

ASSIMILATION PROCESS

(Some information was compiled from *Fusion* by Nelson Searcy)

A church's assimilation process is taking people through the various levels of commitment to a church. Rick Warren outlines them as follows:

- Community (Unchurched Individuals)
- Crowd (Regular Attenders)
- Congregation (Members)
- Committed (Maturing/Involved Members)
- Core (Lay Leaders)

The church's goal and purpose is to evangelize and disciple the lost. With this being its primary purpose, the process listed below is meant as a tool to help ensure this is done most effectively. The process outlined below will not address an outreach strategy to impact those in the 'Community' category as it is assumed that is already happening. This process will address the steps to assimilate individuals at the point when they walk through the church doors.

STEP ONE - Context

- Establish Assimilation Ratio (either current or a goal)
 - How many first time visitors do you have per 100 regular attenders?
 - 3:100 - Maintaining Church
 - 5:100 - Steadily Growing Church
 - 7-10:100 - Rapidly Growing Church
- What are the primary types of visitors you anticipate having? (your target: middle class adults, lower-middle class adults, young adults, youth, etc.)
- What is your end goal?
 - Is it regular attendance?
 - Is it membership?
 - Is it leadership?
 - Is it something else?

STEP TWO - Creation

- Establish an effective process to connect your target individuals to the vision and discipleship processes of your church.
- Remember this principle: **Everything you do should be done with the first-time guest in mind.**
- Pre-Service (From the Street to the Seat)
 1. Greeted
 - Ensure a guest's first impression is a good one. You only have 7 minutes to give a good first impression, maximize this 7 minutes.
 - Items to take note of:
 - Parking:
 - Is there adequate parking?
 - Is it easily identified and accessible by outsiders/guests?
 - Do you need people to assist guests to the entrance?
 - Have they been greeted by our parking team?
 - Entrance:
 - Do you have adequate signage directing people to the entrance of the church?
 - Is it necessary to have greeters outside to direct people?
 - Is the entrance aesthetically pleasing and inviting?
 - Entry: Does the entryway set a 'welcoming' tone? Is it dark/gloomy? Is the first scent a guest smells a good one?
 - Are there individuals greeting a guest with a joyful, excited attitude in the entryway?
 - "Greeters should practically radiate the underlying message you want to send to your guests: "We are nice people, and we are glad you are here!""
 - Make sure your greeters/hosts understand the huge importance in their role. They are the front lines - they set the tone for how a guest will perceive the rest of the entire service.
 - FTG Greeters should:
 - Be presentable in their attire and look. Make sure they are adequately supplied with breath mints and smell nice.
 - Have a name tag/lanyard identifying them as a volunteer/ team member.
 - Welcome guests with a big smile and possibly even a handshake.
 - There should be 2-3 greeters in the Lobby. We don't want to overwhelm guests with a huge army of people, but at the same time if it's only one person that just looks sad.
 - If possible, have multiple levels of greeters/hosts. If you're meeting space is a distance from the entrance, position greeters at major hallway intersections/doorways.

2. Directed

- Once a guest walks in the front door:
 - Where do they go? (Is there signage or are there individuals helping them discover this?) You need signs for:
 - Bathrooms
 - Kid's Areas (Elementary, Preschool, Nursery)
 - Connection Areas (coffee, guest central, etc.)
 - "Every good system needs to be backed up. Let your staff and greeters serve as backup to your signs."
 - What do they do? (Clarity will always ease anxiety. Help ease a guest's anxiety with adequate explanation.)

3. Treated

- "What do first-time guests want to feel? Respected and welcome."
 - Go above and beyond to make guests feel welcome, but do so with consistency. It is very important for both guests and regular attenders to see a consistent process in place for rolling out the 'red carpet'.
 - "When you give [guests] a consistent pre-service experience that makes them feel important, their skepticism lowers while their positive impression and curiosity rises, leaving you in the perfect position to make a real spiritual impact."
- Hospitality Area
 - Staff with friendly, welcoming people
 - Have coffee or other drink options (tea, juice, water, etc.)
 - Provide, at least during high traffic times, some kind of food option (muffins, bagels, donuts, etc.). Food can go a long way in make a solid first-impression. Quality, not extravagance is the key.
 - Have information about the church. (Brochure, Info Cards, etc.)
 - If they have children, they're directed to the kids check-in and then escorted to the kids rooms to meet teachers, etc.

4. Seated

- Have ushers/service hosts positioned at the back of the seating area. As guests walk into the seating area, they are there as a personal guide to their seat. This usher/service host should:
 - Look presentable & have some sort of name tag/lanyard identifying them as an official 'usher/service host'. This will help a guest understand this person was intentionally placed here to help you.
 - Welcome guests with a friendly handshake & smile.
 - Possibly have a bulletin/service information to hand guests/attenders (if applicable)
 - Joyfully volunteer to help them find an open seat/seats.
 - Ask the guests if they have a preference on the location of the seats (if space is available).

- Walk them to the best available open seat (avoid the very front row or back row).
- Kindly ask those already seated in that row to either move toward the middle or stand for the guests.
- Before the usher/service host returns to his/her post ask the guests if there is anything else he/she can do for them?
- The usher/service host then returns to their previous location at the back of the seating area.

STEP THREE - Collection

- Once a person is seated, now they are more prepared to enjoy the service. Remember to keep the guest in mind in all that you're doing and saying in the service.
- To help this first-time guest connect with the church and what it offers, there has to be information gathered at some point.
 - The primary means to do this is through a connection card/tear-off. This may be a card, a tear-off from the bulletin or even part of a friendship pad/booklet that is passed. However it is done, this is key. The card/information piece should include a place for a guest's:
 - Name
 - Email Address
 - Address
 - Phone Number
 - Age Bracket
 - How they heard about the church?
 - Some churches will also use this card/form to help keep attendance for regular attenders as well.
 - Provide a time in the service when guests/regular attenders are filling out this card. If you don't provide the intentional time, the majority of people will not fill it out.
 - Communicate clear action steps for the card.
 - Should it be placed in the offering?
 - Should it be returned to the hospitality area?
 - Should it be used for something else?
 - Give compelling motivation to turn the card in.
 - Whatever the means to collecting this card, make sure guests have some incentive to turn it in. This might include, but is not limited to:
 - Positive Peer Pressure: Having everyone fill out the card at the same time. Also, this allows guests to not feel left out during the offering. They are able to put something in the offering, their info/guest card.
 - A Gift: They turn in the gift card in the hospitality area and receive a gift. (a book, gift card, etc. - Make sure it's something motivating and not just a mug/pen with your church's logo on it)
 - The opportunity to get more info about the church.

STEP FOUR - Connection

- Now that you've collected all the necessary info, you want to establish a good follow-up process. This step is key, because without follow-up, collecting the information is useless.
- Before actual follow-up takes place, you want to plug the information into a church database.
- This follow-up should be "*Fast, Friendly, and Functional.*"
- **Post-Service Follow-up**
 - Once the service is over, you need some way to connect with new guests. As was mentioned above, a connection card will help you collect information, but you also want to at least provide opportunity for them to connect with a person. Not every person will want this, but make it available.
 - In order to do this, you need to have a Guest/Information Center ('Info Central') that is manned by friendly, welcoming individuals ready to meet, greet and answer any questions guests might have.
 - Here are items that should be at this table:
 - Clear signage - make sure this table/area is easily accessible by guests and very clearly marked.
 - It should be positioned in an area close to or on the way to the exit.
 - If possible, make sure this area does not block the flow of foot traffic toward the exit though. You want to provide guests the opportunity to stop and talk if they so choose.
 - Information about the ministries offered by the church (children's, youth, small groups, etc.)
 - Information about next steps (Spiritual Breakthrough, Membership, Water Baptism, etc.)
 - Connection Cards (in case a guest has failed to get a card or loses their card)
 - A gift for first time guests - this can be either picked up at the guest's leisure or redeemed by turning in their connection card (gift suggestions: a short, but relevant book; a coffee gift card; a relevant worship CD;) - with the gift, make sure you include a brief note/letter from your pastor thanking them for attending and inviting them back the following weekend. We include our FTG info case.
- **Post-Weekend Follow-up**
 - In order to be most effective in this step of the follow-up process, make sure you have a capable staff member/volunteer taking the lead with this area. Their goal is to not only follow-through with this process, but to develop a reliable team of volunteers to help. This is usually more than one person can handle on their own.
 - Your goal with the post-weekend follow-up is to help guests see that they are valued and are a priority. In order to do this, you want to follow-up in two ways:
 - **36 Hour Email** - This email accomplishes a few things:
 - This follow-up is most effective for communities/churches where the majority of attenders/guests utilize email. If this is not the case, go to the next form of follow-up with the 'Follow-up Card'. (see below)

- Helps guest see that you appreciated them attending and then invite them back the next Sunday.
- It should be sent from the pastor (whether it actually is or not, it should be sent from him/her) - this can be similar to the note/letter that is included with the free gift following the service.
- Make it as personal as possible (mention the current series, how it was great to have them in the service, etc.)
- Provide a link to a very short online survey (keep it positive):
 - What did you notice first?
 - What did you like best?
 - What was your overall impression?
 - How can we pray with you?
 - Name
 - Email Address
- This email should be sent on Monday between 2:00-3:00pm. This is the optimal time for someone to receive an email as it doesn't get lost in the weekend emails and is received at a time when individuals are looking for a brief distraction at work.
- **Follow-up Card** - Here's a few items concerning this next step in follow-up:
 - This should be sent by Tuesday at the latest. Your goal is that they receive the card by Thursday of that week.
 - Make sure the greeting card/post card is somehow abnormally shaped. You don't want it to be in an envelope that blends in with all the bills or other items in their mail. This will cause it to stand out and catch the eye of the recipient.
 - This is another opportunity to provide your guest with a 'nice surprise'.
 - Have a handwritten note from the pastor in a greeting card or on the back of a postcard. (Stay away from stock letters that are impersonal. Make this as functional, but personal as possible. Your goal is that guests feel noticed and valued.)
 - Hi [guests name],

Great to see you on Sunday at New Life Church. We hope your time with us was both meaningful and relevant to your life - and that you had a good time, too!

Enclosed is a [description of small gift]...[make some reference to them using the card (coffee, gas, etc.) on us!] We hope to see you again soon. Hope you have a great week!

God bless,

[Signature of pastor who taught that Sunday, if that pastor is on staff - if not have the senior pastor's signature]

[Church Name]

[Church Website]

- Include a gift card of some sort with the greeting card/postcard (It doesn't need to be more than \$5). Here are a few suggestions:
 - Starbucks/Orange Leaf gift card
 - Gift Card to a local coffee shop (work out a deal with the local coffee shop that when a guest brings that gift card in, they get their coffee in a cup with your church logo on it, or put a sleeve on the cup with your church logo on it.)
 - Gift card to a local grocery store
 - Gas Card
- If available, include a postcard or info about your current series or events.
- **One-Month Follow-up Letter**
 - This letter is only for those guests that receive each of the previous follow-up items and yet have not returned. You don't want to be too pushy, but just let them know they are valued.
 - This letter should be sent on church letterhead from the pastor a month after their initial visit and include:
 - Thank them for visiting last month.
 - Explain the brief mission of your church (in a non-churchy way).
 - Touch on something that is coming up (a new series, launch of small groups, a big event, etc.)
 - Let them know the church is available to help them in any way and they can feel free to contact the church if they need anything.
 - Provide the necessary contact info (website would be best)
 - Let them know you hope to see them at the church in the future.
 - Signed by the pastor.
 - Include an audio CD of a message that was preached over that last month.

- **Second-Time Guest Follow-up**

- "When your guests return for a second look, you've won 80 percent of the battle of gaining new regular attenders and have drastically increased the chances that they will begin a journey with Christ."
- Your goal in this step is the very similar to your goal for first-time guests: to have them fill out their connection card/friendship pad, only this time check 'Second-Time Guest'.
- These guests will be more likely to check that box than first-time guests, because they know that they received 'gifts' from filling out this card as 'first-time guests'. As Andy Stanley says, "What gets rewarded, gets repeated".
- In addition to them identifying themselves as 'second-time guests', you want to start to create movement through your discipleship process. Your goal is not that they stay simply as guests, but that they start to take clear next steps toward discipleship/involvement.
 - These can be provided on the back of the card, in a bulletin or on a screen. Whatever it might be, you want to once again give clear action steps connected to a clear explanation of why these next steps are important. (Ex: Here at New

Life Church small groups are a valuable way for everyone to grow and develop into more of who God has created us to be. If you are new or have never participated, I would encourage you to join a small group and see what the excitement is all about!

- Give these 'second-time guests' a chance to take a step that requires a deeper level of commitment. Mention these action points/next steps at a couple times in the service (when you encourage people to fill out their info, at the beginning of the message, or in the message)
- **Post-Service Follow-Up**
 - **36-Hour Email** - this second email should include:
 - A thank you from the pastor for returning.
 - An invitation to fill out a more in depth survey:
 - What most influenced your decision to attend [NLC] a second time?
 - What was most memorable about your first or second time at [NLC]?
 - Would you feel comfortable inviting your friends to attend [NLC] with you? Why?
 - How could we improve your experience?
 - Would you be interested in learning more about:
 - Small Groups?
 - Serving on Sundays?
 - Volunteering during the week?
 - Name
 - Email Address
 - Give them opportunities to take next steps and provide them with a link in the email to what those next steps might be.
 - **Follow-Up Letter**
 - Make sure this is still personalized, but can be a little more formal. (Don't send in church envelope, but can be on church letterhead)
 - Thank them for returning.
 - Include a sermon CD of a recent 'Vision' message you have preached. (Recent would be our 27th anniversary message)
 - Invite them to let you know if there's anything the church can do to help them.
 - Encourage them toward some next steps.

STEP FIVE - Commitment

- As mentioned above, once a guest attends two times, you want to start to connect them with some clear next steps. Below I outline what those next steps should be:
 - Spiritual Breakthrough Weekend (SBW)
 - This is a time for new believers to experience freedom from their hurts, habits and hang-up.
 - Provide this 2-3 times a year.
 - This is the first step in your membership process.
 - There are four follow-up classes (spread over the following four weeks) individuals can attend if they want to complete the membership process.
 - Get Acquainted Weekend
 - We could provide a lunch upstairs in the new fellowship room after church.
 - Provide this 2-3 times a year.
 - This is all about getting to know the people and introduce them to the vision and leadership at NLC.
 - Small Groups
 - Small Groups should take place in semesters that fit your churches schedule (typically: fall, winter, spring)
 - If you have a 'new believers'/basics of Christianity small group, this is usually the best one to plug new people into.
 - Provide clear entry points for guests. (Where do they get info about the small groups? How do they join a small group? When is the best time to join a small group?)
 - Water Baptism
 - This typically takes place the same weekend as the SBW, but does not need to be as frequently done as the SBW unless there is an adequate amount of candidates.
 - You want to have clear scheduled times for this each year, though. This provides clarity for attenders so they know when each year water baptisms will take place. Clarity helps to create movement through your discipleship process.

INFO CENTRAL VOLUNTEER OVERVIEW

- Involve yourself in visiting and learning about the various worship experiences of the church.
- Please respect your fellow servants and arrive 30 minutes before the service and plan to stay 30 minutes after the service or until relieved.
- Read and familiarize yourself with the weekly bulletin/communicator. This is where you will find the most recent information for Sunday morning and the opportunities available to our members and guests.
- If you have a lost & found, review the contents of the Lost & Found.
- Check the Center for new brochures or information.
- In order to serve guests, please face forward at all times while serving.
- Always be alert to someone approaching the table. Engage them immediately and offer assistance.
- A simple greeting such as, “Are you a first time visitor?” can open up a whole world of information for both of you.
- Please inform your family and friends of your service obligation to the guests on your day of service and request that they respect this time by not requiring you to socialize during this time dedicated to serving others.
- Please do not allow your family and friends to join you behind the Information Center. While seemingly trivial it congests the area and offers negative connotations for the visitor. Visitors perceive your friends and family members standing behind the center, but not assisting, to be IC Volunteers disinterested in serving their needs.
- If you must have a personal conversation with another volunteer or friend please excuse yourself to the IC Leader and move into another area where the visitor does not perceive they are being deliberately ignored.
- Please refrain from consuming food and drink while serving. It is not only messy but sends the guest a message that they are not the priority.
- Please do not place drinks, snacks, lost & found items, notes, personal items or friends and family members on the Counter. It does not look neat or professional.
- Please remember your mission while serving and limit socializing with other volunteers to those moments when no one is in the vicinity. Please, never provide the guest with the impression that they might be interrupting your private conversation. These two hours of service should be totally dedicated to our visitors and glorifying Him.

SERVICE HOST VOLUNTEER OVERVIEW

Our vision is to create a Host Team environment that impacts guests and members of the host team for our mission of leading people into a growing relationship with Christ. We do this by welcoming, informing, and serving those who attend our services.

Objectives

Our objective is to create environments that are inviting, friendly, safe, and accessible to our guests. This includes parking, public areas, and the auditorium.

Strategy

Design traffic flow, parking, and travel within the facility so that it is non-eventful for our guests. We'll accomplish this through planning, effective signage, and competent, informed volunteers.

Dress Code

You have heard the old saying that you only get one chance to make a first impression. Because dress is so subjective, the only way to clarify this is with details:

FOR EVERYONE

- Blue jeans are allowed, but no holes, please.
- If you paid a lot of money to get that pair of jeans that look really old, save them for the going out!

FOR THE LADIES

- No shoulders, please! No tank tops or spaghetti straps.
- No cleavage. No hint of cleavage. Seriously. I know the trend is shirts/dresses that allow just a little peak. Remember to consider the view from above. What will someone who is taller than you see?
- No bellies or backs. That means no short tops or Bandeau dresses.
- No skirts above the ankle . . . just kidding. How short is too short? What do others see when you bend over or sit down? Choose wisely. I can't imagine anything much above the knee that would be appropriate.
- What about capris or this year's new trend, skimmers? Are they cropped pants? Then, yes. Are they just long shorts? Then, no.

SITUATIONAL DRESSING

- Think about what you might be doing that day as you serve. For example, if you are collecting the offering at a busy service and have to step over someone, don't wear a skirt. If you are serving at a door standing in the sun, don't wear a sheer skirt. Consider if you will be carrying a two-way radio. If so, should you wear a belt?
- Finally, be aware that in the rare situation where you are dressed inappropriately, we will ask you not to serve just for that day. If you ever have doubts, just ask.

Pre-Service

- Arrive in the Host Team room one hour before the service starts. Try to not park in the close parking spots - leave these for our guests. Arriving early allows you time to socialize, as well as to go over any procedure changes or new event details for that day's worship service.

During the Service

- Timing - Take your position no later than 25 minutes before the service.
- Professionalism – Please, no text messaging, talking on cell phones, chewing gum, or handling food, coffee, or soft drinks while you are serving.
- Greeting without bulletins – Be in a position where you can look attendees in the eye and greet them warmly. Be personal:
 - “Welcome to New Life Church.”
 - “Beautiful day, isn't it?”
 - “Thanks for coming.”
 - “Good to see you.”
- Greeting with bulletins - You may have items other than bulletins to pass out, just be flexible.

- Service Host/Ushers – Please be assertive as you serve in the beginning of the service. We call this ACTIVE AISLE MANAGEMENT (AAM).
 - This will cause you to be familiar with your section as the sanctuary fills up.
 - Stop seating when the message begins.
 - When needed, feel free to escort guests to their destinations. Collect the offering on cue from tech sheet.

Post Service

Ten minutes before the service ends, Host Team members are to resume their positions for 30 minutes, or until you are relieved by the team leader.

ABSENTEE FOLLOW-UP

With your weekly service, you will always have people come and go. Some will come every other week. Some will attend once a month. In this atmosphere, you want to do your best to remind people that you care and really do miss them when they are not there. To accomplish this, a process is outlined below to help follow-up with **regular attenders** that are absent for successive weeks.

Quarterly Review:

On a quarterly basis, review all the people who have been guests that have attended at least 5 times in the 4 month period. Look for consistency. If they are consistent then move them to regular attender. If they are inconsistent, then leave them on the visitor listing. People who are visitors that have been attending consistently (at least 5 times) move from visitor to regular attender.

Also quarterly, do a membership review. This is a time to look through your membership roster and identify those who have not been attending. The purpose is to figure out why (they have been getting contacts during the time they were missing). If they are no longer coming then move them to an inactive or transferred status. People who are regular attenders, have gone through the membership process and have applied for membership move to member status.

Absent for 3 successive weeks:

- Send a “We've Missed You” post card
- Include a brief handwritten note on the back of the postcard expressing that you have missed having them at a service.
- This can be subjective. If you see a person's name on the '3 week absent list' that you know either had been there or was away for a valid reason, use discretion in sending them a card. Your goal is not to badger or bother a person, but to let them know they are valued and missed.

Absent for 4 successive weeks:

- Follow-up with a phone call from a pastor or ministry leader.
- The goal of this call is to not condemn them for not attending, but just to make sure everything's ok. You should mention the following:
 - We've missed seeing you at church.
 - Is everything going ok?
 - Is there something we can do for you?
 - Is there anything I can pray with you about?

- Hope to see you again soon!

Absent for 8 successive weeks:

- Send a letter from the pastor expressing much of the same as the '4 week phone call' with a recent sermon CD and possibly a flyer/card promoting the event/activity discussed in the letter.
 - We've missed seeing you at church.
 - Include a short description of something exciting that is coming up at the church (a big event, small groups launch, etc.) and invite them out to it.
 - If there's anything we can do for you, please let us know.
 - Hope to see you again soon!

Absent 8+ successive weeks:

- Keep them on your 'outreach' mailing list, but discontinue follow-up with them unless they connect again with the church.