

Resources from the

***Congregational Resource Guide***

for

***"Strategic Planning:  
Shaping Holy Conversations"***



*This resource list is also available online, with links to resource providers, at  
[www.congregationalresources.org/Seminars/ShapingHolyConversations.asp](http://www.congregationalresources.org/Seminars/ShapingHolyConversations.asp)*

**The Answer to How Is Yes: Acting on What Matters** (Book)

Peter Block, Author. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2001.

*The Answer to How Is Yes* compels us to attend to those ideals and commitments that truly matter—in our individual lives, institutions, and communities. Peter Block points out that we often divert ourselves from our ideals by attending to "how" questions: "How do you do it?" "How long will it take?" Such questions emphasize task to the exclusion of purpose. More challenging and appropriate questions: "What crossroad am I facing?" "What commitment am I willing to make?" These questions concern values, purpose, context, and choice. This book is for persons who are open to a renewed perspective as they re-assess personal vocation and mission.

**Appreciative Leaders: In the Eye of the Beholder** (Book)

Marjorie Schiller, Bea Mah Holland, and Deanna Riley, Editors. Chagrin Falls, OH: Taos Institute, 2001.

Building on the foundation of the appreciative inquiry methodology used in organizational consulting, this book examines how appreciative practices can lend power to the leadership role. This exploration takes place largely through stories of leaders who are transforming their communities through appreciative ways of communicating, relating, and envisioning. Insights and inspiration can be found throughout these stories, and the final chapter offers readers a model of appreciative leadership the editors developed based on the stories gathered to create this book. Also included is a discussion of the characteristics, actions, attitudes, and worldviews of the individuals defined in this book as appreciative leaders. This is a helpful resource for anyone seeking a guidepost to a mode of leadership that honors the individual, brings out the best in others, and creates through vision and a desire to better the world.

**The Appreciative Organization** (Book)

Harlene Anderson, Kenneth J. Gergen, Sheila McNamee, David Cooperrider, Mary Gergen, Diana Whitney, Authors. Chagrin Falls, OH: Taos Institute, 2001.

In this 55-page volume, the authors argue that the old hierarchical organization is no longer effective and needs to be replaced with a model based on the following premises: nothing will motivate people unless it has meaning for them; meaning is created through relationships; and appreciating others' words and actions increases value within relationships, organizations, and the world at large. The authors use examples to flesh out these concepts, contrasting the results produced by existing organizational structures, leadership approaches, evaluation methods, and communication styles with those that "appreciative organization" methods have produced in their own work.

**Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences** (Book)

Gilbert R. Rendle, Author. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1999.

*Behavioral Covenants in Congregations* offers congregations an approach to managing their differences with maturity and respect. Gil Rendle discusses the behavioral covenant as a useful approach to answering a key question: "How will we behave when we don't understand each other and when we don't agree?" A written document developed and agreed to by leaders and creators, the behavioral covenant is a set of promises to practice

the Golden Rule in clearly identified ways. The book provides modules for developing behavioral covenants in various group settings. Among the book's additional resources are examples of covenants for congregations during troubling times.

**Beyond Certainty: The Changing Worlds of Organizations** (Book)

Charles Handy, Author. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996

Throughout this collection of 35 essays written over a five-year period on a variety of topics, Charles Handy discusses the challenges in workplace culture and corporate leadership that confront organizations. The central theme throughout these essays is uncertainty. Of most interest to religious leaders will be the essays devoted to the changing aspects of workplace culture—including "The Coming Work Culture," "Why There is Life After Work," and "The Challenge of a Second Lifetime." While not intentionally directed toward religious organizations, this book would be of interest to those concerned with leadership development, as well as spirituality and the workplace. A quick read, *Beyond Certainty* could also provide pastors with insights into the business world of the members of their congregation.

**The Board Member's Guide to Strategic Planning: Charting the Future for Your Nonprofit** (Book)

Fisher Howe, Author. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Fisher Howe moves readers through the planning process step-by-step. Especially valuable are his emphases on "pre-planning," his explanation of the value of a consultant, and his discussion on how the board and consultant should proceed. The chapter on "the language of planning" includes this advice: "Although it is too extreme to suggest that the words *objective* and *goal* should be banned altogether from planning, their use should be carefully guarded." He urges boards to note both their internal and their external environments, recognizing that most people avoid the struggle with external change forces. This volume will be a real asset for leaders of congregations as they struggle with the hard work of strategic planning.

**The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations** (Book)

Peter M. Senge, Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts, Richard Ross, George Roth, Bryan Smith, Authors. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999.

Peter Senge and others develop and apply systems theory to starting and sustaining productive, developmental life in organizations. The "dance" of the title—and the book's purpose—is to describe the forces that generate and limit change. While the language is simple, the text is replete with insightful definitions. Readers can divide the book into three parts: (1) the overarching theory, and most essential definitions, in the first two chapters; (2) the "big picture" overview (entitled "Leadership in the World of the Living") at the end; and (3) the rest of the book, which elaborates the limiting processes (or "Ten Challenges") that shape profound change. With its attention to behaviors and attitudes that constrain the development of an institution and its members, this book is bedrock material for leaders in any field.

**Discerning Your Congregation's Future: A Strategic and Spiritual Approach** (Book)

Roy M. Oswald, Robert E. Friedrich Jr., Authors. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1996.

This book incorporates the primary resources of discernment and prayer together with significant theoretical material—congregational size, systems, polarity management, congregational health and norms—into a useful and practical strategy for spiritual growth. The process is offered as a road map in which several activities and formats are suggested for each step, with the congregation, not the leader, at the center. This book is for lay and professional leaders who are seeking a powerful sense of God's vision for ministry (as opposed to a process for developing another mission statement).

**The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership** (Book)

R. Paul Stevens, Phil Collins, Authors. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1993.

Drawing on systems theory, covenant relationships, and biblical references, the authors present a model through which clergy can move congregations from focusing on self-preservation to fulfilling their ministry as Christian ambassadors. Shifting the focus from equipping individuals to equipping the whole church, they affirm the importance of interdependence among church members and explore various dysfunctional relationships that work against interdependence. Visionary servant leaders must recognize that their authority ultimately rests in God and they can only effectively fulfill their calling through a life of prayer. Leaders must also affirm that ministry is not what we do with "extra time," but what we do with all of life. Although both clergy and laity will benefit from this resource, it is primarily addressed to clergy.

**The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization** (Book)

Peter M. Senge, Author. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994.

Senge defines "systems thinking"—the titled "fifth" discipline—as a leadership team discerning all the interlocking relationships in a problem situation, and then identifying the causes (rather than the symptoms) of behavior patterns that are constraining or blocking an organization's development. The author offers a half-dozen systems approaches to implementing and sustaining a learning organization. This book is written for the corporate world, but substantive parallels to faith communities can be identified. Ultimately, Senge's systems approach is for leadership open to the calling of building a faith community fully dedicated to the growth and development of its members.

**The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization** (Book)

Peter M. Senge, Author. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994.

A companion to *The Fifth Discipline*, the *Fieldbook* features Peter Senge's nuts-and-bolts applications for building a "learning organization." The importance of the "learning organization" approach to faith communities lies in its open commitment to the ongoing growth and development of both organization and individual. Open the *Fieldbook* at random and encounter applications for working with self, work groups, or an entire congregation. Wide margins are laced with cross-references to related topics, so one may better grasp both the "why's" and the extensive interrelationships. Whether one is a consultant, lay leader, or ordained leader, Senge's tools, approaches, and rationales provide useful additions to one's practice.

**Five Challenges for the Once and Future Church** (Book)

Loren B. Mead, Author. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1996.

Loren Mead explains five challenges congregations must face if we are to have churches in future generations that are stronger than ours. First, we must transfer church "ownership" to allow for greater lay responsibility. Second, new institutional structures are needed to support the work of local congregations. Third, we need to discover a "passionate spirituality" that integrates the rational with the emotional elements of faith and connects our knowledge with our experience of God. Fourth, we must generate and support community in our individualistic society. Fifth, we must become an apostolic people who view mission as a vital, caring concern for all of creation. Congregations that find these challenges daunting are encouraged to recall that clergy and laity have risen to equally daunting challenges in the past.

**Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue** (Book)

Edwin H. Friedman, Author. New York: Guilford Publications, 1985.

Friedman—for twenty-five years a congregational rabbi, family therapist, and counselor to clergy of numerous faiths—applies the prism of family systems theory to three "families:" the clergy's own family, the congregational family, and families in a congregation. Friedman focuses on the powerful position of clergy for enabling family development around life-cycle events and associated rituals. With any family system, Friedman centers on behavior rather than on labeled individuals, and he demands our attention to process rather than to an "identified problem." This book, packed with theory and example, will repay reading and re-reading over the years.

**Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations** (Book)

Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, Authors. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2003.

Congregational planning is often presented as a technical process: the leader is the chief problem solver and the goal is finding "the solution to the problem." But Gil Rendle and Alice Mann cast planning as a "holy conversation," a congregational discernment process about three critical questions: (1) Who are we? (2) What has God called us to do or be? (3) Who is our neighbor? Rendle and Mann equip congregational leaders with a broad range of tools for planning. By choosing the resources that best suit their needs, congregations can find a path that is faithful to their identity and their relationship with God.

**How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems** (Book)

Peter L. Steinke, Author. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006.

*How Your Church Family Works* applies family systems thinking to guide the reader from a micro view of congregational relationships to a macro view. Peter Steinke articulates our interrelatedness and its potential to produce anxiety. He urges readers to recognize that such anxiety provides opportunities for change and growth. He also encourages leaders to be "self-differentiated," or in responsive relationships that neither diminish our own integrity nor intrude on the integrity of others. Healthy responses to congregational struggles include focusing on (1) self, not others; (2) strength, not weakness; (3) process, not content; (4) challenge, not comfort; (5) integrity, not unity; (6) system, not symptom; and (7) direction,

not condition.

**Leadership without Easy Answers** (Book)

Ronald A. Heifetz, Author. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994.

Here is a book for leaders who want more than the "The Six Secrets of Successful Leaders, Easily Digested." As a physician, Ronald Heifetz holds that most problems arise in complex systems and that human behavior is largely adaptive. As a psychiatrist, he believes that patients faced with the truth have enormous capacity to change. And as a musician, he believes in the importance of dissonance, silence, and access to emotions. Heifetz makes two key distinctions regarding leadership: that between technical and adaptive problems (which require different modes of action), and that between leadership and authority. Much of the book works through these distinctions.

**Leading Change** (Book)

John P. Kotter, Author. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996.

An expert on business leadership argues that change strategies often fail because they do not alter behavior. During the twentieth century, organizations typically did not operate in a rapidly changing environment. They pieced together structures, systems, practices, and cultures that often hindered change. Twenty-first century leaders must be committed to lifelong learning, constant change, and new ideas. They must have a persistent sense of urgency, create and communicate vision, empower others across a broad base, and ultimately transform their organizations from static to innovative cultures. The change process described in this book will help leaders understand the stages involved in transformational change.

**Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders** (Book)

Gilbert R. Rendle, Author. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998.

*Leading Change in the Congregation* is for congregational leaders trying to be faithful in a turbulent and unpredictable environment. Combining theory, research, and the author's extensive work with changing congregations, this book provides leaders and others with practical diagnostic models and tools for leading change in a spiritual way. "A posture of nonchange in an environment of great change is not faithful leadership. It is a formula for disconnecting the congregation from the very culture or community it has been called to address." The case studies, analyses, worksheets, and games included in this book will help congregations and their leaders understand the varied reactions that change can elicit.

**Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community** (Book)

Suzanne G. Farnham, Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean, Susan M. Ward, Authors. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1991.

This book is a theological and practical exploration of the meaning of call and the ways in which discernment in community can help us find our vocation. Guidelines for discernment groups and questions to raise during discernment are also included." How can we hear God's call?" the authors ask. This question "cannot be answered by any book. Rather, answers emerge within our hearts as we live the questions. Understanding that God calls us

to ministry . . . and meeting with others for insight and support helps us to live these questions."

**Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change** (Book)

William Bridges, Author. Boulder, CO: Perseus Books, 1991.

William Bridges focuses on organizational transitions (the psychological processes people go through to come to terms with a new situation) within industry, but his experience and insights are readily applicable to congregational life. *Managing Transitions* offers a way to bring closure, let go, proceed through a dry period, and enter a situation of new personal and corporate opportunity. Persons applying this book to life in congregations can appropriate cases from their own experience and rework the assessment questions accordingly. This book resolves psychologically confusing and troublesome issues and offers a greater sense of mastery for persons directly affected by what is taking place.

**More Than Numbers: The Ways Churches Grow** (Book)

Loren B. Mead, Author. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1993.

Author Loren Mead presents four types of church growth: (1) growth of members; (2) growth by members; (3) growth as a church's reordering of the way it works; and (4) growth as a church's enhanced impact on the local community. After opening with case descriptions of example churches, Mead offers reflections or questions addressed to issues and types of growth in each case. One can work immediately with the book's thirteen interspersed worksheets and four-part framework for conducting a parish "strengths-and-weaknesses" analysis. Board members, clergy, and others concerned with numerical, spiritual, organizational, and missional growth will discover powerful starting points in Mead's questions and worksheets.

**Moving Off the Map: A Field Guide to Changing the Congregation** (Book)

Thomas G. Bandy, Author. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998.

Comparing the contemporary church to the passenger pigeons that once filled the sky, Bandy argues that only thorough change will save Christian congregations from extinction. This change must be systemic, not programmatic; it must be owned by the congregation, not by denominations; it must be concentrated on the Gospel, not tethered to tradition; and it must be anchored in the experience of the congregation with Jesus. The book includes a 280-question "Congregational Mission Assessment" to help a congregation discern the foundation, function, and form of its life. Many practical suggestions for introducing the need for—and effecting—change are included. Whether or not one will ultimately embrace Bandy's solutions, attention to his questions would be a valuable exercise for any Christian congregation.

**The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier** (Book)

Loren B. Mead, Author. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1991.

Mead asserts that, as the church's understanding of mission shifts, as once-familiar clergy and laity roles change, and as church executives are called to provide more support with fewer resources, a new church is being born around us. However, we are in a transitional

period: the principles that have guided the church since the conversion of Constantine (a period Mead dubs the "Christendom Era") no longer apply. While alerting us to the challenges of reinventing the new church, Mead also offers hopeful signs of the future church's emergence. Church leaders will find in this book a deeper understanding of the critical opportunities facing those who seek to renew a church that will become, in Mead's words, "a centering presence from which we may serve the new world that God is creating around us."

**Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems (Book)**

Barry Johnson, Author. Amherst, MA: Human Resource Development Press, 1997.

Using relevant case studies and applications, *Polarity Management* analyzes the dynamic polarities in the tensions that are part of community life. Barry Johnson coaches readers in developing five skills to address such tensions: identifying the poles, understanding the positive and negative aspects of each pole, recognizing how people experience the polarities, maximizing the upside and minimizing the downside, and coaching leaders in language that mediates rather than exacerbates problems. Everyone will appreciate the readily usable diagrams for committee and group work. *Polarity Management* is an essential tool for congregations in conflict—especially congregations that get stuck on a particular issue.

**The Power of Appreciate Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change (Book)**

Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, Authors. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2003.

Has your congregation spent energy and resources on "problem solving," only to find that problems either persist or worsen? A new approach—appreciative inquiry—shows that "if you want to transform a situation, a relationship, an organization, or a community, focusing on strengths is much more effective than focusing on problems." Drawing on years of experience in applying appreciative inquiry (AI) to organizational change, Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom present both the principles of AI and case studies that demonstrate how AI works. Congregational leaders who have grown tired of negative approaches to problem solving will be refreshed by the theory and examples presented in this book.

**A Simpler Way (Book)**

Margaret J. Wheatley, Myron Kellner-Rogers, Authors. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1996.

The "simpler way" advocated here approaches organizational change as something that evolves from within rather than something that is imposed externally. Using a poetic, evocative style of writing, the authors seek to shape fundamental attitudes rather than prescribe a specific approach to human organizations. Drawing on analogies with the adaptive capacities of nature, they stress the inherent tendency of life to "move towards wholeness." The authors suggest that members can respect the natural development of their organizations by allowing an atmosphere of freedom, discovery, change, openness, and what they call "messiness." Although of interest to the individual reader, especially anyone involved in leading an organization, this book would also provide a good basis for discussion in a group that wants or needs to open itself to organizational change.

**Stewardship: Choosing Service over Self-Interest** (Book)

Peter Block, Author. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1996.

Congregational leaders might expect a book entitled *Stewardship* to focus on fundraising and financial pledging. This book, however, defines "stewardship" as a choice "to preside over the orderly distribution of power" so that partnership replaces dominance and accountability replaces dependency. Grounded in the view that each of us longs to invest energy in things that matter, *Stewardship* calls us to move beyond self interest and make service the centerpiece of our corporate lives. Central to such a move is the understanding that resources, authority, and responsibility must reside closest to those who are doing the core work. Although not addressed to congregations, the principles and models presented in *Stewardship* set compelling challenges for church and synagogue leaders and boards as they grapple with questions of purpose, control, mission, planning, and responsibility.

**The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry** (Book)

Sue Annis Hammond, Author. Plano, TX: Thin Book Publishing, 1996.

This slim volume is designed for those wishing to get a quick overview of what appreciative inquiry is and what it can do. Written by a change management consultant who has been inspired by the results she has achieved from using appreciative inquiry in her own work with client companies, this book includes easy-to-digest examples of appreciative inquiry principles, brief and inspiring case studies, sample questions, and a resource guide for those wishing to study appreciative inquiry in greater depth. A quick and easy read, this is a great first book for those wishing to learn more about this methodology.

**Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders** (Book)

Charles M. Olsen, Author. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1995.

Based on extensive experiences with church boards, Charles Olsen presents both a vision of and practical suggestions for how boards may become spiritual leaders—and how board membership can become a rewarding ministry. At the heart of his vision is the proposal that board meetings should more closely resemble a worship service than a business council; hymn singing, prayers, biblical reflection, and storytelling would be the norm. The result, he says, would be less conflict for the board, a more valuable term of service for the board member, and better spiritual leadership for the congregation. This is an excellent manual for transforming congregational boards into leadership teams that can serve as vital centers at the heart of faith communities.

**Transforming Congregations for the Future** (Book)

Loren B. Mead, Author. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1994.

Showing that mainline denominations have lost members and money during the past three decades, Loren Mead asks that we dedicate ourselves not merely to increased numbers, but to congregational transformation. A transformed congregation nurtures and strengthens its members' discipleship through four functions: building community; proclaiming God's Word; teaching sacred stories and standards; and discovering and developing gifts of service. From discipleship, congregational members move beyond church walls into apostleship, manifesting God's love and grace in the world. A transformed congregation serves as a dynamic center from which members cycle between discipleship and apostleship. Offering both inspiration and a realistic appraisal of the roadblocks to transformation, this book will

challenge congregational and judicatory leaders to re-envision themselves and their tasks.

**Understanding Your Congregation as a System: The Manual (Book)**

George Parsons, Speed B. Leas, Authors. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1993.

In this application of systems theory, congregational leaders can explore the forces at work and examine their systemic implications in six key areas: strategy, process, pastoral and lay leadership, authority, relatedness, and learning. The manual provides an overview of systems theory, complete instructions for administering and scoring the *Congregational Systems Inventory* (available separately), and guidance for interpreting and explaining the inventory results through the examination of sample scores. One focus of the book is to help congregations live in the tension between stability and change by encouraging adaptation to demographic and development changes without incurring too much stress and conflict.

***Please help us improve this list of resources by giving us your comments and suggestions. Call us at 1-800-486-1318, x266 or e-mail us at [cgreer@alban.org](mailto:cgreer@alban.org).***