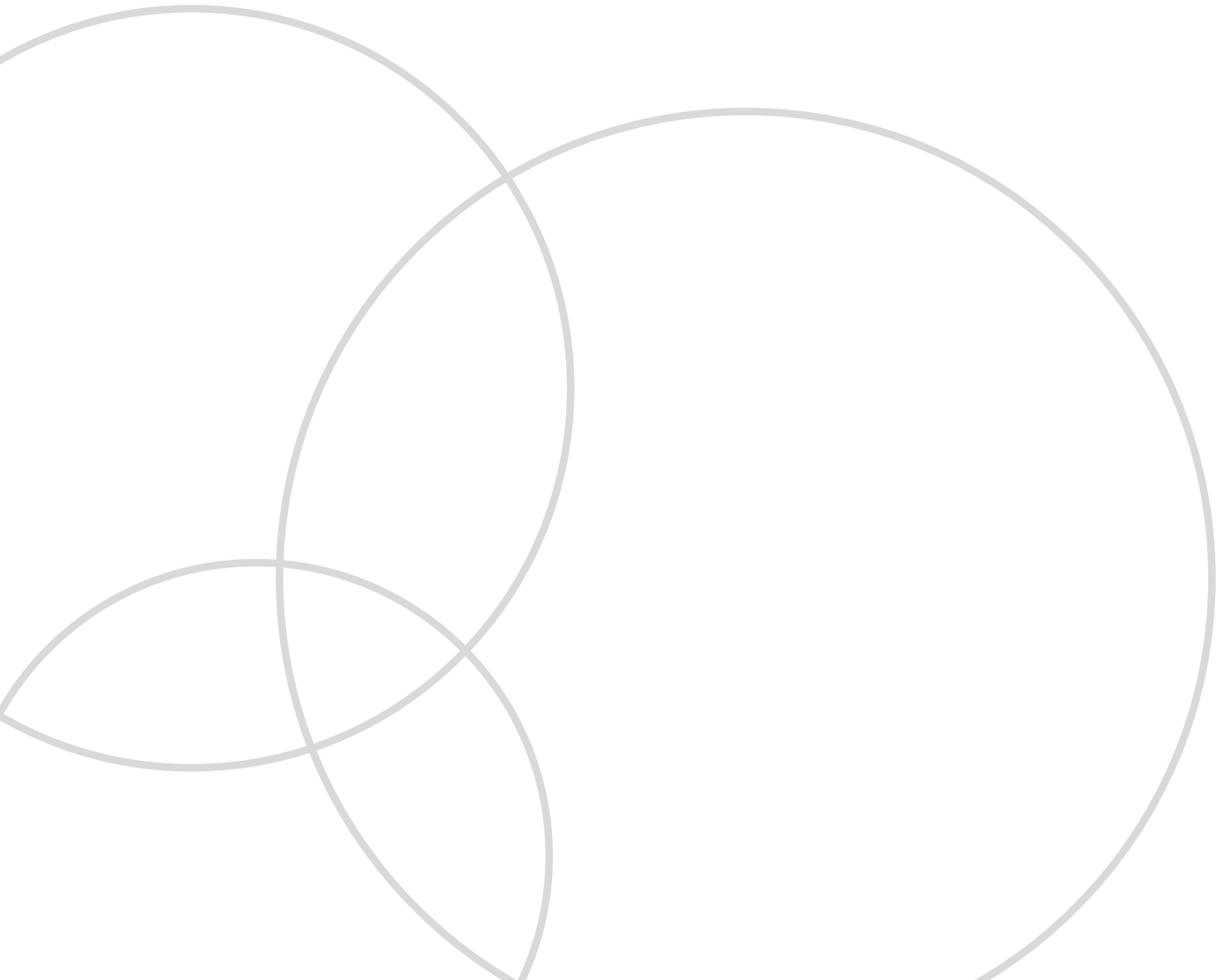


CHURCH COMMUNITY BUILDER

# Assimilation Process Helps Pastors Develop Stronger Relational Connection Among Church Community

A Case Study by Ben Stroup



# Summary

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.

## Participating Churches

Crossroads Church (Northglenn, CO) [www.crossroadsabc.com](http://www.crossroadsabc.com)

St Matthias Church (Paddington, Australia) [www.matthias.org.au](http://www.matthias.org.au)

Fields Church (Galesburg, IL) [www.fieldschurch.com](http://www.fieldschurch.com)

Assimilation is the word leaders use to describe the process of someone first encountering a church and then later becoming a fully committed member. It sounds clinical. The process itself can even become a diversion if the end goal is to track numbers rather than the relationships those numbers represent.

Without people, there is no community.

It's not enough to make sure there are enough new people coming in the front door to outweigh the people leaving through the back. Leaders must be certain that the opportunity to connect in meaningful ways happens systematically and successfully. If not, new relationships are at risk, and the gifts people have to offer the church community may never be realized.

Technology is not about stripping the humanity out of community. Instead, it is about giving leaders confidence that their process is functional and effective. It offers the chance to regularly measure, manage, and adjust the processes to ensure no one is overlooked due to a leader's inability to see breakdowns within their assimilation strategy.

## The Need for Assimilation

"Like a lot of churches, we had a big front door, and a big back door," says Bruce Boelter, Spiritual Life & Formation Pastor at Crossroads Church in Northglenn, Colorado. "We had lots of churn because our assimilation process was not fully functional."

“It was easy to avoid spending time improving our assimilation process because we were consistently growing in average weekend attendance,” says Boelter. “More people attending our weekend services coupled with our move into multi-site ministry compounded our need to adopt a more intentional approach to assimilation.”

Warwick de Jersey, Rector at St. Matthias Church in Paddington, Australia, says, “A lot of the pieces of how we wanted assimilation to work in our community were present, but there were certainly holes in our process. We were working very hard, but we desperately needed a system to force our thinking and standardize the process. Bottom line, we needed to do a better job of tracking people — not just numbers.”

“This is my second church plant,” explains Mark Robinson, Lead Pastor of Fields Church in Galesburg, Illinois. “I’ve learned just how important assimilation is to a church — even from the very beginning.” Robinson recognizes that with the pressure of starting a new church, there is limited time for tasks such as church administration and assimilation. Still, he was going to have to invest in people if he hoped to continue to grow this still-new community.

## A New Process Defined

According to Boelter, “Church Community Builder’s initial assessment revealed that assimilation was an area of our church that wasn’t fully functional.” He admits he knew this was the case. Like in so many situations, finding the time to address it was difficult.

“After working with Church Community Builder, we were able to establish a process that fit how we did church,” says Boelter. “Not only do we understand assimilation, we now have an internal accountability structure that helps us stay on track.” Boelter recognizes how pleased the leadership is with the reports he is able to provide, showing what is happening to the people coming through their doors on any given weekend.

De Jersey says, “Church Community Builder assigned us one of their staff members to ensure we were using the system effectively. We were using a glorified spreadsheet, which was home-grown and limited.” De Jersey continues, “The best thing was that Church Community Builder fit us rather than our church needing to fit Church Community Builder.”

“We needed a system that didn’t feel institutional because we are reaching people with almost no background in church,” explains Robinson. He admits that assimilation has to feel grassroots and not just like the personal agenda of the pastor. Robinson believes assimilation is primarily about “maximizing a

relational opportunity” with the people who participate in their weekend experience. Because of that, assimilation had to be a priority.

## More Time for Ministry Engagement

“Since we put our new assimilation process in place, we now retain about two out of every three first-time visitors,” says Boelter. “When I say retain, I mean they complete our connection process as it is currently defined, which takes approximately six months.” It takes Boelter nearly four hours each week to manage the process through Church Community Builder. Boelter continues, “Without Church Community Builder, it would be difficult to understand and monitor the assimilation process effectively and efficiently.

“It’s easy to track butts in the seats,” Boelter maintains. “But it’s the assimilation process that ensures we get them from their seats to fully engaged in ministry.”

“We have a much better idea today about who is involved in our community — more than we ever have before,” says de Jersey. “The process ensures we spend our time doing the things we are called by God to accomplish.” De Jersey celebrates that he has more time to minister to people now, since Church Community Builder minimizes the time he spends doing administrative tasks.

“Structure and tools ensure assimilation actually happens,” de Jersey asserts. “The end result is that we are able to track and maintain relationships with more people and involve more people in our community of believers.”

According to Robinson, “Assimilation is a way of being faithful to what God has given us. Too often followup in church is based on perception and feeling, which results in someone getting overlooked — even in a small community.”

Robinson describes how much more peaceful he feels at night knowing he doesn’t have to worry that someone was missed along the way. He recognizes that most first-time visitors only give a church one chance. Robinson asserts, “We have to connect with people — every time we can and in every way we can.”

## Conclusion

The discipline of defining a new system can be exhausting. It requires time, energy, and effort. Rarely does a church leader have extra time in the midst of chaotic schedules and the relentless demands of ministry.

Perhaps the more important question is this: can we afford *not* to spend the time defining and systematizing assimilation in our church?

Beyond the spreadsheets and numbers are people who need to engage with authentic believers in genuine community. Without a systematic approach to assimilation, it is nearly impossible to feel confident that someone has not been overlooked, misplaced, or fallen away. The numbers don't give leaders bragging rights. Instead, they push us to find the faces behind the numbers.

Ministry is about people, relationships, community, and impact. Those churches that strive to understand the process of assimilation recognize that doing the hard work necessary to understand, define, and implement a new approach pays off with an increased opportunity for life change and ministry impact. Further, they understand that defining a process and supporting it with technology eliminates needless energy spent managing makeshift systems using multiple tools and increases the time spent building relationships and expanding the Kingdom.

For more about our coaching and assimilation services, email [strategy@ccbhq.com](mailto:strategy@ccbhq.com).

**Ben Stroup** is a freelance writer, blogger, and consultant who specializes in topics related to church leadership, giving, communications, and technology. He posts regularly on The Content Matrix ([www.thecontentmatrix.com](http://www.thecontentmatrix.com)) and can be reached at [ben@benstroup.com](mailto:ben@benstroup.com).