

THE ASSIMILATION OF NEWCOMERS  
INTO THE LOCAL CHURCH

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## INTRODUCTION

The average church growth in America today has either plateaued or is in decline. One of the major reasons for such a decline is the failure to properly minister to the newcomers who attend services. The goal of this paper will be to identify the problem, discover the biblical mandate, and develop a systematic strategy for instructing the church and assimilating the newcomer into the life of the local Baptist Church from the point of initial contact to the point of active, participating membership.

For a number of years, the writer of this paper has been burdened and often frustrated by his own failure and the failure of the local church he pastors to effectively reach the newcomer or first time attender. Even though this church has experienced an average of 350-400 visitors per year for the past several years, only a small portion of these have been reached (approximately 10 percent) and become active, involved members of the church. This is a common problem in the average church today.

The question that will be answered in this paper is: How can churches respond to this dilemma in a biblical way in order to reach more people for Christ and keep them active in the local church? It is important to identify the reason for the problem, find a biblical mandate to solve this problem, and implement a strategy within the local church to address and meet this need.

In order to identify why people do not remain active in church, one must first consider that often people who go to church are unbelievers. Many of these people are there at the invitation of friends, family, or associates. Some are there because they are seeking meaning in life, answers to life's questions, or healing for the hurts of life. The truth of the matter is that they often find no help and no place of refuge in these churches. Certainly all of the problems cannot be blamed upon the local church, but the church must accept its responsibilities in this area. The Church has a mandate to reach the "harvest" (Mt. 9:35-38). This not only includes those who live in foreign lands but certainly would include that part of the harvest God brings into local assemblies, including the first time attender or newcomer. The church's conduct and its response to them can have a great bearing on whether or not they will eventually become believers and productive members of Christ's church. One verse in particular supports the fact that unbelievers attended the services of the early church and that the church's behavior could have a good or an adverse effect upon the spiritual well-being of the unbeliever. It states:

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or **unbelievers**, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in **one that believeth not**, or one unlearned, **he is convinced** of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face **he will worship God**, and report that God is in you of a truth. (1 Cor. 14:23-25, emphasis added)

This verse shows that a certain behavior on the part of the church would lead to an unbeliever concluding that the members of the congregation were "mad." Another

behavior could lead to an unbeliever being convicted and saved. The difference seems not to be an issue with the unbeliever, but an issue with the local assembly.

Because of this there is a great need to establish methods and procedures for reaching the newcomer (saved or lost) and ultimately seeing them become mature, productive members of the church. The pastor-teacher must inform, train, and equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-16) so they can follow biblical guidance in assimilating the newcomer into the local church. This need has resulted in extensive research in the area of church growth and the outcome of this study reveals the necessity for this problem to be addressed in this paper. Though there is much information in the area of assimilation and church growth, several problems are evident.

The first problem that needs to be discussed is that much of the material on assimilation begins with the process of incorporating new *members* into the life of the church but fails to show how to bring the newcomer (even unbelievers) to the point of either conversion or membership. In doing so, most studies only deal with about 10 percent of all the newcomers who come to our churches, since only about 10 percent ever become members. This paper will deal with how to begin the assimilation process for 100 percent of those who are newcomers to the local church.

The second problem is that much of the material available in this area is written from a perspective that most fundamental Baptists could not endorse. The

majority of the leading authors in this area are either of a charismatic persuasion or a liberal Protestant viewpoint. Even some of the Baptist writers seem to have a new evangelical approach – “I’ll do anything to reach people.” There are good works available on assimilation that are biblical in their approach, but an examination of the church growth literature today (books, journals, magazines, unpublished theses and dissertations) will reveal an almost total void of literature from Independent Baptists.

The third problem is that the overwhelming amount of church growth literature, though it has many good and biblical ideas, ignores several key factors that are readily seen in the early church in the Book of Acts. The place that preaching and prayer had in the growth of the early church are not seen by modern day church growth experts as major factors that contribute to the growth and assimilation of newcomers into the local church.

All of the previous discussion leads to the key word in this paper which is *assimilation*. The basic meaning of the word is to make similar. When speaking of food and nourishment, the idea is that of taking in food and absorbing it into the body, until it becomes an actual part of the body. When speaking sociological, assimilation refers to a people being absorbed into a particular culture and becoming like the people of that culture. Church growth experts have adapted this word to discuss the process whereby a person becomes a part of a local church.

Joe Heck is one such expert that describes what takes place when a person is assimilated into the local church. He states:

Assimilation has taken place when a person develops a sense of belonging. New members are assimilated when they are absorbed into the life of the church. The word assimilate means to make similar. New members are assimilated when they have similar beliefs, similar feelings of belonging and similar patterns of behavior as do the long-time members of the congregation.<sup>1</sup>

Steve Burkum gives an understanding of the assimilation process. He says; “An individual is assimilated into a church when he strongly identifies with the goals, purpose, practices and life of that church and claims not only to belong to that church, but that the church belongs to him. Assimilation has not taken place unless a firm sense of ownership has been created within the new member.”<sup>2</sup> This would result in the assimilated member remaining in the church and not dropping out or becoming inactive. Also, this would result in the long term objective of newcomers being integrated into the life of the church so that each one would have a sense of belonging, significant friendships, spiritual nurturing and avenues for service. In order to understand this bond, the terms newcomer and new member must now be defined.

The *newcomer* is the person, regardless of his or her relationship to Christ, who visits the church for either the first time or the first few times. They are new to the church by way of attending a public worship service or function. The word *visitor* will also be used interchangeably with newcomer.

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<sup>1</sup> Joel D. Heck, *New Member Assimilation: Practical Prevention of Backdoor Loss through Frontdoor Care* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1988) p.12

<sup>2</sup> Steven K. Burkum, “ACT – Assimilating New Members into the Local Church,” M.A. thesis, Cincinnati Bible Seminary, 1990, p. 5.

A *new member* is a person who has joined the church by baptism, by statement of their faith, or by transfer of letter who previously had no affiliation with the church they joined. They have willingly fulfilled the church's constitutional guidelines for membership.

How and why these people who have fulfilled membership guidelines enter and leave a church results in an assimilation problem. These people enter what is called the *front door* which will be used to describe the means whereby people enter into the local church's fellowship and/or membership.

On the other hand, the phrase *back door* will be used to describe the way people leave a church, especially because of the neglect of newcomers and new members by the local church. This leads to the newcomer and new member becoming inactive and even leaving the church completely. The result is that they are no longer an active, participating part of the local church.

As discussed, the Great Commission makes it clear that the church is to go into the world in order to reach people with the gospel. McIntosh and Martin present two major questions every church should ask. The first deals with how to develop strategies that will bring more people in the front door. The second deals with developing strategies that will keep people from leaving through the back door. Unless people come to the local church, there is no possibility they can be assimilated into the church. No person ever becomes a member who was not first a visitor. Even if the winning of them took place outside the church, they must come to the church to be assimilated. Once they arrive they are considered a newcomer.<sup>3</sup>

This paper will emphasize McIntosh's and Martin's second question. This paper will not deal with evangelism outside the local church nor the means of getting people to attend the local church for the first time. This is a great need

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<sup>3</sup> McIntosh and Glen Martin, Finding Them, Keeping Them (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), p. 13.

and is certainly a responsibility of the church, but this paper will focus upon what happens once they have come to the church.

No person can be ultimately assimilated into the local church until they first become a Christian and are placed into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Since salvation is a part of the overall process, then the actual assimilation process begins before salvation. As stated earlier, this assimilation process is a part of the Great Commission that was given to the church by our Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 28:19-20). Churches have the responsibility to assimilate newcomers and new members into the church. These newcomers and new members will not usually be assimilated on their own. It will require the assistance of the existing members of the congregation. This requires a deliberate strategy and will not happen automatically. Assimilation is an absolute necessity if the church expects to experience consistent, biblical church growth.

The King James Version of the Bible will be used throughout this paper unless otherwise noted.



## CHAPTER ONE

### MANIFESTING THE PROBLEM

#### The Dilemma Churches Face

According to Leith Anderson, the majority of churches in America are either plateaued or either in decline.<sup>4</sup> Since the very command left by our Lord Jesus Christ to reach a lost world involves church growth (cf. Book of Acts) the church must be concerned about this failure to grow. For many years church growth experts have been examining the reasons for a lack of growth as well as church growth principles. Two points that must be considered are how churches grow and how churches lose members.

Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin have found there are three basic ways people enter into a church, which results in potential growth. These ways are:

1. Biological growth – children are born to the members who grow up make professions and remain in the church. This accounts for about 2 1/2 percent of the average church attendance each year.
2. Transfer growth – this growth results as people from other churches move, get disheartened with the former church and relocate to another church. This accounts for about 8 percent of the average church's attendance each year.

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<sup>4</sup> Leith Anderson, Dying for Change (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1990), p. 46.

3. Conversion growth – this involves people who hear the gospel, respond in faith and join the church. This accounts for about 5 percent of the average church's attendance each year.<sup>5</sup>

As shown, the typical potential growth of the average church in one year would be about fifteen and one half percent. Of a typical church of 200 the potential increase would be about thirty one additions per year. Many churches would be happy with this type result. The problem lies in the fact that people leave churches each year. McIntosh and Martin also state the typical church of 200 will lose an average of 10 percent per year through the following:

1. Death – approximately 2 percent of the average worship attendance each year will die.
2. Transfer – this involves about 3 percent of the average worship attendance each year.
3. Reversion – about 5 percent of the average worship attendance will drift away each year but never attend or join another church.<sup>6</sup>

This would result in an average loss each year of twenty people. When the gains and losses are balanced, the church grows very little, approximately 5 percent at best. Since these are average figures and some churches are growing rapidly, this leaves many churches either plateaued or in decline.

Another expert, John Stott, states: "Church growth is the building of the church primarily through evangelism. While church growth writers of our era speak of other kinds of growth (e.g. transfer growth and biological growth), the Gospel writer Luke is concerned with the growth of the church that comes from the making

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<sup>5</sup> Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin, Finding Them, Keeping Them, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

of new disciples.”<sup>7</sup> The fact is that 95 percent of all Christians are barren and have either not won anyone to the Lord or have not won anyone in many years.<sup>8</sup>

The above problem deals with people who actually attend and become members of the church. Another even greater problem that affects church growth is the great host of newcomers who come but never become active and productive members of the church. The average Independent Baptist Church finds itself mirroring the same statistics as Protestant denomination churches. Even those churches that are aggressively seeking to reach the lost are not experiencing much growth. Some churches boast of thousands of professions year after year, yet their average attendance only reflects a small percent of this potential growth. Even though the church, such as the one the writer pastors, may have 300-400 visitors per year, yet 85-90 percent of them never become an active part of the church (250-350 never become a part of the church). Year after year many people are coming to churches, and making professions of faith but few are continuing to become active, long-term, and productive members of the local church. It is estimated that 80 percent of all churches in America retain less than 10 percent of their first-time attenders.<sup>9</sup> God is allowing many people to attend churches but the churches are not doing a very good job of winning and retaining them.

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<sup>7</sup> John Stott, The Spirit, The Church, and the World (Downer's Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity, 1990), p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> Ken Houts, Care Ministry Team Leader Manual (Prairie Village, Kansas: Kendall D. Houts Ministries, 1998), p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

This problem must be examined with the idea of finding a solution to the great host of people who visit Baptist Churches but who never become a real working part. For some reason these newcomers are never assimilated into the local church. While many decisions may be made, few real disciples are resulting. The result is little or no church growth.

The method for evaluating the success of any evangelistic effort must be to determine how many of those making a Christian profession (decision) have become an active part of the church (assimilation). The issue is not how many decisions were made or even how many were baptized and joined the church, but how many have become productive, involved disciples. Another way of evaluating the success of a church's assimilation effort is to determine how many first-time visitors have come to the church and how many of these have remained to become active members of the church.

People are being reached and coming into the church through the front door while at the same time others who have already been reached are leaving through the back door and becoming inactive. Alan Harre says, "Without assimilation the congregation will find that its open doors only lead to backdoors through which new members quickly exit."<sup>10</sup> Many churches are adding members; yet the church is not growing. All of the growth is offset and canceled by those who are dropping

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<sup>10</sup> Alan Harre, Close the Back Door (St. Louis: Concordia, 1984), p. 32.

out and leaving through the backdoor. Any church interested in numerical growth must be concerned about membership losses.<sup>11</sup> Larry Weeden further explains:

Despite our best intentions and efforts, many of us are frustrated that our churches are not reaching people as effectively as we'd like...Just as frustrating as a lack of effective outreach can be the loss of people out the church's backdoor. Even if new members are coming into the fellowship, there's an inevitable sense of loss and discouragement when others slip away."<sup>12</sup>

As explained, two of the major challenges of the church are to bring people to Christ and His church (evangelism) and then to bond these people to the church (assimilation).

#### The Fault

Who is to blame for this lack of assimilation of newcomers into the local church? Is it the newcomer? Is it the new convert? Is it the new member? Is it the local church? Crowe believes it is true that some people who come to our churches will never return, others will return for a short time but never remain. Some will drift away no matter what the church does, even some who make professions and join; yet this fact does not relieve the church of its responsibility of giving the attention and care newcomers and new members need.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Burkum, A.C.T. – Assimilating New Members, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Larry K. Weeden, ed. The Magnetic Fellowship (Waco: Word, 1988), p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Gayle M. Crowe, "Incorporating New Members into the Local Church," D.Min. dissertation, Harding Graduate School of Religion, 1986, p. 99.

When the question is asked, “Who is to blame, the person or the church?”

One must conclude that there is fault on both sides. Research has shown that the greatest fault lies with the local church. Hodge and Rozen state that:

In some studies the most frequently mentioned reason for dropping out was the subject did not feel they were loved, accepted or wanted by other members of the congregation. Their perception was that no one in the congregation was demonstrating any real love or concern for them.<sup>14</sup>

Win Arn, church growth expert, says when new people are not assimilated “the fault can usually be traced to the church rather than the new member.”<sup>15</sup>

If Win Arn is correct and the church is at fault, then the church needs to follow the example of Christ (1 Jn. 4:19 – we love Him because he first loved us), and take the initiative to love others and to reach out to others rather than leaving them to discover Christ on their own. The church will also help them find their way into meaningful relationships and service. Building relationships between the church members and the newcomers is a key to assimilation. Larry Dyer believes it is the responsibility of the church to take the initiative to help newcomers to build relationships and friendships in the church.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dean R. Hodge and David R. Rozen, Understanding Church Growth and Decline 1950-1978 (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979), p. 65.

<sup>15</sup> Win Arn, The Church Growth Ratio Book (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1987), p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Larry E. Dyer, “The Proactive Strategy for the Initial Assimilation of Newcomers into the Local Church through Tracking, Intentional Hospitality and Newcomer Involvement,” D. Min. dissertation, Covenant Theological Seminary, 1994, p. 3.

Often the church will make excuses for its failure to assimilate by saying, they were never really saved; they did not want to become a part of the church; they are carnal; they are selfish and just want to be ministered to; if they would take their membership seriously they could be active; and, if they really loved the Lord they will become involved. Though there may be truth in each of these statements, statistics seem to prove that the major reason people who attend churches do not stay is that the church failed to assimilate them. There was a lack of follow up and follow through, a failure to care for, to nurture, to befriend, to love, to include, to accept, and to teach. Much of the responsibility for the failure to assimilate people into the local church must be accepted by the church.”<sup>17</sup>

As shown, it seems to be a fact that many churches are ignoring the needs of people both outside and inside the church. Most churches do not have a plan or strategy for reaching and keeping people – no plan to attract newcomers and assimilate them into the ministry of the local church. The purpose of this paper is to address this problem and present solutions so that newcomers can be reached, won to Christ, assimilated into the church, and become disciples - not statistical drop outs.

This failure has not been intentional in most cases. God’s people in Baptist Churches are usually not the type people who would intentionally ignore the great

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<sup>17</sup> Max E. Brand, “The Development of Strategies for New Member Assimilation into the Local Church,” D. Min. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990, p. 6.

harvest of people who come to the churches week after week. Often it is more of a leadership problem than a membership problem. People must be taught by the pastor what their God-given responsibilities are concerning those without and within the church. Pastors have often failed to keep the nature and purpose of the church before the people. There are a number of purposes for the church in the New Testament. Certainly, most would agree with Ken Houts that the mission of the church is the harvest that Christ spoke of in Matthew 9:35-37 and John 4:35-38.<sup>18</sup>

Ken Houts further explains this problem and has come to the conclusion that the average church is so maintenance-centered in lieu of being mission-centered that it has lost the desire and the ability to attract and keep newcomers. The church is focused inward instead of outward. Most of the church's time, effort, money and plans are geared to the maintenance of the existing church family. Practically all of the services are geared toward the maintenance of the exiting group. Ninety-five percent of the pastor's and staff's time is invested in the maintenance of the institution, with little time left for the unsaved and unchurched. An examination of the ministries of the average church will show that the vast majority of our ministries are maintenance in nature. One has only to visit other churches to find that the so-called "friendly church" is often only friendly to itself. The first time visitors attend, they often get a superficial handshake for a greeting

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<sup>18</sup> Ken Houts, Care Ministry Team Member Manual (Prairie Village, Kansas: Kendall D. Houts Ministries, 1998), p. 12.



and leave feeling like they are not wanted or needed.<sup>19</sup> Kirk Hadaway insists that in some churches where the welcome is considered warm, the newer people are never able to gain full acceptance into one or more of the friendship networks in the church.<sup>20</sup> Lyle E. Schaller makes an alarming statement, “There is considerable evidence which suggests that at least one-third, and perhaps as many as one-half of all Protestant church members do not feel a sense of belonging to the congregation of which they are members.”<sup>21</sup>

### Correcting the Problem

Ken Houts’ belief that one’s values define their ministry shows that the church does what it does because of what it believes to be important. These beliefs define, drive, and motivate the church to action. He refers us back to the issue of maintenance and mission. Most of the church’s values are maintenance-centered (focusing inward on the membership). Mission-centered values focus outward on the harvest of people who have been entrusted to the church to reach. Of course, the maintenance of the existing church is important but no church should be satisfied with a ministry that only focuses inward and forgets those outside the

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<sup>19</sup> Ken Houts, Team Leader Manual, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Kirk Hadaway, Church Growth Principles (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), p. 46.

<sup>21</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, Assimilating New Members (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), p. 16.

church who have needs. If the church does this, the church cannot grow or be obedient to our Lord's commands (Mt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8).<sup>22</sup>

In order to correct this problem, the church must be taught the biblical mandate for church growth (which includes assimilation), biblical methods involved in such growth, and also some practical aids in the assimilation of newcomers. Changes must be made within the church to align itself with the scriptures in bringing people to Christ and bonding people to His church as they become true disciples of Jesus Christ.

The church must gain a new vision of its Lord's commands and plan strategies for carrying out those commands in a Christ-honoring way. If churches expect to grow, they must meet the spiritual needs of those outside of their church membership. They must also get the saints involved in this mission-centered ministry (Eph. 4:12), since the pastor or staff cannot do it as well as the people. The membership will need training to know what to do, how to do it, and why to do it. This is the task of the pastor-teacher (Eph. 4:11-12).<sup>23</sup> The next section of this paper will deal with motivating the congregation to assume their God-given responsibility for seeing the need to reach and assimilate people into the local church.

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<sup>22</sup> Houts, *How to Minister to Your Visitors* (Prairie Village, Kansas: Kendall D. Houts Ministries, 1998), p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Ken Houts, Team Leader Manual, pp. 16-19.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MOTIVATING THE CONGREGATION

Much of the problem with the failure to assimilate newcomers into the local church is ignorance. Most people in the average congregation do not see the need to assimilate people into the local church. They hope it will happen but do not realize they are often the reason it does not happen. It is the responsibility of the pastor-teacher to properly teach the people their role and responsibility in the assimilation process of newcomers. It is also his responsibility to see that a strategy is in place to carry out assimilation of newcomers. Growth is a biblical mandate as will be seen in the next section of this paper.

#### Church Growth in the Book of Acts

The purpose for the writing of the Book of Acts is found in Luke's introduction. No one can argue that he made the expansion and growth of the church an obvious addition to the book (Acts 2:43-47; 5:15; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20). Since there can be no church growth without the process of assimilation taking place, one must examine the New Testament for the principles of church growth and assimilation. The Bible must always be the guide when establishing church growth principles and philosophy.

This philosophy is well-stated in the Book of Acts where three different kinds of growth are mentioned. First, there is numerical growth. The Bible speaks about the eleven remaining apostles joining others for a total of 120 in the upper room (Acts 1:13-15); three thousand are seen being saved and added to the church in Acts 2:41; 5,000 more men were added in Acts 4:4; multitudes in Acts 5:14; disciples were increasing in Acts 6:1; being added (Acts 2:47), multiplying (Acts 9:31) and increasing in number (Acts 16:5). The early church knew very little or nothing of biological growth or transfer growth as mentioned earlier. They only knew of conversion growth. Secondly, there was geographical growth as the church moved out in accordance with Acts 1:8. This shows that the growth of the church was not restricted to Jerusalem and Jews but to all peoples of the world. Finally, there was spiritual growth. Allison Trites states: "Where ever the gospel was preached, there was an increase in godly living...The Book of Acts faithfully records the spiritual growth of the early church. Acts 2:42-47 is a beautiful cameo of the inner life of the church."<sup>24</sup> Without such spiritual growth there will be little long-term assimilation of newcomers and new converts.<sup>25</sup>

### The Nature of the Church

Before motivation can take place the congregation must be taught concerning the nature of the church. When one understands the nature of the church, one can then see the need for the assimilation of newcomers, new

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<sup>24</sup> Allison A. Trites, "Church Growth in the Book of Acts," Bibliotheca Sacra 145 (April-June 1988) : 165.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* , pp. 162-67.

converts and new members. Alfred Detter believes that one of the first steps toward solving the assimilation problem is to improve the church's attitude toward newcomers. The early church was receptive by nature. It is the church's responsibility to win converts to Christ through both life and lip and also to assimilate them into the membership (Acts 2:41-47). This is at the heart of the Great Commission – making disciples (Mt. 28:19-20). The people of God during this dispensation, who have the life of Christ within, gather to share that life with one another and unbelievers who might come in among them (1 Cor. 14: 23-25). The church is a community of people in relationship with one another because of their relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup> The nature of the church can be seen in three images used by New Testament writers to describe the church.

### The Body of Christ

The first and most extended image of the church is Paul's metaphor of the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-27). In the body there is diversity, different gifts, unique roles, harmony, bonding, and a need for each other. Ephesians 4:16 says, "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working

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<sup>26</sup> Alfred L. Detter, "The Assessment of Newcomer Assimilation and the Development of an Assimilation Model at Grace Baptist Church," D. Min. dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1989, p. 10.

in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” Every person has needs. The body of Christ has been given the ability and gifts to meet human needs in the power of the Holy Spirit. When newcomers come to church one can never forget God has equipped His people to meet their needs. It must not be forgotten that most people in the Gospels who came to Christ came out of a desire to have a human need met. People tend to be drawn to the source of their help.<sup>27</sup> When the church community reaches out to and helps those newcomers who are not yet Christian, they are often drawn to the church. This gives the church the opportunity to point them to Christ. As our Lord ministered to both saved and unsaved, so is His church to do so. As stated in Galatians 6:10: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” This verse certainly includes the unsaved. They should be recipients of the church’s good, even though they are not of the household of faith. As newcomers (both saved and unsaved) come to church, one must be prepared to do them good, which would include sharing Christ’s love with them.

### The Family of God

Another picture of the church that the people of God must be familiar with is that of a family. Ephesians 3:14-15 says, “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is

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<sup>27</sup> Alfred L. Detter, “The Assessment of Newcomer Assimilation, “ p. 36.

named." God is referred to as Father and people are called His children. Before being saved, people were children of the devil (1 Jn. 4:10). When newcomers come to church they are being beckoned to leave the devil's family and come into God's family by new birth.

One of the marks of a healthy family is love. Love is one of the distinguishing marks of a true disciple of Christ (Jn. 13:34-35). As the Lord's example of love is imitated by the church (Mk. 1:40-41; Lk. 7:12-13; Mt. 22:39) for the lost, the church will have a different attitude toward those who come into their midst. As the unbelieving newcomers believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ, the church must accept them as babes in Christ. There is a divine necessity for the mature to help nurture and strengthen the newborn Christian. Paul prayed much for the new believers (Gal. 4:19). Man was not made by God to live in isolation (Gen. 2:18). People are made to be dependent upon one another (1 Cor. 12:12-14). The more mature Christians must help incorporate the less mature Christians into the family of God in order for them to become productive. Though it is understood that an unbeliever cannot be ultimately assimilated into the church until they are saved, the process can certainly begin the moment they attend their first service, which includes giving them the gospel and having additional opportunities to influence them for Christ. This is why the church wants to keep them coming.

## A Fellowship of Saints

The word “fellowship” is certainly a fitting word to describe the biblical relationship of God’s people to the Lord and to one another. It is the word *koinwnia* (*koinonia*). This word is translated several ways in our English Bible. The two most common ways are fellowship and communion. It has the idea of community, joint participation, sharing or intimacy. As one thinks of including newcomers into our fellowship it must be remembered that in the strictest sense of biblical fellowship, apart from regeneration, this is not impossible. Our goal with the unsaved newcomer is to love them, befriend them, and win them to Christ as they see the love of God in our lives. The ultimate goal is to make true biblical fellowship possible with our newcomers. Larry Dyer says, “As long as we do not compromise our moral and theological stand, we must make every effort to be inclusive.”<sup>28</sup>

Acts 2:42-47 further explains how the early believers were bound together and shared their lives, their goods and their time. Shuman says,

The church grew out of Christian fellowship. Believers, bound together by their common love for Christ and one another, became the church. Fellowship was one of the striking elements of the early church. To early Christians it was inconceivable that a believer would go into isolation. To be a believer was to be a believer in fellowship.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Dyer, “The Proactive Strategy,” p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth W. Shuman, “The Assimilation of New Adult Members at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Houston, Texas,” D. Min. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1995, p. 11.



Believers are responsible for each other. Spiritual growth occurs within the context of fellowship. Stronger Christians have the responsibility to help young or weaker Christians. New member assimilation is necessary because new members need assistance in becoming a part of the fellowship of the church. Detter quotes Ray Stedman who believed “the early church ... relied upon a two-fold witness as the means of reaching and impressing a cynical and unbelieving world: kerygma (proclamation) and koinonia (fellowship). It was the combination of these two which made their witness so powerful and effective.”<sup>30</sup> Fellowship certainly involves relationships. The fact is, the unbeliever is probably interested in relationships more than theology or programs.<sup>31</sup>

### The Involvement of the Membership

Because of this need for fellowship the importance of the laity must be emphasized in this matter of assimilating newcomers. The congregation often has the wrong idea of the role of pastor and people. The church has somehow arrived at the point that many of its members believe that the pastoral staff is responsible for church growth and all that is associated with it, including assimilation. Nothing could be further from the truth. Frank Tillapugh believes this important doctrine of the laity being personally involved in the ministry of the church has been set aside as a result of pastor’s over-emphasizing the need for professionals.<sup>32</sup> When the Book of Acts is examined, the proper balance of the role of the people and preachers are found. Leaders of the church were helped by lay people who shared the task of reaching out for Christ (e.g. Stephen, Philip, Aquila and Priscilla).

This relates to the idea that the priesthood of the believer teaches that God clearly intends for all believers to carry on the work Jesus began when He was on

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<sup>30</sup> Detter, “The Assessment of New Member Assimilation,” p. 25.

<sup>31</sup> Burkum, “A.C.T. – Assimilating New Members,” p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Frank Tillapugh, Unleashing the Church (Ventura, California: Regal, 1982), pp. 122-136.

earth. The pastors are to equip the flock to do the work of the ministry as stated in Ephesians 4:11-12, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

When one examines who was instrumental on the day of Pentecost it is clear that it was not only the preachers but at least one hundred and twenty disciples that were involved. Peter preached the famous Pentecostal sermon, but it is obvious from the context and the pronouns used in Acts One and Two that the laity was involved in witnessing and in the supernatural gift of tongues on that day. Also the involvement of the laity is seen in Acts 2:42-47. Verses 44-47 say, "all that believed were together... and sold their possessions and goods...and they continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house...praising God and having favour with all the people."

In Acts 6 one will find a problem caused by the church not caring for a certain class of widows in the church. The apostles made it clear that their time was to be used to minister the word of God and to pray. The congregation was asked to provide men to care for these widows. When this was done, the membership was cared for, but also the church continued to multiply greatly (Acts 6:7). This was due to the involvement of the members of the congregation in fulfilling that need stated in Acts 6. Green is correct in his assessment and support of the role laity played in the early church in reaching people for Christ. He explains that

Stephen's death led to the beginning of a massive lay movement which spread

the gospel. The ‘amateur missionaries’, those evicted from Jerusalem following Stephen’s martyrdom, eventually became the leaders who changed the face of the movement by preaching to the Greeks and initiating the Gentile mission at Antioch.<sup>33</sup>

In fact, church members must be trained, taught and challenged to open up their lives and schedules to include newcomers and new members. The more new friends a newcomer or a new member can make, the better their chances for staying in the church.<sup>34</sup> New members need assistance in becoming a part of the fellowship of the church. Those already in the church have the responsibility to help those who are new to the church.<sup>35</sup>

### The Theology of Assimilation

For this to work, the congregation must be taught the biblical basis for all it does as a church. This should be emphasized throughout the preaching calendar. God’s people not only need to know what to do but also why they should do it. The doctrine of the Trinity will be examined as to how it influences one’s thinking in the area of assimilation of newcomers who come to the services.

### Doctrine of God

Christians know that it is not God’s will that any should perish (1 Pet. 3:9) but that people get saved and grow in their Christian faith. God has much to say

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 172-3.

<sup>34</sup> Crowe, “Incorporating New Members,” p. 100.

<sup>35</sup> Shuman, “The Assimilation of New Adult Members,” p. 10.

about a Christian's relationship with other Christians. Love for them is based upon love for God (1 Jn. 4:20-21). The Great Commandment, found in Matthew 22:36-40, explains the Christian's responsibility to God and his neighbor (saved or lost). Love must be expressed to others in order to reflect Christ through Christian's lives. As one considers God's will concerning the lost and concerning the growth of new Christians, one must conclude that God wants to use everyone in this process.<sup>36</sup>

### Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Since much of what our Lord said is about these demands of discipleship (following Him and helping others to follow Him), Christ drew to Himself twelve disciples (Mk. 3:13-19) and invested much time in them in an effort to develop them. He was establishing them in the faith and preparing them for future service. Christians are told to continue this disciple making and teaching (Mt. 28:19-20). When considering who is to be disciplined, the Bible is clear that it involves everyone (Mk. 16;15). Christ died for every person and desires every person to become a believer (1 Tim. 2:3-6). Believers are to be baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). All of this is a part of the assimilation process.

### Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

One of the many blessings the Person of the Holy Spirit bestows upon the believer is that He empowers the believer to be a witness to the lost (Acts 1:8).

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<sup>36</sup> Brand, "The Development of Strategies," p. 7.

One's relationship to an unbeliever should certainly be one of a witness. As the unbelieving newcomer enters the church, he is to see Christ in Christian's lives. The Holy Spirit enables the Christian to act, talk, live, carry on his worship, and love in such a way as to exert an influence upon the unbeliever that will help lead them to salvation in Christ. As Paul dealt with the tongues issue in Corinthians, he cautioned them about what was allowed in their public services. How they conducted themselves could either be a blessing or a hindrance to lost people who may have come in among them. 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 Paul makes this statement,

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those that are* unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or *one* unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on *his* face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

This conduct could result in his falling down and worshipping God because he was convinced that God was in them. That is the influence the Holy Spirit desires the church to exert upon unbelievers who attend the assemblies today. The instruction in 1 Corinthians was not just to the preachers but to the church as a whole. The laity of the church is responsible for how they conduct themselves in reference to their influence upon the unbeliever or newcomer in their midst.

In conclusion of this section, the church must be reminded of the sovereignty of God. The strength and power to accomplish the task of assimilation come from the Lord. One cannot dismiss the sovereignty of God in the matter of church growth. No amount of strategies and systems to assimilate people, done in

the energy of the flesh, can ever be of any lasting value. No matter what is done or how it is done, only God can bring conviction, save a soul, or change a life. The Bible is clear concerning human cooperation with God (1 Cor. 3:6-9). The early church followed God's strategy (Acts 1:8) of evangelism. Such strategy was not in opposition to God but in cooperation with God. All of the good that is done to help bring people to Christ and then to maturity and assimilation in the church, is not in opposition to the sovereignty of God but in cooperation and dependence upon God.

### Practical Aspects of Motivating the People

Before a strategy for assimilating newcomers into the local church can be presented to the people, they must be taught the reason for assimilation. Certainly the truth already presented in Chapter One should be incorporated in teaching and preaching concerning the church's responsibility to newcomers.<sup>37</sup> The people must see or own the vision of reaching these newcomers for Christ. The congregation must be taught the proper values that will motivate the church to action. They must then be challenged to participate in such a strategy for reaching the newcomer. They must become doers of the word.

### The Vision

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<sup>37</sup> The writer of this paper preached for eight weeks on Wednesday nights in order to prepare the hearts and minds of the people to implement a strategy for assimilating the newcomers into the church. The above truth from the Book of Acts, the nature of the church and the responsibility of the membership were incorporated into these eight sermons. The problem was also presented (Chapter One) and then the solution to the problem was shared.

To further explain the need for motivation, Dan Houts in his materials on the Care Ministry, is very clear that the mission of the church is the *harvest*.<sup>38</sup> What Jesus told His disciples many years ago in John 4 as they watched the crowds of people coming from Samaria toward Jacob's well, He would say to us today,

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest (Jn. 4:34-35).

The Great Commission points to the harvest and the role of the New Testament Church in relation to that harvest. One way to measure the effectiveness of a church is to see if it is accomplishing its mission which is the reaching of the harvest. It is not the size of the offerings, size of the building, money being given to missions, or the Sunday School enrollment, but the effectiveness of reaching the harvest. Just as the crowds in John 4 were coming to Jesus, so some of the harvest actually comes to the church in the form of newcomers. A church is presented with a great opportunity for being able to reach a portion of the harvest that actually comes to that church. People must be taught concerning this opportunity and responsibility. It has been shown from 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 how important one's actions are to those who visit in our assemblies. If the church is unwilling to properly reach the newcomers who come to the services, it stands to reason little will be done to reach those who will never come on their own. With this in mind, the church must "lift up its eyes" and see the harvest God is sending

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<sup>38</sup> Houts, Team Member Manual, pp. 12-14.

to the church at any given church service. Those who visit church services are usually the best prospects.

Since the average church growth in America is only 2 percent by conversion and 98 percent by church transfer from other churches and biological additions, it is obvious that the mission of the church is no longer the harvest.<sup>39</sup> Instead of being fishers of men churches are only swapping the fish from one aquarium (church) to another. No church should be satisfied with this type growth.

This is not the mission of the church. The church must be shown the vision of lost souls (the harvest) and the fact that many of them will actually come in to the church during regular services. It seems obvious that many churches have degenerated into a maintenance organization rather than a mission driven organism.<sup>40</sup> This is where the values held affects what is done.

### The Values

A church has values just as an individual has values. What is counted as important, what is of great worth, and what is esteemed highly is what is valued.<sup>41</sup> These values are the convictions and the beliefs that are regarded as important, which shape how the ministry should be done. It is what drives the church to do what it does. There is an old axiom but it is true: what one believes affects how one behaves. This is a pattern the Apostle Paul followed in many of his epistles.

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<sup>39</sup> Houts, Team Leader Manual, p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. , p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, ed. Frederick C. Mish, (Springfield, Mass: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1993), p. 1305.



He would present doctrine (beliefs) and then challenge the people concerning their duty or behavior.<sup>42</sup>

Dan Houts further explains that there are two basic types of values, maintenance values and mission values. The maintenance values are the beliefs and convictions that cause a church to focus inward, emphasizing the membership and its care. The mission values are the beliefs and convictions that cause a church to focus outward, emphasizing the unsaved and unchurched. “Adding programs does not change churches... changing values changes churches.”<sup>43</sup>

This writer believes strongly that the church must have both maintenance and mission values. The facts are that most churches are majoring on the maintenance of the existing membership and structure and neglecting the mission of the church, which is the harvest. The Scriptures have much to say about the edification of the body but it also has much to say about the mission of the church in reaching the harvest. Because of this, both types of values are important and neither should be neglected. What a church must do is to examine its ministries and see if they are unbalanced. When one realizes that in the average church the vast majority of all Sunday services, Wednesday night programs, and small group

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<sup>42</sup> The Book of Romans is developed with the idea of giving the believer a doctrinal basis for the behavior that Paul beseeched them to have. Rom. 1-8 gives a detailed explanation of sin, salvation and sanctification. Rom. 9-11 are parenthetical and relate primarily to Israel. In Rom. 12-16, Paul challenges the believers (based upon the mercies of God he had discussed with them earlier) to give themselves wholly to God to live accordingly for Christ, with each other, and before the world. Ephesians is structured in a similar way. Eph. 1-3 gives the doctrinal basis for the church's existence and then behavior is dealt with in the following three chapters.

<sup>43</sup> Houts, Team Leader Manual, p. 18.

activity are geared only for the existing membership, then the church is unbalanced. It is estimated that 95 percent of the average pastor's and pastoral staff's time is invested in the maintenance of the church. The best leaders of the church are often involved only in the maintenance ministries of the church. This may help explain why so few people are coming into our churches by conversion and most by transfer. We end up competing with other churches rather than with the forces of evil over the unsaved and unchurched. One must remember that these maintenance ministries can be changed to become both maintenance and mission ministry; therefore, these ministries can both edify the saints while being a good opportunity to win the lost and also to help assimilate newcomers into the church.

Since most any ministry in the church can be both maintenance and mission driven, both are important to the balanced growth of a church. A church must examine itself carefully to see if it has degenerated into a maintenance only church. This could be some of the reason the church is not reaching the lost and is not growing. Two values that must be taught to the church are as follows.

1. God wants to use His church to reach the harvest

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest. (Mt. 9:34-38)

God can use us if we make ourselves available to Him. We are co-laborers with God (1 Cor. 3:9).

## 2. God wants to work through His church to meet the needs of people

Growing churches meet the needs of people outside of their church membership (mission vs. maintenance). If people come to the church for the same reasons many came to Jesus, it will be because they were motivated by need. An examination of those who came to Christ in the Gospels will reveal that many came because of some pressing need in their own life or a loved one's life (Lepers, centurion on behalf of a servant, man sick with the palsy, those possessed with demons, father with a lunatic son, mothers brought little children, woman with issue of blood, woman in behalf of her sick daughter, deaf and dumb man, blind men, and tax collectors who were rejected by most).

Because of these beliefs, Pastors must teach their people biblical values (convictions, beliefs) that will motivate the membership to embrace mission type values; thus, leading to strategies for reaching the harvest. Once the values are properly taught, then people must be challenged to become doers of the word and not hearers only.

### The Volunteers

Certainly every Christian within the church should be a part of this ministry of reaching lost people and seeing them assimilated into the church. If the church is properly taught it's responsibility for newcomers, as well as the harvest outside the church, there will need to be some plans and strategies to see that these people are given the training and the opportunities to minister to newcomers. A plan to reach and assimilate newcomers into the church must be taught, people must be recruited, and involved in this ministry. It must be a ministry and not another program of the church. If it is only another program, it like many other programs, will have a short life. If it is based upon biblical principles and values and is seen as the mission of the church of Jesus Christ, then people will become

a part of it in order to carry out the mission of the Lord. They will see themselves involved in the work of Christ in reaching the harvest and building the local church.

Once the church is properly taught, values have been clearly explained and accepted, and a plan for assimilation has been devised (see Chapter IV of this paper), then people should be asked to make commitments to such a ministry. After properly teaching the congregation, it would be good to conclude with a sermon challenging people to get involved. A table could be set up where people could sign up (see Appendix Seven for a sample sign up sheet). This could be done at the conclusion of the final sermon in the series where this ministry and its values have been preached and taught to the people. It ought to be the goal of the pastor to have 20 percent of the congregation sign up for further training in assimilating newcomers into the church. Even those who do not formally sign up will have been influenced by the preaching and teaching on the mission values. They should know before they sign up what will be expected of them; therefore, the ministry should have been explained to them in one of the sermons in the series covering this ministry.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MAKING THE PREPARATIONS

This process of assimilation cannot be an afterthought. There must be an organized strategy for carrying out this important work of the church. If the needs of the newcomer are to be met planning is essential. This chapter will focus on preparing and organizing the leadership. There are a number of elements involved in preparing for a successful ministry of assimilation, including prayer, preaching and teaching, facilities and greeters.

#### The Leadership

One of the first tasks that must be done is leaders must be chosen to lead this vital assimilation ministry of the church. These leaders must also be trained for an assimilation ministry. A church must decide what leadership is needed to carry out the assimilation of newcomers into the local church. It will be very ineffective if it is done in a haphazard way. Men and women of great christian character should be chosen as leaders of this vital ministry. The leadership of this assimilation ministry will be the key to its success. Adequate time must be spent by the pastor in praying and considering who would be chosen as leaders. This may be the most important step in a successful assimilation strategy.

## The Pastor

As the leader, the pastor is the overseer of the church.<sup>44</sup> He must be the ultimate overseer of the assimilation ministry. Few will have the same burden for the growth of the church, its health, and the assimilation of newcomers as the pastor. The growth of the church can only happen if the pastor is personally committed to the vision of a growing church and believes this is the reason the church exists.”<sup>45</sup> The Pastor can certainly delegate responsibility but will be the one who is ultimately responsible for the direction of the church (Heb. 13:17). The pastor will need to consider doing the following if he expects to have a successful assimilation ministry. This is an abbreviated list of duties he should consider:

1. He must embrace the biblical goals, values and vision for the growth of the church and for the assimilation of newcomers into the church.
2. He must teach and communicate the vision, values and goals to the congregation on a continuing basis.
3. He must pray, seek out, and recruit someone for the role of assimilation director.
4. He must train and equip the director for this ministry (Eph. 4:12)
5. He must make sure there is proper training for all involved in the assimilation ministry.
6. He must make sure that the assimilation director is held accountable for following through with the team leaders and team members.
7. He should consider teaching a “Pastor’s Welcome Class” for newcomers.

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<sup>44</sup> James Strong, A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek New Testament (McClean, VA: MacDonald Publishing), p. 31. The word used for bishop is *episkopos* (episkopos). This Greek word is translated six times in the King James Bible as *bishop* and one time as *overseer*. An overseer is a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly. The bishop is the superintendent, elder or overseer of a Christian church.

<sup>45</sup> Houts, The Pastor’s Strategy Manual (Prairie Village, Kansas: Kendal D. Houts Ministries, 1998), p. 10.

8. He should consider making Sunday afternoon calls to newcomers who visited in the morning service. In a large and growing church the pastor may need to share this responsibility with other pastoral staff.
9. He should find or develop a curriculum and training manual for the director, the team leaders, and the team members.

### The Assimilation Director

As director, this person will oversee the entire assimilation ministry under the authority of the pastor. This person will have a great impact on the success or failure of this ministry. The pastor of a growing church will not have the time needed to fulfill the duties of the director of assimilation. In a very small church, the pastor may be the assimilation director at the beginning. The pastor should be given the privilege of choosing this man. It should be someone who has leadership abilities, is well respected by the congregation, has the ability to motivate people to action, and is by nature a positive-type person. A person easily discouraged should never be placed in this position. The following are some suggestions concerning the director of assimilation that should be considered by a pastor and church:

1. The pastor must spend adequate time with this person in order to communicate the vision, the values and goals of the assimilation ministry. The pastor must personally mentor this man and equip him for ministry. The time invested in him will pay great dividends.
2. The director will work with and under the pastor to help implement an effective assimilation ministry.
3. He will work with the pastor on choosing and recruiting team leaders.
4. This writer suggests that the director not be a salaried staff member unless the church is so large that a layman could not possibly have the time to fulfill the duties.
5. This person will need to make this ministry his number one priority in the church. He should be relieved from other duties. If the vision and values of the church are properly understood, this will be no problem.

6. He should take the responsibility for training future team members on a regular basis. At least one training session per year for new team members is needed.
7. He should conduct regular and needed meeting with the team leaders.
8. He should meet with the team leader and the team members on the Sunday morning they are to serve. This is for encouragement.
9. He will be responsible to see that the team leaders are held accountable for following all procedures.
10. He should recruit good testimonies about the assimilation ministry that should be given at the discretion of the pastor.
11. He should provide the pastor with an up-to-date visitor/team member report every Monday morning.

### The Assimilation Secretary

The director needs a secretary. This person need not be a salaried person unless the church is the size that would require more time than a volunteer could give. A lady often works better in this type position though it is not necessary this person be a lady. The secretary will work directly with the director of assimilation. A brief job description is give below:

1. Keep accurate records of all visitors (newcomers) including their names, addresses, phone numbers, and other pertinent information.
2. Keep track of the assimilation process for each newcomer.
3. Alert the director when the team leaders do not turn in the needed information.
4. Work with the church secretary concerning mailings and records.
5. Must go through the training for the assimilation ministry.
6. Should give the director a weekly report and update.

### The Team Leaders

A team leader will work with and under the authority of the director of assimilation and in co-ordination with the secretary. The team leader will oversee a team of



eight to fifteen people, depending on the size and growth of the church. The pastor and the director should work together in choosing these key men. Dan Houts says, "Quality leadership produces quality ministry!"<sup>46</sup> Some considerations for this position are listed below:

1. Like the director, this person should be a people-person, have leadership abilities, Christian character, be able to motive people, and be well respected by the congregation.
2. They will oversee their ministry team as they minister to newcomers.
3. These men must be trained and equipped by the Pastor and director.
4. They must embrace the vision, the values and goals of the church and assimilation ministry.
5. They will be accountable to see that all records and cards are turned in to the assimilation secretary in an orderly and timely fashion.

### The Team Members

Team members are the people in the congregation that respond to the preaching on assimilating the harvest into the church. These are volunteers that sign up for more training because of their desire to fulfill God's will in their lives in loving and helping newcomers come to Christ, grow, and become assimilated into the church. The following are suggestions for team members:

1. A team member will serve with and under the authority of a team leader.
2. A team member will serve as the initial greeter for newcomers on one Sunday per month. The other weeks will be used to follow up and befriend those the team member met on their ministry day. They should also be aware of ministering to the needs of the existing congregation.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

- 3. The team member must be adequately trained and equipped to do what is needed for effective assimilation of newcomers.
- 4. The team member must turn in appropriate information to their team leader in an orderly and timely fashion.
- 5. A team member must see assimilation as a ministry and not as another program within the church.
- 6. A team member must embrace the vision, the values and the goals of the church and the assimilation ministry.

### Organization

With the previously discussed people in mind, the organizational chart below is a suggested structure for the assimilation ministry of a local church.

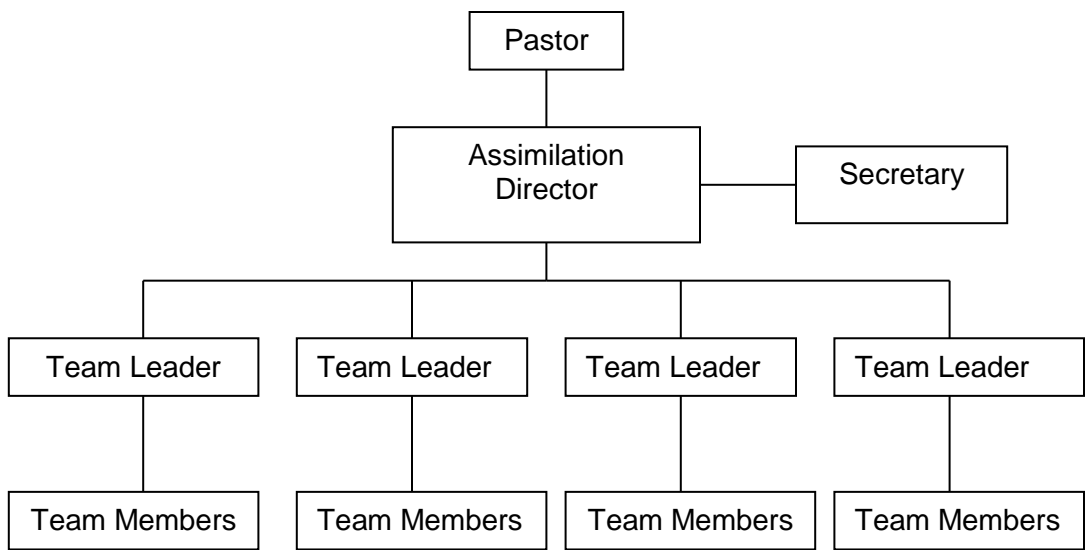


Chart 1

### Training

The people in the above chart must be trained. A lack of trained Christians to carry out the work of the church is usually due to a failure on the part of the Pastor and pastoral staff. People will not and cannot function properly if they do

not know what to do and how to do it. A failure to train is a decision to fail. Training produces competence, competence produces confidence, and confidence produces success.

The pastor should spend adequate time training the director and the team leaders. Too much cannot be said concerning the training and equipping of these key people. They must be people who have the ability to lead others. These men must also have the heart to reach people for Christ and to keep people by seeing them assimilated into the local church. These men must see themselves as a team. They must seek to encourage one another. They will determine whether the assimilation ministry is a success or a failure.

Once the director and team leaders are chosen and properly trained, it is necessary to train the team members. Three suggested schedules for training are found in appendix one. There should be a minimum of five hours of training for the team members. The pastor should conduct the basic training with the director assisting him (team-teaching). This will put the director in the proper perspective before the eyes of the team members and team leaders. He will be seen as the leader of the assimilation ministry as he serves under the authority of the pastor.

### Prayer

All of these people, properly organized and trained, will not be successful without God blessing their efforts. This is where prayer must be seen as a vital part of the overall assimilation process. Prayer for the newcomers and prayer for

those who will minister to them is vital. Of the many elements involved in church growth that are described in the vast majority of church growth books, prayer is usually not mentioned. No one can properly read the Book of Acts (God's manual on church growth) without coming to the realization of how important prayer was in the growth of the early church. Though it must be assumed that church growth experts and writers would recognize that prayer is indispensable to the growth of the church, many of the contemporary writers fail to give prayer any prominent place at all.<sup>47</sup> The Book of Acts gives prayer a high priority in evangelism and the resulting growth of the early church.

One hundred and twenty disciples prayed in the upper room before the great harvest of Pentecost (Acts 1:15). Prayer raised the church to new levels of boldness as they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31). When persecution seemed it would stop evangelism and the growth of the church, the church united in prayer. The gospel continued to spread unhindered because of prayer (Acts 12:5, 12). Prayer was a chief weapon against spiritual forces which sought to stop the church from evangelizing and thus growing (Acts 6:10-18). The Apostles refused to allow social problems to divert them from prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6). As a result of this refusal, the number of disciples increased (Acts 6:7). Thom Rainer says, "Churches today must place a priority on prayer which will

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<sup>47</sup> Thom S. Rainer, "Church Growth and Evangelism in the Book of Acts," Criswell Theological Review, 5:1 (Fall 1999): 60.

be evident in their programs, budget and calendar... Prayer was not the leader in a series of programs; it was the foundation upon which all other ministry was built."<sup>48</sup> Church growth resulting from evangelism is more than good directional signs in the parking lot, clean nurseries and friendly greeters (all of which should be there and not neglected). True assimilation of newcomers is a spiritual battle that must be fought with the mighty spiritual weapons of God (2 Cor. 10:4-5; Eph. 6:18). Appendix Two will give some suggestions on how to establish a ministry of prayer as it relates to the assimilation process. Not only is prayer seen as one of the key elements to early church growth but so was preaching and teaching.

### Preaching and Teaching

Along with prayer there is no doubt that preaching impacted the growth of the early church. Church growth experts disregard or minimize preaching as an element in church growth. Their studies often include many good ideas, but they usually exclude preaching as a contributing growth factor.

For example, Michael A Wilde reminds us that Donald McGavran, founder of the modern church growth movement, coined the term *church growth* in his book, The Bridges of God (1955).<sup>49</sup> McGavran had successfully planted churches

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. , p. 67.

<sup>49</sup> Michael A. Wilde, "A Study of Impact of Preaching Upon Biblical Church Growth," D. Min. dissertation, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1994, p. 3.

in India for seventeen years. Wilde states, “One of the unique characteristics of McGavran’s church growth model was his emphasis on sociological phenomena that did produce growth. His model started a major shift from traditional and biblical patterns of church growth to those which emphasized social science.”<sup>50</sup>

Peter Wagner of Fuller School of World Mission is one of the leading spokesmen today concerning church growth. The *Fuller model* has become a standard of church growth in America. In his book, Your Church Can Grow, Wagner gives seven vital signs of a healthy, growing church he discovered by observing growing churches in America and from a study of Acts 2:41-47. He did not include preaching and teaching as one of those vital principles even though the immediate context of Acts 2 links the numerical addition to Peter’s preaching. Preaching gets a mere mention in the book.<sup>51</sup>

Win Arn also supports this research and is quoted by Earl V. Comfort in his article “Is the Pulpit a Factor in Church Growth?”

Unfortunately many churches in choosing a pastor place greatest priority on the man’s ability to preach. Certainly congregations are entitled to prepared and well-delivered messages. Yet, sermon delivery represents a very small portion of the pastor’s total work week. Indications are that the sermon, by itself, is a relatively minor factor in the growth of the church. How then should its pastor spend his time to have the greatest effect in church growth?<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Grow (qtd. in Michael Wilde, p. 3).

<sup>52</sup> Earl V. Comfort, “Is the Pulpit a Factor in Church Growth,” Bibliotheca Sacra 140 (Jan-Mar 1983) : 66.

This seems to be without a doubt an encouragement to preachers to spend less time on their preaching and more time on so-called *church growth elements*.

Though much of what is said by the above church growth experts is good, these statements cannot be accepted at the sacrifice of good, relevant, Bible preaching.

Ken Sidey presents the following question:

Many church growth experts admit, though the principles they have developed are good, somehow they are not working. In spite of all the church growth advances, the percent of American adults going to church has remained almost the same for many years, while Protestant church membership has actually declined. Could it be the minimizing of preaching?<sup>53</sup>

Preaching is an historical tradition of the church of Jesus Christ, as well as a biblically mandated ministry of the church. Preaching is one deed Christ came to do (Mk. 1:38). He commanded others to preach (Mk. 16:15). After Peter's restoration in John 21, Christ commanded him to feed the sheep. It seems obvious this was done through teaching and preaching the Word of God (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 20:28, etc). This preaching resulted in numerical growth. Growth is found as a result of preaching in such passages as Acts 5:42; 6:1,7; 16:4-5; 17:1-4.

Part of assimilation is bringing people to Christ through the preaching and teaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:18) and then to maturity by using the Word of God (Heb. 5:14). A person who is either unsaved or weak in the faith and has no discernment will find it either impossible or very difficult to be assimilated in the ultimate sense of the word (Heb. 4:12; 2 Pet. 2:2). To this day, the claim that good, biblical preaching will positively impact growth is missing in church growth

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<sup>53</sup> Ken Sidney, "Church Growth Fine Tunes its Formulas," Christianity Today 35 (June 1991) : 46.

literature. Church growth research minimizes the role of preaching in the local church while the Bible affirms it as a significant factor in church growth.

Preaching leads to both qualitative growth (repentance from sin, salvation, baptism, sanctification) and quantitative growth (number of disciples increase and churches are planted). Allison Trites says,

The early church's growth was not simply quantitative; it was also qualitative. There was not just an increase in numbers and in geographical outreach; there was also a definite deepening of spiritual life in the developing Christian communities throughout the Mediterranean basin and the Roman Empire. Wherever the gospel was preached, there was an increase in godly living.<sup>54</sup>

A study of church history will show that preaching has been used by God to bring about church growth.<sup>55</sup> The preaching of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield had a profound affect during the first Great Awakening. The revival preaching of Charles Finney, Dwight L. Moody and Billy Sunday was responsible for multitudes coming to Christ and coming into the churches. DeWitte T. Holland confirms the importance of preaching,

But when the church has been alive, vibrant, sharing and expanding, then preaching has been central...Preaching is the central function of the church, biblically and historically...Certainly Jesus commanded the church to preach. The successful example of apostolic preaching encourages the church to preach. Preaching builds and solidifies the understanding and faith of the church; the church is extended as the gospel is proclaimed."<sup>56</sup>

This has been further explained in a study conducted by Michael A. Wilde in Tucson, Arizona. Twenty-four churches participated with 1,449 people responding

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<sup>54</sup> Trites, p.165.

<sup>55</sup> DeWitte T. Holland, The Preaching Tradition: A Brief History, ed. William D. Thompson (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), p. 56.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. , p. 112.



to surveys for the study. The study found that the number one reason people came to the churches was for the preaching (34 percent). Other options were given, such as friendliness, programs of the church, and relationships. Of the twenty-four churches, twenty-three congregations ranked preaching as the primary reason they continue to come to the church (38 percent). Yet, the *Fuller Model* emphasizes the importance of programs, relationships and friendliness to the exclusion of preaching. Programs, relationships and friendliness are very important. Of all 1,449 who responded, 98 percent agreed that preaching was a major factor in growth. The churches in this study were made up of growing and non-growing churches.<sup>57</sup>

Michael Wilde concludes by stressing the importance of preaching in the assimilation process: hence, people seeking a church will include preaching as a significant part of the equation.<sup>58</sup> Good preaching which is biblical and relevant to daily living is certainly a draw for newcomers (saved and lost) and also an aid in keeping those who are maturing. This in no way denies the importance of friendships and relationships, the physical plant, the welcome people receive, and the way people are followed up. It stresses one factor that is ignored in most church growth literature.

As a result, adequate time must be given to the preparation of good biblical preaching and teaching. Preaching must be relevant to the people to whom it is

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<sup>57</sup> Wilde, p. 96.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. , p. 97.

addressed. Variety in content and style will aid the preacher's ability to communicate the whole counsel of God. The preacher must be careful to give a balanced diet of the Word of God and avoid excessive use of pet topics. Preaching that is aimed at needs must be balanced with strong doctrine in order to provide people with a good foundation on which to live their lives. Messages of comfort and healing are needed in our society. In order to know the people being preached to, the preacher must spend time with them. Many newcomers will appreciate sermons that are fresh, preached with enthusiasm, backed up by the Word of God, with many present day illustrations to life. Humor also has its place in the service if properly used. Expository, topical and textual type sermons all have their place in the variety of preaching that a pastor must do. This writer believes that expository preaching builds the most solid foundation for people in the word of God and so he uses this style more than the others.

### Facilities

With all of the previously discussed preparations in mind, one must not forget that preparing for the newcomer's arrival involves the overall church facilities. The appearance, the layout, and the accessibility of the church facilities can have a role in the assimilation process. Dan Houts says that "visitors make up their minds the first eleven minutes if they are NOT coming back to your church."<sup>59</sup> If this is true, the first few minutes of their arrival on the church property will have a

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<sup>59</sup> Houts, How to Minister to Your Visitors p. 37.

great influence on whether or not they return. This is part of the overall assimilation process of newcomers to the church.

### Parking

Because of the importance of first time impressions, entrance signs to the parking lots should be easily seen from the road. Once the newcomer enters the parking lot of the church, there should either be signs directing them to visitor parking or parking attendants (preferred) to give directions. Many church growth writers recommend having a designated parking area for newcomers near the most convenient entrance into the building. It can be very awkward for a newcomer to be confused about where to park. Train the congregation to leave the best spaces for the newcomers. This communicates to the newcomer that the church planned for his coming. The parking areas should be well marked, clean and well lighted at night.<sup>60</sup>

### Grounds

The general appearance of the campus grounds is also a very important issue if a church expects to draw and keep people from their community. Such maintenance as the grass being cut and edged and trees pruned cannot be overlooked. The campus grounds presents an image to the newcomer. The church wants this image the best possible for the Lord.

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<sup>60</sup> Brand, p. 113.

## The Buildings

Another point to consider is that poorly laid out facilities can be a real barrier to the newcomer. It is often difficult to find either the church auditorium or the church office. When a newcomer does not find directional signs to entrances, parking, nurseries, and restrooms. It makes the newcomer feel uncomfortable. When this happens, Calvin Ratz says the church is saying to visitors, “we weren’t expecting you.”<sup>61</sup> Maps of the facilities should be available at each entrance into the buildings. The buildings should be well maintained and clean. Three areas of the church facilities are especially important to the average newcomer – clean restrooms, nurseries and preschool areas.

## Greeters

Once the facilities are set-up to meet the needs of newcomers then greeters should be stationed in the parking areas and near the entrance doors. Often the philosophy of the church is that anyone can be a greeter so they often chose men who cannot do anything else. If newcomers decide in the first eleven minutes if they are not going to return, then the first people they meet are some of the most important people in the assimilation process. Greeters should introduce themselves, lead people to the places they need to go (auditorium, nurseries, etc) and introduce the newcomers to others in the congregation. The

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<sup>61</sup> Calvin C. Ratz, “The Velcro Church,” Leadership (Fall Quarter, 1990) :39.

greeter should do all he or she can do to make the newcomer's visit to the church as pleasant as possible. John Maxwell has an excellent program for training greeters.<sup>62</sup> The writer of this paper has prepared a training manual for greeters and had training sessions with those chosen as greeters.

### Ratios

Win and Charles Arn present six ratios that affect the assimilation process. Because this author believes they are all important, this paper will briefly describe each of them. Some of these will be elaborated on in Chapter IV of this paper. They deal with issues that the church must consider in its preparation for meeting the needs of the newcomers in an effort to seeing them eventually assimilated into the local church.<sup>63</sup>

### Friendship Ratio

To begin with Arn states that each newcomer should be able to identify at least seven friends in the church within the first six months. Friendships seem to be one of the strongest bonds cementing new members to their congregation. If this 1:7 ratio is not met within six months they will often return to their old friends and old ways. (See page 71 for the results of a study by Arn) The people of the

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<sup>62</sup> John Maxwell, Ushers and Greeters, an audio cassette tape training program (EiCajon: Injoy Ministries, 1991)

<sup>63</sup> Win and Charles Arn, "Closing the Evangelistic Back Door," Leadership (Spring 1984) : 24-31.

congregation must be taught this fact. It is the primary responsibility of the present church member to provide friendship and relationships for newcomers.

#### Role/Task Ratio

Arn further explains that there should be at least sixty roles or tasks available in a local church for every one hundred members.<sup>64</sup> It can consist of choirs, committees, teaching positions, officers, ushers, greeters, secretarial work, visitation, and other specific duties that people can do for the Lord and His church. The problem in many churches seems to be that most roles are filled by a small group of people. If people do not find meaningful responsibility, they often drop out. This 60:100 ratio is important in the assimilation process. A lack of opportunities for service can actually create an environment that produces inactive church members. A church should make a list of all the different ministry opportunities people can get involved in. This should be shared with the new member in such a way he or she is encouraged to participate in one or more ministries. The goal is not to create busy work but involvement in the service of Christ. The church needs to remember to stress mission roles rather than maintenance roles.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

### Group Ratio

To avoid inactive church members, Arn says that there should be at least seven relational groups in place in a church for every one hundred members. These groups may include choirs, Sunday School classes, or Senior citizen groups. The lower this ratio is the lower the growth of that church usually is and the higher the drop-out rate is. The church should examine the number of small relational groups it has in the church. Again, this 7:100 ratio is important if people are to be assimilated into the local church. People must find friends and build relationships.

### New-Group Ratio

Further study finds that for every five relational groups in the church, one of those groups should have been started in the past two years. Arn believes that most groups reach a saturation point after nine to eighteen months from their formation. When this happens they usually stop growing and assimilating new people. As a result, it becomes more difficult to penetrate the group. Friendships are already made. Many groups go into a maintenance mode even though it was probably a mission mode that caused them to grow in the beginning. This is one reason a church must consider starting new groups. This 1:5 new-group ratio will help assimilate more people and close the back door of the church.

### Committee Member Ratio

When the members of all the committees in the church are examined, a church that usually does well in assimilation has one of every five members having joined the church in the past two years. There are certain positions in a church that a new member will not be suited for. Some positions require a period of time to prove the new member's faithfulness. Yet, many churches are too slow about incorporating new members into roles and tasks of the church, such as some committees. This 1:5 ratio encourages openness in the leadership structure of the church.

### Staff Ratio

How does one go about making sure that people are assimilated and ratios are met in a church? Arn suggests that there be one full-time staff member for every 150 people in the Sunday morning worship services.<sup>65</sup> Both Win and Charles Arn recommend that one of the staff members hired after the pastor be a minister involved in evangelism, the growth of the church, and new member incorporation and assimilation. This staff member can usually earn his own salary within one year.

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<sup>65</sup> Arn, Closing the Evangelistic Backdoor, p. 31.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### MINISTERING TO THE NEWCOMER

It is one concern to know the church is failing to assimilate newcomers and to know how to motivate and prepare the congregation to solve this problem. It is another matter to actually do something about the problem. This chapter will deal with the practical *how to* of newcomer assimilation. Larry Dyer reminds the reader that one must recognize that not every newcomer can or should be assimilated into the local church. The church must have biblical boundaries on who can become a part of the church. It is not possible that an unbeliever can be ultimately assimilated into the church unless he or she is willing to become a Christian. It must be acknowledged that the gospel repels as well as attracts people. Having said this, every effort must be made to win the unbelieving newcomer, see them grow, mature and become an active part of God's local church.<sup>66</sup> In a world where people often feel isolated there is a great need for a place where people can find the love of Christ, acceptance as a human being made in the image of God, a sense of belonging and of family, and where they can share and seek help.

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<sup>66</sup> Dyer, "The Proactive Strategy," p. 2.

This chapter will also deal with the period from the time a newcomer arrives at church until they are an assimilated member of the church, which could be months later. One of the most important times in the assimilation process is the first time the attender comes. The importance of the newcomer's initial contact with the church cannot be overstated. He or she must find Christian warmth, love and friendliness.

### The Friendship Factor

Maxwell's study on friendship found that the number one reason that visitors come back to a church is that the people show warmth, fellowship, love, or provide a sense of belonging. People come back to places where they are treated well.<sup>67</sup> A newcomer is more than just a visitor whom the church must tolerate for a service, but actually ought to be one of the most significant and celebrated parts of the church's life. They are a central part of the very purpose of the church's existence. The harvest has come into the midst of the church. What is said and done can have a great influence on whether or not that soul will ever come to faith in Christ (1 Cor. 14:23-25). A good rule to follow is to treat newcomers as you would Christ (Mt. 25:36). Though this is a tribulational passage, this is certainly a principle the church can learn from today. How the Gentiles will treat the Jews of that day is an indication of their love or lack of love for Christ.

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<sup>67</sup> John Maxwell, "Lay Ministry", A Workshop that Motivates and Equips Your People for Ministry Video Series (Bonita, California: Injoy Ministries, 1988).

If the church has made previous preparations for the newcomers arrival (see Chapter Three of this paper) such as designated parking areas, proper directional signs, greeters, and clean facilities, the congregation is ready to minister to them. This ministry will not usually happen by chance but must be planned and organized. The entire congregation must be taught and challenged in the area of newcomer welcome. Certainly it should be the very nature of Christians to welcome people into our assemblies but most churches do not find this to be true. Even if it is generally true in a church, an organized plan will keep people from being missed or neglected unintentionally. There is only one chance to make a good first impression and when it comes to newcomers the church should do it right the first time.<sup>68</sup> This is why the first service they attend is so important. If the church fails them here, it may never get another opportunity to reach them. The initial visitor contact by the congregation is no more than an effort to evangelize the lost and to love and befriend people as a representative of Jesus Christ on earth. Believers are tools the Holy Spirit can use to win the lost newcomer or help the believing newcomer grow in Christ.

To further support this idea, Arn tell us that,

the informal welcome ultimately has the greatest influence on a person's eventual decision to join; or even come back. It is when members go out of their way to express genuine interest in the newcomer...when members are inviting them to a get-together of friends from the church...when they are remembered

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<sup>68</sup> Brand, p. 113.

the next time they visit.”<sup>69</sup> Welcoming isn’t just something done at the door, it’s something everyone does all over the building.<sup>70</sup>

Win Arn believes that relationships are probably the predominant assimilation factor. “Friendship is the strongest bond cementing new members to their new congregations.”<sup>71</sup> One must keep in mind that a newcomer needs seven friends the first six months or they usually will not remain in the church. Shuman says, “People are not just looking for a friendly church, they are looking to make friends.”<sup>72</sup>

Because of these factors the church must be ready, organized and willing to properly meet the appropriate needs of the newcomer on their very first visit to the church. The team members who are serving on that Sunday must be spiritually prepared. When the believers are filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), then the power of God is upon their lives for witness (Acts 1:8). The team will have already met before service to pray and prepare their hearts for ministry (see appendix four for the team schedule on Sunday). This type Christian will be able to manifest the love of Christ to the newcomer (Rom. 5:5). If the team members have been properly trained, they will be ready to minister to the newcomer.

The team members should be allowed to leave Sunday School early to take their positions near the auditorium entrance in order to greet newcomers. They

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<sup>69</sup> Arn, Church Growth Ratio Book, p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> Ratz, p. 43.

<sup>71</sup> Arn, Church Growth Ratio Book, p. 23.

<sup>72</sup> Shuman, p. 89.

should greet these people either near the door or after the ushers or greeters have seated them. An attitude of love must be conveyed to the newcomer. A smile is usually the most common way to communicate to the newcomer that they are accepted as they are. The team members must be taught attention skills and ways to communicate that the newcomer is important to us (see Appendix Five which includes instructions on how to approach and carry on a conversation with a newcomer). The team member must be taught how to get newcomers names, how to make their children feel important, how to focus on them using eye contact, body language, and open-ended questions.

Dan Houts suggests that Christians should be looking for divine appointments.<sup>73</sup> People come to church with all kinds of problems and Christ has the answer. God can bring these people into contact with His people so that they might be able to minister to them on behalf of Christ. Houts calls this a divine appointment. The actual strategy for befriending and ministering to the newcomers before, during, and after the service can be found in Appendix Four. This information is indispensable to the assimilation process. The importance of this strategy cannot be over emphasized in the initial steps of assimilation. The newcomer should find friends the very first service. Helping the newcomer make friends is one of the most important parts of the assimilation process. Helping the

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<sup>73</sup> Houts, You Are a Miracle (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: Destiny Image Publishers, 1996), p. 13.

newcomer build relationships the very first service is so important to the future potential of reaching them and seeing them eventually assimilated into the church. If at all possible, the newcomer should be introduced to the pastor at the end of the service. This will also help the pastor's follow up to be more personal.

### The Follow-up Factor

Other than the first service the newcomer attends and the relationships formed, the first few weeks after the first service are the most important in the assimilation process. This part of meeting the newcomer's needs happens when they leave the church after that first visit. Few churches have an effective plan to reach them other than their names being put into the regular visitation program. This traditional follow up is often not very personal. Often the people who visit them during the following week are people they never meet at church; therefore, they are total strangers. The traditional follow up is usually one in which the people try to sell the church not show genuine concern for those being visited. As the title of this section denotes, this is the follow up to their visit. This section will deal with the first two weeks after the newcomer's initial visit.

### Week One

To begin with, a detailed schedule of events for this week are found in Appendix Six. Each church must develop its own strategy for this vital period in the assimilation process. A clear and precise procedure must be in place or the

assimilation process will be hindered. This is a suggested format that could be followed and should work well in aiding the assimilation of newcomers.

A phone call by the pastor should be made some time on Sunday afternoon. This call will be more effective if the team members were able to introduce the newcomer personally to the pastor before they left the church that day. The purpose of this call is to make sure the newcomer knows their visit was not taken for granted. To make the call more personal, the pastor should be given a copy of the assimilation ministry tracking card (see appendix thirteen). This will give the pastor information that might not be on the visitor card that was given out during the service. If a prayer request was written on the back of the visitor card (see appendix eight), the pastor should assure the newcomer of his prayers for that need. The pastor should offer his assistance and that of the pastoral staff if the newcomer should ever have a need the church could help with. A record of this call should be made and given to the assimilation director to be put on file and given to the team member who has befriended the newcomer.

One problem with the average church visitation program is that practical strangers visit in the home of newcomers. The newcomer never met these people on the Sunday they visited the church. The better strategy is that the people who will first visit the newcomer at their home be one of the team members who met and befriended them on their initial visit. The team member will adopt this newcomer for the next few weeks and even months in an effort to assimilate them into the church.

Statistics show that these visits to the home are much more effective if made within thirty-six hours of the newcomers initial visit and if it is made by a lay person rather than the pastor or staff member. The lay visit is seen as more personal while the staff visit is seen as more professional. Miller explains that

When laypersons make 15-minute visits to the homes of first-time worship visitors within 36 hours, 85 percent of them return the following week. Make this home visit within 72 hours, and 60 percent of them will return. Make it 7 days later, and 15 percent will return. The pastor making this call, rather than a lay person, cuts each result in half."<sup>74</sup>

Based upon these facts, it would seem best to visit newcomers on Monday nights. Dan Houts recommends that the visit not be to sell the church but continue to build a relationship with the newcomer by the team member who befriended them the day before. Houts recommends the team member deliver a basket of cookies as a gift of love to the newcomer's home on Monday night.<sup>75</sup> This should be a very informal time where one may or may not be invited into the home. Remember that the team member is not a stranger since they befriended the newcomer on their initial visit. This makes the visit even more meaningful and personal. This can be very effective if done properly (see Appendix Nine). The writer of this paper has already instituted this in his own church with great results. People are often overwhelmed by this unexpected, simple expression of love. It is something they probably have never experienced before. If their experience at

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<sup>74</sup> Herb Miller, How to Build a Magnetic Church, ed. Lyle E. Schaller (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987)

<sup>75</sup> Houts, Team Member Manual, p. 64.



church was positive and the initial cookie visit is positive, there have been two major positive deposits into the newcomer's life regarding the church and its people. No opportunity to share the gospel should be missed if the Lord opens the door to do so even on this first visit, but should not be forced.

Overall, most Baptist Churches are in the habit of visiting the homes of those who visit their church. More and more churches are failing to visit homes because of the changes in our society. The methods that have been used may need to be adjusted but visiting should never be abandoned. Gordon McDonald did a study on the effectiveness of visitation to the homes. He found that 80 percent rated the visit as positive; only 5 percent were negative and most of these were because of the timing of the visit. He also found that if the follow-up team used a monologue or *sales pitch* which only required token responses from the listener, the listeners did not tend to enjoy the experience compared to an interactive dialogue.<sup>76</sup> If done properly, the gift of cookies also adds to the effectiveness of the visit.

A letter should be mailed from the pastor to the newcomer no later than Tuesday. A sample letter can be found in appendix ten. It should not appear that the letter is a form letter. A personal note may be jotted down in ink by the pastor about the prayer request or something he learned from his phone call. Mentioning the children by name is always good.

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<sup>76</sup> Gordon McDonald, "Ten Conditions for Church Growth," Leadership 1 (1983) : 46.

On Saturday morning, the person who befriended the newcomer at church on their initial visit and made the cookie visit should call the newcomer to invite them back the next day (Sunday). A sample conversation for the phone call can be found in appendix eleven, along with some practical pointers for making the call. This must have a personal tone to it, not a memorized, mechanical tone. This call is vital if you expect to get the newcomer to return to church.<sup>77</sup>

## Week Two

### If the Newcomer Returns for a Second Visit

If the procedures for the first week are followed properly, it is not unusual to expect 50 percent or more of the newcomers to return for a second visit. Most churches do not experience this rate of return because they often have no procedure to follow up the newcomer's initial visit at church or the week afterwards. People are often initially attracted by the church name, location, building or the denomination, but they usually return or remain because of the people. Win and Charles Arn say:

The strategy should seek to foster genuine caring relationships between a variety of members and the potential disciple. It should also seek to involve the potential disciple in several appropriate groups and church programs where new friendships can be made. The more exposures a non-Christian can have to the person of Christ through his people and the church, the more complete his or her understanding of Christ and his love.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Houts, Team Member Manual, p. 66.

<sup>78</sup> Win and Charles Arn, Closing the Evangelistic Backdoor, p. 29.

Simply put, the more exposure to Christ through His people in the church, the more possibility there will be for the salvation of the lost and the ultimate assimilation of all new members.

The team member who befriended them the week prior, made the cookie visits and called them on Saturday, should be waiting to greet their new friend. It would be wise to sit with them. Before they arrive, the name of the second time attender or attenders should be given to at least two other people or couples. This is part of the process of developing friends in the church for the newcomer. The second time attender should be introduced to other people who will show a genuine interest (such as other team members, the team leader or the assimilation director). If the newcomer has teenagers they should be introduced to the youth pastor. This is a good time for the team member to invite the second time attender to a social event that may have been announced that day by the pastor or that may be listed in the bulletin. The team member could also be prepared to invite the attender home for a meal or out to lunch. Sometimes during this second visit, the Pastor's class should be mentioned (see Appendix Twelve). They should be told that if they ever decide to attend the class, the team member who befriended them would be delighted to accompany them. If the second time attender was introduced to the team leader or to the assimilation director, they could make a brief Sunday afternoon call expressing their pleasure in having them return to church and the joy of meeting them.

One of the people who was introduced to them for the first time on this second visit could write a short, personal, hand-written note to be mailed during the next week. These type letters should be very friendly and folksy. Make sure they know who the writer is by referring back to the former service. Invite them to the same social they were invited to by their team member friend. Let them know that their friend and the writer of the note will be present. The note writer should jot down their personal phone number in the letter so the newcomer can call if more information is needed.

A mailing from the church the week after the newcomer's second visit should introduce the second time attender to the Pastor's Class for newcomers (see Appendix Twelve). This is a class that is taught by the pastor during the Sunday School hour. It is four weeks in length and is a continuous class. It deals with the history, the ministries and the philosophy of the church, opportunities for family involvement, the purpose and vision of the church, and some basic doctrines that would involve salvation and growth in Christ. There should also be information about upcoming social events or church activities that the newcomers might be interested in.

The team member should call on Saturday morning to invite the newcomer to join them in attending the Pastor's Class the next morning. The newcomer will have already heard about the class the Sunday before, got a mailing about it during the week and now is being personally invited to attend. The team member must accompany the newcomer to this class. This means that the team member

may have to make arrangements if they have other responsibilities that might conflict. The attendance with the newcomer is of utmost importance. After they are in the class a couple of weeks and have met other people, the team member may assume other duties and not attend with the newcomer. The team member must be sensitive to the newcomer concerning this issue.

If the Newcomer does not return the following Sunday

The church should not give up on reaching people simply because they do not return the following Sunday. The call on Saturday by the team member should reveal any reasons for not returning. Appropriate responses must be in place. Mailings, phone calls, personal letters and even visits should be in order just as they are for those who do return. The average church is often too quick to forget the person who does not return immediately. When the church does this it is communicating to these people a wrong message. The church can certainly not make people return, but we must remove all excuses that they might have because of our failures. The harvest is too important to give up so easily. These, along with anyone who attends the church, should be added to a general mail list. News concerning social events and special meetings should be sent to all visitors at least once every two months. Local people, even when they do not return, should be kept on this mailing list for at least one year. A crisis they may face during the year may precipitate the need for the church in their lives.

## Record Keeping

For all of this to work, accurate records are a must if people are to be followed up properly. This is where the assimilation secretary is so important. Suggested record cards can be found in Appendix Thirteen. The team members must turn in reports to their team leaders who will turn in reports to the assimilation director. The secretary will keep accurate records of all newcomers, which team member has adopted them, what the results of the cookie visit was, the phone calls, the second week follow up, if they returned for a second visit, and if they received mailings. The pastor should be given a master list of all newcomers, their addresses, phone numbers and who the team members are who have adopted them. If the pastor has any questions about the progress of a newcomer, he can talk with the team member as well as check with the assimilation secretary. This is very helpful to a pastor of a growing church who cannot keep up with details about everyone. This will also aid the pastor in determining when he should make a pastoral visit.

## The Final Factor

With all of this in mind, one must deal with the newcomer who is returning again and again to the church. This must include the weeks and even months that follow the initial visit of the newcomer. The goal is to bring the newcomer to the point of assimilation into the local church. For those who are unbelievers at the time they first attend, it will include winning them to Christ, baptism, uniting with the church, growth in grace, involvement in the social fabric of the church and also

an active role or part in ministry. Some who are newcomers are already Christians and may already be scripturally baptized. Some may be mature, growing Christians who have moved into the area while others may be immature and need a great amount of help. Many of the circumstances that are necessary for assimilation will be similar. Once the unbeliever has been saved and joined the church and once the Christian newcomer has joined the church, much is left to be done in the assimilation process. L. L. Morriss commenting on this, said, "It seems to me that one of the contributing causes for the failure to conserve members in the average church is that the church ceased to have a concern for the new member after he joins."<sup>79</sup> Heck, in his book on assimilation states,

Any practical program for assimilating new members must be set...to the first six months. This is not to suggest that assimilation should end after that; it only suggests the crucial nature of that time frame...There are two key periods during which assimilation can and should take place. The first is the time before the individual actually unites with the congregation, and the second is the first six months thereafter.<sup>80</sup>

It is after people join a church that many drop out. Even though they are members they are never assimilated, never feel like they really belong, never get involved in the mission of the church, and never develop many relationships; thus, many drop into inactivity. There is a great difference between being a member of a church and being assimilated into the fabric of the church. It is certainly true that

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<sup>79</sup> L.L. Morriss, "The Care of New Church Members," Review and Expositor (Spring 1963) : 187.

<sup>80</sup> Joel D. Heck, New Member Assimilation (St. Louis: Concordia, 1988), pp. 17, 33

the new member has some responsibility in this process but most often it is an issue of how open and receptive the church is to receiving new members into small groups and giving them roles and tasks to perform. A person can become a member of the church and never become a member of a meaningful small group or ever become involved in an opportunity to serve. Burkum states that “assimilation has occurred when new members can identify with the purposes, goals, practices and life of the church.”<sup>81</sup> The public service may draw people in but usually will not keep them. At best it is an entrance into the assimilation process. The church is often on probation in the mind of the new member long after they join. Keeping them is greatly affected by relationships and involvement which is found beyond the worship service in small groups and friendships. “It stands to reason that the more integrated people are into the social fabric and value system of a group, the less likely they are to leave.”<sup>82</sup> The following sections will deal with what the church can do to aid in the assimilation process.

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<sup>81</sup> Burkum, A.C.T. – Assimilating New Members, p. 20.

<sup>82</sup> “Implications of Social theory for Attrition of Church Members,” (Kansas City: Church of the Nazarene, 1999) , p.1 <[www.nazarene.org/cg/research/ansr6.html](http://www.nazarene.org/cg/research/ansr6.html)> Jan. 8, 2000.



## Small Groups

### The Importance of a Small Group

To begin with, there can be no doubt that the early church, with its thousands of converts, met in small groups. Acts 2:46 indicates that the early believers went from house to house breaking bread. As thousands were saved in the early church, there is no record of them gathering on Sundays in large municipal buildings or large church buildings, but in homes (1 Cor. 16:19 and Col. 4:15). There is evidence they gathered at synagogues as long as they were allowed, but even these were not very large.

Almost without exception, church growth experts believe that participation in small groups is vital to the assimilation of newcomers. Peter Wagner identified two keys to the assimilation of new members. One of those keys was to get the new member involved in a small group.<sup>83</sup> C. Kirk Hadaway identifies several keys to new member assimilation, one being their involvement in a small group.<sup>84</sup> Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin give five strategies that will enable a church to have an effective assimilation process. One is to “help people become involved in a small group.”<sup>85</sup> Lyle Schaller says that face to face groups are essential in the church

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<sup>83</sup> C. Peter Wagner, Leading Your Church to Growth (Ventura, California: Regal, 1984), p. 206.

<sup>84</sup> Shuman, The Assimilation of New Adult Members, p. 15.

<sup>85</sup> Gary McIntosh, Finding Them, Keeping Them, p. 16-17.

and “may be the most important single factor in that church’s ability to assimilate new members.”<sup>86</sup> Suzanne Braden in talking about the importance of the first year in the life of a new member says, “Relationships are the key ingredient in the life of a congregation. People are attracted to churches that demonstrate strong relationships, and most will remain active in a church only if they are able to experience close relationships with others.”<sup>87</sup>

### The Benefits of a Small Group

There are numerous benefits to these small groups. They contribute to the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of the participants. People can find love and support during difficult times in their lives. It provides more accountability. Small groups can incorporate new people more effectively since it is easier to develop relationships and a sense of belonging in a small group as compared to a large group. “Usually the smaller the group, the greater the involvement of its members. The larger groups demand less of their members and they tend to be less involved, less committed and have interactions which are less intense.”<sup>88</sup> The small group becomes a bridge for friendships and relationships. It is a place where

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<sup>86</sup> Schaller, Assimilating New Members, p. 100.

<sup>87</sup> Suzanne G. Braden, The First Year: Incorporating New Members (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1987), p. 19.

<sup>88</sup> Church of the Nazarene, p. 1.

*koinonia*<sup>89</sup> (fellowship) can take place.<sup>90</sup> Involvement in a small group reduces the chances a new member will drop out. Though many small groups are not primarily for the purpose of evangelism, they do help conserve the results of evangelism. Different small groups have the potential for reaching different people.<sup>91</sup>

### The Number of Small Groups Needed

More research about small groups by Win and Charles Arn show that a church should have at least seven relational groups in place for every one hundred members. This is a ratio of 7:100. They have found that the lower the ratio, the lower the growth of the average church and the greater the drop out ratio is. This makes the number of small groups in a church very important to the assimilation process.<sup>92</sup> If there are few small groups in a church, either they have grown to large groups or there are just a few with only a few people involved. It is not difficult to establish a lot of different small groups in a church when one considers the various groups a church may have. The church should consider choirs, Sunday School classes, senior citizen's fellowships, softball teams, lady's groups,

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<sup>89</sup> James Strong, A Concise Dictionary of the words in the Greek New Testament (McClean, Virginia: MacDonald), p. 42. The Greek word *koinwnia* (*koinonia*) is translated in the King James Bible as fellowship, communion, communication, distribution and contribution. It involves the oneness of God's people as they share their lives one with another.

<sup>90</sup> Brand, p. 138.

<sup>91</sup> Ratz, The Velcro Church, p. 44.

<sup>92</sup> Win and Charles Arn, Closing the Evangelistic Backdoor, p. 30.

men's groups, work groups, retreats, Bible Studies, various ministry groups, newcomer classes, new member classes, and missionary groups as small groups.

### The Need for New Small Groups

Even when there is a good ratio of small groups to the total membership, there may still be a difficulty assimilating newcomers into these groups. This is one of the reasons a church must consider starting new groups on a regular basis. Heck, in his book on assimilation, believes in starting new groups since old, established groups are often difficult for new people to break into. "The longer a group is in existence, the greater the instinct for self-preservation and the stronger the desire to maintain existing friendship ties."<sup>93</sup>

Win and Charles Arn also suggest a new group ratio of 1:5. For every five relational groups in the church, one should have been started in the past two years. They believe that most groups reach a saturation point after 12-18 months from their formation. When a class is closed to new people, new people will be repelled not drawn. This usually results in a lack of growth and a failure to assimilate new people. Once these people try to penetrate a small group but find it difficult or impossible, they often will not try another group. This often leads to a higher drop out rate for new members. Of course this is not always the case, but in the average small group this happens. Some may come into this group and others may leave, but it is usually plateaued. New classes and new groups usually draw

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<sup>93</sup> Heck, New Member Assimilation, p. 27.

new people, especially adults. A church that desires to grow should consider starting new adult Sunday School classes. Don not force the division of older classes, just start new ones. Sunday School classes seem to be the most logical and the easiest new groups to start.<sup>94</sup>

In addition, Shuman concludes there is a great need to start new small groups. Usually after a person has been in a church for two or more years, they are about saturated with all the friends and relationships that they have time and energy to handle. As a result, new members and newcomers may find it hard to penetrate their sphere of fellowship. New groups made up of new people will readily accept others.<sup>95</sup>

Mills supports the previous research by saying, "A church cannot grow beyond its ability to assimilate people into the infrastructure (group life) of the church. If groups/classes are ingrown or exclusive, new people have difficulty becoming assimilated into the church. Starting new groups is the best way to guard against exclusiveness."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Win and Charles Arn, Closing the Evangelistic Backdoor, p. 30.

<sup>95</sup> Shuman, The Assimilation of New Adult Members, p. 89.

<sup>96</sup> Steve Mills, "Who is Holding the Rope?" (Springfield, Missouri: Assemblies of God, 1997), p. 1. <[www.we-build-people.org/wbp/leader\\_development/9301](http://www.we-build-people.org/wbp/leader_development/9301)>Jan. 8, 2000.

## The Sunday School as a Key Small Group

The small Sunday School structure provides one of the best means to properly assimilate people into the local church. Unless the Sunday School class is very large or is exclusive and saturated, it is the most logical small group in the church to begin assimilating the newcomer. Even though the potential is there, most Sunday School classes do very little in the assimilation of newcomers into the church. This is why most Sunday School classes (especially adult classes) must be examined and organized to support the assimilation process.

The class must have a teacher with a burden to reach and keep people for Christ. The teacher must indoctrinate his or her class concerning the mission of the harvest. He must teach his class to be open and warm toward newcomers. Each class should have an outreach coordinator. The names and phone numbers of adult newcomers who attend the worship services must be passed on to the outreach coordinator in the adult classes that are appropriate for their age or needs (such as single parent). The same should be true with the younger newcomers as well. The coordinator should make contact with the newcomers to build a relational bridge. Each class should have a hospitality coordinator. This person should be looking for ways to welcome the newcomers and to plan socials which will be conducive to fellowship and the building of new relationships. These informal gatherings help assimilate people into the church. Adult classes should have at least one social event every two months. "Relationships are built by

playing together as well as praying together.”<sup>97</sup> The church must provide opportunities for friendships to develop. This will not happen in the worship services alone.

### Other Small Groups in the Church

There are numerous other small groups a church can have. The church must be creative as it seeks to start new small groups for the purpose of assimilating newcomers into the church and reaching lost souls. Some of the small groups a church may have or consider are: choirs (adult, youth, Senior citizens), Senior citizen groups, special groups for ladies (all the ladies of the church, single mothers, mothers with small babies), missionary societies, softball teams, visitation teams, prayer groups, canvassing teams, helping hand groups and Bible studies.

Information should be given to the leaders of the various small groups in the church concerning these new people. According to age and interests, these leaders should make contact with these new people in order to get them involved with members of the church. Sunday School teachers, senior citizens leaders, youth workers, children’s directors, and heads of social events should be given names, addresses and phone numbers of these new people. If the approach to these new people communicates that the church is trying to get something from them in order to benefit the church, rather than offering to give to them, it will not

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<sup>97</sup> Dettner, The Assessment of Newcomer Assimilation, p. 82.

be received very well. The church should be ministering to them instead of them ministering to the church. The motive of the small group for wanting to incorporate a newcomer or new member is very important. Not only is the small group within the church essential to the assimilation process, but so also is the newcomer's involvement in a task or role within the church.

## Involvement

### The Importance of Involvement

Just as a newcomer's involvement in small groups is vital to their assimilation, so is their involvement in the ministry of the church. The church must help them find a task or role in the church's ministry. Peter Wagner identified two keys to the assimilation of new members. One was to get the new member involved in a small group. The other key was to assign the new member a task within the local church.<sup>98</sup> This is affirmed by Gary McIntosh and Glen Martin.<sup>99</sup>

Members who do not get involved in the ministry of the church by taking a role or doing a task in the church, usually drop out of the church and become inactive.<sup>100</sup> Involvement in a task gives them a sense of importance, of purpose and responsibility. It makes them feel needed. "Whether new members volunteer on their own initiative or are asked to serve in a specific area of ministry in the local church, they must be committed to some ministry in order to be completely

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<sup>98</sup> Wagner, Leading Your Church to Growth, p. 206.

<sup>99</sup> Gary McIntosh, Finding Them, Keeping Them, pp. 16-17.

<sup>100</sup> Brand, The Development of Strategies, p. 132.



assimilated into that church.”<sup>101</sup> People are drawn together when they work together. If a person does not get involved in ministry it will hinder their assimilation. Working together also builds relationships.<sup>102</sup> A failure to work together will keep a person from identifying with his new church family.<sup>103</sup>

### Providing Opportunities for Involvement

Opportunities must be provided for people to work together in the church. Win and Charles Arn have concluded that for every one hundred people a church has in the worship services, it should have at least sixty roles or tasks. In many of the fundamental churches a small group of people are fulfilling most of the tasks within the church. The 80/20 principle is that 80 percent of the work is done by 20 percent of the people. This work needs to be distributed more evenly among the congregation. Often it is not that others will not do, it is they have never been given the opportunity or they have never be trained to do. This lack of opportunity actually creates an environment within the church that produces inactive church members.<sup>104</sup>

A job list should be made of opportunities within the church. This list should be a part of a new member’s packet. It should include basic responsibilities for each task, the approximate time needed to fulfill the task, the particular time the

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<sup>101</sup> Burkum, A.C.T. – Assimilating New Members, p. 40.

<sup>102</sup> Detter, The Assessment of Newcomer Assimilation, p. 55.

<sup>103</sup> Ratz, The Velcro Church, p. 45.

<sup>104</sup> Win and Charles Arn, Closing the Evangelistic Backdoor, p. 30.

task would need to be done, the name and phone number of the person to contact if interested in getting involved, any qualifications (such as skills needed or length of membership), and upcoming training opportunities for the particular task.

#### Providing training for Involvement

If the church expects people to get involved in ministry and do it well, the church must provide training. This is one of the responsibilities of the pastor (Eph. 4:11-12). The church must give the people the knowledge and the skill training needed for the task so people can approach the work with confidence and not become frustrated and stop. Training need not be long and elaborate but it must be adequate. There should be training sessions taking place during the year for the various ministry opportunities of the church. Soul winning classes, teacher training, bus ministry training, nursery worker's training, jail ministry training, rest home ministry training, and assimilation ministry training should be a part of the church calendar. People must be helped to discover their spiritual gifts through talent surveys and spiritual gift analysis. People must be taught so they can be matched with ministry that fits their gifts. Involvement according to gifts and interests usually result in these people remaining active in the church.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Burkum, A.C.T. – Assimilating New Members, p. 45.

## Maturity

Training is important, but if the church expects to assimilate new members into the church it must realize the importance of spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity was the goal of Paul's preaching, teaching and warning (Col. 1:28). Spiritual maturity is also the work of pastors and teachers today (Eph. 4:11-16). A person cannot be properly assimilated into the local church if they do not grow and become a productive member. This maturity and growth takes place in the context of the local church. Burkum states that "God seems to have no plan for maturing individuals during this dispensation apart from a dynamic relationship with the community of believers. Salvation is an individual matter but sanctification is corporate."<sup>106</sup>

McIntosh and Martin give five strategies that will enable a church to have an effective assimilation process. One of these strategies is to help the people grow in their faith.<sup>107</sup> The immature believer is much more apt to become inactive than the mature, growing Christian. Because of this, the maturity of each new member must be high on the list of priorities the church has for the new member.

This can be done through personal discipleship. A mature Christian in the church can disciple a new member; thus, building a friendship as well as helping

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<sup>106</sup> Detter, The Assessment of Newcomer Assimilation, p. 23.

<sup>107</sup> Gary McIntosh, Finding Them, Keeping Them, p. 17.

the new member to grow in his or her faith. A new member's class can also be effective in this process. The Sunday School is a convenient place for the new member to attend and study the Bible with a small group. A properly organized Bible study can be helpful in the maturing process. The Bible is the key factor in the growth of a Christian. The new member packet should have a Bible reading schedule that is explained by the pastor, a deacon or an assigned person who gives the packet to the new member. The new member must learn to trust the Bible as the rule and authority for all they believe and how they live.<sup>108</sup>

### Classes for the Newcomer and the New Member

#### Newcomer Class

Instead of regular Sunday School, a class for newcomers should be added. This is not a new converts class, though new converts could certainly attend. The purpose of this class is to acquaint interested newcomers with the philosophy, the vision, and the ministry of the church; to help them form friendships and relationships; and to give them some basic Bible teaching in the area of salvation and spiritual growth. This class could continue for four weeks and run continuously. It should be structured so a person could enter at anytime and go through the four week cycle. It should be taught by the Pastor. This class might be called *The Pastor's Doorway Class* or *The Welcome Class* or even *The Discovery Class*. Team members who have befriended a newcomer would want to invite and

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<sup>108</sup> Burkum, A.C.T. – Assimilating New Members, p. 30.

accompany the newcomer to this class. The class should always have existing church members in it for the purpose of building relationships with the newcomers. This also provides a small group which is one of the essentials in the assimilation process (see Appendix Twelve).

### New Member Class

Morris explains the need for a new member's class by saying, "It seems to me that one of the contributing causes for the failure to conserve members in the average church is that the church ceases to have concern for the new member after he joins."<sup>109</sup> Ephesians 1:15-19 reveals the heart and desire of Paul for new Christians. New members need to know the importance of church membership and what is expected of them. This class helps them become familiar with the beliefs, purposes, vision, history, and practices of the church.<sup>110</sup> It is here that more friends and relationships can be established. It is also here that ministry opportunities can be presented. Appendix Fourteen gives a list of suggested topics for the new member's class

### Friendship Opportunities

The church must be so structured to aid in giving opportunities to build friendships. There must be opportunities for the newcomer to make friends and for the congregation to befriend the newcomer. This involves the church environment

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<sup>109</sup> Morriss, The Care of New Church Members, p. 187.

<sup>110</sup> Burkum, A.C.T. – Assimilating New Members, p. 32.

into which the new Christian is entering. Win and Charles Arn recommend a number of friendships that are necessary for proper assimilation. Each new person in the church should be able to identify at least seven friends in the church within the first six months. Friendship seems to be the strongest bond cementing new members to their new congregations. Studies have shown those who have not made these friends usually drop out of church and go back to old friends and often their old ways of life. There is a direct correlation between the number of friends a new person makes within the first six months and the rate of activity and the rate of drop out or inactivity. The more friends made, the less likely they are to drop out of church. Arn furnishes the following table below to track this correlation.<sup>111</sup>

50 Active and 50 Non-active members									
Number of friends in the church within the first six months	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Active	0	0	0	1	2	2	18	13	12
Drop Outs	8	13	14	8	4	2	1	0	0

Table 1

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<sup>111</sup> Win and Charles Arn, Closing the Evangelistic Backdoor, p. 30.

McIntosh and Martin also agree that making friends is one of the key elements in the assimilation process.<sup>112</sup> In explaining the need for friends, McIntosh and Martin use the illustration of the giant redwood tree in California. The roots of these trees grow close to the surface of the ground. These trees are vulnerable to strong winds. One notices how they grow in groves with their roots and branches intertwined. This enables them to literally hold each other up. They liken this to people who need others to help them when they face difficulties in life. This is one of the great needs for having friends at church.

#### Membership in the Church

In spite of these friendships, one of the fundamental weaknesses in many Baptist Churches is how people are welcomed into the membership and then how quickly they are forgotten afterwards. Membership in the average Baptist Church is often seen as an unimportant event. Often it involves no more than coming forward in church, giving your profession of faith, filling out a card of information and having the pastor tell the people you have come to join and a simple vote by the congregation. If a strategy is not in place to help the new member become a productive member, they will often become inactive. Experience shows that 80-90 percent of the inactive become inactive during the first six months of membership. There is much to be done to insure that new members who have come through the front door do not go out the back door. The church must make sure no one is lost

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<sup>112</sup> Gary McIntosh, Finding Them, Keeping Them, pp. 16-17.

once he or she has been reached through the ministries of our churches. There are many ways that new members can become assimilated into the church. What has already been said in this paper is vital to such assimilation (small groups, involvement in ministry, maturity, classes, friendship opportunities).

### Receiving New Members

There are three ways a person is usually received into the membership of a Baptist Church: 1) baptism upon their profession of faith in Christ, 2) transfer of letter from another church of like faith, 3) statement of faith. There are several examples that can be taught to stress the importance of membership. People must be taught that membership involves more than walking forward and being voted on. Church membership is a commitment of their lives to a body of believers.

The church this writer pastors will never receive anyone into membership if they walk forward at the end of a service unless they have been previously dealt with about membership. Many unsaved people may enter the church when there is not a thorough procedure for receiving people into membership. Every church must decide what their procedure will be.

Joining the church should be considered a major event for the new member. The church should celebrate the reception of new members. A receiving line should be established on the day they join for members to come by and give them the right hand of fellowship (Gal. 2:9). A future reception could be planned. Pictures could be taken and general information gathered and placed upon a



special new member board (see appendix fifteen). Some churches present several people who have requested membership over several weeks on one day with a reception following the service in which they join. The picture of the new member could be scanned into a computer along with the general information and could be mailed to the membership which would facilitate them getting to know the new members much more quickly. See Appendix Sixteen for details on this special mailing.

Some churches require a membership class before the final vote by the congregation to be received as a member. Even if there is no such class prior to membership, the person should certainly know what is expected of a church member. The importance of church membership must be communicated before they join. It not only prevents people who have no interest in commitment from joining, but it also makes the person joining sense that what they are doing is important and gives them a sense of belonging to something worthwhile. This is an aid to the assimilation process. Most serious minded people want to be a part of something that really matters.

A church could have a new member booklet or packet that is taken to the new member's home by a deacon or person on a membership committee. An appointment should be made with the new member to ensure ample time to do this. The booklet should contain a copy of the church constitution and by-laws, church covenant and doctrinal statement. It should also contain information explaining the importance of church membership. A brief history of the church,

along with pictures depicting its history would be an asset for any new member as they seek to identify with an existing congregation. Along with the history, a pictorial church directory could be included to aid the new member in getting to know people within the church. A description of all the church ministries should be included. Information about stewardship, tithing envelopes, and giving procedures should be a part of the packet. Placing a welcome letter from the pastor near the front of the packet is important. Also, a Bible reading schedule and a how to study the bible lesson could be a part of this packet. This packet should not just be handed to the new members but should be reviewed with them. Before leaving the home, the new member should be convinced of how delighted the church is that they are a part, how important their part will be, what is expected of them and a decision made concerning a ministry within the church they will consider. This would be an excellent time to find out if they are involved in a small group which is essential to assimilation.

#### New member follow up

In order for all of this to be successful, someone should be assigned to every new member to insure that proper follow up takes place. A church could consider having lay pastors take on this responsibility. There should be a predetermined plan for visits, calls, and mailings to the new member (see Appendix Thirteen for the new member follow up tracking card). Keep the new member informed about church life through orientation classes, news letters, regular mailings from the church, and announcements. Sponsor a special event for all new members – an evening with

the pastor and pastoral staff. The team member who originally befriended them should be allowed to accompany them to this event. This could be done on a monthly or bi-monthly basis depending on the size and growth of the church. A church might consider sending out a one month anniversary letter to assure the new member they are not taken for granted. This could be repeated on their one year membership anniversary. Accurate records would need to be kept and a person given this responsibility. There are many other ideas that can be used to help assimilate the new members into the local church.

### Monitoring the Assimilation Process

If a church expects to determine whether or not they are being successful in assimilating newcomers into the local church, then they must be able to measure this success. This not only helps the church know when it is succeeding but also where there are weak spots in the process. Since churches are dealing with the lives and souls of people no effort will be too great in helping to insure complete assimilation into the church.

Win Arn gives seven warning signs of an infrastructure problem that will result in the hindrance to assimilation. He states:

1. A significant number of people are becoming inactive or are transferring to other churches
2. Newcomers are having difficulty gaining a sense of belonging
3. Enlisting workers is difficult
4. Minor conflicts destabilize the congregation's equilibrium, and people leave the church
5. Pastoral care and visitation are primarily the responsibility of the pastor and staff

6. Attrition rate increases with pastoral changes
7. People's needs cannot be met through the existing groups<sup>113</sup>

Joel D. Heck in his book on assimilation says one can know if a member is being assimilated into the life of the congregation. He says the church must ask the following questions:

1. Does he or she have at least seven significant friendships in the church?
2. Does the person regularly attend worship services?
3. Does he or she have a meaningful and appropriate role/task within the church?
4. Does the person actively participate in a small group experience?<sup>114</sup>

Furthermore, Shuman gives eight characteristics of an assimilated church member:

1. Has at least seven friends in the church
2. Understands and is active in pursuing the goals of the church
3. Attends worship at least eight times per month
4. Reports a sense of spiritual growth and development as a result of his or her involvement
5. Regularly gives of his finances to the church
6. Shares his or her faith with unchurched friends and family
7. Has a meaningful role or task in the church
8. Is actively involved in one or more small groups<sup>115</sup>

Shuman also has an eight session seminar for the new members which deals with all eight of these characteristics.<sup>116</sup> This type teaching can be a great asset in the assimilation process. The themes of his eight sessions are as follows:

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<sup>113</sup> Win Arn (qtd. in Steve Mills, "Who is Holding the Rope," p. 2).

<sup>114</sup> Heck, New Member Assimilation, pp. 34-42

<sup>115</sup> Shuman, The Assimilation of New Adult Members, pp. 33-34.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. p. 88.

- Session 1 – Developing friendships
- Session 2 – Mission and vision of the church
- Session 3 – Worship participation
- Session 4 – Spiritual Growth
- Session 5 – Christian Stewardship
- Session 6 – Basics for sharing your faith
- Session 7 – Involvement in a role or a task
- Session 8 – Involvement in a small group<sup>117</sup>

In order to know if the new members are meeting the criteria of an assimilated member, there must be a scheduled *check-up*. There must be a system in place to review new members after two months and then again after six months. A suggested check list can be found in Appendix Thirteen. Someone must be assigned this task and have accountability or this particular aspect will go undone. The assimilation director could assign the team member who originally befriended this person. This is crucial to helping close the back door of the church. The first signs of inactivity must be noticed and addressed. When problems are seen in the lives of new members, action must be taken to encourage and help them in becoming a vital, integrated, incorporated part of the local church.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. pp. 88-124.

## CONCLUSION

The nature of ministry to people must draw upon the person and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has set the example for the church to follow. He came to do the work of the Father and has commissioned members of the church to continue His work in this world. His work in this dispensation includes the ministry of reconciliation and bringing people to a right relationship with God in salvation. It also includes cooperating with the Holy Spirit in bringing people into a meaningful relationship with His local church. God has a community of believers, a body, a family, a flock, a church to which He wants every believer to be properly associated with.

Because of this, the church must rise to the challenge of winning people and assimilating them into the local church so they might be active, productive disciples who will ultimately come to maturity in Christ and bring glory to God. Since people are like sheep without a shepherd (Mt. 9:35-37), the church must have compassion on them. The harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few. The assimilation ministry can be greatly used of God to reach the lost whom God allows to come into our assemblies and then see them incorporated into the church so they can grow, serve, fellowship and minister for the Lord.

Once this great need is understood by the pastor and others in the leadership of the church, it must be taught and shared with the congregation in an

effort to inform them, inspire them, and involve them in this ministry of assimilation. The church cannot assume people will be assimilated into the church without a plan, a strategy, preparation and training. When the church is awakened to its responsibility, then it can accomplish the will of God in this area.

Some of the most basic needs of people have been proven to be the making of friends and the building of relationships. This must be done with the people God sends to His church. Small groups must be provided as a haven for friendships to be made and grow. Opportunities must be given to new members to serve and become active in ministry. The pastor must preach and teach in such a way as to help bring men and women to maturity in Christ. Christians must reach out to and love the harvest for whom Christ died. It must be done now and it must be done effectively. It is the work of the church.

## APPENDIX ONE

## SUGGESTED SCHEDULES FOR ASSIMILATION TEAM TRAINING

The following are only suggested schedules. Each local church will need to find the best time for their scenario. It is suggested that approximately five hours of initial training be given to each team member. Other training will be given as the ministry grows and continues. Baby sitters will need to be provided to insure that all interested people can attend. It is suggested that consideration be given to having the training off the church campus, especially if there is a large number of people. By utilizing a community building in the community it will add emphasis upon what is being done.

Schedule: Option One

Saturday : 9:00 – 10:30am = Training

10:30-10:45am = Break (light refreshments)

12:00 –12:45pm = Light lunch provided for the team members  
in training

12:45 – 3:15pm = Training

Schedule: Option Two

Monday and Tuesday: 6:30 – 8:00pm = Training

8:00 – 8:15pm = Refreshments

8:15 – 9:15pm = Training



Schedule: Option Three

Friday: 7:00-9:00pm = Training

9:00-9:30pm = Fellowship time with refreshments

Saturday: 9:00-10:30am = Training

10:30-10:45 = Refreshments

10:45 –12:15pm = Training

## APPENDIX TWO

### PRAYER AND THE ASSIMILATION PROCESS

Since reaching newcomers and keeping them through assimilation is a spiritual battle, we must use spiritual weapons. II Corinthians 10:4-5 says, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

There should be a strategy to enlist people to pray for the salvation, the growth and the assimilation of newcomers into the local church. Below are some simple suggestions concerning how prayer for the assimilation process can be organized.

1. When visitor (guest) cards are given out to newcomers in the services, they can be invited to write any prayer request on the back they wish the church to pray with them about. These requests are given to the assimilation director who in turn gets them to prayer groups. This request can be a source of personal contact with the newcomer.
2. Senior Citizens can be mobilized and organized into prayer groups. This does not have to be strictly for assimilation purposes but can certainly involve newcomers. These groups can meet prior to or after a church service for the express purpose of praying for newcomers and their needs. The team member who has befriended the newcomer should be included in this prayer time. As people see God answer prayer, these senior saints will begin to get the burden and want to be more involved in the assimilation process.
3. A men's prayer band can be formed that meets on Saturday nights at the church. This prayer time can serve several purposes. The emphasis should be

on the Sunday services. These men can pray for God to send visitors that the church can minister to. This will enable the pastor during the services to let the newcomers know we have prayed and it is no accident they are there. Names of those who have just started coming can be prayed for. New members should also be a part of the prayer time. Prayer time should be given on behalf of the assimilation director, the team leaders and the team members as well. This involves more people in the assimilation process.

4. Team members can meet together during the week (prior to or after services are more convenient for people) to pray for newcomers and new members. This can be a time of sharing with each other and with the Lord. This will keep the burden of assimilation before them. Certainly, team members will want to meet as a group on the Sunday they are assigned to serve in greeting and befriending newcomers.
5. The pastor should meet with the assimilation director and the team leaders in his office at least once a month for prayer. This is not an organizational meeting but a sharing time and praying time. Team members should be one of the focus's of this prayer time. The overall assimilation ministry must be bathed in prayer.
6. Some churches have a prayer group who is praying during a regular scheduled visitation time. The writer of this paper has a group of praying men called the "Abraham Group." They meet on the night of the regularly scheduled churchwide visitation. A list of people visiting, whom they are visiting, and the purpose of the visit is given to them. They pray while others are out visiting. This type group could be organized to pray on Monday nights when the "cookie visits" are being made. Shut-ins of the church can be involved in this part of assimilation. They should be given a specific time to pray and specific names to pray for.

This above suggestions are in no way exhaustive. There are many other ways people can be challenged to pray for the assimilation ministry of the church. Other groups can be used.

## APPENDIX THREE

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ASSIMILATED CHURCH MEMBER<sup>118</sup>

1. An assimilated member has at least seven friends in the church.
2. An assimilated member understands and is active in pursuing the goals of the church.
3. An assimilated member attends worship at least three times per month.
4. An assimilated member reports a sense of spiritual growth and development as a result of his or her involvement in the church.
5. An assimilated member regularly gives to the church
6. An assimilated member shares his or her faith with unchurched friends and family.
7. An assimilated member has a meaningful role or task in the church, appropriate to his or her spiritual gifts.
8. An assimilated member is actively involved in a small group.

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<sup>118</sup> Shuman, The Assimilation of New Adult Members, p. 132.

## APPENDIX FOUR

## THE ASSIMILATION TEAM'S SUNDAY SCHEDULE

## 1. Before the Morning Service Begins

- A. Meet with the team in a designated area at least twenty minutes before the service begins. You may want to consider meeting before Sunday School, depending on the time and schedule of services. This time is for last minute instructions, encouragement and prayer. This is a ministry for the souls of men and women. Spiritual preparation is necessary for such a ministry. The meeting should be brief and should be led by the team leader.
- B. The team should be in the services a minimum of fifteen minutes prior to its beginning. The members of the assimilation team should be dismissed from Sunday School or other duties in order to be in the auditorium.
- C. The team members should be looking for what Dan Houts calls “divine appointments.” The team member should greet the newcomers and seek to build a friendship with them before service begins. See appendix five for a suggested conversation. If there are no newcomers the team members should pray for the Lord’s guidance to minister to a new member or a member that needs encouragement.

## 2. During the Morning Service

- A. The team members who are ministering that Sunday should sit at the back of the auditorium. This will allow them to observe newcomers who receive *visitor cards* (see appendix eight for a sample visitor card). When the ushers receive the cards back during the service, the team members will meet in the foyer or a room provided off from the auditorium to distribute the visitor cards. If a team member befriended a newcomer prior to the start of the service, they will take that person’s card.
- B. The team members should pray for the newcomer during the service. When the service ends, the team member should quietly slip down the aisle a few pews behind the newcomer they have been assigned. This could be done quietly during the benediction. This will allow the team member to be near the newcomer so they can reach them before they exit the auditorium.

### 3. After the Morning Service

- A. The team member should spend some time with the newcomer after the conclusion of the service. This is a good time to introduce the newcomer to the pastor and other team members. Genuine concern and acceptance should be shown during this time. Sensitivity to the needs of the newcomer after a Bible sermon has just been preached, can pay great dividends. Though they did not publicly respond to the gospel, they may be very receptive afterwards.
- B. Once the newcomers have left the building, the team members should have a brief meeting to share blessings from the contacts. The orange *Assimilation Tracking Card* should be filled in and given to the team leader. This will record the results of the team members interaction with the newcomer. The team leaders will give these cards to either the director or assimilation secretary.
- C. The team members should be given a *Week One Follow-up Tracking Card* to be filled out the following week. This will record the results of the Monday night cookie visit (see appendix thirteen ) and the Saturday follow-up call inviting them to return the next Sunday (see appendix eleven). This card must be given to the team leader the following Sunday. He will make sure the information is given to the assimilation secretary for recording.

## APPENDIX FIVE

## A SAMPLE CONVERSATION WITH A NEWCOMER ON SUNDAY MORNING

**1. How to introduce yourself to newcomer**

- 1) “Hi, my name’s \_\_\_\_\_; what’s yours?” *John!* “John, I have a hard time remembering names, would it be alright if I wrote your name down?”
- 2) “How long have you been coming to this church?” *This is our first Sunday.* “That’s great. It’s good to have you. I always enjoy meeting new people who come to our church. I believe you will enjoy the services. We have a good church.”
- 3) “Introduce me to your family.” (if it is a family) Pay special attention to the wife’s name and the children’s names also. Repeat them so you can remember them or write them down also.

**2. How to Learn more about them.**

- 1) Ask the children what school they go to and what grade they are in. Ask them if they like school.
- 2) Say to parents, “you have some wonderful kids. I’m sure you stay busy with them. I know I do with my kids (or my kids are grown but my grandkids keep me going).” (you could stop here and tell a little about your family)
- 3) “You folks live here in King?” *No, we live in Rural Hall.* “We’ve have a number of people in our church from Rural Hall. Where in Rural Hall?”
- 4) “How long have you folks lived in Rural Hall?”
  - a) If less than 1 or 2 years – “Where did you folks live before moving here?”  
*W.Va.*
  - b) If for many years – “Do you have family who live around here?”  
*Yes, all our family lives around Winston-Salem.*
- 5) If they have no family living nearby and have not been here very long, they may be lonely and may be looking friends.  
 “What’s been the biggest adjustment you’ve had to make moving here?”  
 “Some people find it hard to make a lot of friends. Have you found this true?”  
*We’ve made some friends but not too many – mostly at work.*  
 “One of the reasons I like this church so much is that I have found a lot of friends here – people who really care about each other – really love each other. The Lord sure has changed my life since I started attending here.”

- 6) "Where do you work?" – *Sarah Lee*. "I have a good friend who works in shipping there."
- 7) "How did you find out about our church?" (if a member invited them and you know that member be sure to speak well of that member).

### **3. How to find their need**

- 1) "If God would do a miracle for you today, what would you want Him to do?" (If they hesitate too long – "most of us never think about that do we?")
- 2) If they mention some need or if they have already mentioned some other needs about work, family, etc., then assure them you will be praying for them.

### **4. Demonstrate that you really care**

- 1) "I enjoy praying for people because I know the Lord answers pray and meets our needs. Would it be alright if I prayed with you about \_\_\_\_\_?"
- 2) If they didn't mention anything above to pray about, might say, "I enjoy praying for people because I know the Lord answers pray and meets our needs. Is there anything I can pray about with you?"
- 3) If possible, bow and pray a short simple prayer from your heart, using their names if possible and remembering their need and thanking the Lord for them. Be sure you do not embarrass them in any way.

### **5. Concluding the initial contact**

- 1) "I've really enjoyed talking with you folks. You have a wonderful family. I'm really glad you came today. If I can help you folks in any way, please be sure to let me know. Again, my name is "Roger..... Roger Baker". God bless you.
- 2) If this conversation took place after the service, you would want to conclude by saying:  
  
"Would it be alright if I introduced you to some of my friends?"  
(Be sure to introduce them to your Team Leader and to any other people).  
"Before you leave, I want you to meet our pastor." – bring them to see the pastor.



## APPENDIX SIX

## THE ASSIMILATION TEAM'S SCHEDULE FOR WEEK ONE

1. The team member who befriended the newcomer will visit the newcomer on Monday night if possible. The longer the time before the team member makes the visit the less effective the visit will be.
2. The team member should be supplied with a small basket of home baked cookies. This is given to the newcomer by the team member as an expression of the church's love and appreciation for the newcomer. The purpose is to make "deposits of love."<sup>119</sup>
3. This should not be a visit where the team member tries to sell the church. It must be a visit where genuine Christ-like love is expressed. An opportunity to share the gospel should not be missed but also should not be forced. The team member must be sensitive to the needs of the newcomer and the leading of the Lord.
4. The team member should make the newcomer a special object of prayer during the week. Spiritual battles call for spiritual weapons (2 Cor. 10:4-5).
5. The team member should call the newcomer on Saturday of the same week. The purpose of the call is to invite the newcomer to visit the church again the next day. See appendix five for a sample conversation. This call is vital to the success of getting the newcomer to return.
6. The team member should be waiting on Sunday morning to meet the newcomer who has promised to return. It is good if the team member can sit with the newcomer on this second visit. The newcomer should also be introduced to other caring people in the church.

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<sup>119</sup> Houts, Team Member Manual, p. 63.

## APPENDIX SEVEN

## ASSIMILATION MINISTRY SIGN UP

“Believing that God can use even me to love people and reach them for Christ”

If couples sign, please sign on a separate line. PLEASE PRINT

**NAME & PHONE NUMBER**

**TRAINING DATES OK?**  
(Oct.18-19 – Mon & Tues)

1.	_____ - _____	yes	no
2.	_____ - _____	yes	no
3.	_____ - _____	yes	no
4.	_____ - _____	yes	no
5.	_____ - _____	yes	no
6.	_____ - _____	yes	no
7.	_____ - _____	yes	no
8.	_____ - _____	yes	no
9.	_____ - _____	yes	no
10.	_____ - _____	yes	no
11.	_____ - _____	yes	no
12.	_____ - _____	yes	no
13.	_____ - _____	yes	no
14.	_____ - _____	yes	no
15.	_____ - _____	yes	no

APPENDIX EIGHT  
SAMPLE VISITOR CARD

<b>FIRST OR SECOND TIME ATTENDER</b> <b>“Prayer Request Card”</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> First time attender	<input type="checkbox"/> Second time attender
Date: _____	
Name: _____ Spouse: _____	
Address: _____	
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____	
Age: <input type="checkbox"/> under 12 <input type="checkbox"/> 13-18 yr <input type="checkbox"/> 19-29 yr <input type="checkbox"/> 30-39 yr <input type="checkbox"/> 40-55 yr <input type="checkbox"/> over 55	
<input type="checkbox"/> single <input type="checkbox"/> married <input type="checkbox"/> single parent	
<b>Your prayer request:</b> _____	
<hr/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> I would like more information about the church <input type="checkbox"/> I am looking for a church home <input type="checkbox"/> I moved into this area in the past 12 months <input type="checkbox"/> I would like for the pastor to call me	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">           Care Leader _____            Care Minister _____            Section/Row _____ / _____            AM   PM   WED   OTHER         </div>
<b><i>We are so glad you came today!</i></b>	

## APPENDIX NINE

## COOKIE VISIT

**Purpose:** To continue to build a friendship bridge between the newcomer and the team member who befriended them on Sunday by giving them this gift of cookies.

**Assigned to:** The team member who became their friend on Sunday.

**Dialogue: Conversation at the door**<sup>120</sup>

“Hello John (or Mary). Remember me? Roger Baker from Calvary Baptist Church. Just wanted to drop by and give you a gift and let you know how much we appreciated you being with us this past Sunday. It’s not a lot, just a batch of cookies made by one of our best cooks at church. But its our way of saying we care about you and your family.”  
Give them the cookies and wait for their response.

**If they invite you in:** “Thanks, we’ll stay just a few minutes.” (if you say this make sure you only stay a few minutes). Good time to ask them how they liked the church. If there was a need you prayed about, reassure them you are still praying. If for a sick person, ask them how they are doing. Be sure to give a testimony of what the Lord means to you or how you were saved if the opportunity arises.

**If they do not invite you in:** If you feel comfortable, talk a little at the door. Then you might want to say, “It was good having you visit Sunday. If I can be of help to you or your family in any way, just let me know. By the way, here is a gift certificate for you. Bring this back to church next Sunday, give it to someone in the book store in the foyer and they’ll give you your choice of a free book, a sermon tape, or a coffee mug. I’m sure you will enjoy either one of them. God bless you. I enjoyed seeing you again. Maybe we can get together sometimes.”

**If not home:** You may leave it at their door if it is appropriate and easy for them to find. Make sure you follow up with a phone call later that same night.

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<sup>120</sup> Houts, Team Member Manual, pp. 64-65.

## APPENDIX TEN

## SAMPLE PASTOR'S LETTER TO NEWCOMERS

## Church Letterhead

March 16, 2000

Tom Jones  
222 Some Street  
Anywhere, North Carolina 27000

Dear Tom,

It was our joy to have you visit with us this past Sunday. I hope the services were a blessing in your life. I also hope you received a friendly and warm welcome at Calvary. I also hope you could tell we really do care about people. Everyone is important to us and to the Lord. We are just ordinary people for whom the Lord has done some wonderful things. We are so grateful for the changes He has made in our lives. Only the Lord could do this for us. I'm so glad being a Christian is more than just being religious.

We really would like to be your friend. I hope you can return real soon. We are always praying that the Lord will send people to Calvary that we can be a blessing to. That sure is our goal. We believe we honor Him when we love people and seek to minister to them.

If I can ever be of help to you or your family, please don't hesitate to call me at 983-3728. Hope to see you real soon. God bless you.

Yours in Christ,

Roger Baker, Pastor

## APPENDIX ELEVEN

## SATURDAY MORNING PHONE CALL

This call is made with the intent of inviting the newcomer back to church. The entire week, no one has actually invited them back to church until Saturday morning. The same person who befriended them on the previous Sunday and delivered the cookies earlier in the week will invite them. This makes it much more personal. If there is no answer on the first call, the team member should call throughout the day on Saturday until they reach someone. It would not be wise to leave a message on the answering machine unless all other efforts to talk with them personally have failed. An answering machine is not personal and you do not get a response from it.

## Sample Conversation

“Hello, this is Roger from Calvary Baptist Church. How have you been doing this week John?” (response) *Ask them about any special needs they shared with you the Sunday before or during the cookie visit. Let them know you have prayed about these needs. Ask about the family by name.* “How’s little Jane doing? She sure is a sweet little girl.”

“John, Diane and I were talking about how much we enjoyed meeting you and Sue and little Jane last week. We were wondering, if you don’t have any place special to go to church tomorrow, we would really like to see you all again. In fact, you know how crowded our church can be...we were thinking, I could meet you in the foyer near the front door and Diane could save some seats so we could sit together tomorrow. Would that be OK?” (response) “That’s great. I’ll meet you in the foyer about 10:45am. Looking forward to seeing you tomorrow. I really have enjoyed getting to know you. Tell Sue and Jane we said hello. God bless you. See you tomorrow John. Good bye.”

## APPENDIX TWELVE

## PASTOR'S CLASS FOR NEWCOMERS

Schedule:

Week 1: New vision – understanding the goals, purposes and vision of the church

Week 2: New church – understanding the beliefs, history, and style of the church

Week 3: New life – understanding your relationship with Christ

Week 4: New family – understanding ministry and membership

Objectives:

1. Inform – People are often looking for a church that has a clear vision and a strong sense of mission. Communicating such things as the church's history, vision, goals, beliefs and worship style helps newcomers understand a church.
2. Interact – Relationship in the core of Christianity. It is also one of the key elements in assimilating a newcomer. Newcomers will build relationships with others in the class. A warm, friendly, informal atmosphere should be created. Coffee and light refreshments help to create such an atmosphere
3. Involve – The class members should be informed about the different ministry opportunities within the church. Those who have joined should be helped in finding a place of service. Involvement is one of the vital keys in the assimilation process.

Considerations:

1. Every newcomer should be invited and encouraged to attend. The team member who befriended them should invite them and attend with them.
2. Every person who desires membership in the church should be required to attend. New members need to know the church's vision and goals.
3. Pastor should lead this class.
4. By the end of the class, newcomers should have built some friendships and relationships.
5. The class should have a leader and a host/hostess. This should be a member of the church. This again will help build relational bridges to the congregation.
6. Establish a time (week night, during Sunday School, etc), place, format and a curriculum.

APPENDIX THIRTEEN  
RECORD KEEPING CARDS

SAMPLE ASSIMILATION MINISTRY TRACKING CARD

**ASSIMILATION MINISTRY TRACKING CARD  
(FIRST VISIT)**

Team Leader: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Team Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Newcomer: \_\_\_\_\_

Please give all the information you learned about the guest, such as:

\*Did you get to pray with them?

\*How did they respond to your ministry (receptive, reluctant)?

\*Discern their relation with the Lord?

\*Did they reveal any needs?

\*Other comments:

\*List each family member on back:



SAMPLE WEEK ONE – FOLLOW UP TRACKING CARD

**WEEK ONE – FOLLOW UP TRACKING CARD  
(Monday and Saturday)**

Team Leader: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Team Member: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Newcomer: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

1. Monday night cookie Crusade.

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2. Saturday morning invitation to Church

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## NEW MEMBER FOLLOW UP TRACKING CARD

**NEW MEMBER FOLLOW UP TRACKING CARD**

(For Office Use)

Name of Member \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Date member joined \_\_\_\_\_

**Initial**

\_\_\_ Name added to the church mailing list

\_\_\_ Name added to the Church Phone Book

\_\_\_ Pastor letter sent the week after member joined

\_\_\_ Deacon's letter sent during first month after member joined

\_\_\_ In home visit to review New Member Booklet

\*Ministry they are interested in? \_\_\_\_\_

\*Any problems need to be addressed? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Six month Assimilation Check list completed

\_\_\_ One year anniversary letter sent from Pastor

Comments:

## SAMPLE ASSIMILATION CHECK LIST

**Six Month Assimilation Tracking Card**  
**“Check List”**

Team Member \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of new disciple: \_\_\_\_\_

Steps Accomplished:                      Date they first attended: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Salvation

\_\_\_ Baptism

\_\_\_ Church membership

\_\_\_ Sunday School class (which? \_\_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_ Faithful to church services

\_\_\_ Involved in a meaningful ministry (what? \_\_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_ Completed doorway class or other recommended class \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Involved in the Assimilation Ministry

\_\_\_ Other small groups involved in: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Daily Bible Reading and Prayer

\_\_\_ Names of close friends: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

## APPENDIX FOURTEEN

## TOPICS FOR A NEW MEMBER'S CLASS\*

1. Salvation and assurance
2. Church membership and baptism
3. New life in Christ
4. Growing in Christ
5. The Bible and you
6. The Church and its covenant
7. The Church and its beliefs
8. The Church working together as a team
9. The Church ministering to others
10. The Church - its history and its future
11. The Church and your home
12. Sharing your faith
13. Prayer
14. How to deal with sin

\* These are only suggested topics. A church must decide what is best to teach its new members. It is wise not to spread the classes over too long a period of time. The pastor or an able teacher should do this vital teaching. The pastor should certainly want to teach concerning the Church's history and its future.

## APPENDIX FIFTEEN

## NEW MEMBER BOARD

1. The New Member should be told what we do with the new member board so they will know why we want a picture and also why we are asking questions.
2. Have a person assigned to take pictures of new members on the Sunday they join. If they have children who are not actually joining, the children should be included in the picture if possible.
3. Briefly interview the new member or give them a short questionnaire to fill in. Make sure they know this will be used on a public "Getting to Know You" board. Only general information should be sought. The new member should be free to give only the information he or she does not mind being made public on the board. General information should be gathered.
  - a) Name or names of the new member(s)
  - b) Address
  - c) Phone numbers
  - d) Children's names
  - e) Birthdates (no years given for adults without their approval)
  - f) vocation, hobbies, interests, etc
  - g) How long they have been a Christian
  - h) If they are involved in a small group at the present
4. The size and arrangement of the board will depend upon the size and growth rate of the church. The average church may consider a board where each new member is given an 8 ½ x 11 space. This should accommodate their picture and general information. Depending on the growth rate of the church, the board should hold 8-16 new members. This information should remain on the board for at least one to three months.
5. A person must be assigned to keep the board up-to-date and very attractive.
6. The title of the board should be "Getting to Know You." This board should be a very nice built board with an attractive background. Each person's picture and information could be placed on light colored construction paper, which will serve as a background.
7. The board should be displayed in a very prominent location so that many of the church people will pass by it. The better the location, the better it will serve its purpose.

**GETTING TO KNOW YOU**

## APPENDIX SIXTEEN

## A SPECIAL NEW MEMBER MAILING FROM THE CHURCH

As has been presented in chapter four of the paper, one of the keys to assimilation is the newcomer and new member being able to build relationships and friendships within the church. It has been established that the existing church members carry much of the responsibility to see that this happens. The church leadership must make it easy for existing church members to get to know new members. One way this can be quickly enhanced is through a “New Member Mailing.”

1. Once the new member has joined and had his or her picture taken for the “Getting to Know You” board, it can be used for a mailing to existing church members.
2. The picture can be scanned into a computer and enlarged. This picture and general information can be sent in the form of a mailing to existing church members. This will help the existing membership to immediately identify the new member more quickly. They can now put a name and a face together. This will also make it more comfortable for an existing member to approach a new member since they now know their name and something about them. This will aid the process of assimilation.
3. The following information could be included in the mailing. It should have been gathered from the brief interview for information for the “Getting to Know You” board (see appendix fifteen).
  - a) Name of new member or members
  - b) Address
  - c) Phone number (if not unlisted)
  - d) Children’s names (if any children at home) and ages
  - e) Birth dates (no years given on adults, only months and days)
  - f) Vocation, hobbies, interests, etc.
  - g) How long they have been a Christian
  - h) If they are involved in any small group at the present

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