



# Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change

*Mark Lau Branson*

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When First Presbyterian Church in Altadena, California, was asked to provide a mission study report for its pastor nominating committee, the congregation was afraid they would find themselves engaging in busy work and producing a report that would wind up in a file gathering dust. They then asked professor Mark Lau Branson to consult with them on writing this report. He invited them to join in a process of Appreciative Inquiry--a transformational organization change process--which resulted in a major shift in congregational conversations and a new sense of hope. *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations* recounts the experience of First Presbyterian and outlines a process that any congregation can utilize to harness the energies of the congregation at all levels of its common life. Branson first leads readers through the foundations of Appreciative Inquiry and bracingly explores biblical texts for understanding the practice in a faith context. He then outlines and illustrates a four-step process--Initiate, Inquire, Imagine, Innovate--that creatively employs constructive conversations and questions to evoke storytelling and spur imaginations. Branson persuasively demonstrates how concentrating on needs and problems can mire a congregation in discouragement and distract it from noticing innate strengths. By focusing on memories of the congregation at its best, members are able to construct "provocative proposals" to help shape the church's future. Grounded in solid theory and real-life practice, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations* is a groundbreaking work of narrative leadership and the first book to apply the principles of Appreciative Inquiry to the lives of congregations.

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