



The Thrive Project:
a season of experimentation



Spring: a season of experimentation

Spring is a time to plant, a time to bloom, a time to set in motion God's eventual harvest. Jesus' imagery is filled with plant life, which is expected since Israel was an agrarian society, and continues to invite our imaginations to cultivate, nurture, expect, and reap harvests of God-life among us—or have we forgotten how to dream of such things?

The Thrive Project's third season is Spring: a season of experimentation. The premise of the season of experimentation is that we can still dream; therefore, we will still plant, still cultivate, still nurture, and still expect God to do great things. We must continue to partner with the God who brings the harvest.

For each season there is a purpose, and every purpose deserves some metrics:

Spring/Experimentation proposed purpose statement: to engage in ministry and mission as a congregation with sufficient "newness" (e.g. in new ways, for new people, amidst new relationships, with new voices, toward new goals, etc.) that members are required to trust in the Lord with all of their hearts.

Spring/Experimentation proposed metrics statement: By the conclusion of the season of experimentation, our congregation will have experimented with X form(s) of internal ministry within the congregation and Y forms of external or missional ministry.

During the season of experimentation there are a variety of options for inviting congregational discernment. For instance, consider the following ideas:

(1) *Be the Church Always Reforming.* Choose one of the six Great Ends to focus on for skill growth, congregational experimentation, expanding community connections, or risk-taking.

- Brainstorm five *possible* experiments and then choose *one* to try. Evaluate. Repeat as many times as needed.



- (2) *Missional clustering:* Partner with other congregations (either Presbyterian, ecumenical, or interfaith) or community organizations toward engaging missional ministry.
- (3) *"Lord, Deepen Our Service" prayer concerts:* in which the church hosts dedicated times of prayer on each of the Great Ends but specifically targeted toward God's provision for the ministry experiment(s).

For each of the above ideas, the presbytery can provide resources through its Thrive Project facilitators. We have tools to share, and we are in this together. In the Kingdom of God, there is no need to DIY. In the Kingdom of God, we are better together. In the Kingdom of God, where God desires harvest, we are called to plant, to cultivate, to nurture, to expect, and to reap.

We can do this...together!



The Power of Purpose

By Brad Munroe, Presbytery Pastor

Have you ever wondered why, how and for what reason one church is thriving and another that is doing the exact same things is dying? Or wondered why, how and for what reason a program led by a 50-something, well-liked, long-term church member is a great success while the program led by a different church member with the exact same credentials utterly fails? Perhaps the difference is in the why.

Simon Sinek, in his book *Start with Why*, contrasts the impact Apple has had as a successful enterprise versus TiVo as a commercial failure. Both are tech companies with state-of-the-art products; yet one is cutting-edge cool and the other nerdy. What is the difference between Apple and TiVo? Apple started with why.

Apple's why—its vision and self-identity—is to make connections easier, to make it easier and faster for an individual to become a community and for personal ideas to become shared encounter. TiVo's vision and identity is to produce a remote control that allows you to manipulate your TV watching experience; this is not a “why” but a “what.” Apple's vision leads to energy, enthusiasm and passion and *just happens* to get fulfilled by creating gadgets. TiVo's vision leads to the making of gadgets for the sake of gadgets; no wonder TiVo failed.

Starting with why is a theological and spiritual issue. Why do we proclaim the Gospel? Why should I care about my brother or sister, neighbor or stranger, friend or enemy? Why do we seek to maintain divine worship, preserve the truth or promote social righteousness? Why on God's green earth should we seek to exhibit the Kingdom of Heaven to the world? These are questions that energize our faithfulness, that bring passion in the pursuit of fruitfulness.

David Gortner, in his book *Transforming Evangelism*, suggests that beginning with why is essential for our practice of the first Great End of the Church: “No program or formula will work. Evangelism that emerges



from our gratitude and compels us to speak is a chosen habit...”¹ Gortner suggests three spiritual practices to energize the habit of sharing faith:

- I will remember my own wonder, joy and gratitude.
- I will speak; I will tell my stories.
- I will meet other people listening for the Holy in their lives.

Implicit in Gortner's spiritual practices is the notion that faith sharing must start with a clear and compelling sense of why Jesus matters and why our relationship with Jesus matters.

- Because Jesus is the most amazing man, a true revolutionary, a Jesus-troubles-my-soul-in-all-the-best-ways prophet, a “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39) Savior of the world, we love telling his story.
- Because Jesus is both an abiding presence and my guiding light, both my Friend and Savior and Lord, it is a joy to tell his story.

Faith sharing then is neither a “program or formula” but a way of living and moving and having our being...if we start with why.

¹ David Gortner, *Transforming Evangelism*. (New York: Church Publishing Inc., 2008), 48.

A corollary to Start with Why is to define “why” in terms that are real, compelling and connect to our lives in simple yet powerful ways. Dan Heath, in an article based on his book *Writing a Mission Statement that Doesn't Suck*, illustrates what happens when we try to get too cute with our words. He tells the story of the pizza parlor who proposed the following mission statement: “Our mission is to serve the tastiest damn pizza in Wake County.”²

Nice, right? Simple, clear, compelling: makes my mouth water.



But then Dan tells what happened when the owner suggested this mission statement to his managers; everyone became a 10th grade English teacher and began to worry about things from grammar to political correctness to channeling one’s inner thesaurus. The resulting mission statement sounded like this: “Our mission is to present with integrity the highest quality entertainment solutions to families.”³

Would you like to have pizza from this place?

Last year I and others within the presbytery visited the border ministry of Frontera de Cristo with mission co-worker Mark Adams. We talked across the border fence with Mexican church leaders; we visited a migrant

repatriation center and a food cooperative; we held a prayer vigil to remember those who have died in the desert; we spoke with Border Patrol agents and the mayor of Douglas. Sounds nice, right? Perhaps...perhaps not.

But what happens when I talk not about what we did but why we did it; our day of prayer and reflection takes on a whole new light:

- Because Jesus is Lord of all nations, we lived the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) by speaking with those of other tongues, praying the Lord would break down the dividing wall of hostility (Ephesians 2:14).
- Because God hears the cries of the oppressed (Exodus 3:7), we visited a center of healing and hope to hear stories of God’s mercy and care.
- Because God cares for the needs of the hungry (Matthew 25:40), we visited a food cooperative to hear the amazing story of how 16 families no longer suffer food scarcity.
- Because God knows all people by name (Matthew 6:26), we prayed for those forgotten in the desert; we remembered them, and our hearts burned with a passion for shalom.
- Because God has established all governing authorities (Romans 13:1), we listened to the hearts of Border Patrol agents about how they seek to protect our nation even while wrestling with the very real human tragedies that surround them.

Do you know why you do what you do? Can you articulate this truth in simple, compelling ways? As a spiritual exercise, write a mission statement for each of the six Great Ends connecting your “why” to your “what”—starting with why.

In Christian faith, what we do certainly matters, but God cares about our hearts: why we do it matters just as much, maybe more.

² Dan Heath, Fast Company: <https://www.fastcompany.com/1404951/how-write->

[mission-statement-doesnt-suck-video](#). Accessed July 5, 2019.

³ Ibid.



The Power of Adaptation: Technical Fixes vs. Adaptive Challenges

We have all heard the old joke: “How may Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb?” “Change? Who said anything about change?”

We live in an era in which changing leadership dynamics have come to the fore in conversations about ministry. Gone are the days when Bible, theology, church history, and a little preaching were sufficient course studies to prepare one for ministry. Gone are the days when churches could open their doors and *expect* their pews to be filled. Gone are the days of late modernity; here and now are the days of post-modernity, a time when Christian faith is no longer the default assumption of the dominant culture, a time when the church must learn to change.

In today’s world, common ministry assumptions are challenged, ignored, or presumed to be irrelevant. In today’s world, budgets are tight and overly stretched; staffing is being downsized. In today’s world, churches routinely wonder—and wander—about in search of mission and vision statements that do more than sound nice, they might actually guide a leadership team’s decision-making processes. Into this day has come a core of literature about what it means to be a leader for today’s world, for today’s church. Current leadership studies talk about this tension in terms of “adaptive challenges” or “adaptive leadership.”

Adaptive challenges are not about change, but about growth. God is calling the Church to grow deeper into the image of Christ. The literature distinguishes between “technical fixes” and “adaptive change.” It speaks of leaders becoming able to learn, grow, and adapt to the new, ever-evolving challenges of ministry. A technical fix rummages around in the box for the right tool (that must have been misplaced); adaptive leadership asks, “Do we even need a tool? What would happen if...?” A technical fix looks around the table and asks, “Which of us would do this best?” Adaptive leadership asks, “Who else needs to be at the table?” A technical fix works very, very hard to do the same things in ever more efficient ways; adaptive leadership seeks to learn what is necessary to understand what is possible in order to try what has never been attempted.

Harvard professor Ronald Heifetz describes the differences between technical and adaptive this way:

Technical Fix	Adaptive Change
Solutions are already known	Solutions are not yet revealed
The skill set required for leading currently exists	A new skill set is required for leading
Leadership seeks known answers	Leadership asks many questions
Solutions always come from within the present system	Solutions often come from beyond the present system
Problems are quickly solved with limited confusion	Problems require ongoing conversation and sustained discomfort, leading to perseverant dialogue
Leaders manage with their expertise	Problems are solved by wrestling together, collective intelligence
Episodic conflict occurs	Persistent conflict occurs, requiring the work of ongoing transformation

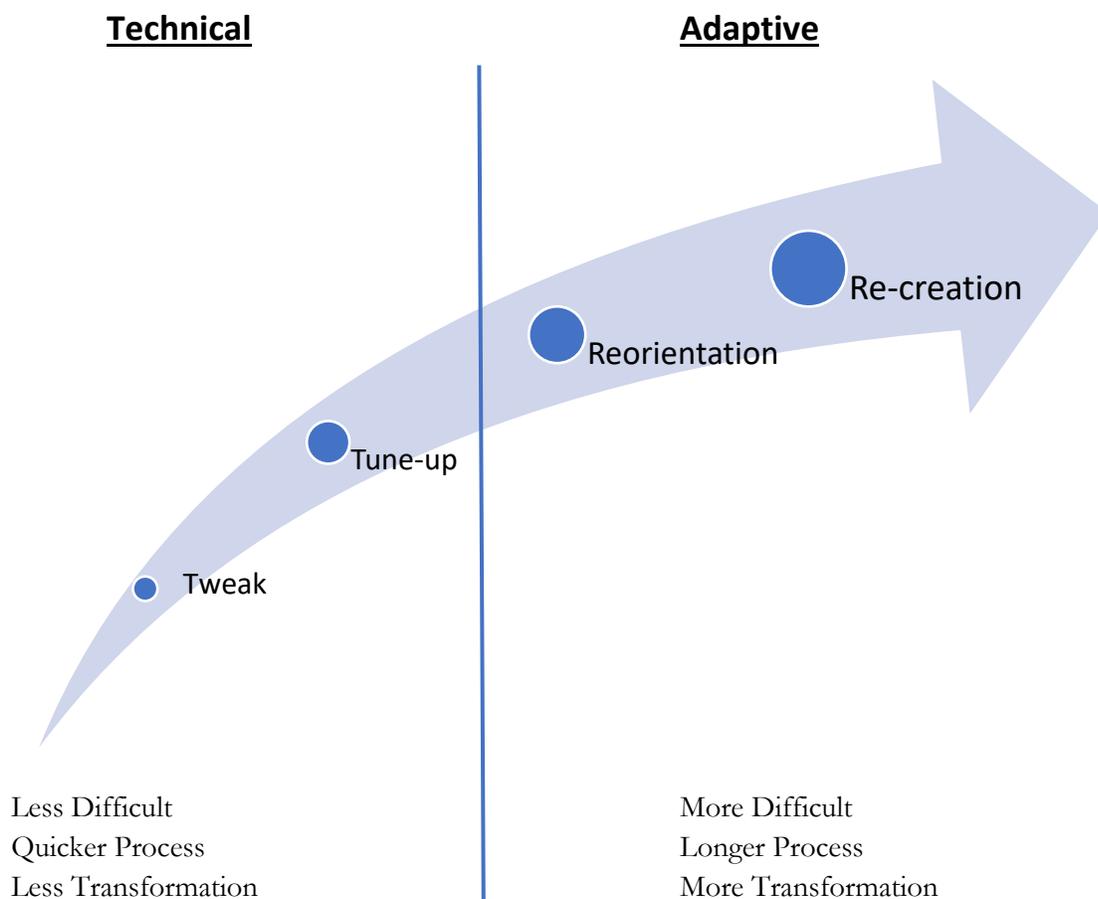
The distinction between technical and adaptive is more than a philosophical notion about leadership. Russell Crabtree, a ministry consultant and researcher who has worked with over 1,300 congregations from across the spectrum of mainline denominations, demonstrates that one of the strongest predictors of church vitality is a congregation's ability to adapt.⁴ Crabtree tracked churches' four-year worship attendance shifts and discovered the following patterns:⁵

- Conservative and highly adaptable: +1.0%
- Progressive and highly adaptable: -5.7%
- Progressive and least adaptable: -11.4%
- Conservative and least adaptable: -16.7%.

Clearly, congregations are struggling to maintain their worship attendance in today's post-Christian culture. However, it is also clear that adaptability is a path toward positive movement. To put these numbers into a Presbyterian, Reformed faith perspective, we might reframe the above chart as follows:

- The Church Reformed and Always Reforming: +1.0% to -5.7%
- The Church Reformed but Never Reforming: -11.4% to -16.7%

The graph below seeks to visualize the difference between a congregation's typical response to a problem, which is to try a technical fix, versus what it might look like to lean into an adaptive response.



⁴ Russell Crabtree, *Penguins in the Pews: Climate, Change, and Church Growth* (Hendersonville, NC: Magi Press, 2017), 53.

⁵ Ibid. The other indicators are “high energy” and “clarity of vision.” Many mainline congregations have one or both

of these two indicators. Unfortunately, even these congregations often struggle with adaptation: “Change?!”



The tendency in most churches is to seek technical fixes because they are less difficult to implement—a mere tweak or minor tune-up is all that is required. They also move from question to answer more quickly and are able to be discussed, decided, and delegated during the same Session meeting. The only downside to technical fixes is that they don't lead to transformation of mission or vision, ministry values or vitality. Conversely, adaptive change is quite difficult to implement—requiring significant changes to the why, the what, and the how of ministry. The adaptive requires both a lengthier conversation and a broader dialogue that can take months, if not years. The upside to adaptive work is that

there exists the real possibility for the kind of God-inspired, God-guided transformation for ministry necessary for today's world.

In many of our ministries, we seem to be answering questions that are no longer being asked by the culture. In many of our ministries, we seem to spend an enormous amount of effort and energy ensuring that we do what we have always done, only better. Yet, there is hope, for in some of our ministries, we seem to be asking the right questions: “What do we have to *become* to be able to discuss these questions in meaningful ways? What is our purpose today?” In some of our ministries, we seem willing to engage in the journey of learning new ways to minister the Gospel of Jesus to a spiritually hungry, compassion-desiring, justice-craving culture.

What would it look like for your Session or your congregation to have the kind of conversations in which adaptive challenges are engaged? Such conversations require communities of radical humility, uncommon honesty, and a willingness to listen, listen, listen. Only communities of sensitivity, trust, and care are able to engage in such conversations.

What kind of community are you?



Jesus' Leadership and the Adaptive Journey: the walk to emmaus and great commission for leaders

One of the prevailing temptations in ministry is to leap too quickly to solutions, especially for those who are leaders in their churches. Leaders become leaders by solving problems, by being perceived as capable and willing to tackle the difficult work of bringing God's good news into people's lives and the life of our communities. As leaders, then, we are tempted to leap before we look, for problems come fast and hard and the next one is just around the corner.

As churches who seek to grow ever deeper into the *missio dei*, the mission of God, and who live in an evolving society that finds "no religious affiliation" and "done with church" (the Nones and Dones) to be faster-growing segments of the population than "mainline Christian," we must ask ourselves what it looks like to walk the transformational journey. What does it look like to walk toward the faithfulness, courage, and compassion we are called to have for the sake of Jesus Christ. Put another way, "What kind of leadership is required to get unstuck?"

Summarized below are *Adaptive Leadership Lessons* from two of Jesus' better-known encounters: his Walk to Emmaus and his giving of the Great Commission. Each of these passages suggest ways we can lead toward adaptation in our congregations. How can we learn from Jesus for our own leadership?

The Walk to Emmaus

1. *Jesus came alongside.* "As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them." (Luke 24:15) Leadership is relational, connectional, a contact sport.
2. *Jesus asked questions.* "He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?'" (24:17) Leadership is inquisitive, interested in the insights, opinions, and input of others.
3. *Jesus listened to their answers.* "About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet.... Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the

women had said, but him they did not see.'" (24:19, 24) Leadership is open to others' stories and experiences; leaders intuit implicitly that transformation begins from a particular time, place, and circumstance.

4. *Jesus interpreted what was happening.* "Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (24:26–27) Leadership frames our communal conversations, helping guide and direct them without controlling the outcome.
5. *Jesus let the disciples determine their own future.* "As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them." (24:28–29) Leadership allows others the freedom to respond in compassion and courage, in faith, in hope, and in love.
6. *Jesus revealed to the disciples their shared community.* "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him." (24:30–31). Leadership cultivates community and caring, the sense that we are all in ministry together. Cleopas and the other disciple returned to Jerusalem and ignited a revolution.

But, before we seek to ignite transformation in our congregations, we do well to engage in a bit of self-reflection. As leaders, how would we rate ourselves? At which of these six actions are we *most* like Jesus and *least* like Jesus? How can we lean into our strengths? How can we invite and enlist those around us to help us minimize the damage we do because of our weaknesses? With God's help, all things are possible.

The Great Commission

1. *Jesus received doubt.* Perhaps the greatest curiosity is that when the resurrected Jesus stood before the disciples, “some doubted.” (Matthew 28:17) Even the greatest leader ever was doubted by his followers. As teaching and ruling elders, not everyone is going to be on board with the decisions we make. That’s okay!
2. *Jesus moved toward the disciples.* Rather than be offended or taken aback, Jesus “came to [the disciples]” immediately following their expression of doubt. It is a leader’s temptation to experience others’ doubt of our leadership as rejection and to move away. Not Jesus. In the face of doubt, Jesus connected at deeper levels.
3. *Jesus gave clear instructions.* In the Greek text, “go” is not in the command form and has the connotation of “as you go.” The command is “make disciples.” (28:18) Making disciples is our mission—God’s *missio dei*. As leaders, we do not need to guess what our mission is, nor do we need to write a mission statement for our church; such has been given us already.
4. *Jesus grounded mission in identity.* The making of disciples is connected by Jesus with baptism (28:19), which is the sacrament of identity. *Who* we are gives inspiration and passion to *what* we do. Because *we are*

God’s beloved—a truth we learn in baptism—we seek to share the fullness of this gift with others.

5. *Jesus reinforced truth with action.* Jesus understood that a truth, such as our belovedness, is an abstraction if it is not reinforced with daily practices of active obedience. (28:20) As leaders, we need to call Jesus’ followers to demonstrate right theology through right practice—be doers of the Word, especially as we seek to live into our own belovedness and teach others according to their belovedness.
6. *Jesus was present.* Leaders aspiring to be like Jesus stay connected to their people. (28:20) The call to practice courageous faith requires knowing that we are not alone, never alone. God does not call us to individualism but invites us into community.

On the mountain of the Lord, Jesus broke through human doubt to invite divine faith. Can we do the same after our encounters with Jesus? Once again, we ask, “At which of these six actions are we *most* like Jesus and *least* like Jesus? How can we lean into our strengths? How can we invite and enlist those around us to help us minimize the damage we do because of our weaknesses?” With God’s help, all things are possible.



The Thrive Project:
tools for the season of experimentation



Exploring Your Church's Mission: creative writing exercise⁶

Because each church is unique, each church approaches the writing of a mission statement in its own way. Included here are some models and samples that may be helpful. These are not intended to be formulas, but merely suggestions and stimulators for your own ideas. Any of these may work well for a first draft and then be further developed.

BASIC MODEL *Begin writing phrases, sentences, and words which respond to the following:*

- Who have we been? Who are we now? How are we unique as a community of faith?
- How does our setting affect who we are?
- What are we doing now? Why do we do what we do? How do we do what we do?
- Where do we want to go from here? Toward what is God calling us?
- What are our hopes for congregational life and outreach into the community and world?
- How are we going to get there? What processes will we employ? Who will be involved?

Develop paragraphs. What themes seem to emerge that might shape the statement?

MODEL #2 *Respond to these questions. Some questions may require more than one sentence to answer.*

- How are we unique as a community of faith?
- How has God shown special care for us as a community of faith?
- What kind of community of faith do we feel God is calling us to be?
- What do we hope to do in order to fulfill our calling?

MODEL #3 *Complete each sentence with several words, phrases, or sentences.*

- We, the members of _____, are a people:
 - Passionate about...
 - Our passion is reflected in...
 - Whose spiritual gifts as a community are...
 - Our spiritual gifts are reflected in...
 - Surrounded by people and needs that...
 - Our response to these needs is...
- As a unique expression of Christian community, we intend to honor this passion and use these gifts to serve these people and needs by...
 - Living out the first Great End of the Church by...
 - Living out the second Great End of the Church by...
 - Living out the third Great End of the Church by...
 - Living out the fourth Great End of the Church by...
 - Living out the fifth Great End of the Church by...
 - Living out the sixth Great End of the Church by...

MODEL #4 Describe a...

⁶This tool has been adapted from the *Commission on Ministry Handbook* of the Presbytery of Genesee Valley.

- *COMPELLING CAUSE* that is connected to a...
- *CONCRETE GOAL* that will be fulfilled by focusing energy and effort, prayer and perseverance on...
- *TWO VITAL BEHAVIORS* that are most likely to create...
 - *MOTIVATION* (willingness) and
 - *SKILL DEVELOPMENT* (ability) to accomplish the goal and fulfill the cause.

- Example 1 – Focus on the proclamation of the Gospel for the salvation of humankind:
 - *Compelling Cause*: People need to encounter Jesus Christ and a personal invitation to church is the most effective way for that to happen, as 50% of friends will say yes to a personal invitation.
 - *Concrete Goal*: FPC members will invite 100 friends to come to church with them during Lent. (Not concrete: We will begin to emphasize the importance of invitations.)
 - *Vital Behaviors for proclaiming the Gospel for the salvation of humankind*:
 - We will (a) print business cards that can be used when inviting a friend and
 - We will (b) write/guide/teach/practice a script to build members' comfort level when inviting a friend.

- Example 2 –Focus on the promotion of social righteousness
 - *Compelling Cause*: People encounter Jesus Christ through a faith community that lives as a reflection of God's light and love, while attractional models of church fail to engage our culture.
 - *Concrete Goal*: We will create six new missional initiatives between Labor Day and Memorial Day. (Not concrete: We will try to be more missional.)
 - *Vital Behaviors for Missional Ministry*:
 - We will (a) create *operational clarity* by defining the term “missional” and what is meant by “missional ministry” in sermons, lessons, and printed material toward the goal of 95% comprehension among our members, and
 - (b) encourage our members to create and initiate their own projects by *redesigning the way we budget for mission* such that all missional projects that include three or more members will be funded by the church.

MODEL #5 *Describe your mission in terms of Identity in Christ, which inspires motivation to understand why something is important, which leads you to live a particular way.*

- We are... (identity statement/description)
 - Therefore, we do Member Care *because...* (why statement/purpose/motivation)
 - Therefore, we *intend* to do member care in this way... (what/how statement)

- We are... (identity statement/description)
 - Therefore, we Worship and Celebrate *because...* (why statement/purpose/motivation)
 - Therefore, we *intend* to worship in this way... (what/how statement)

- We are... (identity statement/description)
 - Therefore, we do Education *because*... (why statement/purpose/motivation)
 - Therefore, we *intend* to educate in this way... (what/how statement)
- Continue “We are...” for the Great Ends, as well as prayer, stewardship, leadership, etc.

MODEL #5A *Another congregation structured the statement by titling sections:*

- Who We Are
- Who We Are Becoming
- Why We Desire to Become Who We Are to Be
- What We Are to Do
- How We Are to Do It
- Why We Desire to Do What We Are to Do



MODEL #6 *Appreciative Inquiry*

- Appreciative inquiry seeks to discern a congregation’s call through conversation about their history and identity that focuses on strengths, blessings, and hopes. For a review of the Appreciative Inquiry process, please refer to the section titled “tools for the season of examination.”

Steps for Using Your Chosen Model

Prepare for a church-wide event by issuing explicit invitations. In advance of the meeting, choose which of the model(s) above you want groups to use in small groups. You may choose to have each small group use the same model (for focus) or assign several models (for variety).

- (1) *Remembering the church’s foundations*: Open in prayer and then begin with members participating in a preliminary exercise that reminds all participants of the congregation’s history, identity, and current challenges. Helpful tools for remembering the church’s foundations include the following and can be found in the season of examination section:
 - Journey Wall
 - Neighborhood Walk/Prayer Walk
 - Appreciative Inquiry
 - MissionInsite Database report
- (2) *Alternative to #1*: If time constraints at a particular congregational event do not allow for full participation in one of the foundation-setting exercises listed above, an alternative is for leaders to summarize gleanings from what the congregation has learned to date about themselves and their history, identity, and current challenges. **(15 to 20 minutes)**
- (3) Describe each writing model to be used and form the small groups by inviting participants to self-select the model with which they are most comfortable. **(20 – 30 minutes)**
- (4) Each small group designates one writer—she or he will craft the narrative but not participate in the group’s dialogue. The designated writer is to listen, listen, listen. **(30 – 35 minutes)**

- (5) The first five minutes of small group time should be spent in silence to allow the introverts to ponder what is important and what ideas they might have. **(35 – 40 minutes)**
- (6) Announce to the groups that they are to discuss what *could* or *might* be written, but do not allow the designated writer to put anything on paper; she or he is to listen the others' ideas only. Give the groups 15 minutes to discuss what they want to write. **(40 – 55 minutes)**
- (7) Give the rest of the group a break and ask the designated writer to spend 10 minutes crafting a response that uses their assigned template. **(55 – 65 minutes)**
- (8) When the group returns, have the entire group respond to what they like about what has been written on their behalf. Each person must share something they like. Only after everyone has said something they like can the group begin to suggest edits to the writer. The writer, and only the writer, has the final word on what gets written. She or he is free to accept the edit, use the edit in adapted form, or reject the edit. Give the group ten minutes for this portion of the exercise. **(65 – 80 minutes)**
- (9) Have each small group present to the entire group what they have written. **(80 – 90 minutes)**
- (10) As a large group, discuss what has been presented: **(90 – 115 minutes)**
 - What themes emerge?
 - What commonalities are present?
 - Where are there differences in assumptions or perspective?
 - Where are there differences in hopes and dreams?
- (11) Thank participants, close in prayer, and give the data sheets to members of the discernment task force (e.g. Session, an Action Learning Team, etc.) **(115 – 120 minutes)**



Writing Ministry Objectives: moving from dreaming to defining to doing

How to Influence in a Positive Direction: four keys

1. The books *Influencer*⁷ and *Start with Why*⁸ posit four keys to influencing positive action toward a directed objective (i.e. getting something done):
 - a. Start with “why”—people connect with purpose and passion
 - b. Define objectives that are clear, concrete, and compelling; they will motivate more effectively
 - c. Focus on vital behaviors or leverage points/actions that direct change
 - d. Over-determine/over-schedule/over-plan for change

#1 – From Notion to Mission: start with “why”

1. Before asking, “What shall we do?” or “How shall we do it?” ask questions about motivation, passion, and purpose. Ask “why” questions!
2. For the church that “wants to grow”: Why should we invite others?
 - a. Because people need to encounter Jesus Christ and a personal invitation to church is the most effective way to create that opportunity. Fifty percent of friends who are invited to church by a friend will say, “Yes.”
3. For the church that wants adults to “get more involved in adult education”: Why does adult discipleship matter?
 - a. Because people encounter Jesus Christ in the Word and experience deep, personal transformation. Adult learners go deeper when they learn in community.

4. For the church that wants “to be more missional”: Why does becoming missional matter?
 - a. Because people encounter Jesus Christ through the faith community that lives as a reflection of God’s light and love. Attractional models of church are, increasingly, failing to connect with those beyond the church.
5. **Key to the Key:** Know why you are doing what you are doing and have a reason that ignites passion, gets the heart pumping, that can be clearly articulated, internalized, and owned by all involved, especially leadership!

#2 – Define Objectives that Motivate Action: moving beyond vague and abstract

1. Typical objective: “We will impact healthcare toward saving lives.”
 - a. Clear, concrete, and compelling: “We will save 100,000 lives by June 16 at 9:00 a.m.”⁹
2. Typical objective: “We will make 5,000 low-interest loans this year in [this developing nation].”
 - a. Clear, concrete, and compelling: “We will lift 5,000 people out of poverty before the end of the year by making 5,000 loans of \$5 per person per day.”¹⁰
3. Typical objective: “We will begin to emphasize the importance of invitations.”
 - a. Clear, concrete, and compelling: “We will energize our outreach by having at least 60 church members invite at least 100 friends,

⁷ Joseph Grenny and Kerry Patterson, *Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change* (Columbus, OH: McGraw Hill, 2013).

⁸ Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. (New York: Penguin, 2009).

⁹ Grenny, *ibid*.

¹⁰ Grenny, *ibid*.

colleagues, or neighbors to church between Ash Wednesday and Easter.”

4. Typical objective: “We will make a push for more adult education.”
 - a. Clear, concrete, and compelling: “We will create and fill four new, short-term small groups; one new, long-term small group; and offer one additional Sunday morning class in order to have 35 new, first-time participants in adult study groups between Labor Day and Memorial Day.”
5. Typical objective: “We will try to be more missional.”
 - a. Clear, concrete, and compelling: “We will use 10% of our mission budget to create six new missional-initiative projects that include at least 18 first-time ministry participants between Labor Day and Memorial Day.”
6. **Key to the Key:** focused, measured, and time-limited objectives will motivate most effectively.

#3 – Focus on Vital Behaviors: leverage points / actions

1. Vital behaviors are those actions that most effect change in a positive direction. What can leadership do that will have the greatest impact toward moving people to fulfill the objective?¹¹
2. Vital Behaviors and “The 80% / 20% Rule”
 - a. 80% of the impact will come from 20% of the ideas/actions.
 - b. Put another way: If you have ten “good” ideas, leadership must eliminate eight of them in order to focus effort, energy, dollars, and attention on the two ideas that will most impact change. Leaders must be able to say “No” to most things in order to say “Yes” to what matters.

3. Sample Vital Behaviors to motivate members to invite friends to church:
 - a. Suggest a script with broad themes/possibilities, and then *practice, practice, practice*.
 - b. Create business cards with directions to the church and worship times for ease of distribution by members to friends, colleagues, and neighbors.
4. Sample Vital Behaviors to motivate members to participate in adult education:
 - a. User-friendly format (because adult learners don’t like to feel stupid) 😊
 - b. Time-limited groups (because adult learners are way too busy)
5. Sample Vital Behaviors to motivate members to get involved in missional ministries:
 - a. Clarity, specificity, and practicality in defining the term “missional”: what is it you are really, actually, and truly wanting people to do?
 - b. Redesigning the church’s budget process to allow “mission money” to support people’s ideas, passion, and creativity through projects that are self-designed but Session reviewed and approved.

#4 – Address both Willingness and Ability: over-determine change¹²

1. To “over-determine change” is to speak *both* to our willingness *and* our ability. If we are willing but not able, nothing will change. If we are able but not willing, nothing will change. For something/someone to change, she or he must be both willing and able! Often a church’s “marketing” is to a person’s desire (willingness) without asking if they have any ability.

¹¹ Grenny, *ibid*.

¹² Grenny, et. al. use the phrases “over-determine” and “over-schedule,” by which they mean organizations need to put much more administrative and leadership focus toward

effecting change than is customary. The authors agree with Grenny’s concept but hesitate to use the phrase “over-schedule” in a document for church leaders, as this phrase has connotations that may confuse the reader.

- a. Willingness and Ability? Yes! = Asking a Presbyterian to think deeply about social issues in light of the Gospel. This is easy, and the program goes well!
- b. Willingness but no Ability? No! = Asking a Presbyterian to evangelize their friend. If you want a Presbyterian to evangelize, leadership better do extensive training!
- c. Ability but no Willingness? No! Asking all people to tithe their giving.
 - i. Ability and Willingness in giving: Asking people to give beyond their normal pledge to support the youth mission.

	Motivation	Ability
Personal	1 Make the Undesirable Desirable	2 Over Invest in Skill Building
Social	3 Harness Peer Pressure	4 Find Strength in Numbers
Structural	5 Design Rewards and Demand Accountability	6 Change the Environment

- 2. To “over-determine change” is also to speak beyond the *personal* and also to the *social* and *structural* as well. Often a group’s “marketing” is to the person’s willingness (see above), yet it is
- 3. Social Influencers
 - a. Social willingness: harness peer pressure; use consistent messaging; use multiple voices, not just the pastor’s; preach to the “we” and not just the “me.”
 - b. Social ability: find strength in numbers; focus attention on the “middle third” of a congregation that are the early adopters; find the hidden talents/gifts in your people.
- 4. Structural Influencers

also important to examine how the social and structural elements in the church motivate and impact change. Here is what over-determining change looks like as a 3 x 2 grid:¹³

- a. Structural willingness (often associated with the *physical* environment): How are rooms set up? What is the traffic flow, both outside the building and within the building? Is there sufficient signage?
- b. Structural ability (often associated with the *administrative* environment): How do congregational policies and practices encourage or stifle energy, intelligence, imagination, and love? How does leadership practice “permission-giving” versus “gatekeeping”? What trouble will I get into for suggesting an idea?

¹³ Grenny, *ibid.*

Influencers and Congregational Revitalization: questions to ponder

1. Getting in touch with “Why”:
 - a. What is your passion? Your motivation? Your dream?
 - b. What makes your heart(s) sing? (This is both a personal and an *all y’all* question)
 - c. How is God calling you to wonder about a BHAG (Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals)?
2. The Six Great Ends and Your Congregational Objective(s):
 - a. Which of the Six Great Ends will you focus on to effect change?
 - b. What are you being called to do, with whom, and toward what purpose?
 - c. How can you write an objective that is clear, concrete, and compelling?
 - d. Is the objective you write focused, measured, and time-limited?
3. The Six Great Ends and Vital Behaviors:
 - a. Brainstorm at least ten good ideas that maybe, might, could (we hope), possibly be helpful toward moving in the direction of your objective.
 - b. Ponder ideas in silence for three minutes (to let the introverts think), and then discuss your ponderings together—first in small groups and then as a leadership team.
 - c. Discuss the ideas in terms of “interest-based” or “values-based” conversation: What can you affirm/appreciate? What are your concerns? What questions make your heart wonder?
 - d. Decide which *two* ideas (no more, no less) have the greatest possibility for leveraging/impacting/creating change in the direction of your objective.
4. The Six Great Ends and Creating a Willingness and Ability to Change:
 - a. How can you speak *personally* to folks in support of their passion? What will make their hearts sing?
 - b. How can you speak *personally* to folks to increase their ability? What training, education, preparation, perspective, or insight is required to move toward one of the Great Ends and your ministry objective?
 - c. How can you speak *socially* to create a sense of “team,” of group unity?
 - d. How can you speak *socially* to find those people who can move the objective forward? How many people are needed to start (to create an “early win”), and how can you add new voices, new hands, new leadership as you grow forward together?
 - e. How can you speak *structurally* through your physical environment? Are there any inexpensive modifications of the building that can be made? Any changes in where people are located or the location from whence they serve that can spark change?
 - f. How can you speak *structurally* through your administrative practices to promote energy, intelligence, imagination, and love? Who are the “secret gatekeepers” that patrol the hallways of your church? How can you convert these gatekeepers into “permission-givers” (and thus co-opt them to help with item 4c above)?



Action Learning Teams (ALT)¹⁴

Ministry Design involves finding ways to bring the unchanging good news about Jesus to a rapidly changing culture—to grow people as disciples while meeting their human needs. This means we need to be a learning congregation, adapting to the reality of a changing culture. Conversely, information that leads to inspiration and motivation but that does not lead to action leads to frustration. Thus, we need to combine *Action* and *Learning*.

How does this work? In simplest terms:

1. It begins with an *Adaptive Challenge*. How can we ...?
2. It is accomplished by a *team* (called an **Action Learning Team** or **ALT**) of four to eight people.
3. They use a *reflection* and *questioning process*.
4. They resolve to *act*.
5. They *learn from the results* of the action taken.
6. They are supported by a *coach*.



Now for some detail:

The **Action Learning Team** needs to be conducted in the context of the Mission and Vision of the congregation. One of the questions that must be in the forefront is “How do the results enhance the Mission and Vision?”

The Adaptive Challenge should be significant and deal with an objective, an opportunity, or an obstacle. It is an issue for which no satisfactory response is known or for which there is no adequate or effective solution.

The Action Learning Team (ALT)

- Gather four to eight members to bring diversity.
- Team members bring faith and a heart for God.
- Team members may know something about the issues but remain open to learning more.
- Team members provide capability and imagination.
- Team members must have a commitment to teamwork and to action.
- The ALT is empowered to carry out the group's plan.

¹⁴ Adapted from Stan Ott, *Acts 16:5: Action Learning Teams*. Vital Churches Institute. <http://www.vitalchurchesinstitute.com/>.

The Questioning and Reflection Process: The team must be open to:

- Questioning the “current knowledge” and finding new knowledge—gracefully challenging assumptions.
- Asking God for wisdom and insight.
- Reflecting on new ideas and possible solutions.

A Commitment to Action

- The ALT expects to act and is empowered to carry out the action. The objective is not a discussion or a proposal but action.
- Experimentation is a learning form of action.
- Action learning is cyclical: improvements are expected within the action/reflection/learning cycle.
- Even if the initial actions are not fruitful, learning has occurred and the basis for other actions is developed.
- Permission-giving by the governing organization is essential. It may take the form of:
 - Full authority to act within the congregation’s stated Mission and Vision, or
 - “Keep us informed and let us know if resources or support is needed.”
- Remember to honor the past while creating the future.

A Commitment to Learning

- Reflect on what has been/is being learned.
- How does the action need to change?
- How can the process be used with other questions or in alternative situations?
- What are the implications of our experience for our congregation?

The Learning Coach

- Observes the process and facilitates open, fair process when necessary.
- May come from within the congregation or beyond the congregation.
- Ensures that all steps are taken.
- Keeps the process moving forward.
- Ensures adequate talk time for all members.
- Watches to make sure that the group adheres to its commitments with each other and with its purpose.
- The Coach does *not* engage in the problem-solving process.

A Suggested Schedule for Action Learning

To adequately address a complex issue and to provide intentional time for questioning and reflecting, the Action Learning process requires three to twelve months.

Meeting Schedule:

- Meet at least 8–10 hours a month.
- Hold an initial extended meeting to hash out issues, define needed knowledge, and set regular (weekly) meetings.
- Set an end date.

Suggestions:

1. Ensure that the elders are committed to the process and that there is one elder as a member of each ALT.
2. Selecting and training the coaches: After the coaches are selected, have a coaches' meeting or two to ensure there is understanding and agreement on the coaching process. Suggest having periodic coaches' meetings for support, sharing concerns, sharing current results, potential overlaps, etc.
3. Selecting and training the ALT members: ALT members should be identified by the Pastors/Elders and trained in the process as outlined in this document. Care should be extended to distinguish between technical and adaptive changes as the majority of participants are familiar with and conditioned by technical fixes and may be inexperienced in considering adaptive solutions.
4. Communications are critical. It is important to keep the Session and congregation informed during the process. It is important that the coaches have clear communications with the ALTs on agendas, action items/plans, meeting dates, and meeting minutes.
5. Communication technology availability: This should include a room that accommodates ALT-size groups and is "wired" for high-speed internet to access Skype or Zoom videoconferencing or provide for conference calls.
6. Budget. There may be costs involved in the learning.
7. What else?



Adaptive Change Checklist:

to help leaders distinguish between technical problems and adaptive challenges

In his book *Influencer*, Joseph Grenny posits six motivational dynamics that influence organizations like churches toward accepting, embracing, and living into change. Grenny places these six influences into a 3 x 2 grid as follows:¹⁵

For Grenny, it is not enough for one to be willing if one is not able, just as it is irrelevant if one is able but not willing. Willing and able go together like summer and apple pie. As well, Grenny argues that while most motivational speeches aim toward the individual—one’s personal willingness—it is just as necessary to target social and structural influences—the forces of the group and the organization of the group—if one wants to produce effective growth and change.

The chart on the next page seeks to merge Grenny’s work with the distinctions between technical fixes and adaptive

leadership found in the work of Ronald Heifetz. As a reminder, Heifetz describes these distinctions as follows:

	Motivation	Ability
Personal	1 Make the Undesirable Desirable	2 Over Invest in Skill Building
Social	3 Harness Peer Pressure	4 Find Strength in Numbers
Structural	5 Design Rewards and Demand Accountability	6 Change the Environment

Technical Fix	Adaptive Change
Solutions are already known	Solutions are not yet revealed
The skill set required for leading currently exists	A new skill set is required for leading
Leadership seeks known answers	Leadership asks many questions
Solutions always come from within the present system	Solutions often come from beyond the present system
Problems are quickly solved with limited confusion	Problems require ongoing conversation and sustained discomfort, leading to perseverant dialogue
Leaders manage with their expertise	Problems are solved by wrestling together, collective intelligence
Episodic conflict occurs	Persistent conflict occurs, requiring the work of ongoing transformation

Church leadership tends to operate in the technical column rather than the adaptive column, yet churches seeking revitalization would do well to learn adaptive ways. What follows is an attempt to create a checklist for adaptive change that offers specific, concrete questions church leaders can ask themselves regarding the

challenges they confront and seek to solve, as well as the means by which they seek to overcome these challenges. To paraphrase the comedian Jeff Foxworthy, “You might need adaptive leadership if....

¹⁵ Joseph Grenny and Kerry Patterson, *Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change* (Columbus, OH: McGraw Hill, 2013).

Technical	Adaptive
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___ Is it a problem familiar from the past?

___ Is it a challenge of the emerging future?

___ Did it “come out of the blue,” a surprise you didn’t imagine would come your way?

Personal Willingness	Personal Willingness
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___ Is the problem within the range of expectations even regarding one’s comfort zone?

___ Does the challenge reasonably create anxiety among those not prone to feeling anxious?

comfort zones?

___ Are people having to step out of their

___ Has a sense of urgency been created?

Personal Ability	Personal Ability
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___ Is a known skill or expertise sufficient to solve required the problem?

___ Is a new or as-yet-undiscovered competency to engage the challenge?

___ Are people having to learn a new skill?

Social Willingness	Social Willingness
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___ Is there a history of shared vision or common not yet expectations around the problem?

___ Is a new vision of the world needed that is shared widely in the congregation?

___ Is the congregation challenging their own assumptions?

___ Is the congregation willing to take action that is uncomfortable and changes their rhythms?

___ Are people saying, “This doesn’t look/feel like church?”

Social Ability	Social Ability
-----------------------	-----------------------

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>___ Does the solution come from within the system?</p> | <p>___ Are you, as a congregation, uncertain about your insight, experience, or competency to engage the challenge?</p> <p>___ Is this something that has both not been tried before and not even been imagined?</p> <p>___ What is the <i>congregation</i> having to learn to conduct this experiment in ministry?</p> |
|---|---|

Structural Willingness	Structural Willingness
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- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>___ Are your By-Laws and Manual of Operations present an sufficient to address the problem?</p> | <p>___ Does your current means of operating obstacle to this challenge?</p> <p>___ Is there a willingness to experiment with a new administrative structure that will appear to the “old-school” folk as lawlessness and chaos?</p> |
|--|---|

Structural Ability	Structural Ability
---------------------------	---------------------------

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>___ Is your building suited to address the problem?</p> <p>___ Are the conflicts that will evolve/occur as you address the problem within the range of expectations for previous difficulties: “We’ve been here and done or cell- this before”?</p> | <p>___ Might you need to alter or move beyond your building to engage the challenge?</p> <p>___ Might you need to adapt Reformed governance toward permission-giving, rewarding creativity, based initiatives?</p> |
|--|--|

