

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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What is an Assimilated Member?

Every pastor wishes for a church of perfect members; and every new sheep an addition to that perfect flock. Ah, yes. But, realistically speaking, what actually *is* an ideal, assimilated member? We would suggest that if you can define one, you have a much better chance of having one; or more.

Before we talk about defining an assimilated member, let's back up and look at Scripture. Jesus said, "go...and make disciples."

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Have you ever wondered what, exactly, *is* a "disciple"? We're called to make them, but how do we know when we've succeeded? Would you know one if you saw one? And here's another question: Is a "disciple" synonymous with an "assimilated member" in your church?

There is value for you and your leaders to take some time and list the measurable characteristics of an "assimilated member" in your church. One reason is that it will help you plan your church's activities so as to contribute to this goal. Another reason to define an assimilated member is that it will help you evaluate whether your present ministry activities are actually contributing to the goal of disciple-making.

We've been thinking about this for a while, and would like to propose a starting list. You may want to add or subtract from it for your church. But you will find the process of developing a list to be a thought-provoking and clarifying activity.

An assimilated member ...

1...*attends worship service regularly*. For most Christians the Sunday morning service is the focal point in the church calendar. It's hard to image a disciple not regularly participating in the sacrament of worship and celebration of God the Father. "Worship the Lord your God..." (Lk 4:8 NIV).

2...*is growing spiritually*. Every believer needs to feel a sense of spiritual movement and growth. The Spirit despises "lukewarm" Christians (Rev. 3:16).

3...*has friends in the church*. Research indicates that assimilated members have an average of seven friends in their new church; drop-outs had made

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What is a disciple? Would you know one if you saw one?

Is a disciple the same as an assimilated member?

only two. "I no longer call you servants...instead I have called you friends" (Jn. 15:15 NIV).

4...*has affiliated with the church body.* The value of a public commitment, through baptism and church membership, solidifies the identify of the believer with the Body of Christ. "There are many parts, but one body..." (I Cor. 12:20 NIV).

5...*is praying.* Growing in one's understanding of how, when, why, and where to pray is important for a follower of Christ. "Lord, teach us to pray..." (Lk. 11:1 NIV).

6...*identifies with the goals of the church.* Clear and specific goals in a church allow members (new and old) to rally around a common focus. "*I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 3:14).

7...*has a ministry role or task.* Service is a key part of the identity of a Christ-follower. Jesus said, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve" (Mt. 20:28 NIV). So should his followers.

8...*is involved in a fellowship group.* The best place to grow spiritually and relationally is in a small group. Jesus led a small group for three years, and they changed the world. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).

9...*regularly tithes.* Assimilated members give back to God what is his to begin with. "The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being." (Mt. 6:21 MSG).

10...*participates in the Great Commission.* A disciple is spreading the good news in his/her social network, and beyond. "You will be my witnesses..." (Acts 1:8 NIV).

A Few Ideas

Make your own list of characteristics of an assimilated member. Try it with your church leaders the next time you're together. Give them a chance to each develop their own list, then compare notes, then review the list above.

Compare, to the best of your knowledge, how many people in your church exhibit these particular qualities or characteristics. Doing this will give you a "spiritual snapshot" of the congregation God has put under your spiritual guidance, and where each person is with respect to the definition of an assimilated member/disciple.

Ask each person in your church to do their own self-assessment for each characteristic.



Adapted from Gary L. McIntosh and Charles Arn's best selling book *What Every Pastor Should Know* (Baker Books. 2013).

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GARY L. MCINTOSH



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GARY L. MCINTOSH is professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. He is a former pastor with many years as a church consultant, is the author or coauthor of thirteen books on church leadership and growth, and the editor of Church Growth Network and Journal of the American Society of Church Growth. McIntosh lives in Temecula, California.

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