” in my ministry and in the church culture as a whole. Appreciative Inquiry gave hope of focusing on the positive narratives and journeys happening in the community at

all times because of God's presence. The church was more than an institution of policies and board meetings, it was a living, breathing mystery of God and his people in relationship.

The velocity and largely informal spread of the appreciative learnings suggests a growing disenchantment with exhausted change theories, especially those wedded to human-deficit vocabularies, and a corresponding urge to work with people, groups, and organizations in more constructive, positive, life-affirming, even spiritual ways. (Cooperrider and Whitney 1999, 28-9)

Cooperrider and Whitney's work caused me to see an easy transition from a business setting to a spiritual one because the principles of Appreciative Inquiry contained biblical principles.

In another book, the same authors spoke of the role of the leader not as CEOs who dictated change, but rather "positive change catalysts." "Leaders participate equally as one of the many essential voices at the table ... leaders recognize that their job is to plant the seed and nurture the best in others" (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005, 45). I saw this servant-leadership model exemplified in Jesus, who sought to develop the disciples in their faith and gifting. The authors continued to use surprisingly spiritual language in a business setting that made Appreciative Inquiry all the more attractive to use at New Life Church. "To be successful, an Appreciative Inquiry consultant must view organizations as living spiritual-social systems—mysteries of creation to be nurtured and affirmed, not mechanistic or scientific operations with problems to be solved" (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005, 46).

One of the greatest benefits of Appreciative Inquiry was how change could come about organically. The organic nature of Appreciative Inquiry gave voice to the inherent mystery in the relationships between people and with God. It could not all be reduced to a mechanical process. Appreciative Inquiry acknowledges complexity and does not seek to predetermine what the results of the process will be. The founders of the Appreciative Inquiry theory and process use the word “miracle” and “mystery” to describe it:

In the same way that birth of a living, breathing, loving, thinking human being is an inexplicable mystery, so too it can be said in no uncertain terms that organizing is a miracle of cooperative human interaction, of which there can never be final explanation. In fact, to the extent that organizations are indeed born and re-created through dialogue, they truly are unknowable as long as such creative dialogue remains. At this point in time there simply are no organizational theories that can account for the life-giving essence of cooperative existence, especially if one delves deeply enough. But, somehow we forget all this. We become lulled by our simplistic diagnostic boxes. (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987, 26)

Appreciative Inquiry acknowledges something important for us a church: that we cannot not understand and control everything, and we do not have to; that is God’s bailiwick. We could embrace the mystery and let God work through the relationships. Ironically, this theory, born in the world of business, touched on the organic nature of the kingdom of God in a way that we do not often grasp as a church. Appreciative Inquiry gave the possibility of positive change happening spontaneously and naturally as a by-product of our positive, collaborative sharing.

Just as the process itself was organic, Appreciative Inquiry drew from the stakeholders of the church narratives that were inherently organic. Stories gave life as they were shared and drew people in. I have observed this in the narratives

and parables of Scripture, the sermons both given and listened to, and the stories shared among the congregation. A process that lends itself to people sharing not just empirical data but meaning through stories was something I believed could bless my church. The process of sharing in community could lead to greater trust, encourage walls to come down and allow for greater collaboration and commitment to one another in the cause of Christ. “Try to offer proof, and others will respond with alternative theories and explanations. Offer facts and figures, and the response is often a debate of the data or its interpretation. But tell a good story, a bold story, and people will connect deeply and respond without explanation” (Rendle 2010, 21). In Appreciative Inquiry, as in all storytelling, questions were very important. One of the core principles of Appreciative Inquiry is that organizations grow in the direction of the questions they ask, again an organic process. “Our experience suggests that human systems grow and construct their future realities in the direction of what they most persistently, actively, and collectively ask questions about” (Ludema, Cooperrider, Barrett 2012, 1). The inquiry process engaged the community’s energy, and when that energy was positively inclined, led to greater trust in one another and collaboration for the church’s future.

The Appreciative Inquiry process was centered on community as well. I wanted a process that promoted team-building and collaboration. The core members of the church were hard workers and could accomplish much in their individual ministries. The downside of this was that working together and having a cohesive vision came less naturally. There was a need for the leaders and

members to have a voice in each other's ministries and spiritual passions, a "cross-pollination," where everyone felt a kind of ownership for each part of the church's ministries and could speak into it. Thus, I saw Appreciative Inquiry as a means of bringing my predominantly task-oriented church together in positive fellowship. Appreciative Inquiry also appealed to my personality and leadership style. As a pastor, I tended to be a more team-oriented leader rather than a CEO-type or "lone wolf" kind of leader. So the Appreciative Inquiry process allowed me to be part of something where the direction and solutions were explored together instead of alone.

Uses of Appreciative Inquiry in my own denomination gave further credence to its use in my local church. In the November 2009 edition of *Ministry* magazine, a denominational monthly journal for Seventh-day Adventist pastors, Dr. William Loveless of Loma Linda University, California, wrote an article "Appreciative Inquiry: Lessons from a business model," outlining the principles of Appreciative Inquiry and its use in ministry. Appreciative Inquiry had been used in five mission hospitals in the East Central Africa Division (Adventist Health Ministries 2017) and in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division (Handysides 2010).

In short, Appreciative Inquiry had a lot to offer. It was a theory that came out of pragmatic science and observation, yet gave room for mystery and complexity. Moreover, I saw it as having principles that could be supported biblically. Appreciative Inquiry had the potential to bring people together, give them value, strengthen relationships, foster exploration and imagination, and give

room for God to flow through the process. Appreciative Inquiry is a powerful tool and a model that is easily adaptable and appropriate for use in the church. It is relatively easy to implement and has real potential to draw members of the church community into positive conversations that lead to deeper relationships with one another.

Complex Adaptive Systems

Dr. Peter Dickens' course on complex adaptive systems in his Leadership and Systems Theory lectures at Tyndale University was transformative in my approach to leadership and became an important component in the thinking that went into the project at New Life Church. Complex, adaptive systems described a world that is not linear, mechanistic, or simplistic but complex, dynamic and constantly developing. Dr. Dickens, "began to imagine a different way of thinking about organizations—not as machines but more like ecosystems of people" (Nelson and Dickens 2015, 3). As had been said with Appreciative Inquiry, organizations were a mystery to be embraced not solved. There was an inherent tension between what could be known and what was beyond us, and complex adaptive systems accepted this tension. The principles of complex, adaptive systems helped me understand the value and necessity of change. Just as a human organism was dynamic and constantly adapting, so too was a human organization. Dr. Dickens said that an organism where everything was locked down and stops changing, was essentially dead (Dickens May 5, 2014).

Dr. Dickens gave an example of what a healthy organic system looked like. He spoke of a garden as a “bounded ecosystem.” There was “garden” and there was “not garden.” Yet what was happening in the garden was dynamic and always changing, in fact part of a garden’s reality was that some things would die even as other things grew. Dr. Dickens saw reality around us as a complex, adaptive system where humans had a role but could not control every outcome because human beings and human relationships were complex. He said organizations were thought of as impersonal, well-oiled machines run by policies, predictability and rules that speak of control. He made the connection that this was how the vast majority of churches were run. Dr. Dickens espoused a creative tension between extremes, an interplay that inhabited the tension and did not try to reconcile it. “Gardens are alive and ever changing and adapting often in ways you, as the gardener, cannot always predict” (Nelson and Dickens 2015, 61). A garden could be tended and nurtured, but the growth that happened within was complex and adaptive. Dickens said our notion of growth was different from God’s, because when we spoke of growth we tried to control it. Describing the Appreciative Inquiry process of what gives life to the organization, Watkins, Mohr and Kelly said, “Bear in mind that this process, like much of Appreciative Inquiry, is an organic and eminently dynamic process” (2011, 201). I began to see the implication of this teaching that the church was not the sum of its policies, procedures and rules, but a living thing; the body of Christ with all the inherent beauty, instability and cycle of growth and decay that entailed. I saw the cyclical approach of Action Research and Appreciative Inquiry in particular, as ways that

embraced the reality of complexity that recognized an organization as an organism.

Dickens also spoke of the Butterfly Effect, the phenomenon of small things that led to systemic change. Appreciative Inquiry said that crucial conversations, asking the right questions, could lead to organizational change. This made me realize that real “God change” could happen in the church through simple engagement of those who considered New Life Church home and allowing the process to emerge naturally rather than trying to dictate how the change should go. Dr. Dickens’ work was also important in helping me as a leader deal with resistance to change. Dickens saw tension as creative and even necessary for the health of an organization. In physics, a system in perfect equilibrium can only tend towards entropy, and Dickens saw organizations the same way. Against what seemed at first like common sense, Dickens said that naysayers served a vital purpose (Dickens May 6, 2014). I began to understand that the objective was not to try to convince everyone but rather to discover our common purpose (the “why”) given by God and organically grow into that purpose, even with those that did not agree. Appreciative Inquiry allowed for this organic principle, for conversations to happen and consensus to begin to emerge while allowing for dissent. One of the principles that had emerged over the years of the practice of Appreciative Inquiry was called the “Free Choice Principle.” It said, “The Free-Choice Principle posits that people and organizations thrive when people are free to choose the nature and extent of their contribution” (Whitney and Trosten-

Bloom 2010, 71). Rather than fear dissent, I could embrace it as a natural part of the organic process.

Author Margaret Wheatley had done seminal work on systems thinking and chaos theory in organizations and was another source for the project. She spoke of leadership in a very different way from the traditional business model of the CEO-dictated change. She saw relationships within the organization as key, something the leader must understand and be immersed in.

Here is a *very* partial list of new metaphors to describe leaders: gardeners, midwives, stewards, servants, missionaries, facilitators, conveners. Although each takes a slightly different approach, they all name a new posture for leaders, a stance that relies on new relationships with their networks of employees, stakeholders and communities. No one can hope to lead any organization by standing outside or ignoring the web of relationships through which all work is accomplished. (Wheatley 2006, 165 author's emphasis)

Wheatley saw the complexity of relationships in organizations as something leadership must embrace. People could not be reduced to just what they do: their skill sets, training and accomplishments. Jesus made how we treated one another of paramount importance, and these relationships built on trust and respect were foundational to organizations. "We will need to become savvy about how to build relationships, how to nurture growing, evolving things. All of us will need better skills in listening, communicating, and facilitating groups, because these are the talents that build strong relationships" (Wheatley 2006, 38).

Rather than come up with a plan and ask God to bless it, the science of complexity allowed a new way for a plan to emerge. Through relationships, conversations, narratives, and sharing together that did not dictate from the outset

how the change would happen but would allow it to happen organically. Appreciative Inquiry accepted this complexity and within its structure allowed for organic change. However, it meant that I had to give up the traditional idea of the pastor having control over the church. As Dickens said, a traditional leader was one who controlled, solved things, saw things mechanically as cause and effect, and was highly prescribed (Dickens May 6, 2014), but this did not work in today's world of complexity. "We have created trouble for ourselves in organizations by confusing control with order. This is no surprise, given that for most of its written history, leadership has been defined in terms of its control functions" (Wheatley 2006, 12). Now there was a way for change to happen by engaging all who were part of the organization and letting change happen dynamically from the grassroots rather than as an administrative directive.

Complex, adaptive systems spoke to the mechanical way in which organizations have been understood to function and emphasized instead organic change; Appreciative Inquiry embraced all this. Rather than the way organizations often run in which there was a need to control all aspects so that outcomes could be predicted and problems could be addressed and fixed for maximum efficiency, there was an acknowledgment for the need of natural processes. The authors of *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination* commented on the current societal influences in the way we run organizations:

The commitment to our current deficit-based paradigm, particularly in our Euro-Centric "Western" culture, is our "default setting," as it were. That paradigm places high value on the machine metaphor (that we can take things apart, fix what is broken, and return to some ideal state). It takes a great deal of "re-training" of our thought processes to shift our metaphor,

our view of the world, to a more organic and holistic image. (Watkins, Mohr and Kelly 2011, 17-8)

Human nature wanted to control what happened and this was not limited to the business world. In the church it could often be seen in the temptation to reduce the mystery of God to a creed, set of beliefs, or a program.

What did leading a process in a complex environment look like? Dr. Dickens had found seven statistically valid factors that had been “demonstrated to facilitate emergent change that enhances organizational resilience, agility and employment engagement” (see Appendix H) (Dickens May 8, 2014): 1) safe-fail culture, 2) collaborative decision processes, 3) collaborative quality, 4) intentional learning processes, 5) culture of experimentation, 6) purposeful orientation and 7) executive engagement. I saw these principles embodied in various ways in Appreciative Inquiry and in the leadership of Christ himself. A “safe-fail culture” describes an environment of experimentation where there is freedom to undertake new innovations and brainstorm new ideas without fear of recrimination but rather learn from mistakes. The objective was not just the end product, but the people and the processes for getting there. The principle of collaborative decision processes depicts an organization where everyone within it feels they can make a difference. The principle of collaborative quality is where the people who actually did the work had input into their own destinies. One of the factors, purposeful orientation, describes a unity of purpose that engages people’s passions, something Appreciative Inquiry sought to find in the core values and shared narratives. The principle of executive engagement describes leadership that is

open, humble, transparent and non-hierarchical and is connected with the people it leads. In this new way of seeing leadership and organizations, there was a flexibility in what was once rigid, such as the roles of leaders and followers and the structures of the organization:

I am attracted to the diversity I see, to these swirling combinations of mud, silt, grass, water, rocks. This stream has an impressive ability to adapt, to change the configurations, to let the power shift, to create new structures. But behind this adaptability, making it all happen, I think, is the water's need to flow. Water answers to gravity, to downhill, to the call of ocean. The forms change, but the mission remains clear. Structures emerge, but only as temporary solutions that facilitate rather than interfere. There is none of the rigid reliance that I have learned in organizations on single forms, on true answers, on past practices. (Wheatley 2006, 15-16)

The organic nature of the kingdom acknowledges there are things outside our control. Appreciative Inquiry spoke often of “life-giving forces” and “generative narratives,” concepts that expressed the dynamic energy that connected everyone in the organization and gave space for it. “Going beyond questions of epistemology, appreciative inquiry has as its basis a metaphysical concern: it posits that social existence as such is a miracle that can never be fully comprehended” (Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros 2008, 354). Organic meant that which grew naturally; by definition it was about what gave life and this was a miracle that could only be embraced, not controlled. “But social life isn't a rigid set of categories. At its best it is a dance, a dynamic, constantly changing kaleidoscope of relationships, as a community creatively changing environment and seeks new ways to create, beauty, experience love, and enhance life” (Harder 2013, 75).

Leading congregational change in a complex environment means the acceptance of both what was one's role and what was not. Complex, adaptive systems acknowledges chaos and forces that are not in our control and saw it as part of the dynamic process. Practically, this means a greater reliance on prayer and listening to God's leading rather than having all the answers up front as the pastor. It required humility, understanding that God worked through everyone in the church, not just the leaders, and good servant-leadership was being able to recognize and give everyone a voice. Plans should be fluid and open to change, and structures should serve mission rather than the other way around. Complex, adaptive systems acknowledges the complexity and mystery of human relationships and encouraged me to put greater focus on space to share collaboratively. Finally it saw the church as a living organism led ultimately by Christ himself.

Summary of Chapter Three

The literature and case studies in Appreciative Inquiry instructed me on its origins, principles and usefulness. In particular I realize the potential it had for use in spiritual settings like a church. It provided me with possible ways to implement it and where I needed to be cautious. Leadership was not about dictating change but rather facilitating change among the participants, something complex, adaptive systems spoke to as well. Complex, adaptive systems taught me the interconnectedness of the body of Christ and the value and centrality of those

relationships. The church was more than what its programs produced, it was a living organism that, when at its best, was attractive for Christ.

CHAPTER FOUR:
PROJECT, METHODOLOGY AND
METHODS

This chapter gives a synopsis of the project and outlines the implementation of the Appreciative Inquiry process at New Life Church. A detailed description of how the four phases were planned and how data was collected and analyzed is provided. Finally, I discuss ethical considerations related to the project.

Field

The project took place at the New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada, within the congregation, where I am the sole pastor. Each of the four phases of Appreciative Inquiry was applied to the church membership with special emphasis on the elders and church board first and then to the whole congregation. The project began in September of 2016 and the last phase took place in March of 2017, lasting a total of seven months.

Scope

The project engaged the active members of the church, about fifty persons, with a focus on the elders, board and church leadership, a group of about fifteen

persons. Presentations were given to the elders and board, and there was agreement with the elders that the initial invitation to participate in the interviews would be to the ministry leaders first before opening it to the rest of the church. Leadership buy-in was desired to better facilitate the rest of the church's participation. The church had many "missing" members who had chosen not to attend but still retain their membership, and others had chosen to leave and had relinquished their membership. The project did not encompass these persons. The church also had many visitors, some of whom were consistent in attendance but had not chosen to become part of the membership for various reasons. These individuals were not requested for interviews, although they were invited to the Imagine and Innovate Phase meetings if they chose to participate.

Methodology

Initially, a project of restoration and healing through a mediation process had been envisioned for the church. However this kind of intervention was deemed too deficit-based and put a lot of onus on myself as mediator. Appreciative Inquiry drew change from the church participants themselves through positive sharing and was therefore seen as more effective. This section outlines the research focus of the project through the methodology of Appreciative Inquiry in its four phases.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry was seen as an effective change agent in a people group with biblical principles at its core. The primary goal was for the

Appreciative Inquiry process to draw the participants into positive conversations leading to transformative futures around Christ. Since the process initially focused on the good in the past, God was naturally at the heart of it because it was only by his grace that anything happened in the church. Therefore the hope was that as the Appreciative Inquiry process unfolded it would not just improve relationships with one another, but would lead to greater unity in Christ as the centre of our experience and blessing.

My plan was to use Branson's "4-I" model, (Initiate, Inquire, Imagine and Innovate) to effect positive change in the relational health at New Life Church. There were a number of ways I prepared for the project. First, I asked as many of the Tyndale Doctor of Ministry lecturers as possible about Appreciative Inquiry and its application in their contexts, people such as Dr. Peter Dickens and Dr. Paul Magnus. Each one had material that was presented in their course study work specifically on Appreciative Inquiry. The principles of complex, adaptive systems in particular were seen in the Appreciative Inquiry process and I anticipated discussion and outcomes from the participants that I could not fully predict. Secondly, the application of Appreciative Inquiry to churches was researched, predominantly using Branson's book. Harder's book and a number of doctoral theses that references Appreciative Inquiry in spiritual contexts were also consulted. Lastly, conversations were conducted with the church elders and board, current church members, former church members and the original pastor of the church. I wanted to get as complete an understanding of the church's context as possible before beginning the project.

Phase 1: Initiate

The objective of the Initiate Phase was to introduce my church and specifically my leaders, to the theory and practice of Appreciative Inquiry and to get their feedback and pray for the next steps. It was important to establish credibility of the Appreciative Inquiry process itself and how it has been used successfully in many different contexts including churches. During this time, the leaders were shown the scope of the project from start to finish and space was created for them to give input into the following steps. It was essential from the outset that this be a collaborative process where all felt invited to take ownership. I shared the most detailed information with the elders, then again with the board, and finally an abbreviated presentation to the church at large at our worship service.

Appreciative Inquiry was introduced first to the elders on September 8, 2016 in my home, sitting on sofas, presenting it from my computer displayed on the television. The intention of the informal setting was to create an atmosphere that was less about business and more about family, conversation, and freedom to explore. A PowerPoint presentation was prepared for the elders that gave some details of the history of Appreciative Inquiry and how it came about as a response to a deficit-based approach to change management. Some central principles of Appreciative Inquiry were explored, focusing on positivity, narrative, community and seeing people-groups organically rather than mechanically when fostering healthy change.

I presented the four theological points drawn from the central tenets of Appreciative Inquiry. One of the themes that arose during the conversations with the elders prior to and during the project came from the Mary and Martha story in Luke 10:38-42. We saw both roles as important, but what Jesus called “the better part,” Mary’s sitting at his feet as a disciple, was something some of the elders felt New Life Church needed more of. We wanted to continue to facilitate space for worship and spiritual growth as Martha did while being sure to “sit at the feet of Jesus” as Mary did—to actually partake in the spiritual fellowship. We wanted to enjoy the relationships with God and with one another that the hard work of Martha provided. This became a focus in the project and was mentioned in all three presentations. A quotation of one of the Seventh-day Adventist church founders Ellen White, “By beholding we become changed” (White 1928, 85), was shared to establish more recent theological underpinnings from our own roots.

Next, the actual process of Appreciative Inquiry was detailed with the four phases: Initiate, Inquire, Imagine and Innovate. Each phase was described broadly and how it would impact the church and what would be required to facilitate each one. Then the ethics of the project were presented, including adherence to the Tri-Council Policy Statement for Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans of Canada, and the Tyndale Research Ethics Policy. Also, the elders were told about the necessity for all participants’ continual, free, and informed consent in the project and that any could withdraw at any time with no consequences. Confidentiality was ensured, participants were not to be specifically identified, names would be encoded, and information for reaching my advisor was given.

Finally I gave some samples of Appreciative Inquiry questions from Branson and Harder and I asked for feedback as to which questions to include for those who consented to an interview. There was consensus to use the generalized questions from Branson's case study from First Presbyterian Church in Altadena, California that looked for generative narratives and core values (see Appendix B). However Branson had a few different choices for ministry-themed questions and we decided to focus inquiry on worship and relationships people had both inside and outside the congregation. This was decided because of their importance in the church both past and present.

This presentation was repeated at the board meeting on September 15, 2016, and finally given to the rest of the church in an abbreviated form on Saturday morning October 16, 2016. Feedback was requested at each presentation and at each meeting with the elders and board and space was given to discuss the project and give input. This happened at all elders and board meetings from September 2016 to March 2017. It was at an elders' meeting on January 9, 2017 that it was decided to have a second Imagine Phase meeting (see below) to discuss further what was brought up at the first meeting. Such engagement was important to the development of the project.

Phase 2: Inquiry

The purpose of the Inquiry Phase was to ascertain what was best at New Life Church: what core values, narratives, and best practices would create a foundation and springboard for narrative sharing and dreaming of the future. This

inquiry was to be done through an interview process. Requests for interviews were made to each elder and board member, and then extended to other ministry leaders and then to the church at large. Data from a total of twelve people was gathered starting on September 13, 2016 and ending on November 29, 2016. Special attention was given to request interviews from a broad range of ages, ranging from young adult to senior, and from both genders, seven male and five female. Also cultural backgrounds were taken into consideration with five of the twelve born outside of Canada. Each request was accompanied by information of what the Inquiry Phase was about, a discussion of ethics and ongoing consent, and whether or not they were comfortable with being recorded. Some requested further information such as the interview questions to review and the consent form ahead of time. The consent form was to be signed at the interview.

The interviews were conducted at the convenience of the interviewee, some in their homes and some at the church. The consent form were discussed and the interviewee went through it and asked questions as necessary. Once they were signed, the interview began using the eight specifically designed interview questions as seen in Appendix B. The interview varied from twenty-five minutes up to one hour in length, with an average of about forty minutes. I went through every recorded answer for each interviewee. I summarized key themes and ideas from all the sentences I recorded. For example, a particular event, a specific pastor, or some random action of the church, may have created positive memories for the interviewee. Effort was made to keep the original words and phrases that were spoken in response to each question. At times a negative memory or

criticism came up in the interview. The interviewees were asked to rephrase their comment positively. For example, if someone said they did not like someone's preaching, they might rephrase as having a wish that the future of their church would have more engaging proclamation of the word. These responses were written down for each interviewee and then collated into a document. This document would be viewed in the Imagine Phase meetings by the participants where core values and imagined futures would emerge.

In conjunction with the data gathered in the Imagine Phase through the group meetings, I decided to do a thematic coding (Stringer 2007, 101) of the same interview data to provide a comparison. I looked at the variety of responses and looked for recurring words and short phrases and then grouped them into thematic categories. These categories were determined by frequency of occurrence when spoken of as key themes. For example if "worship" was a recurring theme that was seen by interviewees as central to their spirituality, then it became a category. These observations were not shared at the meetings but are rather reported here. I did this in order to have another source of data to compare the corroborative inquiry group data in Phase 3. In this way, I would have data from the group's interaction with the interview data and data from my own observations of the interview data. The findings are in Chapter Five.

Phase 3: Imagine

This phase had two focuses. First, the congregation to come together to look at the interview data and interpret core values, stories and practices that

described when the church was at its best. Second, using that interpretive foundation, they imagined the church's future, building consensus as we prayed, shared and wrestled together with the data.

Phase 3 took place in two scheduled meetings to which the congregation was invited to come. The meetings were announced several weeks beforehand through emails, bulletins and announcements. The meetings were broadly titled "Vision Meeting" with a detailed explanation of the Appreciative Inquiry process and the current phase. "Vision Meeting" was a familiar term in church parlance that could more easily describe finding our core values and imagined futures, although the Appreciative Inquiry process was always fully explained as to the purpose of the meeting. I asked one of the church members who had skill in typing notes to record his observations of the meeting as it progressed. I specifically asked him to observe not just what was said but to report the culture, mood and spirit that was there. This became another source of data to compare to the group findings and my own observations.

The meetings took place at 5:00 pm on Saturday, December 3, 2016 and Saturday, January 28, 2017. Originally the plan was to have just one meeting, but after the meeting and discussion with the elders, it was determined that a second Imagine Phase meeting would be beneficial in further honing the church's imagined future. In the first meeting, about twenty-five people came, which represented a good amount of the core membership that attended regularly. The church sanctuary was chosen for the venue following discussion with the elders because it was thought that it would provide a greater spiritual focus and

emphasis. I wanted the members to understand that this was not just an academic project but one where God's leading was needed. A detailed primer of the Appreciative Inquiry process was given to the members, complete with a section on spiritual foundations and then ample space was created for individual prayer, prayer with a partner and finally corporate prayer. It was important that prayer be integral to this process in order for us to be open to God's leading at the meeting.

A hard copy of the interview data was given to each participant. I gave the participants guidelines to look for recurring common themes, core values and topics for further inquiry: anything that tended to be life-giving to the church family. When they saw repeated themes and threads, a story that got their attention, or a topic to ask further questions about, they were encouraged to write notes and mark their copy of the interview data. Fifteen minutes were given first for individuals to look for themes on their own. I wanted individual members to have their own time with the data. Then another fifteen minutes were given to discuss in groups of three to four people and see what common patterns emerged in the small groups. I emphasized that the Holy Spirit was shaping the future of the church through each individual that participated in sharing the positive life God had given the church. The desire was that as the participants focused on these positives it would encourage them to build upon it. "This process, heliotropic in nature, encourages the organization to turn toward images of what gives life and, through continuing dialogue, to assure that a future is built on those themes and images" (Watkins, Mohr and Kelly 2011, 192). The introduction, prayer time and the individual and group work took about one hour.

The participants then came together so they could begin to discuss the findings. What core values and themes emerged? What were they discovering about who they were? When someone would share a positive narrative or a core value, I looked for resonance and synergy among the group rather than unanimous consensus and began to write it on the whiteboard, looking for verbal and non-verbal assent. I explained to the participants that what was being written on the white board from the emerging discussion could be modified at any time. I wanted to rely on the principles of complex, adaptive systems to allow for change to develop naturally through the participants rather than by myself as pastor. They could look for what themes could be grouped together, what could be rearranged, what needed to be clarified. It was important the participants understood the process was theirs and they were free to shape it collaboratively. I encouraged all who were willing, to share, rather than just passively record the comments of those who tended to speak the most. I wanted as broad a cross-section of the members' viewpoints as possible. As I wrote down the values and themes I was hearing on a whiteboard, members would begin to connect those values to other related values or clarify what had already been written. Groups of values began to emerge around a central theme. That central theme was circled and the related values were clustered around it and connected by lines and the central themes became core values. The core values that were collectively recognized as central to New Life Church when at its best were finally tabulated into a list (see Chapter Five).

A church business meeting had been scheduled after the Imagine Phase meeting but the members decided they wanted to continue with the Imagine Phase meeting and so the business meeting was scheduled for a future date. We began to discuss imagined futures, the dreams of what could be based on the data from the interviews and core value work. I used a few terms to describe these imagined futures, namely “provocative proposals” which was Branson’s terminology in his Appreciative Inquiry work (Branson 2016, 95), and “audacious goals,” which is a term from the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists in strategic mission. I encouraged these imagined futures to be stated positively as if they were already happening, point to real desired possibilities, be based on our data, bridge “what is” towards “what might be,” be willing to push boundaries with our sanctified imagination, necessitate new learning, and challenge organizational assumptions and routines (Branson 2016, 96). The imagined futures discussion was based on the core values we had gleaned from our previous work and once again a list began to emerge, also reported in Chapter Five. In total the meeting went for three hours with refreshments served during the break.

The church leaders felt that more space should be given to the Phase 3 discussions, and so another meeting was scheduled. The interview data was shared by email to the church prior to the meeting after getting consent. This time the venue was changed to the Fellowship Hall in the basement. The sanctuary in the first meeting was felt to be conducive to spirituality, but after the discussion of the first meeting we wanted a venue more agreeable to conversation. In the Fellowship Hall, tables were arranged in a circle so people could look at each

other, and again the same individual from the previous meeting was asked to be the “scribe” to record the same kind of observations as the first meeting. Fifteen people attended this meeting, and the majority had been to the first meeting.

After an introduction, twenty minutes was given for people to pray individually. When we came back together we recounted our work from the previous meeting, restating our core values and picking up where we left off in discussing our imagined futures. Some points were clarified and new patterns began to emerge from the conversation, and these were recorded on a whiteboard. Again we looked for a collaborative synergy of voices (rather than unanimity) and what was written on the whiteboard was modified as we progressed. Imagined futures would often spawn other discussions on themes and ideas, and this was encouraged. One of the elders shared a model he had made from the discussion, and this was included in the data in our next phase meeting. Five specific areas for our imagined futures were distilled from the conversation and would be used in the next phase. So, in effect, the first Imagine Phase meeting focused predominantly on the interview data and values while the second meeting focused on the imagined futures that came out of the data. This second meeting went for two and half hours.

Phase 4: Innovate

Again we used the title “Visioning Meeting” and provided a detailed explanation of the Appreciative Inquiry process and of the Innovate Phase in particular in our announcements to the church. This phase took place during a

meeting scheduled on March 25, 2017 at 5:00 pm, also in the Fellowship Hall in the basement. A total of nineteen adults plus six children were present, including four adults who had recently begun to attend the church but were not yet members. At the meeting the ethics were reiterated to all the attendees, and then a recapitulation of the Appreciative Inquiry process and explanation of the action research cycle was given. Again there was prayer in groups and then the Inquire Phase data (interviews) was distributed along with the Imagine Phase data from the previous two meetings (values and imagined futures). I also developed a chart from the drawing one of the members created in the second Imagine Phase meeting that graphically represented the church's access points. I deemed this data could be helpful in our discussion at the Innovate Phase meeting because it was a central point in the previous Imagine Phase meeting. The objective of this meeting was to take the values and imagined futures developed in the previous meetings and create an action list that the church would begin implementing.

As we looked at the data again, I encouraged the attendees not to see the Innovate Phase as creating more programs or just superficial bureaucratic change; rather, to look for grassroots change that came out of our story. I talked about how some change is organic and happens naturally, but some change may need the deconstruction of existing structures and programs so the things that give us life can thrive. The five points of discussion that had been distilled from our conversation in the second Imagine Phase meeting became our focus, asking the Spirit to continue to lead in generative discussion rather than just administration and programming. The questions were asked, "What is our objective? What is the

point to all we do?” Again all participants were encouraged to speak and once more I looked for the collaborative synergy where there would not necessarily be a consensus but a majority of people in positive agreement and cooperation. Everyone was given a voice no matter what their membership status. As the participants talked about the five imagined futures from our previous meeting, two broad areas of innovation began to emerge from the discussion that was recorded on the whiteboard. From these two broad areas of innovation, a list of “action items” was created, and also written on the whiteboard. It was decided that the pastor and elders would oversee the implementation of these points. Overall the meeting lasted for two hours.

Methods

Several methods of data collection were used in this project: interviews, groups discussions, and ethnographic observations of a scribe and myself as researcher (see Table 3). Interviews were a major source of data in the Appreciative Inquiry process. The data from the twelve interviews from the church membership were recorded, summarized and then typed out. This process went from September to November of 2016 and the data was made ready for the December 3, 2016 meeting. The written data was then tabulated into one document with all twelve interviews, plus my responses, at the end. The focus of the interviews was asking questions, hearing narratives, and getting an understanding of the church culture the members perceived.

Group discussions that occurred in Phases 1, 3 and 4 were a major way data was produced. In Phase 1 the group discussions happened chiefly with the elders and church board, with some individual discussion with other church members. These discussions primarily helped shape the timing for the meetings and the venue, but they also gave important input for the interview questions and next steps. In Phase 3 the church came together in a meeting for collaborative inquiry for exploration of the data from Phase 2 and to find themes. This data was recorded in several ways. First, a person was asked to record the proceedings of the meeting by typing it out on a laptop. Instructions were given to record not only empirical data such as ideas for the church future, but also qualitative data such as the mood of the members, relationships, and spiritual insights. Photographs were taken of the data gathered on the whiteboard. Finally a journal of my own observations written down immediately after the church meetings were included as part of the data. Out of the two Imagine Phase meetings, two sets of data were produced: the list of important values and the list of imagined futures. Out of the Innovate Phase meeting, a list of action items covering two broad areas of ministry was produced. This chart (Table 3) summarizes the data used in this project:

Table 3: Project Data Sets

Data Set	Source	Phase	Time	Description
Input from leaders and members	Presentations	Initiate (Phase 1)	September 8, September 15 and October 16, 2016	Input determined interview questions, meeting logistics

Data Set	Source	Phase	Time	Description
Interview data	Twelve individual interviews digitally recorded	Inquiry (Phase 2)	September 13 to November 29, 2016	Recorded data summarized and collated into a document
Thematic coding	Researcher coding of interview data	Inquiry (Phase 2)	January to April 2018	Recurring themes in the interview data
Rough core values list	Collaborative Inquiry at Imagine Phase	Imagine (Phase 3) Meeting 1	December 3, 2016	Interview data themes analyzed into values by participants
Researcher observations	Typed after the meeting	Inquiry (Phase 2)	December 3, 2016	Notes of my observations after the meeting
Scribe observations	Typed on laptop and emailed	Imagine (Phase 3) Meeting 1	December 3, 2016	Scribe's ethnographic observations
Imagined futures list	Collaborative Inquiry at Imagine Phase Meeting 1 and 2	Imagine (Phase 3) Meetings 1 and 2	December 3, 2016 and January 28, 2017	Imagined futures list created based on values list
Researcher observations	Typed after the meeting	Inquiry (Phase 3)	January 28, 2016	Notes of my observations after the meeting
Scribe observations	Typed on laptop and emailed	Imagine (Phase 3) Meeting 2	January 28, 2017	Scribe's ethnographic observations
Action items list	Collaborative Inquiry at Innovate Phase Meeting	Innovate (Phase 4)	March 25, 2017	Action items list based on values and imagined futures lists
Researcher observations	Typed after the meeting	Inquiry (Phase 3)	March 25, 2017	Notes of my observations after the meeting
Scribe observations	Typed on laptop and emailed	Innovate (Phase 4)	March 25, 2017	Scribe's ethnographic observations

To summarize, two main branches of data were explored: first, data

through words. Here I focused on what people said, the interviews, conversation, and narratives as well as the scribe's impressions. I thematically coded words from the interviews to discover independently recurring themes. The second avenue was through ethnographic observation in the individual interviews and group discussions. I recorded meaning from observing the people themselves as they shared their stories, history, culture and ideas, both individually and communally.

Ethical Considerations

This project was approved by the Research Ethics Board of Tyndale University on May 11, 2016. The project used human participants with each individual person voluntarily participating in the project. At each phase the project was explained to the participants, including what data would be gathered, and how it would be used. Informed consent was also explained. With Phase 2, a consent form was also provided to the interviewees and before Phase 3, communication was sent to each interviewee reminding him or her of how the data would be used and how he or she could opt out at any point. In the collaborative inquiry groups of the later phases, each member was told about the project and the consent process and also informed of the option of opting out of the research at any point in time. To ensure confidentiality, participants were never referred to by name in the documentation and interviewees were given code numbers with documentation stored in locked filing cabinets in a locked office. Accountability was invited in all phases and at multiple points during the project.

Elder and board approval were obtained for all parts of the project. Participants were told they waived no legal rights to be involved in this study.

Participants were not harmed physically, psychologically or spiritually during this project. All participants were encouraged to disclose only information they felt comfortable in sharing. Because of the inherent positive nature of Appreciative Inquiry and its questions, this research was designated as minimal risk as per the Tri-council Policy Statement for the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. “For the purposes of this Policy, ‘minimal risk’ research is defined as research in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research” (Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2014, 22).

As researcher I was aware of the potential of a power relationship based on my position as pastor at New Life Church and therefore extra care was taken to ensure there was no coercion when seeking participation. Every effort was made to be inclusive in asking for participation and not to exclude any potential participant. Participants were included or excluded only based on the scope of the project justified by the criteria of the research. Participants did not receive any financial compensation for their involvement in this project.

Summary of Chapter Four

The methodology of Appreciative Inquiry allowed for different types of data to be gathered. Through the presentations and feedback, interviews,

collaborative inquiry, taking notes and ethnographic observation, lists of important values, imagined futures and action items were created. As the data was analyzed and recorded, this data could be useful to the church in helping to find healing from the past, clarify our identity and improve the overall goal of relationship growth.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

This chapter reports on the findings of this project based on the investigation, analysis and interpretation of the data as reported in Chapter Four. I will go through each of the four phases of the Appreciative Inquiry process and report the analyses and interpretation and then the resulting outcomes. At the end I will summarize the findings.

Phase 1: Initiate

The Initiate Phase findings came out of presentations to three groups, the elders, the board and the church congregation, and I found this phase to be integral in the Appreciative Inquiry process. The following are findings for Phase 1 divided into three areas: 1) Learning. I learned more about the implementation of Appreciative Inquiry and its value as I explained it to the leadership team. The elders and the rest of the board began to get an understanding, at least conceptually, of what Appreciative Inquiry could do at New Life Church. 2) Feedback and engagement. I received feedback from the leaders that would shape the project, and this phase created space for dialogue about the project and ourselves. 3) Unity. Phase 1 created opportunities to come together for prayer and informal conversation to discern God's will.

1) Appreciative Inquiry was unknown to my church membership. Preparing for the initial meeting with the elders obliged me to find ways to present Appreciative Inquiry in terminology that was easier to digest. This was helpful to me because learning about Appreciative Inquiry with the perspective of teaching others who knew nothing about it increased my own comprehension of it (see presentation in Appendix A). Explaining the research and case studies to others gave me a better awareness of the potential impact it could have on the church. The responses of the elders seemed to indicate that there was some understanding of the concepts and basic underpinnings of Appreciative Inquiry. Neither the elders nor I saw Appreciative Inquiry as the saviour of the church, but rather saw it as a means to help see how God worked in the past and how we could help the church share together.

The biblical roots of the project were important to some of the elders and to some of the other board members. The principle of positivity was especially important to some of the leaders as the church had been through a lot and negativity was to be avoided. For others the rigor and scientific methodology applied to the process from the beginning with Cooperrider and Srivastva was important. This was not just another opinion but based on solid research and experience. The presentation to the board and the church allowed me to convey the same information and give opportunity for people to learn some of the theological underpinnings of the project and the experiential data of the Appreciative Inquiry process used in other locales.

2) Creating opportunities for conversations in my church did not always come naturally, so the Initiate Phase made space for the members, and especially the leaders, to pause, reflect and give feedback on what the process would look like in our church. As stated in point 1 above, the first presentation of the Initiate Phase to the elders allowed misgivings and concerns about theology or rigour to be voiced and for space to respond to them. There were also conversations about the implications of the project on church time, resources, and future meetings. There was engagement about how easy a worldview based on a deficit-based approach could just be our “normal” and the need to rethink things at a fundamental level. The concept of a “Mary” and “Martha” church had often come up in the past with the elders, and this came into the conversation during the elders’ presentation. This was evidence that Appreciative Inquiry was being contextualized for our church. In both the elders and board presentations, I received input that would help me choose the interview questions and when and how the meetings could take place to maximize accessibility and effectiveness. The board was open to the project, asked some questions as to the nature of Appreciative Inquiry, gave input on the dates for our next meeting, and voted to proceed. I saw some of the implications of complex, adaptive systems that Dr. Dickens had taught where engagement with stakeholders helped determine next steps rather than be dictated by me as pastor. The church presentation was more concise and judging from the attendance at the later meetings, it was clear the core members were willing to support the initiative and give it a chance. One piece of evidence of this engagement was that two members from the

congregation expressed interest in doing an interview, suggesting that explaining the process beforehand increased interest. Another was the turnout at the two Phase 3 meetings and the one Phase 4 meeting (see below). In a busy church that rarely meets together in numbers outside of church services, the numbers showed there was some grasp of and interest in the process that I believe Phase 1 facilitated. However, compared to the leadership team, engagement with the church in this phase was minimal. In future iterations of Appreciative Inquiry, more time would be planned to present and create space to get more church feedback in Phase 1.

3) This phase also created opportunities to pray together and ask for God's guidance. While the Initiate Phase was made up of three formal presentations, there were informal conversations and announcements at church services and prayer for the process during our specially designated prayer times throughout the week. As a pastor I needed this to be more than a business solution for my church; it needed to be Spirit-led, and this phase allowed us to pause and invite his presence. The sense of the presence of God, positivity and community reported by some of the participants in the subsequent phases (see below) could have been affected by the prayer preparation in this phase. In Branson's experience outlined in his book, they used the Initiate Phase not only to share information and get feedback, but also as spiritual gathering times. He suggested a *lectio divina* (a practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer) as part of the initial meetings and in future iterations I would like to do more of such spiritual gatherings in this phase (Branson 2016, 75).

Summary of Phase 1 Findings

Phase 1 increased my learning of the Appreciative Inquiry process not just in theory but in practice in the church. It gave opportunity for the leaders and church at large to learn, ask questions, and express concerns. It created space for feedback, conversations and engagement that would shape the project. It allowed opportunity for spiritual gatherings as a community, something I wish we had done more often. Even though the Initiate Phase was energy-intensive in the research and in shaping the presentations to be as comprehensive yet digestible as possible for the elders, board and church at large, it was an important step in applying Appreciative Inquiry to a church organization. Had I begun with the Inquiry (or Discover) phase as many Appreciative Inquiry processes do, there may have been less grassroots interest and an increased possibility of seeing the process as an agenda item to be done and then moving on. My church was already very active, and time was precious, so including a step for introducing the Appreciative Inquiry journey to the church first before anything else, as Branson had done, gave everyone a voice from the beginning and helped shape how the project would be implemented in future phases. Finally, in hindsight this would have been a good point to give out a questionnaire or evaluation to help measure change between phases 1 and 4 and will be done in future iterations.

Phase 2: Inquiry

I learned much from the Inquiry Phase because it allowed me to engage members of my church in a way that could not have happened in ordinary church

interactions. The answers not only gave me a window into my own church's history, triumphs, and struggles, but also helped me better understand the person I was interviewing. Rather than people being the sum total of the tasks they performed at church, the interviews gave me an insight into their lives and what motivated and energized them. I came away changed by the process with a greater appreciation for my people's journeys. Thus, an important finding of using Appreciative Inquiry was how it changed me as the researcher because of the deeper knowledge and connection with my members.

The interviews provided tangible data that was collected into a document that was a starting point for exploration when we came together in Phase 3. A wealth of qualitative information came out of the data in the form of stories, emotions, values, insights and dreams. New information was obtained on what was already functioning well, and the participants now had concrete examples where God was actively working. As I did the interviews, I noted that as people related their positive memories of their church, positive emotions often accompanied the responses. The interviewees were the experts on their own experience and their responses changed my own perceptions of my church and from their responses it seemed to change their own image of their church as well. If God could bless as he did back then, why not now? Why not in the future? "Good *questions* arouse the interest of people, who find themselves exploring their own and others' stories" (Harder 2013, 93 author's emphasis).

Thematic Coding of Interview Questions

I looked at the document that came out of the interviews as well and used thematic coding to look for repeating themes in the responses to the eight interview questions. There were six broad themes I have identified from this analysis, and I reflect on these findings here.

Community

Community was one of the most important themes gathered from the Phase 2 interview data. When New Life was at its best, interviewees reported that the church reflected the love of Christ well, to both the surrounding community and to each other. Some saw the clearest evidence of community in what we did together; accomplishments that were possible when the church worked together. Others focused on personal interactions; not being judged and being accepted were some of the most prevalent motifs. Some of the participants recalled the time when the church first started as the North Oshawa Seventh-day Adventist Church as the best examples of community, and others saw community best happening in the present. I saw the “Martha and Mary” motif in the way the participants saw community. Some experienced community when working on a task, others through the interpersonal relationships in the church. It was a noteworthy picture of the diversity in the personality types of the church and the value of both.

Worship was also an important part of the community motif. For many of the interviewees, worship was not just the music; it was everything the church did together at a church service, from the announcements to the chatting after church,

so there was a connection to the community theme. The church being non-judgmental was an important factor in how the interviewees saw their church community. It was important that people could come to the church and worship in any way that was meaningful to them rather than the prescribed traditional way. Whether it was sitting quietly, standing with arms lifted, kneeling in prayer or shouting in praise, it was all worship. The Holy Spirit's leading was also an important value to our community worship; they valued the freedom to depart from the scripted program as the Spirit led.

Purpose

Some of the most life-generating stories described situations when the members came together with a shared purpose and vision. That vision could be a single project, such as an Easter play that happened some years ago or a broader vision such as the Neighbourhood Centre's compassion in action with the less fortunate. A motif that emerged from the interviews was the desire for true spirituality over religion. Many of the members grew up in the denomination and experienced organized religion that could often be external and about compliance. A purpose based on Jesus and a willingness to do things differently for his sake (see below) gave the church the freedom to let God lead in non-traditional ways. In my own responses, I saw the leading of the Holy Spirit through prayer and worship as the central way God's purposes were worked out in our church life.

Innovation

The interview data showed an appreciation for when the church was willing to listen to God and not default to traditional church culture. For many of the members at New Life Church there was little permission to try new things outside the prescribed way it was done in previous churches. At its inception, North Oshawa Church was open to fresh new ways to express the gospel and this was seen as valuable at New Life Church today. The early church was a “safe-fail” environment as Dr. Dickens spoke of, where people could try new things and even if it did not always work, there was no blame. This was exemplified in the original pastor, Ladd Dunfield.

Service

The interview data showed service, the act of helping others, as another central theme. New Life Church valued people as more important than the distinctive doctrines of the church. One example from the interviews was of the denomination’s teaching on the importance of physical, not just spiritual, health. For many Seventh-day Adventist churches in Canada and the U.S. this means a vegetarian lifestyle and includes avoiding caffeine, alcohol and smoking. But at New Life, recognizing that so many in our community struggle with much greater issues, some meat items as well as caffeinated beverages were made available at church gatherings, as well as the usual healthier choices. The greater value is meeting people where they are, rather than where we are. The Neighbourhood Centre food bank was a very important factor in the way the church served in an

inner-city area and figured prominently in the data. Both the church members and community as a whole have gone through many challenges, and these were seen to help us focus on service rather than theological squabbles. Our need has made it easier to serve.

Honesty

The interviewees saw New Life church at its best when it was consistent throughout the week; people did not come to church with religious masks on. Honesty and authenticity were modeled by the first pastor of the church, Ladd Dunfield, and has been a value ever since. Authenticity was a recurring factor in what was attractive to the interviewees, people were the same inside and outside of the church. This was expressed in church services through the sharing of testimonies, the freedom to worship, and coming dressed as one wishes.

Safety

Over half of the interviewees mentioned the importance of the church being a safe place when at its best. The safety was seen in areas like the aforementioned innovation where people could try things, but also in the perception that New Life Church is a place people can be themselves. Responses like, people could explore spirituality at their pace, could share or not share about their lives and not feel judged, could cry with someone if they needed it, and hear grace preached and practiced in the church. These were all ways that contributed to this value of the church being safe.

Summary of Phase 2 Findings

The Inquiry Phase allowed for the collection of data on how the members of the church saw themselves and their history. First it allowed me as pastor to have insights into the church itself and in the journey of the interviewee. Secondly, this phase gave concrete narratives and a rough list of values that could be explored and built upon in the next phase. In a church that often worked hard but had little space to articulate their thoughts about themselves, Phase 2 created that opportunity. Thirdly, as people responded to the Appreciative Inquiry questions and shared their good memories and stories, there was a growing energy in their demeanour and responses.

Phase 3: Imagine

The Imagine Phase happened over two meetings and these findings are based on three sources of data. They are, 1) the interview data from the Inquiry Phase, 2) the observations of the “scribe,” one of my members who was asked to take notes not just of what was said but to report the culture, mood, and spirit that was there, and 3) my own observations.

In the first Imagine Phase meeting, my recorded observations were that the mood was subdued at the beginning. As the participants began to read the interview data from Phase 2, and we entered into the discussion time, there was a growing energy. Stories from church life were shared, and important values and ideas for the future began to emerge. When one person shared a narrative of their experience in the beginning days of the church, some of the participants present

nodded their heads in agreement and some inserted comments of how they too remembered. My observation was that the sharing of narratives created energy and participation in every case. Our scribe reported that there was a resonance from the group with what was in the interview data. The collaborative group inquiry resulted in a rough list on the whiteboard that participants saw as important values (see Appendix J) which agreed with the scribe’s observations. I took these values and summarized them into the following core values (Table 4).

When New Life Church is at its best, this is a church that is:

Table 4: Core Value Summarized from Phase 3

Loving	The participants saw themselves as a church that cared for one another, trusted one another, did not pressure others, loved its youth and were united in working together.
Safe	The church is a safe place that is non-judgmental, respectful of privacy and inclusive to all.
Community-oriented	The church thinks outside itself, is compassionate and caring to those in need and friendly.
Authentic	New Life Church is a place where people are transparent and consistent in and out of the church.

Once the rough list of core values was established, we entered in the second part of the meeting of what our imagined futures were, and stories and ideas began to emerge from the previous discussion. This was the report from the whiteboard discussion and the scribe’s notes. One participant said since the surrounding community was important to our DNA as a church, should we put the word “community” in our church name? Another suggested the creation of a “drop-in centre” that would create a safe place with good seats and lighting, to

allow anyone to come in and rest, pray, meditate, read, listen to music, obtain resources and referrals, and make connections. Another thought that came out of the discussion was that since working together was an important value to the church, could we find ways to determine people's gifting so that all could be encouraged to be a part of the church life? A periodic spiritual gifts course was suggested.

There was the thought to extend the concept of community to other churches not of our denomination, to be more inclusive, learn from one another, and pray for each other. I could not have predicted these interesting topics of conversation that came out of the process and I appreciated the complexity in the relationships and conversations that were happening. Building of trust was essential and the important role small groups, like the weekly prayer meeting, play in building it, was discussed. It was suggested that more opportunities for small groups be created. I observed there was some energy and agreement to the ideas above. The people at the meeting expressed appreciation that we could come and pray, talk and share together, not just execute the tasks necessary to the functioning of the church. Appreciation was also expressed for the amount of data collected from the interviews, helping people understand the project was based on research of our own members.

The decision by members to cancel the church business meeting that had been scheduled after the Imagine Phase Meeting may be evidence that the members were appreciating the process. It was likely also an indication that I had underestimated the amount of time it would take to go through the data and

discussions; something I need to note for future iterations (see Chapter Six). At this three hour meeting the participants did some interpretive work as a group as they worked through the interview data that led to a rough core values list and the beginnings of a list of imagined futures. From my observations there was energy and generative conversations among the participants. A few of the participants asked to take the interview data home to read.

In my next elders' meeting, the elders decided we needed another Imagine Phase meeting, indicating that the first meeting had initiated something that was worth exploring. It was of value to me as researcher that the leadership, of its own volition, wanted to explore deeper because it demonstrated engagement and the possibility that the elders saw value in the conversations initiated by the Appreciative Inquiry process. The bulk of the time had been spent in the interpretation of the interview data from Phase 2 to ascertain values, and although the participants started doing imagined futures in the first meeting, they wanted more time to go deeper.

In the second meeting fifteen people were present and conversation was facilitated by sitting at tables in a circle. Again after a brief reminder of the Appreciative Inquiry process and with ongoing consent for participation in the project, we had a season of prayer. From my observation, prayer was very important in the process because it helped establish our meeting as more than an academic exercise or agenda item. I perceived that people were more relaxed and ready for discussion after everyone had a chance to spend the allotted twenty minutes in prayer alone before we came together. I also noted that the best

conversations in this meeting and the next meeting happened when we sat facing one another in contrast to the meeting held in the sanctuary when all were in pews facing the front. I went over the rough list of core values again from the last meeting. The scribe reported that the same values kept coming up. In the ensuing discussion of the imagined futures, the notion of differing “access points” came up that spoke of the various ways people came in contact with the church such as the Neighbourhood Centre, worship services, prayer meeting, children’s programs, and our regular church service. People were already coming to our church for various reasons, and the question was asked how these points could be made as welcoming as possible. But then the question was asked, “What then?” What was the next step as people came in through these access points? In the imagined future more was wanted than just the status quo.

This is when they began to use the word “dream.” They began to share their dreams on how the church could be a place that drew people in (access points) to disciple them. An idea that had some traction was that church was more than what was happening upstairs in the sanctuary and in traditional church programs. There were the “upstairs” ministries of the church, such as the regular church services, worship, children’s ministries, and prayer meeting. But there were also the “downstairs” ministries, which were the many functions of the Neighbourhood Centre as well as church socials and potlucks. The idea was that the church needed to leverage all the access points God had given us and realize church was not just when we were in the sanctuary, but happened at all the access points. They were God-given places we could introduce people to Jesus. Again

the idea of a drop-in centre came up as well as adding “community” to the name of our church.

Another collaborative dream was to grow in the Holy Spirit through prayer, fasting, and spiritual gifts, to continue the journey from the access points to integration in the body of Christ. Another dream shared was to have ongoing prayer every day of the week at the church or from home, covering both the church and the community. Other dreams from the previous meeting were more fully fleshed out. The participants wanted to foster organic small groups. The desire was not so much the structure of the small groups as the relationships they engendered, especially for our youth. They wanted more opportunities to be together and they saw small groups as a good way to do that. This was an important development for me in seeing the “organicity” principle in the way church relationships could grow. The focus was on the relationships growing naturally rather than being imposed through structure and programming. There was further discussion on being more connected with the churches in our neighbourhood to learn from each other. From my observations, the whiteboard and scribed notes confirmed an overall desire for the church to be accessible and welcoming to all, and at the same time be a place of nurture for those who called it home. This was the glimmerings of the two-pronged approach that came out in the meeting for the Innovate Phase (see below).

I learned through the two meetings that many of the participants valued times of sharing like these. A few that came in the first meeting did not return to the second meeting or the Innovate Phase meeting, possibly showing that such

gatherings were not needed by all. However, the majority of the core members returned and expressed appreciation for being able to reflect on our journey and explore our identity in Christ and stated there was not enough of it at New Life Church.

Core Value Comparison between Researcher Thematic Coding and Collaborative Group Findings

The thematic coding work I did with the interview data as researcher provided another source of data for comparison with what the participants did collaboratively in the Imagine Phase, primarily in the first meeting. One of the issues that continually came up is the tension between the time needed to properly assess the data and the time the members had or were willing to put into the process. I did not want to “weary the saints” with too much interpretive work, yet it needed to be enough that substantive data could be collated from the process. It was hoped that the thematic coding could give another perspective to establish greater reliability of the data.

The six themes from my own thematic coding of the interview data were community, purpose, innovation, service, honesty and safety. The core values that were summarized from the Imagine Phase Meeting 1 were compared to my own themes. There were some parallels between my own observations of the interview data and what the participants gleaned from their work in the Imagine Phase. The biggest parallel was that the participants saw their church as loving one another. Considering how deepening relationships with one another was a key objective of the project, this was a potentially significant finding. The church at its best saw

itself as one where people loved one another and was welcoming others into that fellowship and. This was perhaps the overriding self-identity of the church.

My analysis of this finding must take into the account the possibility that people saw themselves as much more loving than they actually were. The Natural Church Development self-assessment in 2015 clearly showed a church that was below average in the area of Loving Relationships. Was this project's finding self-deception? One observation during the project that gave me some indication that this finding was more than just inflated self-assessment, was the joy and acceptance expressed by the core members, especially during the Innovate Phase meeting where new members and interested visitors attended and participated. The participants showed a welcoming spirit and, as will be reported, the newcomers shared powerful testimonies of the love and acceptance they had found at New Life Church. So why the discrepancy between the 2015 Natural Church Development results and the participant's collaborative work? First, it is possible that the church has grown since 2015 and was simply better at loving relationships. Secondly, and more likely from my understanding of the church's history, was that the church really *was* a loving church from the start, but something may have hindered the manifestation of that love. Many of the leadership and members had made it clear that it was difficult to trust because of fear of another schism. Perhaps this fear hindered opportunities for coming together in community and in a church that tended to be task-oriented, unity was expressed predominantly by work accomplished together. It was a finding worth exploring in the future.

The community parallel was also seen in the joy expressed in the interviews and in the collaborative work for worshiping together. The idea that came through in the discussions was that people could come to New Life and worship and get to know God at their pace, evidenced by the “church upstairs” and “church downstairs” concepts. They were both ways the church welcomed people to worship God. There seemed to be a lot of value placed on the relationships they had with one another and with God in community.

The “purpose” theme that I had found in the interview data was less represented in the collaborative discussion of values and I saw no parallel with the “innovate” theme. Innovation did not emerge at all in the core values. Why were purpose and innovation seemingly important to the interviewees, yet did not come out of the collaborative discussion? One possibility is that the end result of purpose and innovation was where the value was placed. While innovation is something the church may do naturally, it was done for the sake of something else, primarily community. The value was in what the innovation was *for* rather than the innovation itself. One promising avenue of exploration is if there might be some shifting from the “Martha” mode of creating the structures for spirituality and be more like a “Mary” church where the value was in the loving relationships themselves.

There were greater parallels between the themes I found in the interview data and the group sessions in the area of service. There was no doubt that the participants saw their church as caring for the community around it. The Neighbourhood Centre was the most important way of doing that and this was

expressed by a majority of the participants. But one finding was that both the interview data and group discussion saw other ways that the church reached out to the community as well. Ease of taking part in church activities, discovering ways the community wants to worship, a former prison ministry, “health days,” Vacation Bible Schools and a strong desire by the group to connect with other churches not of our faith, were all ways the church could serve outside itself.

There was agreement between my coding of the interview data and the group sessions on the “honesty” theme. There was a definite self-assessment that the church was real and not hypocritical. The scribe observed a connection between authenticity and safety. Finally there were parallels in the “safety” theme between the two data sets. The scribe data showed that “being a safe place” was a recurring topic of conversation. He used the word four times in the first Phase 3 meeting observations in the contexts of the participants wanting their church to be a place of where people would not feel pressured, where there was transparency and authenticity, and where vulnerable people who were in the community facing challenges could feel secure. There was a desire for a drop-in centre that would provide a safe place for the community to come in and make connections or sit quietly as they wished.

This comparison helped establish the high value placed on relationships: with God, one another and with our community. This was not a church adverse to relationship; in fact, it was central and opened up lines of inquiry as to what could foster these relationships. This would be explored further in the discussion during the next phase. These findings also showed where the value was not placed during

the group discussions. While purpose and innovation showed up as themes in the interview data, they were less important in favour of relationship-oriented values in the collaborative discussions.

Summary of Phase 3 Findings

The Imagine Phase demonstrated a desire for the members of the church to have more opportunities for community with one another. The Appreciative Inquiry process was meaningful not only in the useful data that was produced, but in the relationships it stimulated. In this busy world, deliberate space needed to be created for such community to happen, and Appreciative Inquiry facilitated that. So I saw the process itself, not just the data it produced, as valuable to the church.

The summarized core values that emerged from the interview data and my own coding showed relationships to be important in our church. The dreams that came out of this phase showed a continued passion for Christ that should be shared with others and a willingness to change in order to accommodate others. There was desire to do more than go through the motions of church, but rather to be the authentic church every day of the week and grow in our walk with Christ and one another. These expressions of faith and unity were exciting to me as a pastor.

Phase 3 is where I observed the greatest experience of the transformative potential in the Appreciative Inquiry process for increasing relationship with God and each other in an organic way. Conversations were natural and unforced, and once the participants began sharing their stories and images, the discussions took

on a life of their own. The participants were gently drawn together and showed all the positive values they held; moreover, the hope was profound at times because they understood through the shared values, narratives and experiences, that God was with New Life Church. They could not have experienced these positive, biblical qualities otherwise. And if Christ was with the church, and if at its best it could show his love to one another, then there was a positive future ahead. I observed that the participants left both meetings with a sense of hope for the future, a sense that far from being through with this assembly, God was just getting started.

Phase 4: Innovate

Unlike the other meetings, we started this one thirty minutes late as people continued to arrive. A total of nineteen adults and six children were present. The children were off to the side and played quietly together, providing a family atmosphere to the gathering. Comments received at the meeting and from my own written observations showed this meeting to be the most Spirit-led time we had had within the Appreciative Inquiry process as evidenced by the joy, collaboration, and prayer we experienced together. All nineteen participants engaged in conversation and about half of the participants spoke with me afterwards of the impact the meeting had had on them and some indicated that they want more of these kinds of gatherings. Hands were going up everywhere, and most of the nineteen adults present spoke. There was laughter and a few tears,

too, as people shared their stories of how New Life Church had impacted their lives positively.

After taking a fresh look at the interview data as well as the core values and imagined futures data, the discussion began, and the participants asked important questions that would set the tone for the meeting. One of the elders asked what was the objective of the church? Was it just to baptize people into church membership? There was agreement from the participants that they wanted more. Another elder asked about the church's mission statement, "To help people become fully devoted followers of Christ." He made the connection from that mission statement to the need for community in order to make disciples for Christ. How can the church foster this community? Some of the participants talked about the importance of "doing life" with people. Standing with someone is an important role. The participants asked profound questions such as what is the church's purpose, why are we here? Each person is a gift to the body of Christ, and once we find that purpose together we invite others to it. And now that people are here, what is next? How do we value people to help them grow in the body of Christ? How do we meet them where they are and not where we are? I observed a sense of the Holy Spirit's presence as these deep questions were asked and a few of the people who were more recent attendees of the church shared their testimonies of inclusion and acceptance at New Life in a way that moved some of the group to tears.

One of my elders, who is a Doctor of Philosophy, had put some thought into the concept of access-points to the church from the previous meeting's

discussion. How did community happen at New Life Church and what were ways people could connect to one another? The diagram labels actual points in the church that interface with the community and I recreated it with his permission.

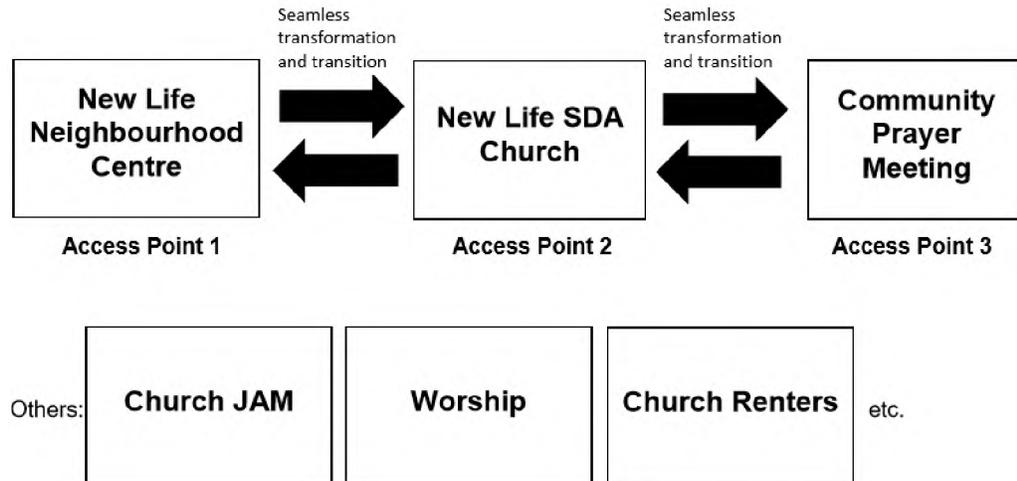


Figure 1: Making church accessible

Source: Dr. Leroy Clarke

The diagram created some discussion about how people came to the church and how the church might transition them between points to integrate them into church life. As the previous data was discussed, two areas of focus emerged: 1) Accessibility to Christ, and 2) Development in Christ. The discussion indicated that the church wanted to draw people to Jesus and then develop them in him.

The following are my observations of the proceedings for Phase 4. For accessibility to Christ, there was discussion on the various access points through which people came into the church and how the church could live out its core values at these access points. For the regular Sabbath morning service for example, the church could practice love through the core values of loving one

another both in and outside the church, and creating a safe and authentic place to explore spirituality. These were values that made us accessible to others. Other ways to increase accessibility to Christ was through small group interactions we already had, such as our Sabbath School time, prayer groups, involving children and youth more in worship and the after-church ministry of connecting.

The Neighbourhood Centre was a critically important access point for people coming to the church to learn about Jesus. It is a key aspect of the “downstairs” church. The Centre’s mandate was not just to give food to people, but to give dignity and respect. Through the various events where it served the public, the Centre was a place where the church wanted to focus on presenting Christ in a way that made more sense to the people. The church in the past few years had three baptisms that were clients of the Centre and another one is scheduled in June for a person who was once an avowed atheist. Other access points were the regular children’s program, Church JAM (children’s church), Vacation Bible School and JustWorship, a periodic worship program on Saturday evenings. They talked of the importance of social times like game nights, the church picnic, movie nights, and even of the value of having renters at the church and learning from them. All of these events have been opportunities for new people to come into the church community and get to know Christ. Some visitors just come to the event, but there are a few that have chosen to stay and become integrated into the church community.

There was discussion on how at all the access points, the church could give people value, prioritize relationships, and most importantly, present Christ

where *they* were, not where the members were. This was a recurring concept: that the church has to present the gospel in a language people understand, and this means intentionality and taking time to know them and the prevailing culture. Prayer was seen as central to this process. The work of drawing people to the various access points and the church being ready to receive them, was the work of God and could not happen without prayer. There was collaborative agreement that intentional prayer should be a part of every access point, not just prayer for the success of what the church was doing but prayer for seekers already at the access point who want to know Jesus, for those who might be hurting and have needs, and for God to send more people to us in the future. We wanted a prayer team that could handle the requests coming out of the access points. There was also discussion on learning the demographics and logistics of people in the surrounding community. What could be done to help our neighbours come to New Life? Also a “connect card” was discussed that could be used at all access points that would allow people to receive information or ask for assistance, and make connections.

The conversation then turned to discussing the portions of our earlier session that focus on development in Christ. The scribe reported on the conversation that not everyone comes to church for spiritual needs; some come to visit for the sake of community. Some just partook of the services offered at the various access points and moved on. Others, however, wanted to know more and were attracted to the community and wanted to belong. The scribe observed discussion on how important finding purpose was to people; how everyone God

brings was a gift to the body of Christ. What is next for these persons, how could the church help nurture and disciple them in Christ? The scribe's observations showed the participants wanted to meet the practical needs of people, to share God's love with more than just words but to "stand with someone." There was the idea of developing mentoring in the church for new believers, young people and for general accountability as ways of developing people in Christ. The elders, who were all present and agreed, would help develop people by dividing the church into elder-led "flocks" for whom they could pray over and minister. Again the idea of a regular spiritual gifts program was discussed and would be implemented periodically as part of the life of the church. Small groups were discussed again in more detail. They did not want to start more groups just for the sake of activity. Instead they discussed how they could leverage the current small groups already in existence, (such as the prayer meeting attendees, the worship team, Sabbath School groups, and the Neighbourhood Centre volunteers) into being more holistic and organic in order to fostering real relationships. These were practical ways to develop people.

The discussion on accessibility led to a desire for more communal prayer so that God could use the current access points of the church to bring in more people. Understanding the people in our community was part of the equation to make us more accessible as well. In order to develop the people God had brought to the church, there was agreement that the elders be given a greater one-on-one role rather than just their overall strategic implementation role which was often the case at New Life Church. Having a periodic spiritual gifts program for new

believers could help develop and integrate them into ministry at the church. The importance of the relationships engendered by small group interactions was something the participants actively wanted more of and after the meeting this was reiterated to me by a few members of the group. There was also discussion on how the implementation of the Appreciative Inquiry process would happen at the church.

From the discussion, a list of action items was created:

1. Pastor/Elders will oversee the implementation of action points.
2. Use bulletin and mid-week emails to disseminate information frequently and accurately.
3. Foster a culture of prayer at each access point that prioritizes prayer for people interested in Christ and prayer for those still to come.
4. Create a prayer ministry to pray for each access point in the church and the people that come in through there.
5. Create a “connect card” for new people to obtain information, help and connection in the church.
6. Do a study on demographics and needs in our community to better facilitate access.
7. Divide church membership and interest among the elders to better facilitate discipleship, volunteering, identifying gifts and needs, finding purpose, etc.
8. Have a spiritual gifts program periodically for new believers and others who may want to reaffirm them (spiritual gifts can change).

9. Intentional development of organic small groups, especially for young people, based on interests, demographics, etc.

The list was created so that the Appreciative Inquiry process would lead to tangible results rather than just remain a discussion. Since the Innovate meeting, we have begun implementation of the items on the action list in our elders' meetings.

Summary of Phase 4 Findings

The Innovate Phase meeting brought together all the preceding discussions into a hopeful and joyful dialogue. From my observations, we were uniquely blessed that some of the attendees were recent to the church and shared their positive experiences; we also learned from them what needed to be improved. It seemed clear that intentional space was needed for these familial gatherings where people could just dream, share, and feel heard and loved and it led to a sense of unity I had not experienced before in the church. From my observations, the conversations generated felt natural, in harmony with the organicity principle, where the future could be explored freely instead of feeling like an imposed leadership mandate. Rather than a sense of needing to expand programs and do more, or try to fix what was wrong, there was a sense of wanting to go deeper to enjoy what the church already had. The action items hinted at a longing for the intangible-but-real sense of community, belonging and Christ-likeness that could not be mandated from a meeting or a program. The participants wanted to have a

sense of working hard like Martha, but to learn to rest, listen, and enjoy Christ and each other like Mary.

Findings Through the Lens of Complex Adaptive Systems

The Appreciative Inquiry process incorporated some of the principles of complex, adaptive systems learned in class and in the literature researched. Throughout the process, the importance and complexity of the interconnected relationships were seen in each step. In Phases 1, 3 and 4 I observed how the group dynamics and the ensuing conversations were not predictable. Dr. Dickens emphasized the “emergent” nature of the process, meaning that it developed as one went along, it could not be controlled and prescribed from the start. I had an idea of the structure of Appreciative Inquiry but I could not have predicted the ideas that came out of the discussion, the people who would attend, or how the meetings would unfold. Dr. Dickens spoke of how even something we take for granted like language creates complexity. Did I understand what the interviewees actually said and what they meant by it? My understanding of the themes in the Phase 2 interviews and how they were summarized for Phase 3 were choices I had made that possibly could have changed the conversations if I had chosen different words.

As researcher I saw the value of seeing the organization as a garden instead of a well-oiled machine. Appreciative Inquiry did not do away with structure, but it did not make structure so paramount that it stifled the organicity of the process. Appreciative Inquiry spoke of the “generative forces” that took

place within the organization when there were positive narratives shared in community. There was the church, and there was the “not-church,” but what happened within was dynamic and ever-changing. I am certain that doing this process again would result in different conversations and findings. There was the possibility of developing a culture where it was safe to fail and try new things and my role must be more of a gardener and facilitator than CEO. This lack of control was at times disconcerting for me as researcher and pastor, but also exhilarating in trusting God to work through his people in possibly surprising ways.

I saw evidence of the Butterfly Effect where conversations over a few short hours might eventually result in systematic change and a potentially a changed church culture. Decisions to cancel a church business meeting, to have two Phase 3 meetings, which Appreciative Inquiry questions to use, or to include people who were not members yet but were interested in the potential for the church and this project, all had effects down the road. It is certain that the Phase 4 meeting would not have been so spiritually and emotionally impacting if we had restricted attendance to members only. We would not have heard the testimonies of the differences the relationships in the church had made to some of the relative newcomers.

I also saw that my role as pastor in the church was embedded in the community and there were challenges in keeping myself objective as researcher (see Chapter Six “What I Would Do Differently”). It was not fully possible to separate myself from my own church family, and this had its own complex effects. Complex, adaptive systems also helped me understand that the people

who did not participate also had a positive role. While no “decliners” were polled as to why they chose not to participate, complex, adaptive systems see non-participants as part of the tension that was necessary for the health of the organization. Organizations thrive when people are free to choose how much they will contribute.

Finally, I saw the principles of complex, adaptive systems displayed in how the mission began to take precedence over the structure. The church determined that relationships were vital and programs and events that created those relationship opportunities were not as important as the relationships themselves. Church business meetings were postponed, relationships were prioritized among the elders, old ministry structures were discarded for new ones, and new and innovative were explored to create relationship opportunities with the community and other churches. Complex, adaptive systems theory was a way of understanding the findings through the Appreciative Inquiry process at New Life Church.

Overall Summary of Findings

The Appreciative Inquiry worldview was a paradigm shift in my experience of church as a pastor. My church graciously gave of its time to journey with me in this project, and from the feedback of the participants and my own observations, it was in general a positive and useful experience. About half of the core membership participated in some way in the Appreciative Inquiry process. The data that was based on our own interactions could be useful in helping build a

positive future. Interviewees expressed hope about their church both in times before the schism in 1997 and after. This along with the group sharing that was based on the interviews could lend to healing the participants' perspective of their own past. Certainly the data suggested that the participants believed in the future of their church. The core values helped establish an identity that was very relational: loving each other, and welcoming the community into a safe and authentic environment. How much of this assessment was perception and how much was reality could be debated, but at least while the participants spent time together, there was an increase in joy and excitement during the three group meetings and a call by many for more such gatherings. To achieve the objective of increased loving relationship resulting in unity, Appreciative Inquiry had some positive effects at New Life Church. I began to see the possibility that unity was not hindered because the church was unfriendly, but rather because there was little opportunity (or even trust) to invest in the time and risk it required to connect with one another. As the pastor I saw the organic principle that there was value in planning but also saw that the Spirit's movement that cannot be planned. I needed to embrace the mystery and miracle of God moving among his people in community.

Between the end of the project and the writing of this thesis, there has been some strategic implementation of the provocative proposals. The elders and I have met several times to work on action items from the Innovate Phase, and there has already been some implementation in the area of more focused prayer and the creation of a "connect card." At the beginning of 2018, we implemented a

restructuring of ministry in the church. The elders were given an area of ministry focus to oversee and under them, leaders and workers were doing the ministry itself. The elders' focus was on nurturing the leaders and workers in their area rather than on the task itself. There has also been a greater focus on relationship-building through various small group events such as prayer meeting, fun nights, and newly created Sabbath School groups. There will also be a relationship-building weekend seminar this year sponsored by the church. There is also work proceeding with the head elder and myself towards a more robust discipleship track that brings people together and instructs them beyond baptismal classes. There is still more to be done, but there is hope that this will be just some of the first fruit coming out of the discussions from the Appreciative Inquiry project.

CHAPTER SIX:
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND
CONTRIBUTION TO MINISTRY

The findings of this project have several implications for those seeking a process of change in an organization. It was particularly successful in improving relationships in a church setting. These implications are summarized, first by what the process did or did not do at the New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church, second by my own personal reflections, third by implications for other churches, and finally by a discussion of ways I would improve the project in future iterations.

Overall Benefits

First, the Appreciative Inquiry process gave the church real data. The interviews, core values, imagined futures, and action items were all outcomes that are now being used in building our future. The data was far more compelling when it came from the church itself; it was harder to ignore because it was our own journey, our own narratives. These outcomes contributed to the church, helping to restructure how leadership oversees ministries to focus on the people rather than only on the task. It also resulted in a greater focus on, and need for, relationship-building in our event-planning and membership development. There

are ongoing plans for greater discipleship development opportunities, such as spiritual gifts assessments and fostering organic small groups. Development would also happen by improving structures to facilitate connection such as the connect cards and better processes to communicate with the church and community.

The process also brought people together in a positive way. Relationship building was a central objective and hope for this process, and this was a definite benefit. Appreciative Inquiry gave the church a chance to look *at* each other, and not just at the work to be done or the persons at the front of the church. In a church that was very hard working and could easily become program-oriented, Appreciative Inquiry provided a means for the community to share about itself. Appreciative Inquiry allowed relationship building, first for myself as pastor as I interacted with the interviewees, and then as a church as everyone shared together. The sharing of stories created life and energy and a desire for more communal space. Appreciative Inquiry whetted our appetite for more holy community together; this was repeated to me at all three of the group meetings. I had heard in my time as pastor the challenges in trusting one another because of the pain of the split in the past, and I saw Appreciative Inquiry as something that fostered trust that the church *can* come together in healthy ways to pray, talk, share, and grow with little risk. The Appreciative Inquiry process, because it was inherently positive, gave the church a chance to see potential rather than problems and even the most difficult events and patterns of the past could be seen in a new light.

It was easy in a church that could often be program-oriented to see Appreciative Inquiry as just another thing to do. Nevertheless, as we met and saw the interview data and began to pray and talk together, there was connection that happened naturally. Appreciative Inquiry provided a natural way for people to share positive stories and it was transformative. Rather than an artificial, dictated experience, Appreciative Inquiry created space for life to emerge in the way that was natural for our group. This gave a sense of freedom that there did not have to be a goal to be achieved. The church could explore together and see how God led and let the chips fall where they may. Since it was positive from the start, the conversations never led to anything damaging. Ideas could spring up naturally and could be examined and gain energy or be discarded with no fear of consequences, because it was a safe space.

Appreciative Inquiry gave every willing participant a voice in the process. Through this process, everyone could speak and share their experience, whether or not they had been engaged from the birth of the church or were newcomers. As long as they were interested in participating, they could, and this empowerment helped me hear from people that might not normally participate. It could open up new possibilities for group collaboration for future gatherings and initiatives. The core values also clarified a sense of identity. This led to an understanding of how central relationships were to the church, both the relationship with God and the ones with one another.

Appreciative Inquiry bred hope. Our church had gone through challenges in the past and had sometimes felt battered and bruised. Hearing the stories of

individuals in the interviews, how they saw God so clearly in the best times and even when there was struggle, produced a sense of possibility. God was still with his church, there was still a purpose and a future. Appreciative Inquiry seeks what gives life, what is generative, and there was that intangible but real sense of energy that began to happen as everyone shared together. The focus was on possibilities not problems. Appreciative Inquiry has a “begetting principle” where a group of people move in the direction of their focus. The more positive and hopeful was the conversation about the past, present and future, the more New Life Church moved in that positive direction, and this was observed. There was a sense of purpose and possibility. The participants were no longer talking theory or agenda items; these were real-life experiences through story, and there was a sense of the holy as everyone listened. And finally, this sense of hope and possibility made change possible. There were many things that were good at New Life Church but also practices, cultures and perceptions that needed shifting. Change was a real possibility as the church learned to make the celebration of God’s goodness the new normal.

I would like to see more relationship development opportunities in the church, both through education and by creating relational experiences. The core members’ strengths are what has kept the church going since the schism, and many of these strengths were in the areas of administration and task execution. These were strengths that need to continue to be exercised, while intentionally growing a culture where relationships can grow. The declining membership over the years was evidence that just having the programs in place was not enough.

The Appreciative Inquiry process gave a sense of the life that comes out of healthy Christ-centered relationships, and we needed to promote this more in the church as a culture, not just as a one-time event. This was something that is beginning to happen.

There are also some limitations with Appreciative Inquiry. The process could not ascertain the veracity of the participants' self-assessment that New Life was indeed a loving church. Their understanding that one of the core values of the church was love for one another could possibly be only a perceived strength. So the use of Appreciative Inquiry as a definitive fact-finding process has its limitations and it was not a solution for everything that was wrong in the church. However the process moved people to talk and explore together and this was still an important outcome, even if the process could not fully discern between a real and a perceived strength of the church. Appreciative Inquiry, embedded as it is in the Action Research Cycle, is meant to be iterative. As the implementation unfolds, perception will run up against reality and this may appear in future iterations of the process. So even with the limitations of Appreciative Inquiry, there is still benefit to the generative discussion it promotes.

Personal Reflection

New Life Church had been through some difficult challenges in the past. I had hoped Appreciative Inquiry could help the church find a vantage point to better see their past. The interviews and group stories spoke of hope both before and after the schism, and this was encouraging to me that there was something

worth celebrating, past, present and future. In September of 2017, five months after the Innovate Phase meeting, the church had its twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations. Part of those celebrations included inviting the original pastor, Ladd Dunfield, to preach, and members who had left at the schism were also invited. At least twenty of those people came to celebrate and listened to Pastor Dunfield. Some of them played music at the anniversary service. This was a good first step in healing, both for those who left and those who remained. This, combined with the Appreciative Inquiry project, may have helped the church begin to close old wounds and see the future with optimism.

I most appreciated how Appreciative Inquiry created space to just talk and reflect. To some who were naturally task-oriented, this may not have been their greatest need. But for those who longed for relationship, Appreciative Inquiry helped it happened in a natural way and I was blessed to see many who called New Life Church home, engage in energetic, positive discussion about their own church and call for more such opportunities in the future.

The interview process was inspiring to me as pastor. Listening to the journeys of the participants in the interviews helped me understand how faithful they had been through the ups and downs of life. It was an honour to pastor this group of people. I gained a greater appreciation of the variety of personalities and backgrounds that was our church and how well we could work together and dwell together in unity. Appreciative Inquiry was both structured enough and free enough to encourage me to try. The structure helped me know what was next and encouraged me on the path; the organic, developing nature of Appreciative

Inquiry gave me freedom not to be required to have all the answers; rather, I could trust in my members as the Spirit led. From my perspective, it was the perfect combination of structure and freedom that encouraged me to try *something* that could bless the church. And both the theological underpinnings that I explored in Appreciative Inquiry and the many cases of its use in the business world and increasingly in the church, gave the process credibility. It was a process that gave space for God and his people to come together in a positive, communal, and organic way, and I found myself changing as I listened to and interacted with the congregation.

Implications for Other Churches

Any church that wants to increase loving relationships in its congregation could benefit from Appreciative Inquiry. In the church health assessment called Natural Church Development, the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a denomination in Ontario ranked lowest in two areas: Loving Relationships and Holistic Small Groups, both are areas that deal with relationships between church members. I believe increasing the quality of relationships among the members is a vital objective in the denomination as a whole, and Appreciative Inquiry is one tool that can help foster this. Working together positively and organically, as Appreciative Inquiry does, can help increase a sense of unity in the church. Also, focusing on God's goodness and leading in the past can give people a boost in their relationship with God and allow Christ to be seen in the life of the church

more clearly. I believe many of the central principles of Appreciative Inquiry can find biblical backing, making this process a possibility in any church.

Also, a church that has experienced pain in its past could use Appreciative Inquiry as a way to bring much needed peace, rest and hope. Appreciative Inquiry does not ignore negative experiences; it approaches them from a different angle. It is the safest way I have ever encountered to deal with historical pain in the church. Appreciative Inquiry's constant focus on the positive does not allow for people to wallow in negative perceptions of the past that could spark controversy and discord.

For a church that tends to be task-oriented and has many programs, Appreciative Inquiry is a good possibility to create space for the church to reflect, dialogue, dream, and collectively seek God's vision for the church. The Seventh-day Adventist denomination tends to be very busy, and a method to pause and reflect could be very useful to bring cohesion and focus. Any church that feels like it has too much "Martha" and not enough "Mary" could benefit from the Appreciative Inquiry process because it places the value on the relationships themselves, not just what people can produce.

Churches that have experienced pain in their past may also struggle with trust. Appreciative Inquiry creates safe places for people to share that engenders trust and builds relationships. Appreciative Inquiry seems to be one of those projects that, at worst, does no harm and at best, can transform the church, and it is forgiving in its implementation. There may be omissions, there may be areas where more or less time could have been spent, and there may be events that

could have been better organized, but even an imperfect implementation yields positive results (see “What I Would Do Differently” below).

Every church is different. Growth happens naturally, organically, according to each church’s “DNA.” The temptation is to “cut and paste” the experience of another successful church onto one’s own, but Appreciative Inquiry allows growth to happen at the pace and in the “soil” that is native to the church. Since it is the members themselves who take ownership of the process and are the source of data, the solutions that come out of it are natural to the church body, and it is easier to take ownership.

Finally, Appreciative Inquiry creates space for God. It is a paradox that sometimes we become bound to doing what we have always done in the name of God that we actually stop following God. Appreciative Inquiry allows a church time to listen to God’s Spirit, time for communal prayer, and time to reflect. The process is flexible so that whatever spiritual disciplines work at an individual church could be used in the Appreciative Inquiry. For example, a church could take time to fast during the Appreciative Inquiry process, sing spiritual songs during a Phase 2 meeting, or have a time of fellowship celebration after a Phase 4 meeting. Whatever the church finds encouraging and edifying can be incorporated into the Appreciative Inquiry process to help members connect with God.

What I Would Do Differently

Speaking of the concepts of Appreciative Inquiry, Loveless said, “Although these concepts are not difficult to understand, like all tools used in

organizational work, they need to be experienced several times before they can be mastered” (Loveless 2009, 20). Loveless is right. Appreciative Inquiry is conceptually large and it takes practice to fully understand. Consequently there was things I wished I had done differently. I took to heart the injunction to take notes as much as possible, but I still wish I had done even more to record data. For example, I had a scribe’s observations for Phases 3 and 4, but it did not occur to me to “observe” Phases 1 and 2 because I was focused on the workings of the phases themselves (introducing Appreciative Inquiry and doing the interviews), so there was no “recording of me recording.” There is a sort of “meta-observation”—“observing the observation”—in which one records about the process itself rather than just recording the output of the process. This is something I would like to have done more of in this project. Even where I did obtain data, I would have liked to record more. For example, in the Imagine Phase I should have been more rigorous in exactly what way the whiteboard data was formed. I would recommend not just writing down on the whiteboard but asking members to write down the themes that come up both in their time alone, and with the group. As a result, the findings and conclusions from the data could have been that much more accurate. Now that I know more about data collection I would have been even more meticulous in recording the process at every stage.

This difficulty in seeking to capture a wider view of the project made me lose an opportunity to acquire other types of data from the participants themselves. For example, I was focused on the results of the phases themselves but it would have been useful to gain feedback from the participants specifically

about Appreciative Inquiry and perhaps a “before and after” comparison. It would have increased rigor and reliability of the actual results at each phase.

One of the things I observed post-project was the difficulty in separating my pastoral role from that of a researcher. As a pastor that had been ministering for almost twenty years, I know how to conduct a meeting, how to listen, and how to encourage participation, but this could become a liability if I began to rely on “common sense” in how I led and formulated data. This could work in a non-academic setting, but not for a scholarly one. The need for greater clarity in my roles was seen in my pastoral heart for my church. I care deeply for my church, and that is a good thing, but there were times my enthusiasm for my own church may have caused me to inject my own emotion and desires into the meetings. This may have made it more difficult to judge what my congregation’s discussion was and what was affected by my influence, making the conclusions from the data less clear than I would have wished. Being clearer in my mind about my dual role as researcher and pastor, and the need for appropriate boundaries in the way I conducted the project, could help gather better data.

One of the issues I consistently faced in this methodology was lack of time. As was mentioned before, there was a tension between the time necessary for due diligence to be done on the interview data and subsequent findings, and the amount of time my members were willing to give. I was keenly aware of the ethics of free, ongoing consent, and I did not want to cross the boundary by using my position as pastor to impose on my members’ good graces. To overcome this, I should spend far more time on the Initiate Phase in the future. If more time were

given in “front-loading” exploration and training regarding the power of Appreciative Inquiry, then perhaps there would be a concomitant ownership and greater enthusiasm in later stages. I would have felt greater confidence to spend more time on interpreting the interviews; in hindsight, one hour was not enough. While the hour was useful and good data came from it, more time spent could have helped create more links and lines of inquiry that would have been fruitful.

As was said before, the process was new to me too, and now I understand more clearly how emergent and powerful Appreciative Inquiry can be. The elders and board members were able to support the project based on a limited understanding of what it could do, and based on trusting in me as their pastor. In the future, a more detailed exploration of the benefits of Appreciative Inquiry in organizations of all kinds would be helpful (such as a sermon series on the theological underpinnings, more case study examples, and some books on the basics).

I would also involve my church at large more. I spent the most time with the leaders, and there was good reason for it, but in hindsight I would have liked to do more with the whole church. Again, perhaps a sermon series on emergent change, contrasting a mechanical view of an organization to one that is complex and adaptive, or the organic nature of the Kingdom of God, could have helped the church better understand the potential. As a researcher, I had been steeped in the Appreciative Inquiry process for some time, even if I had never done the process, but that was not the experience of the members. Upon reflection, the critical nature of Phase 1 is more apparent to me, and I would spend more time there with

both leaders and church membership. In summary, I agree with Loveless that Appreciative Inquiry is not something to try once; it is a worldview that can be used over and over and even become part of the culture of the church, thereby increasing effectiveness with each use.

Conclusion

Appreciative Inquiry created a way for us to gather around Jesus and one another. The power of Appreciative Inquiry is not in the tool itself but in the acceptance of the mystery of how positive relationships and practices are transformative. To date, the elders and I continue to implement the actions steps that emerged from the process. The process created a sense of possibility and the power of what God can do when we trust one another and work together. The name “Appreciative Inquiry” will not be remembered in the church, but what the process did in gathering us together around Jesus to share, laugh, and hope together as his church will, by God’s grace, continue to bless us in the years to come.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:
Appreciative Inquiry Presentation to Elders -
Initiate Phase

Ap-pre'ci-ate, v.,

1. valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems
2. to increase in value, e.g. the economy has appreciated in value.
 - Synonyms: VALUING, PRIZING, ESTEEMING, and HONORING.

In-quire' (kwir), v.,

1. the act of exploration and discovery.
2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities.
 - Synonyms: DISCOVERY, SEARCH, and SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION, STUDY.

Background

- In the early 1980s David Cooperrider began developing Appreciative Inquiry (AI).
- He was looking at the traditional way groups did “change management”. This just means how change happens in an organization, so for example if there’s a problem, or a company wants to increase customer satisfaction, what changes need to happen? He found out something fascinating.
- The traditional way of doing things was to focus on the problem and it wasn’t working too well.

Problem Solving Approach

- Identify Problem
- Conduct Root Cause Analysis
- Brainstorm Solutions & Analyze
- Develop Action Plans
- This has been called a “deficit-based” approach. What is wrong and how do we fix it?
- *Metaphor: Organizations are problems to be solved*

Background continued

- Cooperrider began to experiment with a positive approach to change. He began to find a new cooperation and innovation that had not been seen before.
- He began to focus on people's strengths, and became fascinated by studying people, teams and organizations at their best.
- As he worked he found out a central principle of change: "What we focus on, we become."
- This is of course a principle we find in the Bible and Ellen White beautifully put it this way: "By beholding, we are changed".

Appreciative Inquiry Approach

- Appreciate "what is". What gives life? Listening to narratives of how God has gone before us and has already blessed us is transformative.
- AI focuses on the organization as people, not a machine. As Jesus taught about His kingdom, the church is a living thing, it's organic, it can't be run as a business. (And the traditional model is not even working for businesses anymore).
- It involves all stakeholders rather than a "top-down" approach. Whatever change happens, we will all decide it, not the pastor or conference. It is community-driven, we pray, dream and plan together.
- Because it focuses on the positive and what already works, it inspires.
- Metaphor: Organizations are living things, complex, mysterious. Only God fully knows how it all works together, because Jesus is the Head of the body.

What is it?

- "The cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives a system "life" when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to heighten positive potential." – Cooperrider, D.L. and Whitney, D. , *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change*. In P. Holman and T. Devane (eds.), *The Change Handbook*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 245-263.

Theology of Appreciative Inquiry: Positivity

- Philippians 4:8-9, "Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard. Then the God of peace will be with you."

- Proverbs 17:22, “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones”.
- Philippians 4:6, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God”. We are not to be problem-focused but God-focused.

Theology of Appreciative Inquiry: Community

- Philippians 2:1-2, “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”
Community is critically important in Scripture, and in Appreciative Inquiry.
- We have been so soaked in the individualism of modern Western culture that we feel threatened by the idea of our primary identity being that of the family we belong to—especially when the family in question is so large, stretching across space and time. The church isn’t simply a collection of isolated individuals, all following their own pathways of spiritual growth without much reference to one another. – N. T. Wright
- “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” Romans 12:4-5.

Theology of Appreciative Inquiry: Narrative

- “Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story...” Psalm 107:2
- God constantly called Israel to remember their story of how God delivered them from slavery.
- “Congregations have observed, tasted, and claimed the narratives of God’s presence and transformative power—and the remembering brings those stories into the present...” – Mark Branson
- Jesus taught mainly through stories (parables). There is power in narrative to transform lives.
- The New Testament church shared their stories (testimonies) with one another daily.

Theology of Appreciative Inquiry: Mary and Martha

- Both Martha and Mary did good things. But Martha’s focus caused her to rebuke Mary and Jesus said Mary chose the “better part”. What is that better part?
- “Every house has a laundry room, but you don’t live there.” – Dr. Mark Chapman. There are things that we do to make life possible, shopping,

getting gas, cutting the lawn, but life is not in those tasks, it's in the people, the relationships.

- How can we become a church that is balanced between relationship-oriented Mary and get-things-done Martha? Can AI help us find the proper focus?

The Process

- Appreciative Inquiry is in four steps or phases. I am using the “4-I” model: Initiate, Inquire, Imagine and Innovate.
- 1) Initiate:
 - Introduce AI to key leaders and groups in the church. These will help shape the direction of the project, questions to be used in the interview process, who will be interviewed, and an invitation to help interpret the data for the next step.
- 2) Inquire:
 - The life-giving narratives in the history and experiences of the members will be drawn out through interviews. At the end of this phase, the data will be analyzed to determine what the next step looks like.

The Process continued

- 3) Imagine:
 - What are the common themes and shared images? Come together to create some goals towards a preferred future. Analyze data to shape the next step.
- 4) Innovate:
 - Create new ways to implement the imagined futures in the church. How can our goals become a reality at New Life church?
- After this I will evaluate the data and the effectiveness of the AI process at New Life church. This data, with permission from all involved, will become part of the thesis in due course.

Ethics

- This project will adhere to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans of Canada, and the Tyndale Research Ethics Policy.
- I must continually seek free, informed, and ongoing consent from participants of this project. Consent will be written.
- Participants are free to leave the project and can ask to give or take away consent for their data at any time.

- Confidentiality is ensured, participants will never be specifically identified, and all data will be encrypted and stored safely and results will be encoded to protect identity. There is no physical risk at any point.

Ethics continued

- Data from interview questions will be taken as a whole without concern for what the individual response was. If any specific references are made in the report, names will be changed. Any quotations used in the thesis must have written permission by the participant.
- Appreciative Inquiry is an inherently positive process and this project is deemed as low-risk for all involved.
- At any time participants can speak with Dr. Robert Shaughnessy at rshaughnessy@tyndale.ca or 416-226-6620 ext. 2239.

Sample Appreciative Inquiry questions

- Reflecting on your entire experience at New Life Church, remember a time when you felt the most engaged, alive and motivated. Who was involved? What did you do? How did it feel? What happened?
- What are the healthiest, most life-giving aspects of the relationships among people at church? What would you say has been most valuable about your friendships? Have certain groups been valuable to you? What would you say is most important about how we relate to each other? Give me some examples of how we live together at our best?
- What do you think is the most important, life-giving characteristics of our church? When we are at our best, what is the single most important value that makes our church unique?
- Make three wishes for the future of our church. Describe what the church would look like as these wishes come true.

APPENDIX B:
Interview Questions - Inquire Phase

Opening Question

1. Reflecting on your entire experience at New Life Church, remember a time when you felt the most engaged, alive and motivated.

Value Questions

Relationship with God

2a. When you consider all of your experience at our church, what has contributed most to your spiritual life?

Relationships with each other

2b. What are the healthiest, most life-giving aspects of the relationships among people at church?

Relationship with the community

2c. When you think about how our church has related to our community and to the world, what do you think has been most important?

Worship

2d. What are the most valuable aspects of our congregation's worship?

Yourself

2e. Don't be humble; this is important information. What are the most valuable ways you contribute to our church personally—your personality, your perspectives, your skills, your activities, your character? Give me some examples.

Summary Question

3. What do you think is the most important, life-giving characteristics of our church? When we are at our best, what is the single most important value that makes our church unique?

Wishes

4. Make three wishes for the future of our church. Describe what the church would look like as these wishes come true.

APPENDIX C: Imagine Phase Meetings One And Two

MEETING ONE

Introduction

- Reminder of free, informed, ongoing consent to participate

Appreciative Inquiry Primer

- Change can be inconvenient
- Whatever is pure, noble, of good report
- Orienting ourselves towards what gives life
- What is already good at New Life?
- Four phases of Appreciative Inquiry
- Guiding principles
 - Value differences
 - Emergent, collaborative process
 - Appreciative Inquiry leads to action

Prayer Time

- For God's Spirit
- For unity
- For God's will to be done

Finding Core Values

- Participants explore interview data from Inquiry Phase
- Look for core values, themes and topics for further inquiry

Sanctified Imagination

- Clarify themes in collaborative group discussion
- Imagined future by creating provocative proposals/audacious goals

MEETING TWO

- Prayer Time
- Recap of previous meeting
 - How has God led us in the past?
 - What is our "positive core"?
- Continue work on imagined future by provocative proposals/audacious goals

APPENDIX D:
Innovate Phase Meeting

- Reminder of free, informed, ongoing consent to participate
- Reminder of the Appreciative Inquiry process
- Prayer Time
- Recap of core values and imagined futures
- Innovate collaborative group discussion
- Action items list

APPENDIX E: Consent Form

Information and General Consent Form

Research Project: Fostering Positive Change Through Appreciative Inquiry at the New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church in Oshawa, ON

Researcher: Frank Dell'Erba, Doctor of Ministry student at Tyndale University

Thank you for considering participating in this Doctor of Ministry project. Appreciative Inquiry is a strength-based approach to organizational change. Appreciative Inquiry uses four steps to accomplish positive change: Initiate, Inquiry, Imagine and Innovate and each step will welcome your participation and input. This project seeks to use the Appreciative Inquiry model to focus and build on the positive history of how God has led at New Life church and foster vision, unity and ministry for the present and future.

This form asks for your consent to participate in this project. You will be asked to participate in several areas. In the Initiate phase, information will be shared either individually or in groups about what Appreciative Inquiry is and what will happen in succeeding steps of the project. Your input will be sought in giving direction to the project, shaping the questions and to help interpret the data in the next steps. In the Inquiry step, you may be asked to participate in an individual interview with the researcher involving several questions about how God has led in the past at New Life and in your own ministry. Your story at New Life church will be key in helping shape what the future will be. In the Imagine step, the church will come together to dream of what the future will look like. We will discuss common themes, shared images and create some goals towards a dreamed future. In the Innovate stage we will come together again to discuss how our goals will become reality and make it sustainable. The researcher will again meet with you once more individually to ask a few questions of changes, positive or negative, you may have perceived during the whole process.

All information will be gathered in strictest confidence and your name will never be used. You will always be asked to give written consent for your input that will be used in the project, and you can withdraw your participation and any data gathered in previous steps at any time. Under no circumstances will there be any retributive behaviour or thinking by the researcher for a decision not to participate. Appreciative Inquiry is inherently a positive process and carries very little risk because it seeks to benefit everyone. There is no physical risk at any point and participants waive no legal rights to be involved in this study. Each individual will have their names encoded to a number. The results of the interview questions will then be taken by the researcher and studied as a whole without concern for what the individual response was. If any specific references are made in the report, names will be changed. All records of the research will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office at home.

If there are any concerns, please direct inquiries to Frank Dell’Erba, the researcher of this project and a student of Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, Ontario. He may be reached at _____ (cell), email _____ and/or address at _____. If further assistance is needed, participants may call the researcher’s faculty supervisor at Tyndale University, Dr. Robert Shaughnessy, rshaughnessy@tyndale.ca or 416-226-6620 ext. 2239. Thank you for your willingness to participate.

I hereby agree to participate in this study, as described above:

(Participant’s Name)	(Participant/Guardian’s Signature)
(Date)	

(Researcher’s Name)	(Researcher’s Signature)
(Date)	

**APPENDIX F:
Project Research Log**

Date	Person/Group/Event	Type
2-Feb-14	Elder 1	Conversation
17-Jan-14	Pastor 5	Email
6-Feb-14	Elders Meeting	Conversation
3-Feb-14	Pastor 5	Email
8-Sep-16	Elders Meeting	Presentation
15-Sep-16	Board Meeting	Presentation
12-Sep-16	Pastors 1, 2, 3 and 4	Conversation
12-Sep-16	Creating Thesis Outline	Word Document
13-Sep-16	Begin Inquiry Phase interviews	Interviews
15-Oct-16	Initiate Phase presentation to the church	Presentation
29-Nov-16	End Inquiry Phase interviews	Interviews
1-Dec-16	Interviewees of church membership	Email
3-Dec-16	Church	Imagine Phase: Presentation and discussion #1
12-Jan-17	Board Meeting	Discussion
24-Jan-17	Church	Email
28-Jan-17	Church	Imagine Phase: Presentation and discussion #2
20-Mar-17	Church	Email
24-Mar-17	Elder 2	Email
25-Mar-17	Church	Innovate Phase: Presentation and discussion
13-Apr-17	Elders Meeting	Conversation

APPENDIX G: Invitations to the Appreciative Inquiry Process

OCTOBER 15, 2016 APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY PRESENTATION TO THE
CHURCH – INITIATE PHASE

Good morning. Some of you know that I have been pursuing graduate studies at Tyndale University for the last 3 years. The most important part of my time there is the doctoral project and thesis. Every student must do a project that seeks to bless the church he or she pastors. I have begun my project and I wanted to let you know about it and seek your input. My project is to conduct a process called Appreciative Inquiry that seeks to encourage positive growth and change in the church. So give me few moments to explain what this is about.

The term “Appreciative Inquiry” came about in the early 1980s by a man David Cooperrider as he looked at the business world. He found that traditionally, a group of people were treated as a machine. The way you dealt with problems was to focus on the problem, fix it, and then everything should run smoothly. Like a car: you bring it to Darren to see what part is not working and once it’s fixed, it’s good to go. Well that works for cars. But Cooperrider was surprised to find that it wasn’t working too well with people. This is called a “deficit-based” approach: what’s wrong and how do we fix it? Organizations are seen as problems to be solved. But it was found that people are way more complex than that. Jesus never treated His disciples as problems to be solved.

Cooperrider had the simple idea: What if there were a positive approach to change? What if asking what’s wrong, we ask what’s right? He began to focus on people’s strengths and their stories of life and growth. He became fascinated with studying people, teams and organizations at their best. As he worked, he discovered a central principle of change: **What we focus on we become.** Does this sound familiar to you? Of course it’s a biblical principle. Philippians 4:8, “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.” Ellen White puts it beautifully, “By beholding, we are changed.” It’s like the saying, “You are what you eat”. 2 Cor. 3:18, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image...”

Cooperrider was amazed to find that when people focused on what was giving life to the organization, listening to people’s stories, allowing every person to be a part in shaping the future, that organizations changed for the better in powerful ways. Over time spiritual leaders realized that churches were also being run on the same traditional model. What’s wrong? Fix it. For years churches have been run like businesses, our meetings were business-like, we even call coming together as a church to decide on church matters a “church business meeting”.

But it was found that the “What wrong? Fix it” approach doesn’t work. People and relationships are more complex than that. Jesus used organic language to

describe our relationship with Him and each other. Vine and branches, yeast, mustard seeds, wheat and weeds, Jesus as the head of the body of believers. It was dynamic, it was understood that people and nature were infinitely complex and only God could fully understand it and rule it.

So church leaders began to ask if Appreciative Inquiry, considering it had such strong biblical principles like focusing on the good, working together as a community in unity, and sharing our stories together, if it could work in churches. Since the early 2000s, numerous churches have tried it and it was found to be a great blessing in helping the church find God's vision, purpose and direction to grow and change for the better. Why does it work?

1) Appreciative Inquiry asks how God has blessed us in the past and what has worked well. It focuses on the positive. That's the "appreciate" part of it. What is good, what gives life, where have we been at our best? Because we focus on what works, it inspires us rather than just seeing the problems.

2) Appreciative Inquiry asks everyone who is part of the church for their stories, their narratives. That's the "inquiry" part. Many traditional businesses and churches have the strong CEO that tells the organization what to do. That's the top-down approach. But this just doesn't work anymore. You can't dictate to people by rules or salaries to change internally. It doesn't work, Jesus knew that. Instead every person in the organization is understood to be a part owner of the organization. You are the lifeblood of New Life church. It is not the big kahuna who decides, it's not the board who decides, it is all of us who decide together as God leads. It's about the whole community. That's what made me excited about this project, it has the potential to get us all working and dreaming together.

New Life has been through a lot. We are a church that has had some knocks, but God has never abandoned us and today we have so much to celebrate. Next year we celebrate 25 years since this church's inception as the North Oshawa SDA Church on September 26, 1992. I wanted to pick a project that would help us realize how good God is, how He has blessed us through each one of you, whether you are a founding member or just made this church your home recently. So here's the process for Appreciative Inquiry, it's in four steps. It's called the 4-I model: Initiate, Inquire, Imagine and Innovate.

1) Initiate is what we're doing now, it's introducing Appreciative Inquiry to you. The most important thing I want you to understand is how important you are to the process. I want this church to grow in God's leading and vision and direction, and your input on that is vital.

2) Step 2 is Inquire. I have already begun asking some of you to do interviews with me. In the interviews I ask you some simple questions about what has blessed you in your time at New Life. It's all positive, no awkward questions, no negativity. I'm looking for a sampling to interview from the congregation: ages, genders, cultures, new people, long-standing members, etc. I'm looking for common themes in everyone's narratives, shared experiences that will help us dream of the future. If you are interested in doing one certainly let me know and I'd be glad to do that with you.

3) Step 3 is Imagine. This is where everyone is invited, whether you've specifically done an interview or not and we share together as a community. What are the common themes we are seeing in how God has worked at New Life? What are our core values that God has raised up this church for? Here we start dreaming of what the future can be like at New Life. I'm hoping we can do this before our Church Business meeting coming up in November.

4) The last step is Innovate. Now that we've shared together, dreamed together of what the future could look like, how do we make this happen? How does the vision and mission and goals God has put on our heart become a reality at New Life church?

So that's it. What we discover together will become my thesis that I hope will bless this church and others churches that may come along looking for ways for God's transformation to happen. The project and thesis is very time intensive. The conference allows for a leave of absence for school but I am trying to avoid that. So you will find that there are a lot of guest speakers who will be preaching at New Life this quarter and the next. I normally preach 10-11 times per quarter, this quarter I'm preaching 7. For the bulk of November I will not be preaching to free up time to get a lot done for school, we will have some great guest preachers coming. I'll still be here at church, I'm not going anywhere, and I will be available as always for prayer, visitation, prayer meeting etc. I really would appreciate your prayers over the next 6 months. Again I will repeat it, your input and feedback is valuable so I'm inviting your voices to be heard as God shapes the future of this church. Thank you for your kind attention.

NOVEMBER 30, 2016 ITEM IN EMAIL TO THE CHURCH – IMAGINE PHASE

Vision Meeting and Church Business Meeting: Sabbath, December 3 starting at 5 pm. This Sabbath evening we will meet to pray and explore and discuss what God has done, is doing, and will do at New Life Church, it will be an exciting time! There will be snacks served and then we'll go into our Church Business Meeting time. Anyone who considers New Life home is cordially invited to be there!

DECEMBER 1, 2016 EMAIL TO INTERVIEWEES – INQUIRY PHASE

Hello, you are receiving this email because you kindly consented to do an interview. Thank you so much for sharing your perspective and hopes for your church, it will be a great blessing to all. On Saturday night at 5 pm we will explore the data in the interviews and look for common themes and stories that help us understand God's leading in the past, present and into the future.

In an effort to provide opportunity for ongoing consent, I want to reiterate a few things and always give you opportunity to say yes or no.

- Your name will not be used in the data, however your identity could be guessed by the context. This is pretty common in churches, especially smaller ones.
- During the interviews some of you gave names, such as Ladd Dunfield or others who had a positive impact on you. These names will be retained.
- This is a low-risk project and it is all positive. Though you may be identifiable, the published thesis will never use anything that could identify you.
- At any time you can opt out of the project. If you would prefer your data to not be used Saturday night, let me know and I will remove it.

Thank you again for taking time with me to bless your church. God bless!

Frank

DECEMBER 2, 2016 E-BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE CHURCH – IMAGINE PHASE

Vision and Church Business Meeting: Sabbath, December 3 starting at 5 pm. This Sabbath evening we will meet to pray and explore and discuss what God has done, is doing, and will do at New Life Church, it will be an exciting time! There will be snacks served and then we'll go into our Church Business Meeting time. Anyone who considers New Life home is cordially invited to be there!

JANUARY 18, 2017 ITEM IN EMAIL TO THE CHURCH

Vision Meeting and Church Business Meeting: Saturday night January 28th at 5 pm. We will continue to explore the future of our church and your input is needed and appreciated!

JANUARY 24, 2017 EMAIL TO THE CHURCH – IMAGINE PHASE

Hello church family. I want to invite you to come out this Sabbath, January 28 at 5 pm for the continuation of the Vision Meeting started in December and then the Church Business meeting afterwards. In December we explored how God has led this church, even with the challenges and we came up with a list of core values and themes that people resonated with:

When we are at our best, New Life is:

- A safe place, not worried about externals, no pressure
- Friendly, sense of community, want people to belong
- Accepting, non-judgmental, inclusive
- We think outside ourselves

- Close-knit, work together, active
- Authentic, try to be real, transparency
- Youth are a strong focus
- Growing trust in God and one another

Attached is the data from interviews done with 14 church members, just click the link below. At the top of the file are 8 interview questions and the responses from 14 different members. The idea is to look for common themes of what God has been doing at New Life and why God has called us into existence from North Oshawa Church until now. With this data and previous discussion, we will explore the future this Sabbath.

Interviews: https://gallery.mailchimp.com/5e1072ef971e8378b9b79d404/files/Imagine_Phase_Data_from_Interviews.pdf

I would like to invite you to consider these 3 things:

1) Will you pray for your church? Invite the Holy Spirit into your life and to guide the church. The more time we spend with God in prayer, the more we will hear His voice, it's as simple as that. I want to again invite you to Prayer Meeting at 7 pm on Wednesday and/or the Prayer Time at 8:30 pm afterwards in my office for focused prayer. Even if you can't come on Saturday night, pray for God's leading at New Life.

2) Read the interviews prayerfully and think about the future. Put yourself in the place of Mary, sitting at Jesus' feet. What is He telling you? What is His will for New Life church? If you can, make a note of your thoughts and consider sharing what God has revealed to you at the Vision Meeting.

3) Come out at 5 pm Sabbath, January 28. Nothing replaces your presence there. Whether you want to share or just listen and pray, you are invited to be a part of shaping the future of New Life.

Thank you church family, have a God-blessed week.

Frank

MARCH 17, 2017 E-BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE CHURCH

Vision Meeting: March 25 at 5 pm we will conclude the visioning meetings we've been exploring since December for Pastor Frank's doctoral project on Appreciative Inquiry. Come and gather with your church family and discover God's leading through you, His church. Your input is vitally needed and appreciated! JustWorship will follow at 7 pm.

MARCH 20, 2017 EMAIL TO THE CHURCH

Hello church family. I want to invite you to come out this Sabbath, March 25 at 5 pm for the conclusion of our vision meeting started last December. The whole process is called "Appreciative Inquiry" and at its heart is a means to engage people to create God-led change. Appreciative Inquiry was birthed as a reaction to the standard business practices we see in our society and even in the church where the few manage and govern the many; where an organization is seen as a machine that can be controlled and predicted. Appreciative Inquiry has the biblical basis that there is power when ALL the community, the "stakeholders", are seen as valued and positive discussions and sharing of stories create natural change and direction. In the church, it is an invitation to gather together around Jesus and listen to His Spirit flowing as we pray and work together. It has been used to bring healthy change and direction in churches.

Church is more than doing things and then going home. To put it mathematically: JESUS+PEOPLE=CHURCH. Church is a group of people around Jesus, it's a lifestyle, it's what we *are*. It's more than our building. As a pastor I find strength and hope when we meet together and pray and share instead of just "doing the church thing". Why not look at who God called us to be, look at our society around us, and ask pointed questions: Who are we in Christ? Is the current structure adequate to serve the mission God is putting in our midst? What can we do to allow God's Spirit to flow unhindered among us? How can we be more united in love and purpose? What needs to change and what needs to be held on to?

Our last phase is called INNOVATE. This is where we take the good things from our past, the things we dreamed about in our last meetings, and with God's leading make it happen. We are looking for common ground through prayer and discussion, share discoveries and possibilities, and come to an agreement on how it will happen. We get an idea of the vision God has for New Life church and then create actionable ideas to move us closer to that vision.

At our last meeting, considering our past, these are some of the biggest things that came to the surface:

- Make church accessible. Not just in the disability sense, but accessible for people to find Jesus. Creating seamless access points for example between the church and those who come to the Neighbourhood Centre or Prayer Meeting.
- Focused on the Holy Spirit developing us. Discipleship, growing in our walk with Christ.
- Prayer is central to the church, dream of having prayer happening at the church and with the members every day.
- The nurture of organic small groups. Youth, music, social

- Praying, connecting and interacting with other churches in our area.

Here again are is the data from the interviews done in Fall of 2016 that provided the basis for our discussion in the last 2 meetings, and the points of what we found out through that data of when we are at our best.

Interviews: https://gallery.mailchimp.com/5e1072ef971e8378b9b79d404/files/Imagine_Phase_Data_from_Interviews.pdf

When we are at our best, New Life is:

- A safe place, not worried about externals, no pressure
- Friendly, sense of community, want people to belong
- Accepting, non-judgmental, inclusive
- Thinking outside ourselves
- Close-knit, working together, active
- Authentic, trying to be real, transparent
- Is strongly committed to youth
- Growing in trust with God and each another

If you consider New Life home, I'd like to invite you to attend at 5 pm Sabbath. Even if you choose not to be there, please make it a commitment to pray for God's leading in this process and in all the church.

Thanks for your time, God bless.

Pastor Frank

MARCH 24, 2017 ITEM IN EMAIL TO THE CHURCH

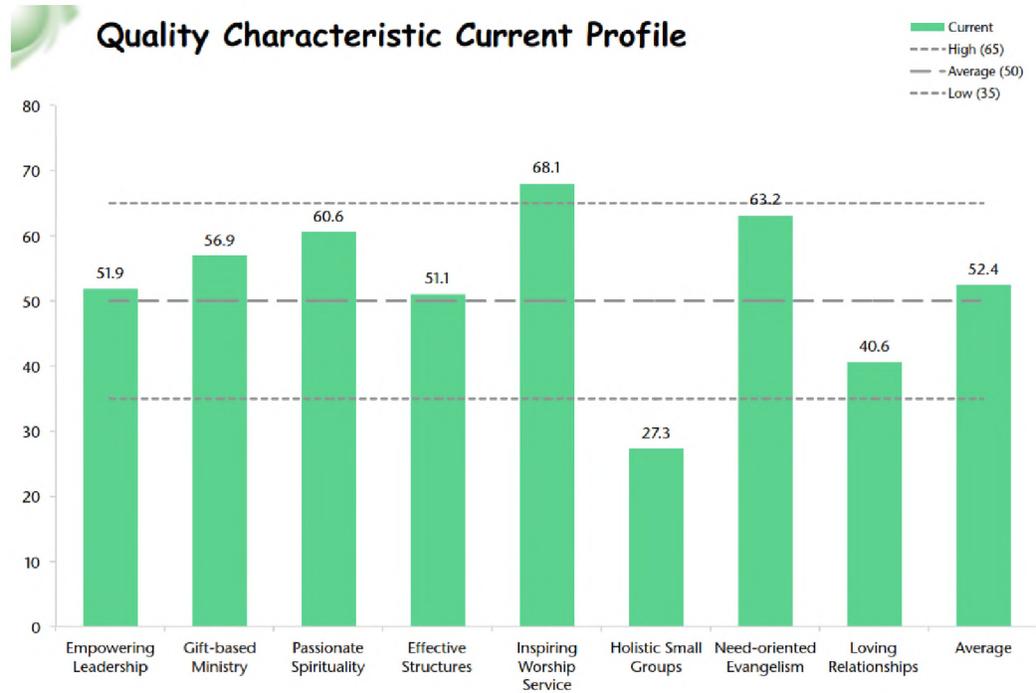
Vision Meeting: 5 pm Sabbath, March 25. This is our last meeting for the Appreciative Inquiry project. The last phase is called INNOVATE. We take the best of our past that God blessed us with, combine it with the "holy dreaming" that went on in the last two meetings, and create actionable ideas to move us closer to the vision God has for us. If you consider New Life home, your presence, input and prayers are appreciated.

APPENDIX H:
Dr. Peter Dickens' Seven Factors That
Demonstrate Emergent Change That Enhances
Organizational Resilience, Agility And
Employment Engagement

(Dickens May 8, 2014)

- 1) Safe-fail culture – Ok to make mistakes, freedom. The degree to which the organization is perceived to be innovative, make mistakes, learn and move on without fear of recrimination.
- 2) Collaborative decision processes – People feel they can make a difference. The degree to which people throughout the organization have timely input into the decision that affect the work that they do.
- 3) Collaborative quality – People define their own fate. The degree to which decisions about quality measures and strategies are defined by the people doing the work, supported with the data they need to make decisions.
- 4) Intentional learning processes – Humility, “teachableness”, in the organization. The degree to which there is both formal and informal support for both technical and relational skills and the willingness of the organization to learn as it goes.
- 5) Culture of experimentation – Innovation, permission to try, not locked down to tradition. The degree to which people are willing to try new ideas and approaches, to listen to people who think different than they do, and to welcome innovation.
- 6) Purposeful orientation – Unity of purpose, passionate unity. The degree to which people feel they have a common purpose and focus and share a passion for that purpose.
- 7) Executive engagement – Leadership is visible, open, humble, innovative, connected to members. The degree to which senior management demonstrates support for, and commitment to non-hierarchical approaches.

**APPENDIX I:
Natural Church Development Scores for New
Life Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Spring 2015**



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Scores (Canadian church national average is 50):

Empowering Leadership:	51.9
Gift-based Ministry	56.9
Passionate Spirituality	60.6
Effective Structures	51.3
Inspiring Worship Service	68.1
Holistic Small Groups	27.3
Need-oriented Evangelism	63.2
Loving Relationship	40.6
 Average	 52.4

**APPENDIX J:
Rough List from Value Discussion -
Imagine Phase Meeting 1**

- A safe place
- Friendly
- Accepting
- Inclusive
- Non-judgmental
- Community-oriented
- Thinking outside ourselves
- Working together and are close-knit
- Compassionate, caring
- Focused on our youth
- United, working together
- Not pressuring people
- Authentic
- Transparent
- Trusting of one another
- Respectful of privacy

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