

The Characteristics of an Assimilated Member

Does your church have a working definition an “assimilated member?” Here’s why I believe you should. First, it will clarify what a “disciple” is, in response to Christ’s command to go and make them. Second, it will help you determine how (or if) your “assimilation system” is really working. Third, a clear definition will help church leaders develop plans and priorities—so that more people move toward this goal.

Here are nine characteristics I believe can define an assimilated person. Perhaps you can think of others.

An assimilated member...

1. *...understands and identifies with the goals of the church.* A goal is not a purpose statement. It is a list of specific objectives you plan to accomplish in the coming year. The church’s goals should certainly be included in the new member orientation. How many of your members and attenders (new or old) could list at least two of your church’s goals for the coming year?
2. *...attends worship regularly.* For most Christians, Sunday morning is the focal point in the church calendar when the people of God come together to worship Him and celebrate life in Christ. A fluctuation in worship attendance is the first sign of a person beginning to drop-out.
3. *...experiences spiritual growth.* Every Christian needs to feel a sense of spiritual progress. This is especially true for new Christians who have so much to learn about their new life in Christ. Providing a class/group for new believers should be addition to a class/group for new members.
4. *...takes a formal step of affiliation with the church.* The secular study of “values clarification” has found that when people take a public stand in support of an issue, they remain a “convert” longer than if they are a silent supporter. The implications for the church are obvious. While some churches are moving away from formal membership, there are good reasons for people to have a way to publicly show their commitment to Christ (i.e., baptism) and to their church (i.e., membership).
5. *...has friends in the church.* New members who remain active in their church make an average of seven new friends in the first year; drop-outs make less than two. Lake Avenue Congregational Church (Pasadena, CA) uses their Christian education classes to provide for these important relationships. Their purpose statement reads: “The classes are to function relationally, providing the necessary feeling of belonging and togetherness, providing social functions appropriate for each age level, providing social concern and practical care for the members.”
6. *...has a church role that complements his/her spiritual gift.* A “role” is an appointed, elected, or voluntary position, with the responsibility lasting at least a year. The more roles available in a church, the more people can be involved. Effective assimilation churches average 55 roles for every 100 of their constituents. Declining churches average 27 per 100.
7. *...is involved in a fellowship group.* Very few people in small groups drop out of church. Groups provide a unique connecting and growing experience for new and old members

alike. Since newcomers have difficulty “breaking in” to groups that have been together for more than a year, 20% of all groups should be less than two years old.

8. *...is tithing to the church.* “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be, also” (Mt. 6:21). An important part of any member’s responsibility to the church is financial support of its ministries. Stewardship should be stressed as part of one’s commitment to Christ and the church.
9. *...participates in the great commission.* New Christians are some of the most enthusiastic people in the world. Many have just turned around 180 degrees in their life. Their enthusiasm is so contagious that often friends and relatives come to Christ and the church over a very short period of time. This natural desire to tell others should be encouraged.

Here are four suggestions to increase the number of people who acquire these characteristics in your church...

1. Develop your own list. Discuss, pray, and then decide on the characteristics that fit your church and your priorities.
2. Review and re-design your new members’ orientation around your definition.
3. Evaluate your present constituency with respect to your definition. Complete and then discuss a chart that includes all of your members/regular attendees:

Church Member	Characteristics					
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
Jim Adams	X	X			X	
Trisha Burns	X				X	X
Hal Carter				X		
Kelly Danielson		X		X		
Josh Eckstrom	X					
Rebecca Gardner				X		
etc., etc.						

4. Develop plans that will move more members and attenders toward this ideal.

A measurable definition of an assimilated member will give you a clear picture of your present effectiveness, and a practical way to evaluate your discipleship plans in the coming years. Try it...you’ll like it!