



# Living the Resurrection

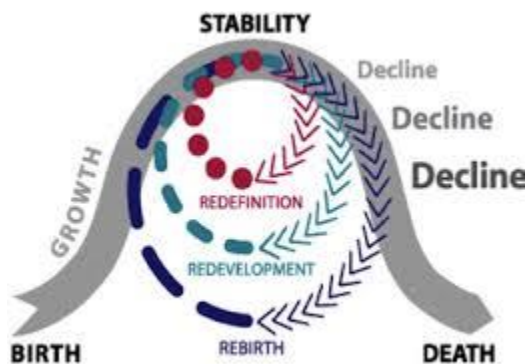
*Helping congregations thrive*

## Motivation

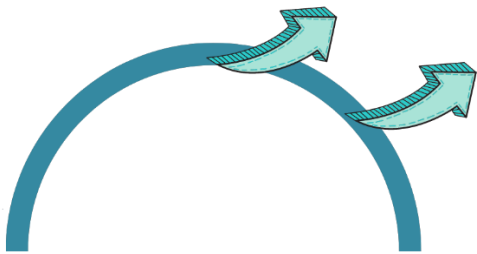
“Give them the facts. When folks understand the facts, they’ll see the need to change and do it.”

Saying I’ve heard a lot!

I fell for this adage, but my experience changed my mind. Folks need more than the facts. Back when I believed the myth, I would show folks a lifecycle graph and explain the stages of life in an organization. The illustration looks like a hill with tunnels going through it.



My hope was that congregations would see that there is a way out of decline. They could dig a tunnel through the hill and be back on the other side and grow again. However, that wasn’t the response I received. However, rather than change my mind about the idea, I changed the illustration. The second one had little arrows flying off the hill as if to start a new one. I thought it looked more optimistic. It didn’t.



No matter which illustration I used; the response was the same: “We are sliding down the hill to an inevitable death.” Every version of this negative comment was met with affirming nods throughout the room. Normalizing a congregation’s decline by framing it as a fact of the lifecycle of an organization, even with a possibility of a way out, didn’t motivate anything constructive.

There’s a great book with a horrible title that compares studies and shows that “facts, fear, and force” do not motivate change, instead they arouse emotions like resentment, frustration, and hopelessness. The book is *Change or Die: Could You Change When Change Matters Most?* and its point is that when faced with this decision, most people choose to die.<sup>i</sup> It’s not enough to tell them the facts and point out a way to a different possibility. People need to catch a glimpse of what their specific future could look like and then have someone lead them through each step until they demonstrate that they can continue on their own. And besides all of that, the lifecycle charts aren’t theologically helpful.

### The Power of Meaning and Purpose

Lutheran theology is built on a missiology of death and resurrection, not a lifecycle. God continually leads us through death to new life because God never stops pursuing the divine vision of the kingdom. We don’t dig our way back to new life or jump off the side of decline. The invitation to participate in God’s mission is part of our motivation to change. We have a part to play!

The power of purpose to motivate constructive change is backed by research and articulated by several authors. Abraham Maslow discovered that human beings have psychological needs for safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization.<sup>ii</sup> Over the years his work has been amended, but his list remains pretty much intact. The main modification is that people move freely between the levels of the pyramid – it isn’t a linear ascent through the layers. The key learning remains: if we want to motivate

people to change, we need to understand how their behavior is influenced by our common psychological needs.



## Maslow's hierarchy of needs

People need to be valued by others for what they can add to the community<sup>iii</sup>. The Wholeness Principle of Appreciative Inquiry insists that everyone matters and that each voice must be heard. Listening to every member calms their defense mechanisms by ensuring that their needs for safety, belonging, and esteem will be met.

The main tool appreciative inquiry uses to ensure that every member is heard is one-on-one interviews. The questions used in the interviews are designed specifically for each situation, but in my work, there is one that gets chosen for every context: “What do you treasure about being part of this congregation?” After going through the responses to that question from more than forty congregations, I discovered that our congregations don’t suffer from a lack of meaning. They simply have a very narrow vision of their purpose. When asked what they treasure about their congregation folks talk about the close relationships they share. They find purpose in answering God’s call to love one another. That is a core value for many congregations. Knowing the core values of your congregation is one key to helping them move toward their goals.

## Pushing and Pulling our way forward

Motivational theory holds that there are two drivers involved in constructive change: a concern that pushes a person away from the past and a hopeful vision that pulls them toward the future.<sup>iv</sup> Statistics of doom might motivate a desire to “do something,” but that isn’t enough to maintain momentum through a change process. There also needs to be a strong pull driver; a vision of what could be better, and an exciting goal that people want to work toward.

Motivational drivers are rooted in the unique values and experiences of each person and then, each congregation. Peter Coutts illustrates this using hay. Each person is a bale of hay, full of stalks of hope, and others stalks of concern. A congregation is a barn full of hay bales.<sup>v</sup> One-on-one interviews are an effective way to discover the hopes and concerns a congregation has in common. Those stalks contain stories that reveal the core values of the congregation.

Knowing the values of your congregations, plus their hopes and concerns, allows you to pursue a supportive goal. The tool appreciative inquiry uses to pursue a value-based goal is called a “Possibility Proposal.” In “Leading Change: Theory and Strategy” (see link at end of document) we explored one typical structure for such a proposal.

Because we all treasure (shared value in the congregation),  
And we want to (existing goal),  
We would like our congregation to try (step toward goal), on a trial basis.

This basic template is fine to motivate a congregation that doesn’t express any specific concern about its future. However, if your congregation has a strong concern, you can use the template below. This Possibility Proposal combines push (concern) and pull (hope) drivers to move the congregation forward together.

Because we want/are \_\_\_\_\_ (value) \_\_\_\_\_  
And we are \_\_\_\_\_ (concern) \_\_\_\_\_  
We will pursue \_\_\_\_\_ (hope) \_\_\_\_\_ by (first step toward goal).

Here’s a sample of a Possibility Proposal

Because we treasure our adult kids

we are concerned about the next generation of children, especially those in the neighborhood around our church.

We hope to make a difference in their lives

by building relationships with the teachers and administrators of the school across the street to see how we can partner with them for the kids.

## Acting on the Theory: Designing a Possibility Proposal

The first step to designing your own Possibility Proposals is to understand the criteria.

Possibility Proposals:

- are the fruit of your listening to God and one another.
- are rooted in God’s mission.
- are supported by both the concerns and hopes of the congregation.
- move toward a goal or desired outcome.
- require imagination and stretch the congregation a bit.
- are persuasive!
- are possible!

To succeed you will need to employ two kinds of motivators.

- 1) An emotion that pushes them away from their current state...frustration/concern/worried.
- 2) An emotion that pulls them toward a desired future possibility....hope/joy/proud

| VALUES the congregation routinely expresses. | CONCERNS (push) you hear voiced by members of your congregation. | HOPES (pull) you hear expressed by members of your congregation. |
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Respond to the following questions:

1. Which value has the most energy—you hear it often as why folks have stayed, what they treasure most about being part of the congregation.

2. Which hope has the most energy-- when folks talk about it their eyes light up and they get excited. You feel their joy and delight.

3. Which concern has the most energy – you hear it often and when folks talk about it their shoulders slouch a bit, but their eyes hold your gaze, and they don't seem defeated by it. You can feel their frustration and desire for it to be otherwise.

4. Pick a Value→Concern→Hope combination that makes sense together and can support a step toward an existing goal of the congregation.

Possibility Proposal template:

Because we \_\_\_\_\_ (value) \_  
and we are \_\_\_\_\_ (concern) \_\_\_\_\_  
we want to \_\_\_\_\_ (hope \_\_\_\_\_) by \_\_\_\_\_ (first step toward goal) \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluate your draft proposal:

- Is the value clear?
- Can you identify the concern/push?
- How about the hope/pull?
- Does the proposal support one of your goals?
- Do the words of the proposal sound like something people would say?
- Does the proposal excite you? (it should 😊).

Use the process in “Leading Change: Theory and Strategy” to gather support from key people in your congregation before you present the proposal.

Leading Change: Theory and Strategy.

[https://www.livingtheresurrection.com/files/ugd/97338a\\_92950e104f914aa3a96392cc42a29af5.pdf](https://www.livingtheresurrection.com/files/ugd/97338a_92950e104f914aa3a96392cc42a29af5.pdf)

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<sup>i</sup> Deutschman, *Change or Die*.

<sup>ii</sup> Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*.

<sup>iii</sup> Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*.

<sup>iv</sup> Coutts, *Choosing Change*.

