

Lesson Six

Assimilating New Believers

Synopsis

This lesson identifies significant elements necessary to incorporate new converts into the fellowship of the local church for the purpose of transformation.

Learning Outcome

The student will

- recognize and express the essential elements needed to encourage the spiritual formation of a new believer
- determine how each of these elements can be incorporated into the life of the local church

Learning Objective

The student will know

- the importance of supporting new believers in their on-going transformation by incorporating and engaging them into the fellowship of the local church

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- Assimilation Defined
- Characteristics of an Assimilated Person
- Assimilation Processes

Newcomer Attraction

- Evangelistic Pathways
- Ministry of Presence
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Newcomer Welcome and Follow-up

- Hospitality and Welcome
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Church Membership

- Nature of the Church
- Nature of Church Membership
- Requirements for Membership
- Membership Course

Building a Sustainable and Stable Discipleship Culture

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Lesson Six

Assimilating New Believers

Participant Activity:

Have you ever participated in follow-up with a new believer? What did you do? How did it go? What would you do differently next time?

- Have you ever been made to feel like a project someone was trying to complete rather than a person? What were the circumstances? How can you avoid this mistake with those you are discipling?
- What worries or apprehensions do you have about conducting follow-up with new believers?
- What do you think a new believer in Christ needs most in the few weeks following their conversion?

Introduction

Every local pastor reflects on the number of people who have passed through their ministry and what was done to keep and incorporate all of them into the life of the church. The assimilation of new members into the mission of the local church is often unintentional and ineffective. Many churches do not recognize the great need to train new members to become ministers and missionaries who carry on the work of the church. Christianity is about both believing and belonging. How well we make new-comers and members feel welcome and a part of our church is a significant issue that must be intentionally addressed if a new believer becomes assimilated into the life and ministries of the local church.

Assimilation is simply the task of moving people from an awareness of your church, to attendance at your church, and then to active membership in your church. While the term assimilation is a relatively new term in church language, we can see it occurring throughout the historical record of the book of Acts.

Participant Activity:

Read Acts 2:41, 6:1-6 and 15:28-29. Identify the issues experienced and solutions provided around subgroups of people assimilating to the newly founded church community.

Characteristics of an Assimilated Person

Church growth expert Win Arn has a list of eight characteristics of what she calls an "incorporated member." These characteristics help describe a person successfully assimilated into a local church:

- Able to list at least seven new friends they have made in the church.
- Can identify their spiritual gifts.
- They are involved in at least one (preferably several) roles/tasks/ministries in the church, appropriate to their spiritual gifts.
- Actively involved in a small fellowship (face-to-face) group.
- Demonstrate a regular financial commitment to the church.
- Personally understand and identify with church goals.
- Attend worship services regularly.
- Identify unchurched friends and relatives and take specific steps to help them toward responsible church membership.¹

Components to the Assimilation Process

Building effective systems to move people along in each of the eight areas adds even higher value to a local church. When considering systems to create or adapt, the pastor should keep in mind the size, finances, leadership, demographics, worship style, location, and spiritual development stages of various groups of people in the local church. No matter which system is adopted in the local church, these four components must be built-in:

Connection

People need to be connected to the life of the church. Getting people plugged in to fellowship, events, groups, and serving will

ensure they're ready to commit to the local church and increases the chance they will stay connected.

Sample action steps:

- Create a list of small groups that are active in your local church.
- Create a personal follow-up process after the first visit to assure first-time visitors are not forgotten or overlooked.
- Instruct small group leaders on the tools available for small group ministry and help them understand the importance of their role in making connections with people.
- Make visitors aware of events and opportunities to connect with the local church. Provide first-timers and frequent visitors with a list of the events you offer so they can get involved in the life of your church.
- Pair them with another person (or couple) who can make a personal connection.

Participant Activity:

Discuss: How can your church make stronger connections that lead to assimilation into the local church?

Communication

Provide a clear and consistent message that communicates how visitors become connected to the life and ministries of the local church.

Sample Action Steps:

- Explain the vision and mission of your church and how it connects to the process. At least once a quarter, schedule a service that focuses on the vision and mission of the local church.
- Make it clear why commitment to the local church matters and what it involves.
- Establish a way people discover their gifts and get involved in the life of your church.
- Apprise newcomers of opportunities to serve and learn at your church.

Participant Activity:

Discuss: How do people in your church know what's going on and how they can participate?

"New members pursuing spiritual growth want to know you're in it for the long haul."

Coordination

Assimilation and spiritual growth are multifaceted. Because it involves so many areas of life, it's essential to make sure the classes, events, serving opportunities, groups, and mentorships are all in sync. When people are assured of their destination, they are far more willing to take the first step.

Make sure your plan includes actions such as these--

- Assign leaders of each step who monitor and encourage individuals to keep moving in their spiritual journey.
- Classes and learning opportunities that coincide with serving opportunities.

Participant Activity:

Discuss how your systems and ministries of the local church are organized in a way that makes sense to onlookers.

Commitment

New members pursuing spiritual growth want to know you're in it for the long haul. Nobody wants to be deserted halfway along the process. You can create accountability by giving specific leaders clearly defined responsibilities. And it helps to keep your leaders well trained and in the know. Make sure those committed to helping new believers in your church,

- Completely embrace your church's mission and vision for assimilation and discipleship.

- Are trained and equipped to be faithful, rather than choosing to quit when things become difficult.
- Have ongoing support that allows them to handle the pressures of guiding individuals as they pursue assimilation and discipleship. If there's no way forward, people won't grow. Design systems that train people to share and show the love of Jesus.
- Are personally passionate and called to connect new believers to Christ and the local church.

Participant Activity:

Discuss: What are you doing to make sure ministry leaders have what they need to remain committed to assimilating new believers? How can you continue to build stamina in your leaders?

Newcomer Attraction

Our world is very different. At the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, the future of the church in the western world looked promising. However, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, individuals in the western world are alienated from the church and indifferent to the gospel. It is no longer surprising that individuals within our communities have never heard about Jesus, the gospel, or ever been in a church.

Peter Roennfeldt, ministerial secretary for the Trans-European Division in England, shares in his article, "Reaching the Unchurched," five challenges the global church is facing that is causing such disconnect. An awareness of these historical challenges may guide our work with unchurched people.² Peter continues his research sharing five historical obstacles that have produced an unchurched generation.

- The alienation of the masses by competing and secular ideologies. Five hundred years ago, the Renaissance informed the masses that the church's worldview was not the only one, and the seeds of pluralism and

secularism were sown. The Reformation broke the ecclesiastical stranglehold of the church. The Bible was read, and much of the church dogma was discredited. Nationalism shattered Europe. Science challenged the church's prescientific assumptions of the universe, and the climate was right for the Enlightenment to elevate human reason and progress. The industrial revolution spawned urbanization, breaking family ties, challenging traditional values, and further alienating the masses from the values of the gospel.

- The destruction of the faith through war. War separates people from their regular work and church life. Christian nations at war with each other (each claiming God is on their side), the tragedy of sectarian violence and religious/ethnic cleansing, and the readiness of Christian nations to use their military power do nothing to commend Christianity as a faith that can heal hurting people. But, more than that, the horrors of war destroy faith.
- The challenge of other religions and rising nationalism. Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam have undergone an unexpected renewal. Spirituality is not absent among the unchurched, even though most people today do not adhere to or order their lives by Christian teachings. More and more unchurched people are attracted to other world religions or neo-pagan "spiritualities" and philosophies.
- The negative perceptions of the church and the distrust of all things institutional. Many people have painful stories of how the church failed them or their ancestors at

the most sensitive times. Real or imagined, the causes of resentment seem endless. Of course, some don't like the way the church challenges sin. But it is tragic so many perceive the church to be uncaring, arrogant, abusive, hierarchical, and lacking justice and equality. Also, there is the perception the church is divided against itself, with so many denominations breaking into various off-shoots due to doctrinal, relational, or cultural differences.

- Worldviews most find more attractive than Christianity. Four major forces have shaped our generation: postmodernism; broken, blended, and busy families; modern technology; and disillusionment. More and more, people are becoming accustomed to living in a society of multiple truths and contradictory lifestyles.

These obstacles to the Christian faith warrant the church to be mindful of the approach it takes in ministering to newcomers to our churches. We cannot ignore these facts and assume all who enter into our networks are well versed in the Christian faith. We must be able to meet our newcomers where they are. This is consistent with the incarnational ministry of Jesus to be the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13) and with Paul's testimony that he was prepared to be all things to all people to win some for Jesus (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

Ellen White describes the five-step strategy Jesus followed:

*1) The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. 2) He showed His sympathy for them, 3) ministered to their needs, and 4) won their confidence. 5) Then he bade them, "Follow me."*³

It may be at steps four or five that an unchurched person may attend church. This might even take a few years. Therefore, the churches that are committed to sharing faith with the unchurched will prioritize ministries and programs that position themselves on the path at steps one to three, to establish contact with many unchurched people.

"We cannot ignore these facts and assume all who enter into our networks are well versed in the Christian faith."

For most church-going Christians, reaching the unchurched is like reaching into an unknown culture. Therefore, we need to support new and innovative approaches, Ellen White wrote,

*The people of every country have their own peculiar, distinctive characteristics, and men must be wise so that they may know how to adapt themselves to the peculiar ideas of the people, and so introduce the truth that they may do them good. They must be able to understand and meet their wants.*⁴

Participant Activity:

How do we best align our ministry efforts in local churches to meet the current needs of the communities we serve?

Evangelistic Pathways

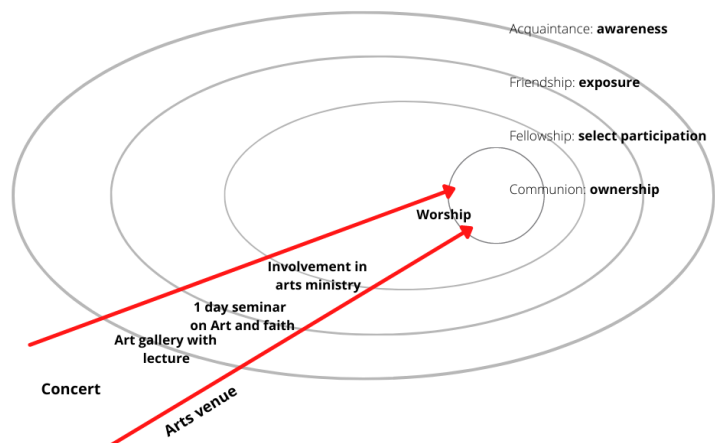
We can no longer approach secular people with the assumption they have any Christian background or spiritual memories from the church. We must meet them where they are and guide them step by step. An evangelistic pathway is a tool you can use as you consider the questions unchurched people within your networks have and how you can engage with them. An evangelistic pathway considers four spheres of influence. For each level of relationship, a commitment is provided through a venue sponsored by the member, the local church, or community. Here are samples of pathways based on interest.

For more information on Evangelistic Pathways, consider the breakout session listed on YouTube by John F. Thomas: <https://youtu.be/Ji2WFxpJnsW> (audio only; approx. 1 hour).

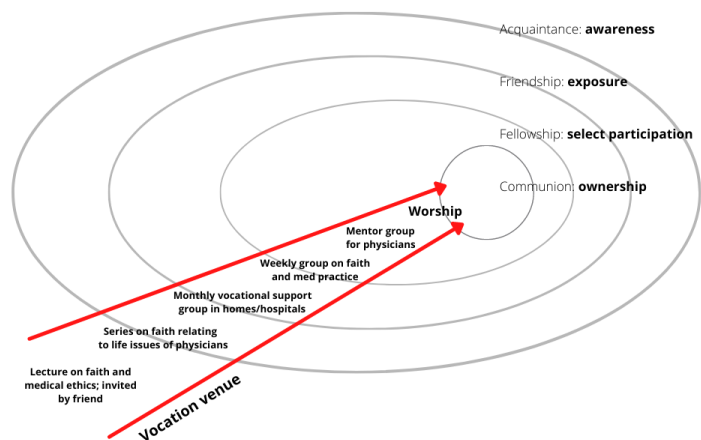
Ministry of Presence

*What attracts large numbers of unchurched people is changed lives—a lot of changed lives. People want to go where lives are being changed, where hurts are being healed, and where hope is being restored.*⁵

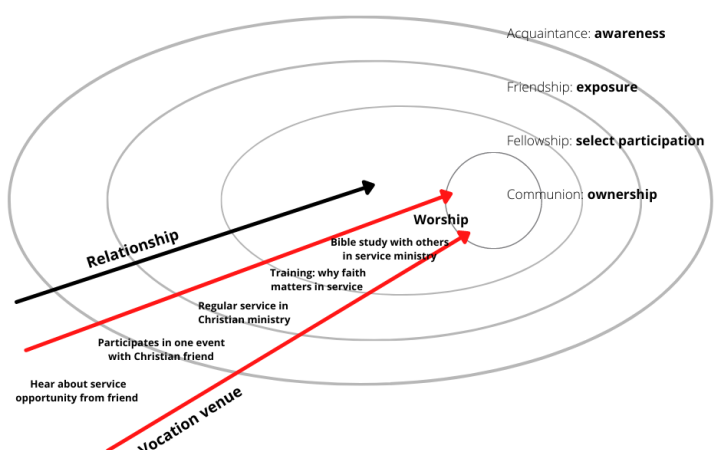
Evangelistic Pathways



Evangelistic Pathways



Evangelistic Pathways



Jesus attracted crowds and established an open door for ministry by meeting the felt needs of the people.⁶ Others may call it servant evangelism. It's focused on being the hands and feet of Jesus in a world filled with so much need (Matthew 25:3-36). Through

need-meeting ministries, the unchurched sense the warmth and acceptance of Christianity. What is important in this aspect of ministry is to provide it with no strings attached. One of the motivations behind this type of evangelism is the Bible tells us God's kindness leads people to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Presence evangelism reaches people where they are and makes them aware of the Christian community showing God's love in unmistakable and non-threatening ways. Not everyone is comfortable walking into a church building but receiving a free service with no strings attached is harder to resist. It could lead them to ask why someone would go out of his or her way to perform this act of kindness. This type of service has the potential to soften people's hearts, enabling them to hear and receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a good way to "water" seeds previously sown (see 1 Corinthians 3:6).

Personal Invitations

Assimilation not only involves new believers being connected to the local church, but it also includes an expectation that church members will regularly and intentionally share the gospel and invite their friends and families to the church they attend. Assimilation begins with a passion for the lost. When a church isn't growing, its members are not "inviting." In the ministry of attracting first-time worshipers, a personal invitation from a friend or family member is by far the single most effective method. Consider the research conducted by Church Growth, Inc. in which over forty-two thousand laypersons were asked, "What or who was responsible for your coming to Christ and your church?" Responses included the following:

A "special need" brought them	1-2%
Just walked in	2-3%
The pastor	5-6%
Someone visited me	1-2%
Sunday School	4-5%
Evangelistic crusade or show	½%

"...a personal invitation from a friend or family member is by far the single most effective

Church program	2-3%
Friend/Relative	75-90%

George Barna, founder of Barna Research, studied the success stories of two dozen churches he labeled "user-friendly" churches. In these churches, members realized inviting people to church was just part of their responsibility. They also were expected to accompany their guests to the church activity. Then they were to provide the follow-up. "It was not the task of a 'visitation team' or an 'evangelism team' to make the visitor feel welcome." It was the responsibility of the person who invited to provide the "on-site hospitality" and the "post-visit debriefing."⁸

Even though personal invitations are the most effective, other methods of attraction should be used as supplements. An attractive, visible building and sign are important. The use of websites, social media, advertisements, mailings cannot replace personal invitations, but they can support them.

In "The Parish Paper," Herb Miller quotes a study of 152,681 adults. One section of that study lists influences for conversion. The following percentages of adult converts indicated the following influences were important:⁹

- 76.9% Attending worship services
- 57.5% Reading the Bible on your own
- 56.6% Someone personally sharing the plan of salvation
- 53.0% Watching the way a person lived as a Christian
- 47.2% Someone telling about their own personal experience
- 46.6% Attending Bible study
- 46.6% Experiencing a personal crisis

27.9% Attending a revival or crusade
21.6% Watching/listening to religious programming on TV/radio
16.9% Reading a religious book or tract

Participant Activity:

Discuss what this research tells us about the importance of mobilizing our members to be involved in personal evangelism and invitation.

Newcomer Welcome and Follow-up

Hospitality and Welcome

In "How to be a Friendly Church," Gary McIntosh states four to five percent of our worship attendance should be first-time visitors if our church is to grow significantly. For example, if your average worship attendance is 160, there should be six to eight first-time visitors every Sunday. McIntosh suggests that seven key areas be prepared for company:

1. Beautify your property.
2. Upgrade your childcare.
3. Provide clear directions throughout your facility.
4. Welcome guests graciously.
5. Enhance your worship service.
6. Preach relational messages that uplift.
7. Follow up appropriately.¹⁰

McIntosh also suggests recruiting friendly ushers, greeters, and parking attendants who will project enthusiasm, courtesy, and pride to your guests. He also suggests instructing members to follow the "10 Foot Rule" and the

"Just Say Hi Policy." "Whenever they come within 10 feet of a person whom they don't know they are to just say hi."¹¹

In his book, *How to Build a Magnetic Church*, Miller offers several suggestions for creating a friendly climate that will attract and welcome newcomers to the church:

- The senior pastor must be a constant model of warmth.
- Organize an effective team of greeters.
- Encourage "extroversion in the pews." Instruct members to assume responsibility for those seated around them. Have them welcome and get acquainted with any visitors. They can serve as "secret hosts" who befriend newcomers and accompany them to a visitor welcome center or fellowship area.
- Allow time within the worship service for the congregation to greet one another and visitors, as well.
- Let people visit freely before the worship service.
- If possible, provide an open space for fellowship following the worship service.
- Supply coffee and refreshments that will invite people to remain longer and get acquainted.
- Provide name tags, especially for the members, so visitors will know their names.
- Invite guests to a social event in their honor. Listen to the interests and ideas of these prospective members.
- Provide a high-quality nursery.¹²

There are two ways to deal with the hospitality issue—passive hospitality and active hospitality.

Passive hospitality involves directional signs and maps that make navigating the church property easier. Passive hospitality also includes cleanliness and a clutter-free atmosphere. You can evaluate your passive hospitality through a survey sent to guests or by frequently walking through your facility with the eyes of a first-time visitor.

Active hospitality involves real people who watch for ways to assist anyone entering the facility. New and longtime attenders like to be recognized and greeted. It is easy to be a

" Four to five percent of our worship attendance should be first-time visitors if our church is to grow significantly."

friendly, effective greeter. However, it is crucial to treat new visitors and returning visitors with the same sense of intensity. How effective is your hospitality process? Ask yourself these questions:

- Are we making people feel welcome in our “home”?
- Are we treating people the same way we would treat them if they were visiting our home? If we invited someone to our home, would we meet them at the door or just leave the door open?
- Are we sensitive to the nonverbal communication first-time visitors exhibit?

Participant Activity:

Discuss these questions: What are three things visitors would say about their initial experience at your church? What are three things you can do this week to improve your hospitality?

Visitor Follow-up

What kind of follow-up should a local congregation use to ensure the highest possibility for a return visit? Effective visitor follow-up focuses on building relationships and making connections. It's important to note that visitors want to make connections and build relationships with people besides the senior pastor. Pastors must mobilize church members to be fully engaged in the follow-up process of visitors in the church.

Most churches have developed a system that allows visitors to provide contact information by completing guest cards. This information is then given to a team or designated person for inputting into a database and initiating follow-up. Churches can also consider using technology-based systems that provide such resources and support to local churches online (i.e., Fellowship One, Text in Church, Google).

You can spark relationships using the following tools:

- Phone Calls
- Text Messages

"Churches can also consider using technology-based systems that provide such resources and support to local churches"

- Email Messages
- Postcard Mailings
- Delivering a Gift

The truth is, we all communicate in different ways, so what is convenient for one guest may not be suited for a different guest. That is why having multiple tools in place helps to ensure everyone receives an initial connection.

When providing follow up to first-time visitors, ministries must be:

Consistent

Show you care. Follow-up for at least six weeks with a new guest. Help visitors overcome a pattern of not attending church by consistently staying in contact (you cannot do this by sending one email or letter in the mail). As a church, it is your job to help visitors begin the new habit of attending church through consistent follow-up communications for at least six weeks after the first visit.

Relevant

Communicate in ways people communicate with friends. Make sure your messages are personal. Remember your goal is to build a relationship with them, so your tone should reflect that. A formal, scripted letter isn't

"Remember your goal is to build a relationship with [guests], so your tone should reflect that."

going to encourage interaction from the recipient. In addition to being personal, be

engaging. Ask them questions that make them want to respond to your message and keep the conversation going. Always end the communication with a call to action.

Other creative ways to follow up with guests include,

- Create a Welcome Center in the church facility staffed by friendly, helpful volunteers and information brochures for the various ministries of the local church.
- Provide complimentary refreshments to encourage fellowship.
- Make special deliveries for guests who provide addresses (i.e., cookies, church promotional items, etc.).
- Invite to "Coffee with the Pastor" where they can meet the pastoral staff and spouses.
- Connect guests with sponsors by assigning a member family with a new member family for three months to a year. During that time the long-term member family will pray for the new family, develop a personal relationship with the new family, and seek to involve them in congregational activities.

In creating an assimilation plan, tailor your approach to your specific church based on two significant factors, the cultural context and the size of the congregation. For any size church, however, an essential part of a successful assimilation plan is to establish a system to track the participation and follow-up of newcomers during their first six months to one year.

Church Membership

Participant Activity:

Discuss the following questions--

- Since salvation is all that is necessary for heaven, why is there a need for church membership?
- Should the church make additional provisions for membership? Why or why not? How can your position be supported by Scripture?
- What is the significance of using a

covenant for church membership?

- What are the qualities of a healthy church member? How is that consistently translated to the body of Christ in the local context?

The Nature of the Church

Clarifying its relationship to the more global entity, Pruitt (1981) has defined the local church as "... a company of believers in any locality who are voluntarily united together in covenant and spirit as a part of the general or universal church, for the purpose of establishing themselves in the faith of Christ, for the evangelization of the area, for the support of the world-wide mission of the universal church, and to prepare for the coming of the Lord."¹³

Scripturally based metaphors for the church:

- A Body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22, 4:15; Colossians 1:18, 2:19)
- A Bride (Revelation 21:2, 3; Acts 20:28; Jude 1:21; Revelation 19:7, 8, 19; Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 21:9, 10; John 14:2, 3)
- A Royal Priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Romans 6:13, 12:1; Hebrews 13:15)
- An Edifice (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5-7)
- Branches of a Vine (John 15:1-8)
- A Flock and Fold (John 10:14-16; 1 Peter 5:2, 3)
- A Family (Ephesians 2:29, 3:14, 15; 1 Corinthians 12:25, 26)
- Salt and Light (Matthew 5:13-15)

Since the New Testament does not explicitly state to "join a church" or "sign this card," many come to believe church membership is not biblically expected. We also know membership in a church does not in any way contribute to our salvation. Therefore, individuals, at times, minimize the importance of church membership.

Nature of Church Membership

Based on the nature of the church we just reviewed, it must be stated that "it was never in the mind of God for Christians to exist outside

the fellowship of a corporate body of believers; such an idea of insularity is contrary to the concept of the church widely portrayed in the New Testament. On the contrary, the Bible provides numerous blessings that stem from membership in the local church."

Public Declaration of Faith

The Scriptures teach that conversion to Christianity should be given expression in public witness. This public witness leads to a clear understanding of commitment. The early church knew who was a part of their community and who was not. They had a very clear understanding of who was inside the church and who was outside of it. In 1 Corinthians 5:11-13 and 2 Corinthians 2:6, Paul rebukes the Corinthian church for not expelling a man who is in serious sin. Notice how Paul refers to those "inside the church" and those "outside the church." The church could only legitimately remove from its fellowship those who had formally committed to the church, identifying themselves with it.¹⁴ (Mark 1:1-4; Luke 12:8, 9)

Personal Accountability and Growth

Church membership provides a clear opportunity for personal interactions with others. In covenant with other believers, the Christian essentially gives others of the body the right to call into question anything that is not Christlike in personal attitudes and behaviors. Without church membership, no one feels responsible for helping individuals do the right thing or make the right decisions. The exercise of church government and discipline according to Matthew 18 and other passages (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:31; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 3:10-11) presupposes the pastoral leadership of a church know who their members are (Ephesians 4:13-15; Proverbs 11:14; Hebrews 10:24; Matthew 18:15-17).

Development of Spiritual Gifts

Every believer possesses some gift of grace for service in the ministry of God. In each congregation, God has strategically placed individuals according to their giftedness and requires that each becomes actively engaged

so the body may be vibrant and successful in its mission. Church membership allows the opportunity to discover, develop, and use the gifts within the church context (1 Corinthians 12:8-11, 28; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11; Matthew 25: 14-30; 1 Peter 4:10).

Extended Witness

Alone, believers are not able to fully commit and accomplish the Great Commission. However, as a member of a group, there is an opportunity through pooled resources for evangelizing the world. As part of a local

"The various ministries within the local church make possible the spiritual process of

body, the individual member advantageously multiplies his/her impact for Christ by joining hands in combined efforts with other believers (Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Leviticus 26:7, 8; Acts 8:14-17).

Nurture of Community

In the early church, coming to Christ was coming to the church. The idea of experiencing salvation without belonging to a local church is foreign to the New Testament. When individuals repented and believed in Christ, they were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5). More than merely living out a private commitment to Christ, this meant joining formally with other believers in a local assembly and devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42).

As the body of Christ, the church is pledged to the support of its membership spiritually, socially, and physically. The various ministries within the local church make possible the spiritual process of discipleship. Church leadership provides guidance and support; groups are developed that offer prayer, presence, finances, counseling, and/or

encouragement. This community is based on the primary goal of nurturing one another as we pursue spiritual transformation.

Membership Requirements

Churches that have high membership standards are more likely to grow. Raising the membership bar raises commitment throughout the church. What might such a membership standard look like?

In the Church of God of Prophecy, minimum requirements for membership include,

- Experience of salvation (which includes repentance, denouncing and forsaking of sin)
- Water baptism
- Public commitment to the local church by taking the membership covenant
- Participation in ongoing discipleship opportunities offered by the local church
- Commitment to spiritual growth (including pursuing sanctification, baptism of the Holy Spirit)
- Clear understanding and submission to church government and doctrine¹⁵

Also, churches provide practical opportunities to set and clarify membership expectations including,

- Completing a church membership course
- The use of church membership commitment forms
- Scheduling a “get-acquainted interview” or “conversation with a purpose” between the pastor and prospective member

The importance of church membership can also be displayed through the emphasis on how we welcome new members. There is evidence of increased numbers of baptism of new believers and individuals being added to the church when high importance and attention is given to welcoming new members.

Pastoral leadership must clearly articulate the value, purpose, and benefits of welcoming new members. Some ways we can welcome new members include:

- New member Sunday/baptism Sunday
- New member photos
- New member luncheon

- New member households listed in church bulletin
- Whole household introductions in worship
- Video summaries
- New member packets

Membership Course

Research shows that growing churches have implemented the strategy of providing a new membership course. The length of these classes varies from several hours on one day to one hour a week for as many as eight or nine months. The way a person enters a church dramatically influences the way he or she will function. Men and women will take their commitment to Christ and the church more seriously if they have taken the time to be instructed in what vital Christian faith and responsible church membership means.

Pastor Rick Warren suggests, “the membership class is the most important class in your church and should be taught by the senior pastor if possible. A strong membership class will build a strong congregation.”¹⁶

No matter what length, frequency, or style you use, membership courses should have all the following components:

- Newcomer friendly. Make sure the course helps to answer the following questions:
 - Do I fit here?
 - Does anyone want to know me?
 - Am I needed?
 - What is the advantage of joining?
 - What is required of members?
- The gospel message. Provide a clear explanation of the gospel and our need for salvation. Don't assume that everyone becoming a member, understands their need for a Savior. Testimonies are shared with individuals committing or recommitting their lives to Christ through a church membership course.
- Exciting and interactive. Using video clips, a notebook with a fill-in curriculum, small group interaction, and a good meal together are ways to engage potential new members. Also, include a lot of stories that personalize the history, values, and direction

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of your church.

- Variety. Consider providing alternative strategies for teaching the membership course to children, youth, disabled, and potential members whose first language is not the primary language spoken at your church.

Your membership class should answer the following questions:

- What is the church?
- What are the purposes of the church?
- What are the benefits of being a member?
- What are the requirements for membership?
- What are the responsibilities of membership?
- What is the vision and strategy of this church?
- How is the church organized (locally and globally)?
- Who composes the leadership of the church?
- How can I get involved in ministry?
- What do I do next now that I am a member?¹⁷

The Church of God of Prophecy has published the "Membership Matters" course that mirrors the research reviewed above. For more information and to download the course, go to <https://lddcogop.org/membership-matters/>

Ongoing Discipleship

The new membership course will not provide instruction on every truth, principle, and practice we want potential members to know and understand. Looking at the model of Jesus, we notice discipleship was an ongoing, three-year journey with the twelve disciples. Jesus

told his disciples that upon his departure, the Holy Spirit would continue the discipling work in and through them.

Such opportunities must be provided to our new believers and other members currently in different stages of life. The basic outline below is an outline used at The Hub Church in Jersey City, New Jersey, USA, and includes principles and ideas from Rick Warren's book, *Purpose Driven Church* and Church of the Highlands "Growth Track Model."

Sample Outline Of Discipleship Tracks

Connect 101

Whether you are new to being a Christian or to The Hub Church, Connect 101 is a great step for learning about our history, beliefs, and process on becoming a member of the Hub family. You will also have the opportunity to get

"The church will need to offer a balance of other training opportunities based on members' perceived and actual needs."

baptized after this seminar. These classes are a prerequisite for our church membership.

- The Gospel, Our Response, and Assurance of Salvation
- The Marks of a Growing Disciple
- The Hub Church DNA, Structure
- Church Membership

Grow 201

In Grow 201, you can find out what it means to be more like Jesus, learn how to spend time with God through prayer and Bible study, discover the importance of tithing, and understand the value of community. At the end of Grow 201, you will have the opportunity to connect with a fellowship group that will encourage continued growth and practice of the following spiritual disciplines.

- Prayer, Bible Study and Fasting
- Living on Mission for God
- Honoring God with My Resources
- Living Victoriously
- The Spirit-Filled Life
- Living in Biblical Community

Serve 301

In Serve 301, you will discover your calling, and learn how God can use your spiritual gifts, passions, abilities, personality, and experiences to help others. Upon completion, you will be invited to serve on one of our ministry teams.

- What the Bible Says About Ministry
- Spiritual/Grace Gifts
- S.H.A.P.E.
- Loving Like Jesus/ Developing a Heart to Serve

Missions 401

This seminar is designed to help you discover the life mission God has purposed for your life. You will learn how to reach people with the good news of Jesus Christ. You will be equipped to become a "world-class" Christian.

- Discovering My Life Mission
- Sharing the Message
- Fishing My Mission Pond
- Becoming a World-Class Christian
- Disciple-Making

Beyond these fundamental courses, every individual needs more individualized training. "The church will need to offer a balance of other training opportunities based on members' perceived and actual needs. Progressive, creative planning throughout the disciple-making process will keep members motivated and excited and will reinforce the climate for church discipleship and disciple-making."¹⁸

While these courses will provide great information to your members in various stages of life, the most critical aspect of discipleship is that the local church has cultivated an environment where spiritual growth is highly valued and expected. The pastor is the one who sets clear standards for all members to

pursue discipleship. These standards should be published, frequently discussed, taught, and proclaimed in the life and service of the church.

Suggested resources for evaluating your church's spiritual environment:

Marshall, Mark. *Mapping your Church Strategy*. Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2003.

Mims, Gene. *The Kingdom-Focused Church*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003.

Rainer, Thom S. and Eric Geiger. *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples*. Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2011.

Spiritual Growth Assessment Tool (www.lifeway.com/discipleship)

Participant Activity:

Discuss the following questions--

- As you think about your future discipleship strategy, identify actions you should take to make discipleship an intentional, observable process in your church.
- What does the church offer that has helped me grow in my faith?
- In what ways does the church encourage me to own my growth as a disciple?
- Is our church doing everything it can to offer opportunities for disciples to grow and mature?
- What needs to change to move toward an effective discipleship culture?

Conclusion

As Christians, we are called to belong, not just believe. God calls us to live and grow within a community that is committed to worshipping, walking, and working together in making Christ known in their community and world.

Lesson Review Questions

1. The task of moving people from an awareness of your church, to attendance at your church, and then to active membership in your church is called _____.
 - a. Connection
 - b. Assimilation
 - c. Ministry of presence
 - d. Evangelistic pathways
2. What are the four components to the assimilation process that must be built-in to an effective system of assimilation?
 - a. Connection, prayer, mentorship, and service
 - b. A personal invitation, meeting needs, hospitality, commitment
 - c. Connection, communication, coordination, commitment
 - d. None of the above
3. What does Peter Roennfeldt call the alienation of the masses by competing and secular ideologies, the destruction of the faith through war, the challenge of other religions and rising nationalism, the negative perceptions of the church and the distrust of all things institutional, and worldviews most find more attractive than Christianity?
 - a. Challenges to spiritual growth
 - b. Reasons to attend church regularly
 - c. Historical obstacles that have produced an unchurched generation
 - d. The repercussions of a broken world
4. According to Ellen White, the five-step strategy that Jesus followed is: 1) He mingled with men as one who desired their good. 2) He showed his sympathy for them. 3) He ministered to their needs. 4) He won their confidence. 5) Then he bade them, "Follow me". Churches that are committed to sharing faith with the unchurched will prioritize ministries and programs that position themselves where?
 - a. Steps 4 and 5
 - b. Step 4
 - c. Steps 1-3
 - d. Step 1 only
5. Because reaching the unchurched is like reaching into an unknown culture, we need to support _____.
 - a. New and innovative approaches
 - b. The status quo
 - c. Stronger emphasis on social media reach
 - d. Strengthening the culture of the church
6. Through what type of ministry do the unchurched sense the warmth and acceptance of Christianity with no strings attached?
 - a. Personal invitations
 - b. Small groups
 - c. Sports ministry
 - d. Ministry of presence/need meeting ministries
7. What is the single most effective method of attracting first-time worshipers to church?

- a. The church website
 - b. A personal invitation from a friend or family member
 - c. Children's ministry
 - d. Social media presence
8. According to Gary McIntosh in "How to be a Friendly Church", what percentage of a church's worship attendance should be first-time visitors in order for the church to grow significantly?
- a. 4%-5%
 - b. 2%-3%
 - c. 8%
 - d. 15%
9. What are some ways Gary McIntosh suggests the church can prepare for company?
- a. Welcome guests graciously, enhance your worship service, and preach relational messages that uplift
 - b. Offer front row seating to guests, encourage members to welcome those around them, and point out new visitors to the congregation
 - c. Beautify your property, upgrade your childcare, and provide clear directions throughout your facility
 - d. Both a and c
10. Directional signs and maps that make navigating the church property easier, cleanliness, and a clutter-free atmosphere are signs of _____.
- a. Passive hospitality
 - b. Funds well spent
 - c. Active hospitality
 - d. Both a and b
11. Real people who are watching for ways to assist anyone entering the church facility is an example of _____.
- a. A model congregant
 - b. Active hospitality
 - c. Passive hospitality
 - d. Both a and b
12. Effective visitor follow-up focuses on _____.
- a. Building relationships
 - b. Making connections
 - c. Sharing your testimony
 - d. Both a and b
13. When providing follow up to first-time visitors, ministries must be _____.
- a. Persistent
 - b. Cautious
 - c. Intentional
 - d. Consistent
14. How many weeks should you continue to follow-up with a new guest?
- a. At least 6 weeks
 - b. 1 week

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- c. No more than 4 weeks
 - d. Until they return to service
15. When creating an assimilation plan, you should tailor your approach to your specific church based on _____.
- a. The cultural context of the congregation
 - b. Current technological trends
 - c. The size of the congregation
 - d. Both a and c

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