



Consultation in the Churchplace

— A Practical Introduction —

"If you keep doing what you've been doing, you'll keep getting what you've been getting" (business cliché).

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

"Some of us change, some of us mutate." (Joyce Davenport, in Hill Street Blues)

"Don't punish a learner. If you do, you'll immobilize him." (Ken Blanchard)

Church Transformation – Prayerful, Complicated, Effective

Transformation in churches is often more complicated than in businesses for several reasons:

- Each member of the church has very personalized ownership of the community.
- Most churchplaces do not have adequate avenues for resolving conflict and hurt.
- We often feel resistant to change, looking backwards, preferring the way it was.

Consultation in the churchplace can be as simple as meeting with the church leadership for a series of evenings or a day-long workshop. Sometimes, it is helpful to interview key leadership within the church (e.g. homegroup leaders, elders, the worship team, deacons, etc.) so as to provide feedback to the leadership. It is this kind of information that can be most helpful in the growth and development of the church.

We work with churches so that:

- The whole church can rightly assess their strengths and weaknesses in engaging a postmodern world.
- The leaders and key lay people can develop a strategic plan for interacting with the surrounding community.
- The church can be transformed from a Sunday-by-Sunday experience to a faith community that grows all week long.

We also empower churches as well as mission organizations in working with their pastoral and other leadership staff in job transitions, conflict management, long-term planning. Where necessary, we also utilize the resources of psychological and vocational assessment.

Churchplace consultation normally begins with a 3-4 hour, face-to-face "consult" that allows the church leadership to ask questions and begin the planning for the ongoing consultation. There is no obligation to continue the consultation after this initial session.

How Does a Church Best Choose a Consultant?

1. Does the consultant have the background and experience that is required?
2. Is there an emotional and spiritual “fit” between the church and the consultant?
3. Can the church afford (as in time, money, energy and the like) the consultancy at this time?

When Is the Best Time to Have a Consultation?

1. Anytime the church is open to change or needs to change.
2. The last 6 months of a pastor’s tenure or the first 6 months of a pastor’s tenure.
3. When there is a crisis.
4. When there is a significant downward and inward spiral of decline in the church life.
5. Prior to a building project or adopting a new and significant ministry venture.

What Opportunities Might a Church Community Expect From a Consultation?

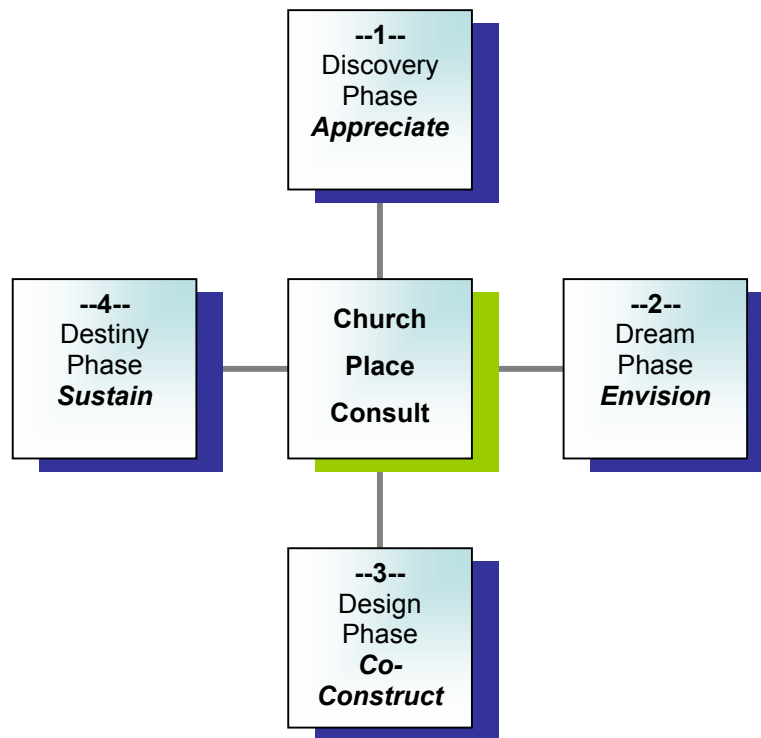
1. An opportunity to dream what the church community can be.
2. An opportunity to decide how to measure growth and health.
3. An opportunity to listen deeply and intentionally to the hearts of others.
4. An opportunity to discover what changes are necessary.
5. An opportunity to distinguish a preferred community future.
6. An opportunity to design and deliver the favored direction.

Operating Assumptions of Our Consultation

1. Our consultation is focuses around our appreciation of God, His church, one another and one’s self.
2. In every Christian community something is already working. Consultation is about discovering this.
3. What we focus our energies on becomes our reality. Consultation is about collaboration as we share, affirm and co-ordinate our discoveries.

4. The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in more life-producing and powerful ways than does diagnosis or fault-finding.
5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
6. As we carry our past forward, it needs to be what is best about our shared histories.
7. It is important to respect differing perspectives and values.
8. The language we use creates our reality.
9. Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities.

Appreciative Inquiry – a Design for Consultation¹



¹ For a fuller understanding of Appreciative Inquiry, please see my outline "Appreciative Inquiry: A Paradigm Shift for Social Systems" posted on our webpage, www.TheDucklows.ca.

The Ongoing Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry²

1. The Discovery phase:

- a. The core task in the discovery phase is to appreciate the best of "what is" by focusing on peak moments of community excellence—when people experienced the community in its most alive and effective state.
- b. Participants then seek to understand the unique conditions that made the high points possible, such as ♦relational and strategic leadership, ♦life-affirming relationships, ♦particular innovations in strategy and mission, ♦empowered values within the community, ♦capacity building and ♦external relationships with the surrounding neighbourhood and world.
- c. We deliberately choose not to analyze deficits, but rather systematically seek to isolate and learn from even the smallest victories.
- d. In the discovery phase, people share stories of exceptional accomplishments, discuss the core life-giving conditions of their community and deliberate upon the aspects of their history that they most value and want to enhance in the future.

2. The Dream phase:

- a. In the dream phase, people challenge the status quo or “what is” by envisioning “what could be” as we look to more valued and vital futures.
- b. This phase is both practical, in that it is grounded in the community's history, and generative, in that it seeks to expand the community's potential.
- c. Appreciative inquiry is different from other planning methods because its images of the future emerge from grounded examples of the positive past. They are compelling possibilities precisely because they are based on extraordinary moments from a community's history.
- d. Participants use positive stories in the same way an artist uses paints to create a portrait of the community's potential. They think great thoughts and create great possibilities for their community, then turn those thoughts into provocative propositions for themselves.

3. The Design phase:

- a. In the design phase participants create a strategy to carry out their provocative propositions.

² Appreciative inquiry is a continual cycle. The destiny phase leads naturally to new discoveries of community strengths, beginning the process anew.

- b. They do so by building a social architecture for their community that might, for example, re-define approaches to leadership, governance, participation or capacity building.
 - c. As they compose strategies to achieve their provocative propositions, local people incorporate the qualities of community life that they want to protect, and the relationships that they want to achieve.
4. The Destiny phase:
- a. The final phase involves the delivery of new images of the future and is sustained by nurturing a collective sense of destiny.
 - b. It is a time of continuous learning, adjustment and improvisation in the service of shared community ideals. The momentum and potential for innovation is high by this stage of the process. Because they share positive images of the future, everyone in a community re-aligns their work and co-creates the future.

Eight Essential Refocusing Questions for Church Transformation

1. Biblical purpose: Why do we exist as a church?
2. Ministry milestones: How has God worked in our past?
3. Ministry focus: Whom has God called us to reach?
4. Core values: Who has God shaped us to be?
5. Vision: Where is God leading us in the future?
6. Ministry model: Which model most facilitates your vision?
7. Goals: How will we accomplish our vision?
8. Ministry plan: What is our Plan for Ministry for the next five years?

Book Recommendations for Leaders – A Starting Place

- Cooperrider, David L., Peter F. Sorensen, Jr., Diana Whitney, Theresa F. Yaeger (eds). *Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization Toward a Positive Change Theory*. Stipes, 2000.
- Herrington, Jim, Mike Bonem and James H. Furr. *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey*. Jossey-Bass, 2000.
- McLaren, Brian. *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in a Postmodern Matrix*. Zondervan, 2000.
- Van Yperen, Jim. *Making Peace: A Guide to Overcoming Church Conflict*. Moody, 2002.