

Assimilation Concepts

by Scott Armstrong

It is a process of connection...

A plan of moving first timers into full timers... converts into disciples... Making outsiders become insiders... Move them from the harvest to the harvester...

Three things any church must do well

1. Attraction...
2. Assimilation...
3. Activation...

We're focusing on the 2nd one... however, part of that overlaps into activation... we'll discuss that later...

Principle & Importance of Assimilation

It's important that even when you are just starting your church, you have a strategy, and that you put a plan in place to implement it... You already have a lot of faith... If your like me... I was pumped when I launched out... I just knew we were gonna have revival and reach the world... and they were gonna put me in the Herald...

Of course, time and experience has a way of tempering some enthusisam... and you should never lose enthusiasm... but you do learn how to sustain it... It's a marathon, not a sprint...

The zeal of the initial thrust is important, the momentum of the first stages of preparation and launch are often incredibly fantastic... and you see results early... so it's important that you think through this process prior to... so that you don't let people fall through the cracks... and you stay focused on it...

A greenhouse is an environment conducive for little seedlings and saplings to grow... particularly while they're vunerable, and the outside environment is too hostile for their fragile state to grow... Doesn't that sound like the Church! An effective assimilation strategy will create a 'greenhouse' where little Christian seedlings can be nurtured... The environment they live in often is worldly, hostile to spiritual concepts... strongholds that Satan has had in place for years... it's tough for any spiritual seeds to grow...

But if we can get them in the greenhouse... If we can make them feel like they belong here, with us... we can optimize the temperature, and fertilizer, and water, and care for them... and soon they will begin to put down roots...

And in this generation, more often than not, they don't come running to the altar, and get baptized, come up speaking in tongues, and throw away all their cigarettes and ungodly habits on their first visit...

That does happen, and thank God for it... but for most people... and in my experience, it's a process... Sure, they encounter God immediately... but they are so far off, so spiritually unaware... and when they come into our services, they are overwhelmed w/ this confrontation of the spirit and truth and love that often, it takes a bit of digestion... and you have got to understand that that's ok... again, in some types of people, that is the best time for them to react... but often they need some time to take it all in...

I think it's important that we give folks time, without pressure... people soak it in... think it over... This is a good time to have a Bible study... and make an informed decision... in my experience, they last longer...

So they have to feel like they are at home, welcome, and a part... very soon... or else, they will go somewhere where they do feel that... You've got to connect them to people... weave them into the culture of your church... they can't feel like outsiders, if you want the Holy Ghost inside them...

The church must hold people long enough... that God can do a work... When you have a broken bone, the doctor puts a cast on it, to hold that bone in place until the healing process is complete...

People that come to your church are broken... They are wounded... The Church is a cast that holds broken person together until Jesus can heal them... You can't hold them if they don't think of it as their church... They have to buy in... They have to belong before they believe... They have to connect before they correct...

Our world today, people are coming from all sorts of weird stuff... as a church planter, you got to get used to weird stuff and weird people... the people walking through your doors are not gonna be greeting you like your at General Conference...

You got to get comfortable with sinners... you got to be ok being around them... if they sense you are repulsed by their lifestyle, if you focus on their piercings... their tatoos... their hairdoos... their whatever... that may seem

foreign to you... you've lost them already... They need to feel your genuine concern and love...

You got to get into their home... and get them into your home... they have to stop saying 'your church'... and begin saying, 'my church'... That's when you know they are assimilating... They may not look the part... talk the part... may not understand much about anything... but if they feel like they have a home... they'll be there long enough until healing can take place...

In a church plant setting, get rid of the notion that you're gonna have to do it the way the POA, or some other large established church does it... lose your comparison, that will kill you... however, you can still do it with excellence...

Assimilation North American Missions style... is different from an established church... in fact, I believe church planters have an advantage... in that everything we do is personal, and folks can't hide in the crowd... often there is no crowd...

In your setting... you can be personal... real... up close and connected... Too many times church planters priorities are the sound system, and the database... and the facility... and all those things are important... but in reality... it's the people...

In the end, it will be people, not programs, that connect visitors to your church... That being said, you can create an environment where this can occur..

How Jesus assimilated His Disciples

Luke 9:1 Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. 2 And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick.

At the 30 year point of Jesus life, He embarked on His ministry, first being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, and announced as the Messiah... Then it was off to the wilderness, for a 40 day fast and spiritual battle, which He was victorious... the immediate next thing as He began his public ministry was the calling of the disciples... Before he launched out, he reached a core group to go with Him... Then He began the three 1/2 years of teaching, healing, and ministry that ended at His death, burial, and resurrection...

When we come to this point in Luke 9, it's half way through these three 1/2 ministry years... We're 21 months now into the ministry of Jesus, only 21 months or so are left until the cross... Up to this point, though the disciples were right there with Him... Jesus did His ministry basically all by Himself... All the miracles were miracles that He did... All the messages were messages that He preached... All the questions were questions that He answered... Everything was done by Him.

It was in a real sense a one-man operation, or a one God/Man operation... And therefore His ministry was isolated to wherever He was... If you wanted to hear the gospel, there was only one preacher... If you wanted to be healed, there was only one healer... If you wanted to ask questions about the truth of the Kingdom of God.. there was one answer man and that was all.

And as a result, as His ministry developed in Galilee over 18 months, the crowds got bigger and bigger... which, in a way, moved the people further and further away from Him and began to be a hindrance to Him... Jesus wanting to go to the house of Jairus found it extremely difficult to get there... just trying to work His way through the massive multitudes that continued to accumulate as the word spread

Time is short... Only 21 months to go... There is even less time for Galilee because Jesus will be soon leaving there as verse 51 of this chapter indicates, He begins to set Himself toward Jerusalem... but the towns and villages are many...

Somebody's got to go... Jesus can't cover all the ground... so He moves into a new strategy of multiplication... He then begins to multiply Himself through his disciples in order to take the gospel to all the towns and villages of Galilee... and maybe into some places for the first time... Not sure if the disciples knew exactly what they were getting into when they left their nets back about 21 months ago...

Ready or not, the disciples were about to move into some on the job training... they were about to move from learners to doers... This is their first field experience... This is their first try at sermons and signs...

This is Jesus assimilating his disciples into their own ministry...

As such I would like to point out 4 Key Points in this first sending... 4 verbs in this story that summarize Jesus principles of assimilation

1. Luke 9:1 Then he **called** his twelve disciples together

It's never too early to plant the vision into a first time guest... even before they are converted... you can't sell them on your beautiful building... on other tangible things... but you can sell them on the gospel, obviously... but perhaps not so obvious is you can sell them on their own value and importance to the kingdom...

Call them together, cast your vision... enlist their help... Assimilate them into the fabric of your ministry...

2. Luke 9:1 He **gave** them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases.

Being Jesus, God in flesh, He could supernaturally impart to His disciples as He deemed appropriate... But remember He had been mentoring them for over a year... He spent time with them... He empowered them... Not just supernaturally, but through training... through fireside chats, and shadowing him in all that he did...

To equip... to train young leaders... to raise up people to intentionally multiply the work of God... Church Planter, you have to pour yourself into potential leaders, who can multiply you, and ease your workload... Even Jesus came to a point where He couldn't do it all himself...

His plan all along was to impart and release... sorta like a fisherman... the catch & release program... He imparted His mission to the disciples., and they would establish the church... As Pastors... we must impart... we must mentor... we must train... We must give... and your people will multiply your efforts... and grow themselves in the process... and they will do some stuff better than you... so get rid of your pride, check your ego at the door...

Jesus did... He said, "greater works shall we do"... He didn't say, well they're ok... but I got the real power... NO, He was pleased in their progress...

3. And he **sent** them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick

This commissioning in Luke 9 was a beta group test... but it went so well that the Lord expanded it to the great commission:

Matt. 28:

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

The great commission is to make disciples... to teach, and to baptize... The heart of the Great Commission is making disciples... but, where disciples are gathered, churches are formed... and disciples are formed where people are assimilated through an inspirational encounter (call)... through equipping (training, classroom – discipleship course), and a sending (hands on, getting feet wet ministry)... If we're the bride of Christ... we need not be barren... but reproducing...

We preach and rightfully so, – He's coming back for a Church, without spot, wrinkle... a bride not already past the stage of childbearing... but a baby making church...

4. Luke 9:10 And the **apostles**, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.

In verse 1 they left as disciples... but in verse 10, they returned as apostles... a disciple is a learner... an apostle is a messenger...

They weren't apostles until they were sent... until they were engaged in the harvest... until they put their learning into practice...

The Apostles proving was in their sending... and so it is today...

So... Jesus called them, he assimilated them through equipping, training, shadowing, then he gave them tasks, sent them out on assignment... then they returned w/ the full report... and no doubt when they went aside privately to Bethsaida... they had what the military calls an after action report...

And the disciples returned His investment int them by establishing the church... We can do no less...

From the Street to the Retreat

In this segment we are going to discuss some Practical techniques on people's initial visit to your church... We want to sorta follow the potential Pentecostal from the street to the seat... Assimilation happens as soon as they drive into your parking lot...

Now, there is a simple, yet profound relationship between the number of people who talk to a first-time guest, and a guest's impression of the "friendliness" of

that church... Many surveys have been done, and I have concluded from my personal experience that the perceived "friendliness" of your church is the most significant factor in whether or not a first-time visitor will return.

In a church of most any size... the first impression of a church does not come from the pastor or music... It comes from the hospitality (or lack thereof) from the parking lot to the pew... People who can smile and provide a positive welcome make a huge impact.

In a church plant setting, it may be the Pastor or spouse, or even the kids that are greeting folks as they come in... that's not a bad thing... at least you know they're being met w/ a friendly face...

Now here is where you can begin to assimilate people... as you begin to have some people... I would train them as soon as possible to be greeters... Now I don't want to cross anyone's theology... but for me, this is an ideal place to put people to work... soon... their not singing on your platform... their not teaching in your classroom... and they may not have it all together...

But to ask someone to serve in this capacity is an awesome confidence boost for folks... and they know they are valuable... and they will buy in that this is my church... Again, they may not have it all together as of yet... and you have to decide when they're ready for this... but to me, as long as they don't smell really bad... and present a horrible image... you know, scary... goofy... etc... I personally am more concerned w/ them having nice breath and a decent image than with their theology at this point...

You only get one chance to make a first impression...

Some training is necessary... clarify how you want them to dress, but use people as soon as possible... this will go a long way to getting folks to buy in... So, either you, or those you have assigned should be friendly, informative, and helpful...

You know, Assimilating people can also be called Using people... I believe in everyone finding a place of service... I don't believe that people just want to sit and soak... I think they want to feel valued... This generation equates morality with humanitarian service... so use that... let them find a place to serve... giving, serving, making a difference is incredibly lifting to the human spirit...

Why not let folks do some stuff... You can't be afraid of what your established church Pastor over in the other town might think... Are you there to impress him, or are you there on a mission... Know what you believe... but have a plan

to get there... You on the front-lines... your performing spiritual triage... God's called you to your city... You know those people better than anyone...

Just remember, the direction they are heading in is the important part... not where they are now...

Here is some criteria to think about, when wondering if they can be used:

* Is this a public ministry that I feel should be reserved for mature, grounded, Apostolic saints, or not... there is such a thing as escalating standards...

Preachers, Teachers, Singers, Platform folks all should present the image you believe is a mature saint... don't shy away from that... however, try to almost invent things that others can do...

* What talent and desire do they have

* What do I need that will help me, and further our church

Love People... Use People...

Now, let's continue our journey w/ them into your church for the first time... The foyer should be clean, and if anyplace looks nice, it should be the foyer... Don't go out & buy yourself a \$1000 desk for your office, and have green outdoor turf carpet in the foyer... if you have an open space, make a foyer w/ some sort of partitions... don't want to overwhelm folks as soon as they open the door...

Does the entryway set a 'welcoming' tone? Is it dark/gloomy? This is the front line of their experience... and will set the tone for the rest of their visit... 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.

Also, the foyer is not the place to put strong doctrinal tracts that would be better explained in a one-on-one Bible Study.

Ensure there is a workable procedure for getting the names and addresses of each guest... Different things work better for different situations... A welcome center is nice... but if you're not there yet... a guest packet presented by a friendly greeter works... maybe just a guest registration book... We give our guest cards away in our coffee mug, filled w/ treats, starbucks card, and a church pen...

Guest information cards that are completed in some manner are invaluable... We are trying to glean the names and addresses of guests for followup... A good packet of materials for the guest to take home is also helpful.

Ensure the information from the card gets input into a database, and into the right hands of followup people... don't just throw it in a file... work this list... develop a system... delegate some help... this is another area where you can use some people who may not be ready for prime time yet... but they do office work... and can help you... assimilate them...

Through all the processes of your entire church... look for ways to incorporate people who aren't qualified yet for public ministries...

Pastor, you will have to teach your church about making room for guests to sit... I hate seeing folks having to crawl over people... or to brush people away because their saving a seat for their lazy family who can't get there on time...

Give them the best seats... I like to encourage our ushers to seat guests about half way from the front... not so far away... yet not too close... Train folks to be friendly... and they will mostly be like their pastor & pastor's wife... if they see you being friendly... they will be...

Have anointed music... Anointing is always a product of preparation; therefore for music to be anointed it must be prepared and prayed over.... Work in some older, familiar songs... even an old hymn w/ a new beat... there is comfort in the familiar...

Your asking them to step out of the familiar soon enough... so make things at least somewhat familiar...

If you have to play music from your iPad, or iPhone... maybe you have a small sound system... recruit and train someone as soon as possible for this job... that's assimilation...

Explain things that are happening... use common terms... not Pentecostal rhetoric...

Church Planter, you have an ideal opportunity to talk w/ your guests... to pray with them at the altar... & to set up a Bible study with them... we get most of our Bible studies at the altar...

Have good church... let God move... Assimilation is happening...

From the Retreat to the Repeat

Now let's follow that same potential Pentecostal from the Retreat, when they leave your service to when they return... and that is key, getting them to return...

It's not rocket science... The more often guests return, the more likely it is that they will stay... The longer they stay... the more they grow... It's a snowball effect... the more times the little bit of snow touches more snow... it grows...

We're in a world today where people often connect and assimilate before they're converted... I just had a first time guest this last Sunday come to the altar after my message... I went to pray with him... and I could tell he simply wasn't quite ready to receive the Holy Ghost... so... I told him how I appreciated his courage to respond to the Lord... and I prayed for him... and we talked a bit... and set up a Bible study... was I disappointed he didn't get the Holy Ghost... no, because he made a big step... and I know we can keep him coming...

We didn't run him off by pushing him to a place he wasn't ready to go yet...

So we follow up... This is the real work of assimilation... Follow Up...

Don't forget to undergird your followup with prayer... A good idea is to enlist your new converts in prayer for those who have visited... they will take on a burden...

Your follow up should be Fast, Friendly, and Functional

Get the information entered into a database... again, you can use someone to help you in this area...

You should be having:

1. **Post service followup...** they should leave with something in their hand... children should be able to show mommie & daddie what they made, or drew... theirs nothing better than something hanging on a fridge from your church that their kid drew in SS...
 - a. That Sunday afternoon, they should receive a call thanking them for their visit...
2. **Post weekend followup...** There are different schools of thought... within 24 hours a followup visit... an email on Tuesday... a hand-written letter sent on

Tuesday that would arrive by Thur or Fri... all very valid... but you have to decide what you can do...

This is an area where you have to do something, and do it well... so plan it... and do it, consistently...

I would recommend a series of letters... Bro Coon has some great material... find that at www.truth-publications.com Use that, you don't have to reinvent the wheel... so steal a few spokes here and there...

Studies have shown that an optimal time for people to receive a followup email is Monday from 2:00–3:00...

Send a survey card... how did we do?...

Also, connect w/ them on FB... Twitter... add them to your 'group'... as soon as possible...

Text them... most people now have gotten rid of land-lines... put them on your group text... I send a text every Sunday morning before church... probably helps to wake some up... but when they see that, they feel like, I'm a part

This is very important... invite them to some sort of Pastor's Social... we do a brunch... this has proven to be the best thing we have done... gives them a non-threatening atmosphere to get to know you... and when you have 'staff'... it's important to have them there also...

3. Post Monthly followup...

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.... send them an mp3 sermon...

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.)

4. Absentee Followup... have a system for keeping up w/ folks... this is sooo important... either have a software system... or keep the cards close by for a monthly review... and a quarterly review... follow up according to a logical pattern... it will keep you on track...

But also, we are a spiritual group... at least we should be, so be sensitive to the spirit... don't be so logical, and ocd that if God lays someone on your heart... you don't contact them, because well, you just sent them a follow up letter...

This is our strength... the supernatural divine leading of God... so, by all means, keep that first and foremost...

Technology offers the chance to regularly measure, manage, and adjust the processes to ensure no one falls through the cracks... but develop your own system... it may be as simple as a new iCalendar called, followup... or you can buy various software...

Software:

- FellowshipOne.com
- ChurchCommunityBuilder.com

Recommendations:

- "Fusion" Nelson Searcy... Turning First-Time Guests Into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church
- "Fitly Framed", Carlton Coon... Truth Publications

There are gobs of resources on the internet...

But understand... love people... equip them, and use them... and they will reproduce the same...