**The Church/Pastor Review**

***- A Positive Inquiry Approach -***

**Overview:**

This Positive Inquiry approach to a Church/Pastor Review helps the church board and pastor discover the positive reality of what they “now see” and then build a series of bridges to the dream of what “could be”, the design for what “should be”, and finally to the destiny of the positive bright future that “will be.”

**Foundations:**

A positive inquiry…can get much better results than seeking out and solving problems. That’s an interesting concept for most of us – but we all realize that continual focus on problems and troubleshooting and correcting problems over a long period of time can lead to a negative culture. “If you combine a negative culture with all the challenges we face today, it could be easy to convince ourselves that we have too many problems to overcome – to slip into a paralyzing sense of hopelessness….Don’t get me wrong. I’m not advocating mindless happy talk…we can’t ignore problems – we just need to approach them from the other side.”[[1]](#footnote--1)

Churches are *heliotropic*. The word *heliotropic* derives from the Greek words, *helios – sun* and *trepein – to turn.* Literally: to turn toward the energy of the sun.

Heliotropic is a term usually reserved for the study of botany – for instance, sunflowers are heliotropic: if you were to watch sunflowers for an entire day, the flower faces east in the morning and by evening is facing west – following the energy of the sun. At night it hangs its flower down waiting for the positive energy of the sun to draw it up once again. If you put a plant on the window sill – it will eventually completely change its orientation to face the energy it derives from the sun.

The academic discipline of Positive Organizational Scholarship has discovered that individuals and organizations are not only heliotropic; they actually respond far more constructively to positive influence than to negative. But, it has also discovered that individuals and organizations will be influenced by the greatest energy source of their environment. If the greatest source is positive they will realize that positivity. But, conversely, if the strongest source is negative, the person and organization will actualize that negativity – taking on its very form![[2]](#footnote-0)

Of course, we in the church have known this from the Scripture for millennia! Take a quick tour with me of Matthew’s Gospel alone… The Lord scolded the disciples for their lack on many occasions: “O you of little faith!” (Matt 6:30; 8:26). He explained, “your faith has healed you.” (Matt 9:22) and then made the astounding claim: “According to your faith will it be done to you” (Matt 9:29). In his hometown of Nazareth even Jesus was not able to do many miracles “because of their lack of faith.” (Matt 13:58). Jesus outlined the seemingly outlandish principle: “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt…if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.” (Matt 21:21-22).

Experiment with me and let’s join together in a faith-filled, positive inquiry approach to our church/pastor review…

**A Church/Pastor Positive Inquiry focuses on four vital steps….**

1. Discovery: the positive reality we “now see”
2. Discovering the Positive Core of our ministry…

Human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently focus upon. We want to take a few minutes to make the positive core of this church the common and explicit property of all of us here right now.

What are the things that are going well right now? Our achievements, assets, vital traditions, best practices, positive emotions, leadership capabilities.

Let’s engage in blue-sky thinking, no one will contradict another for a positive attribute that we see. Let’s make the list and fill up this page. This will become our root cause of success analysis. Tell me the very best of what you “now see.”

1. Discovering the positive core of our relationships…

Board members, I want to give each of you a chance to think what it is about your pastor that you most deeply appreciate or admire. One thing – I’m asking you to prioritize. Then I’d like you to tell that one thing to Pastor. As Pastor hears those things from you – the heloptropic effect will be for your pastor to strive to be even more like that positive attribute that you describe.

Next, I’m going to ask Pastor to speak into the life of each board member here this evening. Pastor, what is it about that board member that you most deeply appreciate or admire?

Ephesians 4:28-30 gives us this principle: “Do not let *any* unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but *only* what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God”

Only one other time in Scripture is “grieving the Holy Spirit” mentioned: Is 63:10. The result was that his hand was against the people. I have enough problems on my own without the hand of the Holy Spirit pushing against me. Talk about rolling a boulder up a hill!!

Let’s do the opposite of grieving the Spirit and instead bless the Spirit of God with discovering the positive core of the body of Christ.

Board members start (identify the most positive person and start with that individual) ☺ Then, after the board members have all had a chance to share, Pastor speaks faith and positivity into the life of each board member.

1. Dreaming: the positive, bright future that “could be”
2. What are *your individual* dreams for the next four years?

Now, with the positive core in mind. Thinking of these things as a means…what would you love the end to look like. Think of your best qualities, magnified, extended and multiplied.

Imagine that you went to sleep tonight during this board meeting and you woke up 4 years from now – the DS is *still* meeting with the board ☺ … what would you love the church to look like? What would love to see happen? What have you got a passion to see happen? What is it you want more of in your church?

Let’s engage in more blue-sky thinking and build a bridge from our Discovery of the “what is” of our positive core to the “what could be” of a dream – no one will contradict another’s passion and positive energy and faith to see something done.

Fill up a page and as moderator, combine ideas that are similar as they are stated by the group until they have dreamt all they have to dream! You should end up with 15-20 different things that people would love to see happen in the next four years.

1. What are *our collective* dreams for the next four years?

Now, let’s run our dreams through a dream-catcher ☺ Let’s build a bridge from the “what could be” of our dreams to the “what should be” of God’s destiny for our church in these next four years.

Listen carefully as I read back to you your 15-20 unique ideas. As I read through your list, think of which 5 are most important to you…you will have a chance to vote when I read the list a second time. Put your hand up for the idea that most resonates with you – that is closest to your heart’s desire. We’ll count the hands for each idea and by the end will come up with 3-4 dreams that are collectively most important to you.

At the end of this simple exercise you will have identified the most broadly held dreams of the church.

1. Designing: the positive, bright future that “should be”

We will only begin the design process this evening: I want you to answer two questions. Given our 3-4 priorities that we believe could be accomplished in these next four years…

1. What is the most important positive contribution Pastor could make toward the realization of *our collective* four-year dreams?
2. What is the most important positive contribution the Church Board could make toward the realization of *our collective* four-year dreams?

I’m going to ask you to trust your DS. Please write a brief, legible, one-sentence answer to these two questions and then pass your paper with the answers to me.

I will invite you to take a brief stretch break for the next 5 minutes as I read your responses and look for the common thread or the highest priority of what I hear you saying. Then we will come back together and with the pastor and board all here, I will go over what I hear you saying is the greatest positive contribution that the pastor and the church board could make toward the fulfillment toward what our future “should be”.

1. Delivery: the positive bright future that “will be” (Paragraph 122)

As I mentioned in step 3 – we have now identified *the most important single contribution* that the pastor and church board can make toward the positive bright future that the Lord has put in our collective heart and mind.

In order to build a bridge from what positive bright future that “should be” to the certainty of one that “will be”, the Pastor and church board need to take the delivery step. I strongly urge you to follow the instruction of our Manual in paragraph 122 that states: “Every year, the pastor and the church board shall conduct a planning session to renew the expectations and goals of the church and the pastor….Such written understanding shall be filed with the district superintendent.” The result will be a “Destiny Delivery Plan”

At this point I provide an agenda and template (which includes some resources provided by Pastor Dale Schaefer of Medford First) to the board and pastor to help them facilitate a planning retreat to finish building the design bridge from what “should be” to their ordained destiny of what “will be”.

**Conclusion: deliberation toward consent (Paragraph 123)**

The DS dismisses the pastor and deliberates with the church board to strive toward consent the deliberation toward consent to continue pastoral relations

With the beginnings of design and the hoped for delivery of steps 3 and 4 – is there consent that we continue pastoral relations (Paragraph 123)? In a worst-case scenario, if there is no consent, I invite the church board to proceed with the Delivery step of strategizing forward to the what “will be” with a Friday Evening/Saturday morning retreat that results in the “Destiny Delivery Plan.” Then with the plan clearly outlined re-visit with the DS – are we now prepared to consent together for continued pastoral relations into the bright positive future that “will be”?

1. Tom White, “Working in Interesting Times.” In *Vital Speeches of the Day,* vol LXII, no 15 (1996), pp. 472-474. [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change, (San Francisco: Berret-Koehler Publishers, 2005) provides a brief overview of the process which I have adapted for the purpose of the church/pastor review. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)