

WORKING TOGETHER TO SHARE

THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS:

ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

OVIEDO, FLORIDA

AND

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

SANFORD, FLORIDA

A HISTORY

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⊕ **Introduction**

*"Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."
–Philippians 4:8*

Approaching congregational transformation vibrantly and holistically has awesome potential.

⊕ **A Case Study: Weariness to Anticipation**

The History:

Lutheran Church of the Redeemer (LCR) held its first worship services on May 10, 1953. The church is located about 20 minutes north of St. Luke's-Oviedo, in the town of Sanford, FL. The community surrounding the church consists of single family homes and apartment housing. The neighborhood has changed considerably over the years and has yet to experience the revitalization that is prevalent in other parts of the town.

Through a series of unfortunate events, the congregation of LCR experienced a split that became 'official' during the summer of 2006. One portion of the congregation moved to another location; the remnant of about 35 individuals stayed at the current site.

At this juncture, Ed DeWitt, an LC-MS Pastor on leave, stopped by the church one day to offer his services on an as-needed basis. He was unaware of the events that had transpired; the members asked for his help. Ultimately, they called Pastor DeWitt to serve LCR on a part-time basis (20 hours a week).

Pastor DeWitt, prior to entering seminary, was a member of St. Luke's congregation. He was familiar with the church's leadership and hopeful about the possibility of assistance that St. Luke's might be able to give. The initial concern was to restore hope and healing to the congregation in the Sanford location. He contacted St. Luke's and an initial meeting with St. Luke's leaders, Pastor DeWitt and a core group from LCR was set up.

The first meeting was held at St. Luke's on December 9, 2006. And from there the story unfolds...

The Story

It was crucial for the day to start out on a positive note. Upon entering the room, members of the core group were visibly weary and emotional. They were presented with the day's theme: "Vision for Redeemer of Sanford: Beginning Change-From Weariness to Anticipation."

With the assistance of staff from St. Luke's, we conducted interviews with the core group members following the Appreciative Inquiry process. Much of what was

recorded came from the real sense of hope and optimism that people, despite their sadness, felt about **Lutheran Church of the Redeemer** and its prospects for the future. The core group became energized and excited about the church's future when members began recalling the best of the past and letting their imaginations reach to the future.

The questions used in the interview were part of a cooperative search for the best in people, the **LCR** organization, and the church-at-large. It involved the discovery of what gives "life" to a living system when it is most effective, alive, and constructively capable of fostering peoples' relationship with God. These are the interview questions:

- **What attracted you to Lutheran Church of the Redeemer?**
- **What were your initial feelings and impressions when you first came to Lutheran Church of the Redeemer?**

These themes prevailed: **relationships, spiritually fulfilling, active engagement in the community, reaching out to others.**

Then, group members were then asked to identify 3 wishes/dreams for **Lutheran Church of the Redeemer** in the categories of Worship Education, Outreach and Caring.

The data from that day was put together and reviewed at a subsequent meeting with representatives from St. Luke's Lutheran Church in narrative form. It drew on information from the meeting(s) and attempted discover those ideals that are common between the two organizations (Redeemer and St. Luke's). The information shared that day included practical ways to build the relationship between the organizations to effectively, *"Proclaim Jesus Christ so that all may know God and grow in faith toward Him and in love toward one another."*

This foundational document was intended to serve as a catalyst and an invitation. The invitation: To participate in an organization-wide process where everybody has an opportunity to think strategically and imaginatively about "a common vision for Redeemer's future." As a catalyst: To provide inspiring snapshots of many of the strengths of LCR "when it is working at its very best." A copy of the original document is available upon request.

An excerpt...

Redeemer is a church that has withstood the test of time as internal and external changes occurred.

The question is not whether to continue to exist, but how to persist and work through inevitable pains even when there are voices of doubt and cynicism. In this case, **even** the cynicism should be valued. The cynical voice puts into words the doubts we all have. We have no doubts only about things we do not care about. That's the point. People care. They see a promise in the vision they really want. With the recommitment already expressed and the collaboration of the two organizations, **strengthened worship** can and will thrive at **LCR**, and making it work will be a big key to the church's growth in the future.

But it is not just the spirit of mind-set of resilience. When working at its best, Redeemer is a vibrant, close-knit family of believers with a passion for the Gospel and the mission to bring others to faith in Jesus Christ.

Over the next several months, we held meetings to discuss the findings and began designing and innovating the future. We wanted these meetings to serve three purposes:

1. As a vehicle for discussing the discoveries – to confirm, restate, debate and elaborate.
2. As an opportunity to appreciate **Redeemer** for what it is today and to expand our thinking about what it can be in the future.
3. As an invitation for people at **Redeemer** and **St. Luke's** to become part of a 2007 Vision for Redeemer of Sanford team.

The Partnership begins in earnest

In April of 2007, St. Luke's 'officially' launched its partnership with LCR. Before doing so, leaders of St. Luke's, along with the Voters' Assembly, agreed to commit ministry resources to LCR on a limited basis. The areas that received the greatest

concentration of support from St. Luke's were: Music, Education, Pastoral, and Administration.

- Music – “Strengthening worship” was identified at the onset as an area of crucial importance to the members of Redeemer. This was particularly true when it came to music. Consequently, a member of St. Luke's music department came alongside Redeemer enhancing their worship experience.
- Education – Redeemer members longed to re-capture the days when Sunday mornings resounded with adults and children filling classrooms for Bible studies and Sunday school. Pastors, St. Luke's Director of Christian Education and members of LCR and St. Luke's began collaborating to build a healthy Christian Education program.
- Pastoral – One of St. Luke's pastors supports and serves the congregation and assists Pastor DeWitt. Preaching and teaching duties are shared; other areas of ministry are taken care of as agreed upon.
- Administration – Support is provided by St. Luke's Administrative Director. Turning visions into reality and ensuring deadlines and timelines are met by conducting weekly meetings are vital components of the Director's role in the partnership.

Shortly after the partnership launch, St. Luke's began a Strategic Planning process. Recognizing that the Sanford church would greatly benefit from a focused vision to help continue its growth, LCR representatives were included in the Strategic Planning process alongside their brothers and sisters in Christ of St. Luke's. The collaboration and cooperation of the two organizations significantly increased the likelihood of success – members working side by side in service of a common goal.

Through weekly meetings that focus on implementing strategic initiatives, the leaders of St. Luke's and LCR have been successful in sustaining the ministry momentum started over a year ago. Attendance numbers are increasing; but they only tell part of the story. The hopeful spirit of the members at Redeemer is

soaring – they are renewed in purpose, refreshed in focus, and revitalized for Kingdom work.

To God Be the Glory!

⊕ A Theory of Positive Change

A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is based on the simple assumption that every organization has something that works well and these strengths can be a starting point for creating positive change. This approach to organizational analysis and learning is intended for discovering, understanding, and fostering innovations in social organizational arrangement and processes.

AI Insight

AI was used in 1980, when David Cooperrider, a young doctoral student at Case Western Reserve University, was helping a friend do his dissertation on physician leadership at one of the top tertiary care medical centers in the world, the Cleveland Clinic. They asked physician leaders to tell stories of their biggest successes as well as their biggest failures. But when David Cooperrider looked at the data, he was drawn only to the success stories. Listening to their narratives of strength and strong leadership, he was amazed by the level of positive cooperation, innovation, and egalitarian governance at the clinic – when it was most effective. With the intellectual collaborations and prodding of his advisor, and the permission of the Clinic's chair, David decided to look at the data only in search of the positives – everything that served to give life to the system and to people when they were most alive effective, committed, empowered, and so on. Everything else was considered irrelevant. The method of analysis was to systematically and deliberately appreciate everything of value and then use the positive analysis to speculate on the potentials and possibilities for the future. An anticipatory theory of future possibility was created and momentous stories were used to make vivid the potentials. History was used as a source of possibility. In a report to the board of governors, Cooperrider and his advisor (Suresh Srivastva) called their method Appreciative Inquiry (AI). This was the first organizational analysis using AI. The results of the study created such a powerful positive stir that the board requested this AI method be used at all levels of the 8000-person organization to facilitate change. Cooperrider wrote his dissertation on the whole process and created a scholarly logic for this, a new form of action research. This experience set the stage for the AI learning community.

AI is deliberate in its life-centric search. Carefully constructed inquiries allow the AI practitioner to affirm the symbolic capacities of imagination and mind as well

as the social capacity for conscious choice and cultural evolution. The art of appreciation is the art of discovering and valuing those factors that give life to a group or organization. The process involves interviewing and storytelling to draw out the best of the past and set the stage for the future.

The following propositions underlie the practice of AI:

1. **Inquiry into “the art of the possible” in organizational life should begin with appreciation.** Every system works to some degree. Therefore the primary task of congregational analysis is to discover, describe and explain these “exceptional moments.” The appreciative approach takes its inspiration from “what is.” This is the first step of the process in the 4-D Cycle: *Discovery*.
2. **Inquiry into what is possible should yield information that is applicable.** Organizational study should lead to the generation of knowledge that can be used, applied, and validated in action.
3. **Inquiry into what is possible should be marked by a quantum leap into a desired future.** An organization is an open-ended, indeterminate system capable of becoming more than it is at any given moment and learning how to take part actively in guiding its own evolution. AI allows use of systematic management analysis to help the organization’s members shape an effective future according to their own imaginative and moral purposes.
4. **Inquiry into the human potential of organizational life should be collective.** This principle assumes an immutable relationship between the process of inquiry and its intent.

⊕ **Guiding Biblical Principles**

By focusing on the positive, the effects of Appreciative Inquiry permeate every level within a congregation. Conversations begin to take on a tone of hope for a glorious future together. However, any vision of what “Might Be” must be guided anchored in biblical principles.

Formation and Re-formation of Communities of Believers

From the time the Gospels and Paul’s letters were written, congregations have faced challenges. These came in the form of religious leaders, political leaders and misplaced faith. The Bible categorizes these threats as being from, “the world, the flesh and the devil.”

⊕ **Unlimited Potential: Ablaze!**

Through its life-giving design, Appreciative Inquiry has the power to help renew, refresh and revitalize congregations – individually or in partnership with other churches – as evidenced by the story of St. Luke’s and Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. AI begins an adventure. Its call to adventure, already experienced by many people and organizations, has brought a new paradigm. These people and organizations sense an exciting direction in change; they sense an invitation to “a positive revolution.”

A *positive revolution* aptly describes the impact of creating an organization in full voice and making it a center stage for whole system change. Inviting people to participate in dialogues and share stories about their past and present achievements, assets, unexplored potential, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high-point moments, lived values, traditions, core and distinctive competencies, expressions of wisdom, insights into the deeper congregational spirit and soul, and visions of valued and possible futures can identify a “positive change core”.

From this, AI links the energy of the positive core directly to any change agenda. This link creates energy and excitement and ‘ignites’ a desire to move toward a shared dream: *Reaching people with the Gospel.*