

“Strengthening Our Covenant with Ourselves and Our Community”

Our Purpose: To renew our Covenant with one another and our Church Community

Interview Guide and Questions

Note to Interviewees: The Appreciative Inquiry team encourages each person to read through the interview guide before you are interviewed. The following introduction, background information and lead-in paragraphs that introduce each section and individual questions provide a context for understanding more fully the intent of the questions. In addition, the accompanying two page description of the appreciative inquiry approach to planning change helps to understand the nature and key elements of this approach to the change process. The second page deals with how this change project will proceed in our church.

Introduction

The purpose of this interview guide is to assist church members in conducting interviews with other members about the future of the church. We will use the Appreciative Inquiry approach to discover the forces and factors which give UUCLC its success and vitality when it is at its best.

Appreciative interviews bring out the best in people and organizations. They provide opportunities for people to speak and be heard. They ignite curiosity and the spirit of learning, and in so doing they enhance organizational knowledge and wisdom.¹

Topics covered in this guide include background information, interview questions, tips on conducting an interview, and reporting interview results.

Background Information

Our interviews may be unlike others that you have done. Why? Because the interviews will focus on our positive experiences, allowing us to share what we do best and how that can make us stronger. This means all the interview questions are cast in positive terms. As Appreciative Inquiry (AI) experts note:

The practice of asking positive questions not only brings out the best in people and organizations; it also amplifies and magnifies the most positive life giving possibilities for the future... If you truly wish to change your world, you must change your way of asking questions. It could be that the moment you do so, a totally different world will take shape around you.²

Now, here's the larger context the interviews fit into: once we've identified what we do best – our positive core – we will come together to dream about how we build on that base. Then we'll design the systems to make the dream our reality. Then we'll do it – some parts immediately; some over time. That's the plan in a nutshell.

¹ Diana Whitney & Amanda Trosten-Bloom, The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change, Berrett Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2003, p. 147.

² James Ludema, Diana Whitney, Bernard Mohr, Thomas Griffin, The Appreciative Inquiry Summit: A Practitioner's Guide for Leading Large-Group Change, Berrett Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2003.

How is this approach different than the typical problem solving approach to planning?

<u>Appreciative Inquiry Approach</u>	<u>Problem Solving Approach</u>
Focuses on positive change Draws group toward a positive future Builds future from prior strengths Engages many members Seeks new designs/ways of doing Commits to action	Identifies problems Analyzes causes Searches for solutions Develops action plans One of the difficulties in using the problem solving approach is agreeing on what the problem is, much less a solution. It is much faster and more constructive to describe what we want and then figure out how we will make that happen.

In short, Appreciative Inquiry is a bottom-up, future looking, inclusive approach to positive change. It ignites a grassroots movement, gives voice to our dreams, builds commitment to a shared vision of the future, and creates provocative propositions that guide the church’s future development.

In addition to the general questions (sections A & F), interviewees will be asked to answer questions in one or more of their personal areas of passion. *These are questions regarding four areas (sections B, C, D, and E) that are focused on the first four major strategic directions (affirmative topics) from the church’s long range plan titled “Charting the Future.”* We request each person interviewed to pick at least one of the areas from Sections B through E, but want everyone to feel free to answer questions in as many of these sections as desired. The interview may run a little bit longer as a result, but we welcome more rather than less input.

Interview Questions

Lead in to the Interview session: The covenanted congregation is the basic institution of liberal religion.³ Mutual promises flow from a shared covenant (a solemn agreement or vow) and draw Unitarian Universalists closer to our unifying core than individual claims can manage. Promises are fulfilled only in communal life; they require persons living in relationship to one another. When they are at their best, congregations nurture the life-giving qualities of covenant: faithfulness, trustworthiness, and love.⁴

“Community, covenant, and caring are the watchwords....of what is at the center of our faith. We come together in voluntary commitment to each other to live out our lives with the highest values we can mutually discover. And we pledge to each other our energies to reshape the world for the greater good.”⁵

³ Excerpted from: Redeeming Your Church with the Power of Covenant, Walter Hez, ed. Skinner House, 1999.

⁴ Excerpted from: Engaging Our Theological Diversity, UUA Commission on Appraisal, 2005, pg. 128.

⁵ Ibid, pg. 54.

Section A: General Questions

A.1. First Impressions: First impressions are really important. They create a set of expectations that set the tone for future engagement. This question is going to focus on your first impressions of this church.

Question A.1.1 Take a moment and think back about your beginning with the church. What were your most positive and powerful first impressions? What first attracted you to UUCLC and its people?

A.2. Creating a Positive Church Culture: Every church's culture is unique and special in some way. Each has its patterns and stories that reflect the underlying character of the gathered community.

Question A.2.1.: Reflect on a high point in your life as a member of this church - a time when you felt embraced, cared for, respected or enriched by the community. What was the situation? What happened? Who was involved?

Question A.2.2: What values or qualities were present in that experience and how could you tell they were present? Why are these values and qualities important to you?

Question A.2.3.: When you think about your experiences in other churches, what is it about their culture that makes them attractive? Would you like to see more of that quality in our church? If so, fast forward to the near future and describe how we are creating more of that quality in our church life.

A.3. Articulating our Strengths and Strategic Advantages: Successful people, teams and organizations, including churches, work from their strengths to achieve extraordinary things. When churches are at their best, people know and build on the church's distinctive advantages: strengths, core values, programs, and services that draw people to them.

Question A.3.1: What do you see as UUCLC's greatest strengths, core values, programs or services? Can you think of a story that illustrates one or more of these strengths, values, programs or services? What ways of working together do you see in place right now that reaffirm and increase these strengths?

Questions A.3.2: What do you believe are our church's most significant or distinctive advantages? As you envision the future, how are we building on and leveraging these advantages to be the best we can be?

A.4. Creating and Sustaining Positive Energy: Churches - and other organizations – work best when they are vibrant, alive and fun. You know when the joint is jumping. You can sense the spirit of the place and the pride of the people there.

Questions A.4.1: Tell me about a time when you experienced positive energy at church. What was the situation? What created the positive energy? How did it feel to be part it?

Question A.4.2: What do you recommend to increase the level of positive energy at church? Imagine the church 2 to 3 years in the future. What promises are we making with one another to fuel this positive energy and keep it burning brightly?

Section B: Our Shared Community

B: Creating a Sense of Shared Community: Churches are like a patchwork quilt with a variety of patterns, colors, shapes and sizes that eventually create one end product. The people who make up the church come with a plethora of stories and shared values that contribute to a common vision. Much like stitching together the squares that make up a beautifully patterned quilt, effective churches maintain closeness, a shared sense of community and support for and among the members, even as it increases in size and diversity. They help each member discover and apply his or her own ministry as we support and care for one another and enhance opportunities for growth in service and leadership.

Question B.1: Tell me about high point when you felt supported by our church community. What was the situation? What happened? Who was involved?

Question B.2: Recall a time when 1) you provided leadership for some program or ministry of the church, or 2) had an opportunity to work with someone you considered to be an inspirational leader. Describe the situation. What do you most value and appreciate about such opportunities?

Question B.3: Picture the near future. What kind of opportunities are allowing or inspiring you to make the most rewarding contribution to the church?

Section C: Spiritual Growth

C: Providing opportunities for Spiritual Growth: When operating at its best, the church is a place for inspiration and exploration. It provides meaningful and inspiring worship experiences, opportunities to stretch its members' hearts and minds, and encourages them to spiritual growth, drawing on the wisdom and perspective of diverse religions and cultural traditions. The opportunities are many and varied for shared worship, meditation, interaction, solace, safety, and spiritual renewal.

Question C.1: Tell me about a time when you were on the receiving end of a quality moment – when a church service, religious education program or opportunity for dialogue inspired or delighted you.

- What was it like?
- How did you feel?
- In what way, if any, did the experience enhance your relationship with a person or persons in the church?

Question C.2: Describe a time when your thinking was challenged or you were inspired to live more fully in accordance with UU principles.

- How did you grow or change as a result of the experience?
- How can the church help you more?
- As you envision growing spiritually, what new contributions do see yourself making to the church?

Section D: The Wider Community

D: Reaching out to the Wider Community: Responsibility to our church is not limited to the work we do within our walls. One of our UU principles calls for us to practice justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. Another asks us to pursue the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. “Reaching out” means developing, supporting, and participating in programs and activities that respond to the needs of our Las Cruces community.

Question D.1: Tell a story about when you were engaged in living these principles in the larger community, either locally or as part of a positive force in the world..

- What was the high point of your experience?
- What was your contribution?

Question D.2: What resources does our church have that can benefit the community?

Question D.3: *Dream into the future....* the church and community have a wonderful mutual partnership.

- Describe what this looks like?
- What three things are being done to create this partnership?

Or

- Describe the three most compelling partnerships between the church and other organizations that are getting unprecedented results for the church and you?
- What are we doing to realize the promise of these partnership responsibilities?

Section E: Growing our Congregation

E. Identifying the Possibilities for Growing our Congregation: A growing congregation seeks to be a covenantal church. Growth follows naturally when we provide opportunities for close community, spiritual growth, and service. To do this we must live up to our promise (our agreement) to work together in “right relationships” that affirm and promote respect for the worth and dignity of all members as well as all persons in our wider community.

Question E.1: Can you think of a time when there was a spurt of growth in our church. What were the circumstances? What decisions, actions, projects or programs fueled the growth?

Question E.2: Tell me about a time in Las Cruces when you realized that we are living in an extraordinarily rich and diverse multi-cultural environment. What trends and changes are you seeing in Las Cruces or the larger world that excite you and give you a sense of confidence in the possibilities for the church’s future? (*e.g. changes in local demographics or the economy or people’s need for a spiritual home.*)

Question E.3: Given the trends, imagine the church 5 years from now.

- Who are we attracting to our membership and how are we doing it?
- What kind of programs are we offering?
- What do our facilities look like?

Section F: Closing Questions:

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with me. I've learned a lot. I have three final questions.

Question F.1: Pretend you have a magic wand you can wave over the church. Tell me three wishes you would like to grant to the church to heighten its health and vitality.

Question F.2: What is the most important thing you have learned or re-learned about your experience in our church as a result of our conversation?

Question F.3: It will help our analysis to know a few facts about you.

How long have you been a member of the church? _____ years.

How would you judge your level of involvement in church life?

- a. ____ highly involved
- b. ____ somewhat involved
- c. ____ only marginally involved

Closing Statement: In order to make full use of your thoughts and ideas, the AI Team members need to record the details of what you've shared. I'm guessing this won't be a big deal for you since the things you have shared are an example of the church at its best. Still, I want to be sure that you're comfortable. Is there anything that you have shared that you don't want to share with the team or would not want to see quoted anywhere?

{Note to Interviewers: If there is a story or piece of conversation that strikes you as sensitive or troublesome in any way, you should specifically make note of this portion of the interview as soon as you have asked the question above. We want to make sure this is a positive experience for the all who are interviewed.}