



# Greeted, Directed, Treated & Seated: How a Texas Church Grew Their Attendance and Membership Through a Strong Assimilation System

By Nelson Searcy

Nelson Searcy has trained more than 3,500 pastors and church leaders as founder of Church Leader Insights and the Renegade Pastors Network. He currently serves as the Founding and Lead Pastor of The Journey Church, with locations across New York City and in Boca Raton, FL. Nelson is the author of over 100 church growth resources and 19+ books.

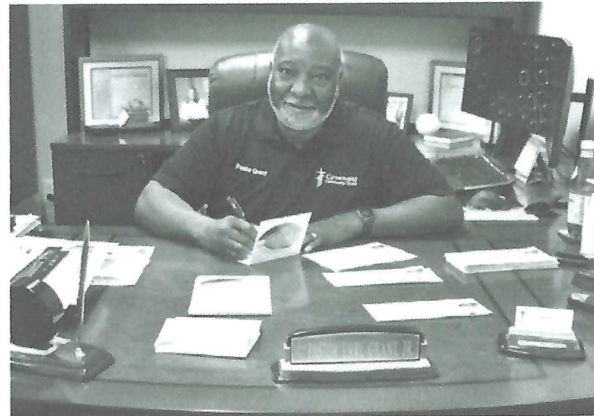
After establishing Covenant Community Church in San Antonio, Texas, Pastor Earl Grant, Jr. found himself on an island, isolated with no resources and stuck in a ministry routine. Immediately, he desired different results and wondered how he could grow, seek new ideas, meet new people, and touch more lives.

## Investing in Church Growth

Earl was familiar with my name because a friend introduced us for a ministry opportunity years prior. God's divine intervention brought us together again — this time for a coaching opportunity. A prayerful decision led Earl to conclude that investing in my Titanium network (highest level of coaching) was the right thing for his church in order to grow into their full God-given potential.

He brought this revelation to the staff's attention and received overwhelming support. One remark in particular that he'll never forget came from the Chairman of Trustees who said, "Well, Pastor, if you're not growing, how can we grow?"

From then on, investing in my ongoing coaching has been the stepping stone he and his team needed to embrace change. It has led them to new methods to enhance their Assimilation



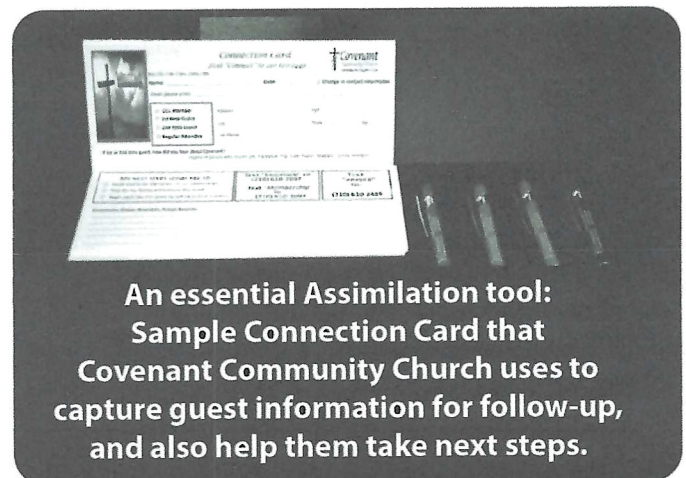
**Pastor Earl Grant has implemented a strong Assimilation system at Covenant Community Church. Here he signs handwritten notes for this week's first-time guests, as part of consistent follow-up.**

process and lead to more life transformation.

## "From the Streets to the Seats"

The Power of Assimilation is often overlooked. I discuss this in my best-selling book, *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests Into Fully-Developed Members of Your Church*. When you start considering each first-time guest as a gift from God to you, it's essential to ask yourself, "Did I receive them? Did I handle those gifts properly by having a plan in place to assimilate them?"

Assimilation leads to life transformation by giving people the means and opportunity to become mature followers of Christ. Assimilation is



**An essential Assimilation tool: Sample Connection Card that Covenant Community Church uses to capture guest information for follow-up, and also help them take next steps.**

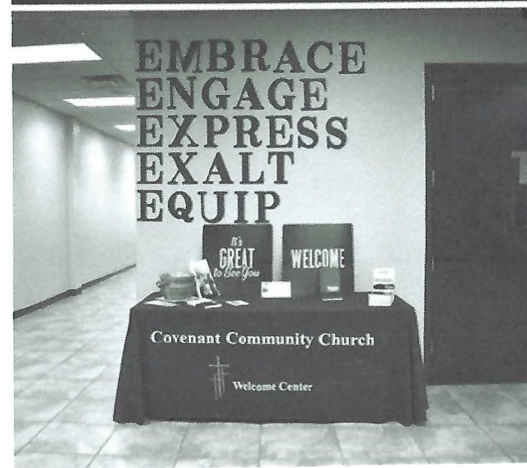
simply the process of encouraging first-time guests to return to church until they accept Christ and commit themselves to the local church. Putting a strong Assimilation System in place is the best way to ensure newcomers stay long enough to respond to Christ's pull.

Before implementing the Assimilation System, Earl's church was accustomed to a traditional approach — welcoming new people as visitors instead of guests. That changed after I helped engrain this idea in Earl and his team: consider all guests as gifts from God, so you intentionally prepare for and seek them out at each service.

Referring to newcomers as guests instead of visitors was the initial shift in perspective needed to enhance their impact on the local community. They added greeters, a welcome team, connection cards that guests fill out each week, assigned parking for first-time guests and welcome packets available at every service.

But he doesn't stop there. Earl also maximizes the connection cards by filling one out himself because he recognizes that people need to observe you've done it first, which will encourage others to fill it out, too. And if they aren't interested in filling one out, he asks them to write a prayer request so the church can pray for guests' specific needs. Additionally, their follow-up team is known for committing downtime to calling first-time guests.

Also for any first-time guests, Earl writes handwritten notes every week. This is the keystone of



### **A welcome table offers several gifts and materials for first-time guests each week.**

the Assimilation System as it opens the door for personal connections with first-time guests.

Each volunteer team plays a critical role in ensuring every guest feels *intentionally* welcomed. According to Elaine Parker, the Administrator for Covenant, the church dubbed this Assimilation process "from the streets to the seats." This process ensures guests are greeted and directed from the parking lot to their seats.

Earl is confident that these Assimilation steps have enhanced the compliance of guests using the cards and increased their participation in submitting prayer requests. The Assimilation System's impact on newcomers is visibly tangible — to such a degree that he has seen a *direct link* between the new measures he's applied

and the influence they've had on previous attendees' decision to become returning guests!

### **Contending for a Double Portion**

At the beginning of 2024, in our coaching sessions I had challenged Earl to have the church pray to double their first-time guest attendance for the first quarter. The congregation rose to the challenge through prayer and community outreach. Pastor Earl and his staff remained consistent in motivating the church to invite people to the upcoming Easter service personally and intentionally.

As a result of their prayer and preparation, God over-delivered. At the beginning of the year, their average attendance was around 200 people, which more than doubled to around 500 people for their Easter service!

Putting the Assimilation System into effect has brought significant growth to their church within the past year. For instance, from January to April alone, The Covenant Community Church grew by 16 new members who have been assimilated from first-time guests to second-time guests, then to regular attendees, and now fully engaged members.

### A Logical Learner's Perspective

Everyone has their own learning styles. Earl's learning style is logic, so he identifies with systems, and they work with him. He testifies that the Assimilation System has helped him be "firm in their mission and message while being flexible with the methods. Because a system will allow you to make necessary adjustments to either maintain or enhance your efficiency and effectiveness."

He continues, "I now know I don't have to change the message or our mission, and I am free to have flexibility to change methods. Because if they don't work, that's not the end of the world. It's okay because you can make the necessary adjustments. If one method is ineffective or you are not as efficient as you want, you have a system to help identify what is ineffective. The system allows you to stay on target and ask yourself: What is your mission? And what is your message?"

He admits that in ministry, a part of being faithful and fruitful can also be stressful and frustrating. Which begs the question: How can you minimize the frustration? The answer: Have a **S.Y.S.T.E.M.** that **Saves You Stress Time Energy and Money.** Then, once you commit to that, your efforts will be maximized through ongoing evaluation and improvement.



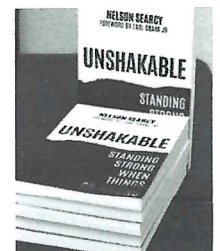
**From the parking lot through the lobby, guests are greeted, directed and treated — and eventually seated as well.**

### Far-Reaching Impact

Many Covenant CC guests have noted that the Assimilation process they use is impactful. One family who suffers from an autoimmune disease shared with the staff that they felt cared for during the pandemic because the parking ministry was wearing masks, even though it was hot outside.

The family highlighted that they felt the church cared for their health and protection. They stressed that being greeted, directed, treated and seated created a welcoming culture for first-time guests. That same day, they joined as church members, stating, "We knew this was the place for us because you showed that you cared about me, without knowing what I was dealing with and my need to be protected in that way."

Earl understands there are many unique ways the church can make guests



feel welcome to increase their chances of returning and accepting Christ. Last Easter, Earl partnered with me as a co-author on the book *Unshakable: Standing Strong When Things Go Wrong*. I wrote this book to bring biblical hope, healing and perspective to the most difficult situations people face. The book is customized with Earl's bio, photo, church information a personal foreword from Earl, deepening that connection with the first-time guest.

When he and his church anticipated the book launch of *Unshakable*, he prepared a sermon series alongside it on "Unshakable Faith," which was based on Hebrews Chapter 11. Covenant CC has copies readily available for newcomers, enhancing

their first-time guest experience. Although some first-timers may not immediately return, their free copy of *Unshakable* is sure to leave a lasting impression that will help them find their way back to Covenant or bring them godly direction during times of need.

The book's chapters address topical areas that are perfect for anyone to skim through, depending on their season of life. People have responded with endearment about *Unshakable* because it has helped them in different circumstances, such as their marriages, jobs, etc.

You can participate in this, too, and have access to a book with your name that guests will love and that your church would love to be part of. As Earl explains, "You can take it and tailor the message

for your ministry in your environment." (Learn more about this opportunity and request a free book at [www.UnshakableNow.com](http://www.UnshakableNow.com).)

### **A System Designed for You**

Earl encourages pastors who want to grow their churches to focus on their Assimilation System. He stresses that you will never feel alone being a part of this Renegade Pastors Network and that resources are always made available to you through the help of other pastors.

If you're a pastor hesitant to embrace change in your church systems, Earl challenges you to ponder: what do you have to lose? He is confident that if what you are doing now is not giving you the return you desire, it is worth trying something else that is proven to help ministries of various sizes, denominations, and ethnic make-ups. 🌐