

Karen Hollis

Visioning Theme

I've been asking and considering a lot of questions lately. What is God's call for us? What does the life you offer look like? What are the works you would have us do? What is fruit that will last? What are our connections? When can the visioning team meet? Are we accomplishing our task? What are the right questions to ask?

Questions are wonderful things . . . before we're even able to consider the answer, sometimes we marvel at the question itself. A question can open up a whole world. The moment we ask a question, something begins to happen. Words help to create our reality.

As a visioning team, we've been very aware that the words we use and the questions we ask will shape the answers we receive. We feel this responsibility to be faithful to our task. Every choice we make and every step we take shapes the process and shapes the outcome. And so we pray that God is guiding us, that God speaking to us is not dependent on a perfect process.

We pray, again and again, God, what is your call for us? We're asking the question through the lens of appreciative inquiry, which at its heart . . . is about the search for the best in each of us, our congregation, and the strengths-filled, opportunity-rich world around us . . . AI is a fundamental shift in perspective . . . to 'see' the wholeness of the human system and to 'inquire' into that our strengths, possibilities, and successes.[1]

When we started talking about visioning as a congregation, I heard lots of questions about the benefit of going through a visioning process. What are we going to get out of it? Is there value to vision statements? Truth be told, many churches create a vision and a year later no one can remember what it is. Where did we put that piece of paper? Did anyone ever get it on the website? How will we know if we're living our vision?

With appreciative inquiry, we are seeking an authentic and practical answer to "what is God's call for us;" an answer that is not only measurable but comes with a measuring stick for discerning if we are on track or if an initiative is in line with our call.

We've spent some months preparing for this inquiry and are ready to embark on this journey . . . taking our first steps in worship today. In a few minutes, I'm going to invite you to consider . . . you guessed it . . . some questions on the yellow sheet of paper, and write down your answers. You will use this paper, then to have a conversation with 1 or 2 other people around you. We will conclude with some congregational sharing. At the end of our worship service, we will say a commissioning prayer to liturgically launch us into appreciative inquiry, after which you will be invited to bring your yellow paper forward to put in the basket and receive a gift from the visioning team. The visioning team will read them and consider them as we discern the 5ish questions we will be posing to the congregation. They will also be added to the collection of input we are already receiving from the congregation about our vision.

Turning then to the questions on your yellow sheet . . . "What do you like about our congregational life?": a question intended to help you reflect on your experience at CCG and why you invest your time and resources here. The second question, "what do you want more of?" is intended to help you dream a little. Before I let you loose, I want to have a bit of a discussion amongst us about what we mean by congregational life. For me, I want us to expand our thinking from our worship life, which is certainly included in congregational life but is not the whole. So . . . worship is included in congregational life, what else would you include?

[Talking]

I invite you now to put your papers down and find your centre again and breathe. I invite you to prayerfully sing this chant as we prepare to consider these questions.

[Chant]

I'll give you a couple of minutes to write. When you hear the bell, please find 1 or 2 others to talk with . . . preferably not the people you came with. [2 min]

You have 2 min per person to share. I'll give you a bell at 2 min, 4 min and when we are wrapping up.

What do you like about our congregational life and what do you want more of? Which answers resonate the strongest for you?

[1] <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/learn/appreciative-inquiry-introduction/>; Sep 28, 2019