

GROUP PROCESSES THAT FACILITATE POSITIVE CHANGE

A RESOURCE FROM THE CENTER FOR CONGREGATIONS

Emphasize the positive. Use affirming language. Look for the life-giving moments. Congregations are finding pathways to positive change through a variety of group processes that encourage supportive and uplifting actions involving the whole community of faith. Processes such as Asset Mapping, Appreciative Inquiry, World Café, and Open Space Technology are gaining momentum as congregations look for ways to emphasize and utilize their strengths to meet their challenges.

WHAT IS A POSITIVE CHANGE PROCESS?

A **group process that facilitates positive change** is one that encourages an organization to view itself not as a problem to be solved but as a mystery to be embraced. These group processes encourage positive and affirming language and actions, finding the positive core, uncovering skills and talents already within the organization and sharing stories, knowledge and creativity. These processes involve the whole community, which is part of what makes them so successful.

WHAT ARE THE MOST POWERFUL GROUP PROCESSES?

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is the process of studying what gives life and meaning to an organization when it functions at its best. This developmental process engages individuals within the organization in its renewal, change and focused performance. Developed by Dr. David Cooperrider, AI encourages a particular way of asking questions and envisioning the future that fosters positive relationships and builds on the basic goodness in a person, a situation, or an organization. In so doing, it enhances a system's capacity for collaboration and change. Using the four-step process of Discover, Dream, Design, Destiny, AI is based on the belief that people tend to move in the direction of what they study.

Asset Mapping is the process of identifying assets (skills, talents, strengths) already in an organization and connecting them to each other in creative and innovative ways. Assets studied include physical, individual, institutional and economic.

Open Space Technology is an organic way to conduct a conference, retreat or meeting where attendees generate the agenda and participate by leading small group break-out sessions during the meeting time. Open Space Technology is a unique way of shaping the direction of an organization from within.

World Café is an energetic, easy-to-use process to foster dialogue, share knowledge and discover new opportunities. Based on living systems thinking, the Café creates networks of conversations that matter. Café is based on the concept that people already have within them the knowledge and creativity to address challenges – get them together to share this knowledge, and positive changes can happen.

WHEN WOULD WE USE THESE PROCESSES?

Appreciative Inquiry is a great tool to engage a large group with specific ministry planning, comprehensive planning, evaluating programs, and team building.

Asset Mapping is a good preliminary step to visioning. This is a creative way of bolstering a congregation's strengths.

Open Space Technology is also good for large groups. This process works best if leaders are open to risk-taking and new possibilities, without a pre-conceived agenda.

World Café helps a congregation address a particular challenge or issue or answer a question, such as "how can we as a congregation respond to our changing neighbor-



hood?” World Café works well when a large portion of the congregation is engaged – this allows a variety of insights and views to help shape the direction of the identified challenge.

WHAT SHOULD WE THINK ABOUT BEFORE WE GET STARTED?

Let’s hear it for the team. Appoint a team to plan and coordinate the event. More hands will make it easier when it comes to gathering supplies, setting up the meeting space and presenting the process. Appoint someone from your congregation to be the group facilitator who will lead the process.

Give it some time. Planning a large group process can take a while. Allow yourself plenty of time to prepare, plan and collect supplies. Also think about the amount of time needed to take participants (especially a large group) through the process. Most of these processes work well with a minimum of 25 persons and as many as 100. It may be unreasonable to allow only 15 minutes during a business meeting – you may need a couple of hours, a whole day or more. Research into the process will give you an idea of how much time is needed.

Let’s go shopping. Have an ample amount of supplies ready for the event. Most of these group processes utilize easels, chart paper, sticky notes, markers, worksheets and more. The resources about the processes often provide lists of needed supplies.

Making space. Think about the type of space needed to take your group through the process. Most of these programs require wall space for posting ideas and room for individuals to move about the area. Also take into consideration the number of folks who will participate – many of these programs encourage whole community involvement.

Using Resources is a series published by the Center for Congregations designed to help congregations make effective use of specific kinds of resources. It is our hope that you will find them useful in your work as a congregation.

Get it together. Think about how you will organize the gathering space. Will you need microphones or a podium? World Café works well with a comfortable ambiance, bistro tables and tablecloths, while Asset Mapping requires lots of wall space and large tables.

Information to transformation. Think about what you are going to do with the information that arises from the event. How will you use this information? Who will usher the information forward and keep it moving?

Resources You Can Use

For resources on this subject, check out the Congregational Resource Guide (CRG) at <http://thecrg.org/>. Suggested CRG search terms: positive change, planning, Appreciative Inquiry, World Cafe, Asset Mapping, Open Space Technology.

For more resources on this topic

CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE GUIDE

<http://thecrg.org/>

