Four Processes that Drive How People Connect with Your Church
It might surprise you to hear that what we at Church Community Builder care most about isn’t software (although we believe we have a fantastic church management system). We care most about helping churches like yours multiply their ministry efforts — not by changing their why or what, but by improving their how.

It’s a privilege to partner with a church and come alongside its leaders — executive pastors, small group pastors, volunteer coordinators, assimilation directors, facility managers, administrators and financial overseers — and help them all be more effective.

Our software is an amazing tool which, if used in the context of good processes, can truly help you and the other leaders in your church improve your ministry efforts. While everyone here at Church Community Builder cares about making church ministry more effective, we have a dedicated team of coaches who can work with your church to guide the people who wear various hats toward more effective ways of running their ministries.

An ideal time to look at your internal systems and processes is during a migration to a new church management system. We’d love to help you with that!

If you’d like to discuss whether or not we’re a good fit and would be able to help your church staff (both paid and unpaid), we’d appreciate that opportunity. We know we’re not the best fit for every single church. In fact, every once in a while, we’ll steer a church away from Church Community Builder! Yes, we really do this. [smile]

That said, please explore our website, and look around the internet to see if we’re just blowing smoke. When you’re ready to start talking with us, we look forward to hearing from you!

— Chris Fowler, CEO Church Community Builder
What Executive Pastors Should Know About Assimilation

By Steve Caton

‘Assimilation’ sounds like a big, scary word. But it’s a vital part of any healthy church that’s thriving in ministry. Do assimilation well, and you’ll have the people and money you need to continue to move your church forward. Do assimilation poorly, and you’ll lose people and ministry funding — and you won’t even realize it.

To achieve ministry success, you’re responsible for supporting many areas of your church, including your church’s assimilation process. While you might not be directly responsible for day-to-day assimilation work, it’s important for you to have a solid understanding about the processes your church has in place to move people from first-time guests to fully engaged members.

Do you need to rethink your church’s assimilation process?

You might need to rethink your assimilation process if:

1. You don’t know what assimilation is.
2. You can’t explain your assimilation approach or strategy.
3. No one on your organizational chart is assigned that responsibility.
4. You judge growth by your ability to slightly outpace your rate of attrition.
5. You have no idea why someone who seemed to be connecting suddenly disappeared.
6. People participate in your new members’ class, but then are never seen or heard from again.
7. You look to place volunteers regardless of their passions, interests, experience, or abilities.
8. You think collecting personal contact information is intrusive.
If you identify with any one of those eight statements, this eBook was created with you in mind. After reading it, you’ll have a better understanding of both the principles that drive effective assimilation and your role as an executive church leader in the process.

**THE REASON FOR ASSIMILATION**

Before we can improve your church’s strategy for moving people through the engagement process, we need to step back and see why it’s important.

**Reason #1:** Assimilation leads to healthy church growth.

Assimilation is a core component of church growth, but it’s often overshadowed by outreach. Most staff members assume that growth is primarily the outreach pastor’s responsibility, and most church leaders are satisfied as long as new visitors outnumber those slipping out the back door. The problem is that this assumes a steady influx of new visitors and ignores the potential of people who want to go deeper but can’t figure out how. A well-designed assimilation process can make a huge impact on helping people engage — and stay that way.

**Reason #2:** Assimilation is essential for life change.

We can’t stand in the pulpit preaching to people and simply expect transformation to take place. There’s a reason some churches are full of spectators. Profound teaching has the potential to challenge the way people think, but it takes much more to empower sustainable life change.

Consider the common strategies for supporting teaching and discipleship. Small groups, volunteer development, missions and outreach, stewardship and giving, events, leadership development — these can be very powerful drivers of life change. What do they all have in common? They’re all key milestones in a church’s assimilation process.

**Reason #3:** Assimilation keeps people the priority. Many church leaders think that focusing on a process means you’re taking away from the emphasis of building relationships with people. But an effective assimilation process is essential to truly learning about people and helping them serve in places that align with who God created
them to be. Too often, we send an implicit message of, “Thanks for coming ... now go figure it out.” When we invest in our assimilation process, we’re showing interest in people, making them feel valued, included, and special. This often leads to more committed, engaged, and passionate church communities — and investing in people like this is our responsibility as church leaders.

THE FUNCTION OF EFFECTIVE ASSIMILATION

Let’s go ahead and clear this up now: assimilation is a process, not an event. It transforms our programs, services, and events into connection points to foster authentic community. It uncovers members’ interests, passions, and personalities, and teaches members about the leadership, community life, and vision of the church. Done well, it can exponentially advance the church’s mission through members’ passions, interests, and skills. Done poorly, it can burn new members out in record time and create the epic ‘revolving door’ we often refer to in church life.

The assimilation process begins when a person first visits the church and ends when that person connects with the people, ministries, and programs that drive its mission. Only after people get engaged in the community of the church can they grow, be discipled, and start on the path to real life transformation. Assimilation is where it all begins.

Assimilation Is an Engine

In the same way an engine is composed of multiple parts all working together to move a vehicle in one direction, effective assimilation is a system that involves many different areas working together to move people from first-time visitors to fully engaged members. And just like you inspect and care for your car’s engine, it’s important to regularly inspect the parts of your church’s ‘assimilation engine’ that matter most in getting you where you want to go. How you do that is what we’ll cover next.
THE PROCESS OF EFFECTIVE ASSIMILATION

Each church is unique; therefore, each church’s assimilation process will be different. Instead of providing you with a step-by-step guide for improving your church’s assimilation process, it’s more beneficial to understand the fundamental principles needed to improve your church’s assimilation process.

No matter how large or small your church, these are three keys for improving your assimilation process — and, ultimately, your ability to minister effectively:

1. **Embrace the importance of evaluating your current process.**
   Sometimes it’s all you can do to maintain the status quo each week. You feel
constantly behind in your daily tasks, while your ‘someday’ list keeps growing. It might be hard to imagine having time to stop, strategize, and learn a new system.

Still, taking time to think through your church assimilation process might be the single most effective choice you can make in ministry. We can’t afford to ignore the importance of defining and systematizing assimilation. Without a systematic approach, it’s nearly impossible to be confident that someone hasn’t been overlooked or fallen away. The only way to know whether or not your church’s assimilation process is providing the most opportunity for life change and ministry impact it can is to take a step back and evaluate it objectively.

2. Identify the primary areas that need inspection.

What parts of your church’s assimilation engine need a tune-up? How does each play a role in keeping your church’s growth running strong?

While each church’s assimilation process is unique, there are certainly elements included in every process. After working with hundreds of churches to improve their assimilation processes, here are the four primary parts or processes that need inspection:

1. Hospitality

There are two elements to successful hospitality — passive and active. Passive hospitality includes directional signs and maps that make navigating the campus easier. Active hospitality involves real people watching for ways to assist anyone entering the facility. Can your volunteers answer a visitor’s question with confidence, or do they fumble around and look clueless? First-time visitors need to feel confident that you and your people know what you’re doing.

2. Information Gathering

Hospitality is hard to measure. We can’t say, “We had a 23 percent improvement in hospitality.” Capturing information, however, is easier. When churches intentionally gather information from visitors, they often discover there’s a bigger discrepancy than they expected between their headcount and the actual number of visitors. So it’s important to gather information and then provide a few ways for first-time visitors to
connect. Make sure you provide just one or two next steps and don’t overwhelm them; you can ramp up people’s commitment levels slowly.

3. Follow-Up

Follow-up doesn’t require a lot of creativity — just remember your visitors and say hello — but it’s important to evaluate. A simple thank-you card could suffice, but you can make a bigger impression if you include a small gift (a Starbucks card, a bus ticket, etc.). Make sure the note is personally signed by someone — photocopies don’t build relational connections.

4. Connection

This step is the end of assimilation and the beginning of discipleship. There should be a smooth handoff to someone who can guide people to go deeper in their relationship with God and their connection to the church. The discipleship ministry of the church will only be as strong as the assimilation process. If you aren’t assimilating people, you’re only increasing the number of spectators.

Every church has an assimilation engine that includes these four parts. What makes one successful is how well these parts are working individually and collectively.

3. Develop a strategy for improving your church’s assimilation process.

Your church’s assimilation process isn’t going to improve by simply praying about it. You need to take time to intentionally invest in a plan that’s going to improve your church’s overall health and growth. A process is something that can be measured and monitored; the same should be true of your assimilation strategy.

Here are some ways we’ve seen churches benefit from greater intentionality around assimilation:

1. They end up mapping out how a new visitor is integrated into their community. This helps them remember the new visitor experience.

2. They develop a process that can be replicated and reproduced. These are critical to the success of your ministry, and should regularly be assessed and tweaked.

3. They’re able to measure what’s working and what isn’t. You can’t manage what you don’t measure.
4. They place a higher percentage of attenders into small groups. Active small group participants are more likely to be faithful givers, volunteers, and lay leaders.

5. They have greater success connecting people with volunteer opportunities that match their passions and abilities. Just filling slots leads to burn out; matching people to positions leads to breakthrough.

6. Their churches are producing active leaders instead of ‘frozen chosen’. They make it more comfortable for people to get involved than to just sit and consume.

7. They discover ministry opportunities they didn’t know existed. God has given your members unique gifts and a purpose that He wants to fulfill through your church. That purpose might be something you hadn’t considered before.

4. **Leverage technology to measure the results of your process.**

   Technology will help you make assimilation more efficient and effective. In addition to helping you distribute workloads, it can also provide a place for recording and measuring the effectiveness of your process. A church that combines the right technology with a solid understanding of its process can see return on investment (ROI) in ways such as:
• Better matching between interests of the member and opportunities for ministry
• Increased satisfaction in volunteer placement
• Greater assessment of the leadership potential of new members
• Insight into new ministry opportunities based on members’ unique gifts
• A much higher rate of generosity with respect to time, talent and treasure

The larger your church becomes, the more you and your staff will need to rely on robust technology designed to accelerate the rate your people grow, serve, and commit to being part of the long-term vision and development of your church.

THE IMPACT OF ASSIMILATION

You probably have a list of things you’d like to do to help your church reach more people. However, you can’t keep doing the same things you’ve been doing and expect different results. A weak assimilation process is probably at the root of your issues. Discipleship suffers without a process to move people into a deeper relationship with Christ; community withers because people feel disconnected; generosity isn’t cultivated like it could be; and overall church health decays because there’s no plan in place to help people keep growing.

**Consider taking these next steps:**

1. Outline your church’s assimilation process. It will take time, but there are few things you can do in local church ministry that will result in a greater ROI. It starts by carefully documenting your process as it exists today.

2. Assess the effectiveness of your process. How are you doing in the areas of hospitality, information-gathering, follow-up, and connection? These are all key parts in turning first-time guests into fully engaged members, and should be evaluated regularly.

3. Put necessary changes in motion. Be intentional. That means putting action to your words and doing something new and different. You can’t expect better results if you continue to do the same things week in and week out.

You might need to adapt your current assimilation process, or even create a new one, but the effort pays off. Not only will you engage more people in ministry, but you’ll feel the impact in every area of your church: volunteers, giving, serving, and participation.
The assimilation engine powers your church. The more powerful your assimilation process, the more powerful your church. Assimilation doesn’t create growth, but it does multiply it. If you want to keep your church moving forward, take a second look at how effective assimilation can multiply your ministry efforts and maximize your Kingdom impact.

**SUMMARY:**

Every church has an assimilation process intended to drive the overall growth and health of the church. Just like you inspect and care for your car’s engine, it’s important to regularly inspect the parts of your church’s ‘assimilation engine’ that matter most in getting from where you are to where you want to go.

This resource will help you identify the four key parts in your church’s assimilation process and ensure each is running as well as it can, moving people toward full engagement in the mission and ministries of your church.

**CASE STUDY:**

Assimilation Process Helps Pastors Develop Stronger Relational Connection Among Church Community

**LINK:**

http://www.churchcommunitybuilder.com/resources/case-study-assimilation/

**SUMMARY:**

Without a systematic approach to assimilation, it’s nearly impossible to feel confident that someone hasn’t been overlooked fallen away. Technology can play a key role in helping your church define and support this process. In this case study, individual church leaders reflect on the impact technology has had on their ministry by supporting and systematizing their assimilation process. In every situation, the improvements to each church’s assimilation process led to deeper, more personal relationships with potential and existing membership.
YOU’RE CALLED TO EQUIP.

HOW?