


International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry

November 2014

Volume 16 Number 4

ISBN 978-1-907549-21-2

 [dx.doi.org/10.12781/978-1-907549-21-2](https://doi.org/10.12781/978-1-907549-21-2)

# AI Practitioner



[www.aipractitioner.com/subscriptions](http://www.aipractitioner.com/subscriptions)



# Spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry

Edited by

**Duane Bidwell, Ph.D.**

**Katherine Rand, MPP**

Sponsored by

**JLS International BV**



## Spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry

Inside this issue

### Welcome to November 2014 issue of AI Practitioner

Spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry celebrates the spiritual dimension by exploring its connections with AI theory and practice. Editors Duane Bidwell and Katherine Rand bring together articles that reflect on how spirituality, spiritual practice and AI flow together to shape the experiences of practitioners and participants. Articles highlight new practices, offer case studies and provide insight into ways of integrating spirituality and AI principles.

Kristen Crusoe, Annette Garner, Kathlynn Northrup-Snyder and Sarah Wallace describe an innovation in nursing education in the Feature Choice article "Using Motivational Interviewing in Nursing for Improved Professional Development: Moving from Appreciative Inquiry's Dream to Destiny Phases."

In Research Review & Notes, Ottar Ness highlights first-person perspectives in dual

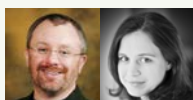
recovery and discusses what Appreciative Inquiry has to offer the mental health field.

We would like to thank Joep C. de Jong and JLS for sponsoring this issue.

**Anne Radford**  
Editor, AI Practitioner

#### 4 Spirituality and Appreciative Inquiry

Editors: Duane R. Bidwell and Katherine Rand



#### 6 Feature Choice

Using Motivational Interviewing in Nursing for Improved Professional Development: Key Facilitation Skills: Moving from Appreciative Inquiry's Dream to Destiny Phases

Kristen Crusoe,  
Kathlynn Northrup-Snyder,  
Annette Garner and Sarah Wallace



#### 18 Encounters with Appreciative Inquiry and Buddhism

Enhancing My Practice as an AI Practitioner and Researcher

Jan Reed



#### 21 Beginner's Mind in Psychotherapy

Alex Reed



#### 25 The Gift of Humility

Appreciative Inquiry in Organizations

Diana Whitney



#### 29 Graffiti Paper – Co-created Learning as Spiritual Space

Joan McArthur-Blair and Jeanie Cockell



## 34 Voices, Values and Vision

Claiming the Best of a National Faith Tradition

Amanda Trosten-Bloom



## 39 An Appreciative Inquiry into the Next Chapter of the Bryn Athyn Church

Meaning through Spiritual Living, Connection through Community and Trust through Transparent Governance

Ray Wells, Page S. Morahan, Erik Buss and Jennifer Pronesti



## 47 Revitalizing the Faith Journey

Bringing Appreciative Inquiry to Church Communities

Samuel Mahaffy



## 52 Appreciative Inquiry of the Inner World

Cleaning the Windows of Perception

Hans Uijen



## 56 Integrating the Spiritual Dimension

Employee Spiritual Care in Dutch Hospitals as an Inspiration for AI Practitioners

Heike Aiello and Hetty Zock



## 61 Appreciative Inquiry and the Beloved Community

Power of Stories, Witnessing, Intuition and Language in Shaping Pastoral Leadership

Vicki Hammel



## 65 Appreciative Inquiry Research Review & Notes

Highlighting first-person perspectives in dual recovery and discussing what Appreciative Inquiry has to offer the mental health and addiction field.

Ottar Ness



## 68 About the February 2015 Issue

Appreciative Inquiry practices in Ibero-America (Latin America, Puerto Rico and Spain)

Editors: Dora Fried Schnitman, Jorge Sanhueza Rahmer and Miriam Subirana



## 69 About the sponsor of this issue

JLS International BV has been using AI to facilitate change and innovation in organizations since 1995.



*JLS International*

## 70 Advertisements

The Center for Appreciative Inquiry  
AI Practitioner Subscriptions 2014

## 71 IAPG Contacts and AI Practitioner Subscription Information



#### Ray Wells, Ph.D

Ray Wells, Ph.D., is the president of Wellbeing Systems, Inc. in Abington, PA. He teaches AI in St. Joseph's University's OD and Leadership graduate program and consults for the Corporation for Positive Change and Company of Experts. Ray has led more than a dozen major change initiatives using AI processes.

Contact: raywells@wellbeing-systems.com



#### Page S. Morahan, Ph.D

Page S. Morahan, Ph.D., is a resident of the Bryn Athyn Church Community and has been a practitioner of AI for more than a decade. Trained originally as a microbiologist, she is founding director of Drexel University College of Medicine's ELAM® and FAIMER®'s leadership development programs, and has authored over 150 peer-reviewed publications

Contact: psmorahan@att.net



#### Erik Buss, MDiv

Erik Buss, MDiv, is assistant pastor at Bryn Athyn Church and leader of the strategic planning process. He has authored two books on applied theology, *Freely Give: Evangelization and the New Church* and *One Heart: Finding True Happiness in Marriage*, and served in pastorates in Chicago, Seattle and South Africa.

Contact: erikjbuss@gmail.com



#### Jennifer Pronesti

Jennifer Pronesti is a retired attorney and mother of three currently serving on the Bryn Athyn Church Board of Trustees as chair of the Strategic Planning Committee. She also serves on the board of the General Church of the New Jerusalem, the Cairnwood Estate Board of Governors, and as chair of the Bryn Athyn Historic District Council.

Contact: jbpronesti@verizon.net

# An Appreciative Inquiry into the Next Chapter of the Bryn Athyn Church

## Meaning through Spiritual Living, Connection through Community and Trust through Transparent Governance

Over a two-year span, the Bryn Athyn Church, the largest New Church congregation in the world, used Appreciative Inquiry processes to engage more than 450 people in building both a shared vision and a strategic plan to get there. The process healed factional rifts, improved transparency in church governance, and resulted in increased trust, financial stability, volunteerism and community and youth engagement.

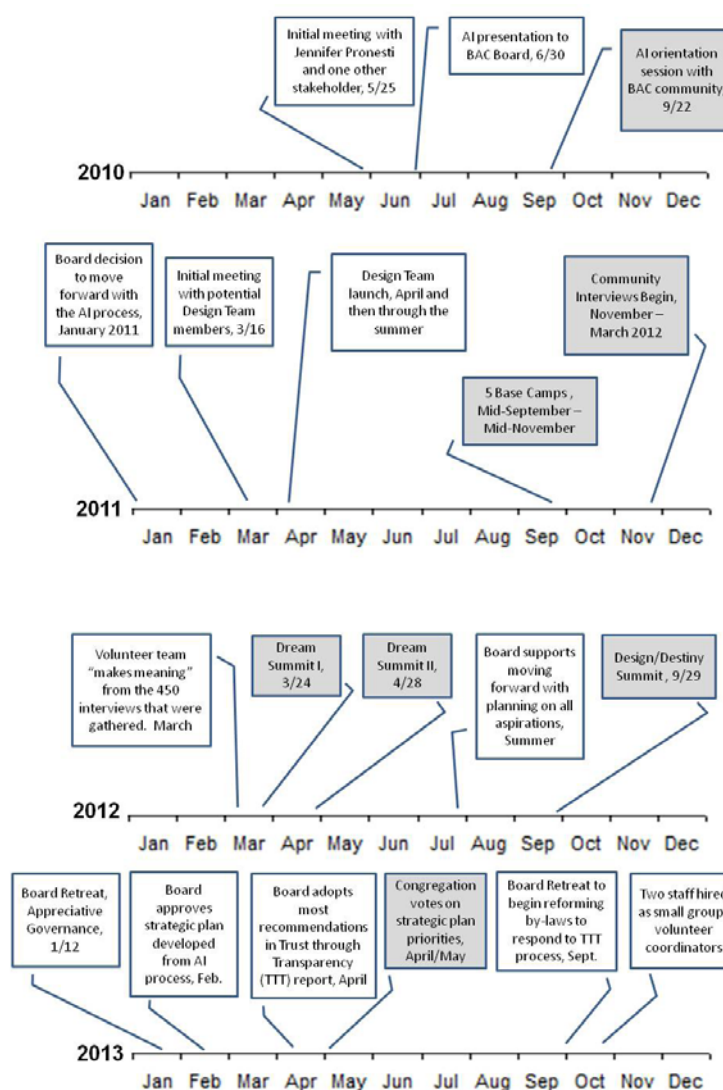
The Bryn Athyn Church (BAC)<sup>1</sup> in Pennsylvania is the largest New Church congregation in the world. The New Church is based on the teachings of the Bible as illuminated by Emmanuel Swedenborg, an eighteenth century theologian and scientist.

In 2010, the Bryn Athyn congregation experienced conflict around several issues, including decisions by the BAC board; growth initiatives by related church bodies; and donors perceived as attaching strings to big gifts. The community fractured when donor-driven plans for a new school building appeared to threaten the church's thrift shop. Discontent and alienation dominated conversations.

Both lay and formal leadership thought Appreciative Inquiry (AI) offered an opportunity to reconnect the congregation through re-discovery of shared values. New Church doctrine and core AI principles are closely aligned, which the BAC board stressed when it proposed an AI process to the community:

<sup>1</sup> <http://brynathynchurch.org/>

Figure 1: Timeline for the entire initiative, beginning in May of 2010 and running through 2013. Follow-up activities continue on a regular basis.



The person whose rational mind consists in truth alone, and does not at the same time consist in the good of charity, is quick to find fault ... He views everything from the standpoint of truth, and nothing from the standpoint of good. The one thing to soften his hardness is the good of charity...when good draws near and implants itself in truth the latter becomes so different that it can hardly be recognized (Swedenborg, 2013 translation).

The congruence between AI's core principles and the spirituality of the community became an important dimension of the process. Three aspects of the process contributed to its success: an intentionally slow startup, thorough community involvement, and ongoing board commitment.



'I was impressed by how positive language kept being gently used by leadership... There was a respect that was emerging, a respectful way of being and viewing.'  
Design team member

### Slow and intentional startup

By intention, stakeholders were introduced slowly to the AI process. First, the church board, and then a cross-section of the community, sampled the process. A larger-scale process began several months later with broad outreach to stakeholders.

### Thorough community involvement

Stakeholders included the Bryn Athyn Church, its associated preschool, elementary school and church-run thrift shop; nearby denominational headquarters; Bryn Athyn College; a denominational secondary school; church retirement community; community-driven artworks facility; and historic district including the Bryn Athyn Cathedral. Other stakeholders included people attending a variety of church services in five different locations, some outside of the immediate Bryn Athyn community, as well as people disenfranchised or disengaged from the formal church.

A design team representing all stakeholder groups worked for six months to select four affirmative topics for community-wide discovery interviews: joyful community; useful service from strengths and passion; lifelong learning; and moving forward (signaling intention to move beyond conflict). These topics resonated with doctrinal commitments to diversity, service, personal responsibility and an ongoing search for knowledge and truth. As one member said, "I was longing for the community to act on Swedenborgian principles and no longer be an organization that has a mission of healing people, but often hurts or even destroys the people within the church and community."

AI's formal 4D process – Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny – took place over 12 months to shift the congregation's fractured culture by engaging as many church and community people as possible. Discovery interviews initially occurred at large group meetings ("base camps"). After the first two, participants took the initiative to extend themselves into the community with smaller, more intimate interview sessions. In six months, five base camps involved about 225 people, and one-on-one interviews involved another 225, generating 450 interviews for analysis by a volunteer "meaning-making" team.

Discovery interviews were a powerful tool for effecting culture change. "The fact that the church was willing to stop and listen, and to encourage everyone in the church to stop and listen, changed the tone of the dialogue," assistant pastor Erik Buss said. "Once people saw that they were being heard, the intensity dropped away from the conversation, and we moved from looking at problems to looking at possibilities." A design team member commented: "I was impressed by how positive language kept being gently used by leadership ... There was a respect that was emerging, a respectful way of being and viewing. The interviews were precious privileges – connecting me to others, and others to others."

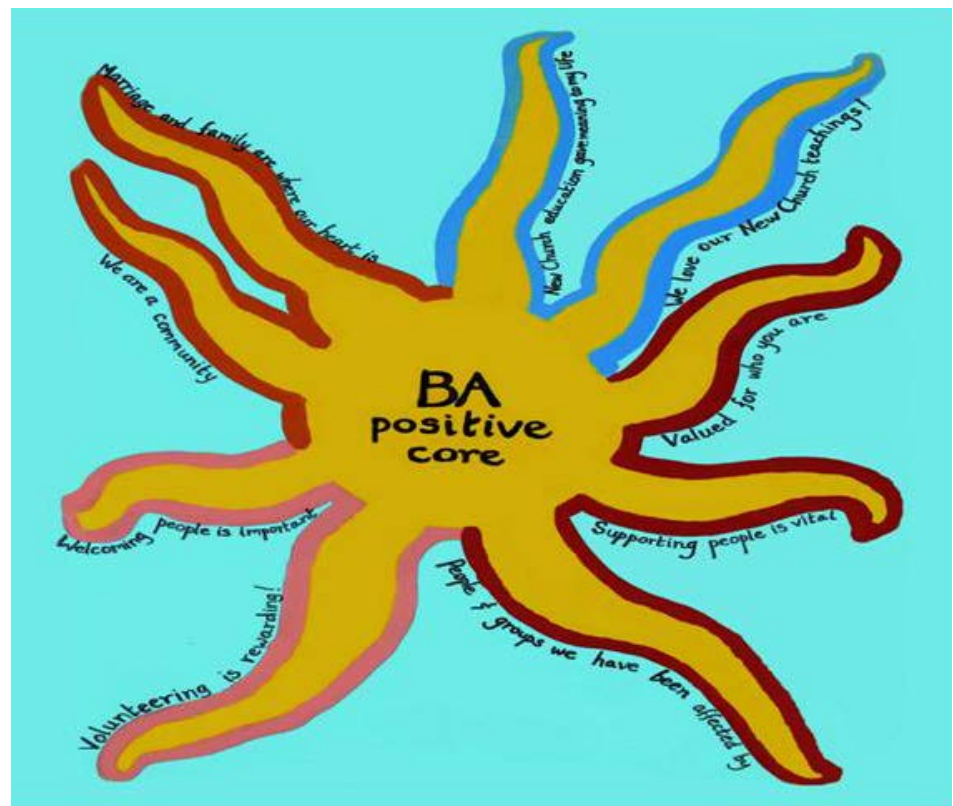
In an unusual step, the design team insisted that base camp meetings include a "concerns conversation" in which participants could anonymously list concerns, followed by a large group conversation. Consultant Ray Wells was apprehensive. "I

had a lot of anxiety about designing and facilitating the concerns conversation. In ten years of AI work, I had been successful at discouraging groups from running down this pathway. This group had very strong feelings that concerns should come to the forefront in a public forum and be facilitated in a structured, manageable way."

This created a key learning: the discovery process produced a high, and the concern conversation was a downer. This helped participants understand the value of an appreciative approach. One design team member said, "It was good to see the turnaround in a base camp from the strain of the concerns conversation to the positive energy of the subsequent interaction, which accentuated the difference in productivity and usefulness."

After the base camps and community interviews, about 15 volunteers spent a month analyzing data to identify nine themes, the positive core of the church and the glue for the community and church in planning a collective future:

The positive core of Bryn Athyn



1. We are a community.
2. Marriage and family are where our heart is.
3. New Church education gave meaning to my life.
4. We love our New Church teachings!
5. You are valued for who you are.

6. Supporting people is vital.
7. We honor people and groups we have been affected by.
8. Volunteering is rewarding!
9. Welcoming people is important.

The visions for the future were represented by painted trees created by local artist Ann Buss. Then, in the spring of 2012, about 175 community members participated in two half-day Dream Summits. The first resulted in 24 graphic visuals of the future of the BAC community. Many design team members felt the first Dream Summit was critically important:

'Themes of the Bryn Athyn Church Community Preferred Future' created by Ann Buss, a local artist.



"I think it popped the bubble of people feeling like they did not have a voice. The interviews probably had tons of impact for individuals, but for me the feedback of the message in the visual images was key," said one team member.

"Of those who came to the first Dream Summit, there was a sense of unity, importance, being included, necessary, heard – each person could make a difference that day," said another.

At the second Dream Summit, another graphic created by local artist Liz Kufs summarized the community's future hopes through 14 themes that emerged from the first summit. Self-organizing groups crafted 14 aspiration statements used at an autumn Design/Destiny summit to develop specific plans. Project groups attempted to bring the aspiration statements to life; then assistant pastor Erik Buss led efforts to create specific strategies. Developing consensual plans to drive action was the most difficult part of the entire process.



Summary of the community's future hopes created by Liz Kufs, a local artist.



### Board engagement

One reason for success was the BAC board's involvement during the 30 months. The strategic planning committee initiated the process, the entire board participated in an orientation and voted to enter the process, and members served as informal leaders, active voices, and listeners throughout. Jennifer Pronesti reflected: "I definitely underwent a personal transformation as a result of my involvement. Again and again I catch myself before I fall into negative thought processes or, sometimes after the fact, I realize that I have made assumptions about people. The training has opened doors and allowed me to get to know people in meaningful ways and have connections with, that otherwise would have taken years to form."

A critical board decision was allowing all 14 aspirations from the Dream Summit to move forward – even an aspiration advocating for women in the ministry (currently not allowed by the General Church) and one focused on use of property not owned by the church. At a subsequent retreat, the board reviewed articles on appreciative governance (Lee, Mohr and Torres, 2011) and developed seven themes that guide ongoing strategic planning:

1. Effective pastoral leadership
2. Clear/efficient administration of congregational uses
3. Fiscal responsibility
4. Broad influence and transparency in decisions
5. Clear/transparent policy for maintenance/development of church-owned facilities and land
6. Improved relations across all Bryn Athyn institutions
7. Sustained momentum of AI process

## Service to others is both a strong doctrinal and community value

### Contributions to strategic planning

The AI process created three unequivocal outcomes that informed strategic planning: people wanted meaning through spiritual living, connection through community and trust through transparent governance. Additionally, service to others is both a strong doctrinal and community value and the congregation has a long-term interest in education. The strategic plan goals parallel these:

1. Support people in worship and spiritual living that put the Lord and the Word – which includes the Bible and Swedenborg's Writings – at the center of our community.
2. Provide education for children in the light of New Church teachings.
3. Warmly welcome people into the life of the church and community.
4. Create opportunities for people to find joy in serving others and to feel that their spiritual needs are being met.
5. Practice transparent and effective governance that inspires trust and a clear sense of a commonly held direction.

The strategic plan is broadly accepted and perceived as a community, rather than a board, creation. Inspired by AI principles, for the past two years the BAC leadership has asked the congregation to choose strategic priorities for the coming year.

Dream Summit results: a selection of the 24 graphic visuals.



### Vignettes of progress

An 18-month, volunteer-driven AI process involved 450 people, creating enormous individual and collective learning. Leah Rose, co-chair of the Design Team, had felt marginalized prior to taking a leadership role. "I learned that we probably care about our community and/or church more than we think we do, or sometimes than we feel we do," she said. "Everyone has a story worth hearing. Being willing to listen to one another...that is where human connection happens, where energy is formed."

'Everyone has a story worth hearing. Being willing to listen to one another...that is where human connection happens, where energy is formed.' Leah Rose

Two years after the final BAC Design/Destiny summit, AI has influenced direct and indirect changes, perhaps even transformation, in the community's culture. Specifically, there is:

- Increased trust through formal structures to facilitate transparent governance
- Increased volunteerism, community engagement and new staff support of volunteers
- Increased support and new programs for marriage, young children and the family
- Increased support and new programs for community engagement by young adults
- Collaboration with Bryn Athyn College about use of land not owned by the church
- A developing culture of listening and advocacy
- Improvement in donor relationships and fiscal management, including a balanced budget after five years of deficit spending

Self-organizing groups crafting aspiration statements



Although there are still things to accomplish, the place feels different: it is more inclusive, more transparent, more attentive to shared spirituality across generations, and there is more engagement from a broader number of people and a greater sense of connection via community. And when the BAC builds the community center that is the aspiration of many – or attains a gift to do so – it would be, perhaps, safe to proclaim long-term success.

### References

Lee S., Mohr, B.J. and Torres, C. (2011) Introduction to Appreciative Governance, *AI Practitioner: The International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry*. 13(4), London, UK.

Swedenborg, Emanuel. (2013) *Secrets of Heaven, Vol. 2*. (Trans. Lisa Hyatt Cooper) West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation.