

# FUSION

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**Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church**

by Nelson Searcy with Jennifer Dykes Hensen (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007)

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*a book review by Jack De Vries*



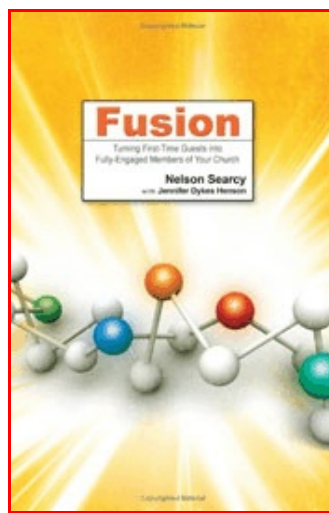
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About the author:

**Nelson Searcy** is the founding pastor of The Journey Church of the City in New York City, which he and his wife, Kelley, began from scratch in 2002 and which now has more than 1,000 members. He has personally trained more than 20,000 pastors, church planters, and church leaders in live events and seminars through ChurchLeader Insights, an Internet resource for pastors. Prior to starting The Journey, he was the founding director of the Purpose Driven Community with Rick Warren at Saddleback Church. He is the author of more than 60 best-selling resources on church planting and church growth.



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**S**even minutes is all you get to make a positive first impression. In the first seven minutes of contact with your church, your first-time guests will know whether or not they are coming back. - Nelson Searcy

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The sub-title of this book *Fusion* caught my immediate attention: *Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church*. Searcy addresses a perennial concern of churches: how do we effectively assimilate people into the life and ministry of the church. He contends that we only have seven minutes to make enough of an impression that first-time attenders return for a second visit. Whether it is seven or ten minutes – Searcy’s point is crystal clear. If we take assimilation seriously, then we need to be very intentional on how we meet and greet visitors to our services.

But we can leave it with that initial impression. We also have to be very intentional on our immediate follow up. Reading this book one might get the impression that church has become simply a numbers game. But Searcy is quick to point out: “By putting a well-planned, well-executed Assimilation System into place, you will be doing your part in ensure that the first-time guests who cross your paths are transformed into fully developing followers of Jesus. ... ‘This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth’ (1 Tim. 2:3-4).” (38)

This is a book you can easily read in one sitting, but the practical suggestions offered will keep you in action for a long time. This is the huge benefit of this book. Not only does it offer good

biblical foundations for effective assimilation, but it provides suggestion after suggestion how assimilation can and will work.

Searcy builds his Assimilation System around a three-step process:

1. Turn a first-time guest into a second-time guest.
2. Turn a second-time guest into a regular attender.
3. Turn a regular attender into a fully developing member.

The rest of the book describes how this system works. The goal of assimilation is to encourage guests to return or stay, to build relationships with others, and explore the way serving will lead first-time attenders to eventually become fully

developing members of the church.

I found myself resonating with the suggestions Searcy makes in this helpful book. We as churches need to take care of each and every first-time guest God sends our way. When I began the ministry more than 25 years ago our method of beginning the assimilation process was to have visitors sign a guest book when they arrived at the front entrance of the church. While this method might have encouraged a few church people to write down their names, already back then this method simply did not work. First-time churchgoers would not sign a guest book. This is even more true today. Over the years I have used bulletin tear-offs, inserts, bookmarks, pew cards, friendship pads – and each had a measure of success. Searcy recommends using a communication card which eventually is

placed in the offering when it is given or handed in for a free gift at a hospitality table. Whatever method one uses, it is key to remember, as Searcy points out, “guests don’t want to be singled out.” (74) If everyone fills out a card, both regular attenders and guests, then visitors can remain practically invisible.

The use of communication cards is only one of many ideas Searcy makes. I would suggest that churches use this book as a tool for group study with church leaders and/or volunteer teams. (Check out the box below for some more ideas)

If you wonder if this book would be useful, just think about your own church for a moment. Get out a calculator or a piece of paper, and check out your numbers. Remember, facts are your friends. They tell you the story of what is happening. Searcy gives us a practical exercise.

Top 10 Takeaways from *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church*:

- Assimilation can be defined as “the process used to encourage first-time guests to continue coming back until they see and understand God’s power, accept Jesus as their Savior and commit themselves to the local church through membership.
- By sending guests to you, God is giving you the opportunity to cooperate with Him to move someone forward in their journey toward Jesus.
- A church in maintenance mode will probably have 3 guests per 100 people. A steadily growing church will have about 5 guests per 100. A rapidly growing church will have 7 or more guests per 100 people.
- The Church should be a family expecting guests.
- We live in a culture where the business world understands more about true expressions of hospitality than the Church does.
- The more prepared a church is to receive guests, the more guests a church will receive.
- You have 7 minutes from the time someone arrives on your campus to convince them to come back.
- If you want to leave any hope of assimilating your guests, you cannot let them leave without knowing how to connect with them. The art of communication is the language of leadership.
- The most powerful word for change in your church is “because” (and obviously the words and communicated principles that follow).
- All follow-up should be fast, friendly, and functional. It should provide a “wow factor” that pleasantly surprises people and stirs up a desire to give church a second, third, and fourth chance.

Source: <http://travjohnson.wordpress.com/2008/07/07/book-review-fusion-by-nelson-searcy/>

Statistics suggest that each year a church needs to have

- 3 guests /100 attenders to maintain itself
- 5 guests / 100 attenders to steadily grow
- 7 guests or more / 100 attenders to rapidly grow. (32)

Considering your church, how many guests do you need to have each year to steadily grow? If you

have 100 attendees, you need at least 5 guests each Sunday. Over a year this would amount to 260 guests. But then the question remains, "What is happening to those who visit?" How many of these guests do you retain? How many of them are actually assimilated into the church? Do the math. Searcy admits that many churches who consider themselves

healthy and growing have a retention rate of 1/20. But he maintains, that if churches are serious about growth then they need to pray and work toward an assimilation rate of 1/3. This simply means that out of the 260 guests in a year, over 80 need to become second-time guests and eventually fully developing members.

Using Searcy's statistics, I wondered how this would all add up for the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. The facts are that we have over 8000 members. Let us assume that all 8000 are

regular attenders. Committed as we are to reaching the lost for Christ, and multiplying as churches, this would mean that among our churches, we ought to have 400 as guests in our churches each Sunday for a total of 20,800 guests in the year. If we were to have a retention rate of 1/3, this would add over 6800 people becoming fully developing members of our churches. Something to think about, isn't it?



Whatever you do, do something about assimilation! The harvest is plentiful, and as the Bible reminds us: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9) Searcy's book will stimulate your thinking and help you help others in their journey toward God.

Check out Searcy's website:

[www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/Fusion](http://www.ChurchLeaderInsights.com/Fusion)