

Practical Ministry Skills:

Launching a Church-Wide Campaign



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LAUNCHING A CHURCH-WIDE CAMPAIGN



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By Sam O'Neal

For many church leaders, organizing and executing a church-wide campaign seems like a daunting task—or at least a task that raises a multitude of questions.

How do we choose the right material? Can we make our own curriculum based on the pastor's sermon? How do we convince existing small groups to get on board with the campaign? How do we let the congregation know about our plans in a way that gets everyone excited to participate? How do we convince people to join a new small group during the campaign, and where do we find leaders for those groups? What do we do as a church when the campaign is over?

Thankfully, "Launching a Church-Wide Campaign" has answers and practical advice for all of these questions and more. It's a great resource for any church thinking about taking the plunge into a small-group campaign because it has expert advice and tips from practitioners and campaign veterans.

One example is Steve Gladen, whose opening article "12 Tips for a Successful Campaign" is a wonderful roadmap for any church or pastor looking to launch a church-wide experience. Steve has done it many times well, and his insights are invaluable. But be sure to heed Dan Lentz's caution in the following article that campaigns do not take the place of healthy discipleship systems within a church.

In the **Key Practices for All Campaigns** section, you will find more helpful resources for organizing and implementing your campaign. This includes articles by Rick Howerton on recruiting new group leaders and members, plus a great piece from Alan Danielson called "Four Important Steps You Haven't Considered."

Many churches prefer to build a campaign using the pastor's normal message series as the foundation, which is why we have included material on **Key Practices for Sermon-Based Campaigns**. The articles in this section will help you understand the process and value of sermon-based small groups, and even give you tips on creating your own DVD curriculum.

—SAM O'NEAL; copyright 2010 by the author and Christianity Today International.

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Twelve Tips for a Successful Campaign

A step-by-step guide from a campaign super hero

By Steve Gladen

Having lived through 9 campaigns (running point on 5) in my 12 years as Small-Group Pastor here at Saddleback, I have discovered that a strategy is only as good as the foundation and follow-through that surrounds it. As they say, the devil is in the details. That's why our [Saddleback Church Campaigns](#) come with full instructions on how to run the campaign from start to finish. The instructions explain what types of teams you need to develop in addition to providing a calendar timeline and training DVDs.

Here's another thing I've learned: a church-wide campaign will be an exponential experience for any church. It can be exponentially positive or negative, depending on how you approach it. So, based on my experiences (and a few battle scars), here are 12 tips to ensure a positive outcome for your church.

1. What's the Compelling Question?

When you run a campaign, you need to know which question the campaign will answer. To give you an example, for our 40 Days of Purpose Campaign the question was, "What on earth am I here for?"

The compelling question gives your people a reason to join a small group and attend the corresponding weekend services. It provides your group leaders with motivation to invite others into their small group. Without a compelling question, the congregation won't understand the central theme or the reason for the campaign.

2. Align Children, Student, and Adult Ministries.

A lot of churches that run a campaign miss the power of alignment by only doing it for the adults. When your children and student ministries memorize the same Scriptures, read about similar themes, do projects together, and listen to the same weekend message, everyone is on the same page. Discussions naturally flow into the home from parent to child and child to parent.

3. Stick to the Principles and Apply Your Own Methodologies.

When aligning your campaigns for children and students, you need to adapt the material to their learning level. So if the adults are memorizing a Scripture, the children may learn part of the same Scripture instead of the whole thing—because that is appropriate for their level.

The same principle needs to be applied to your entire church. Weekend messages need to be adapted to your church's context and culture. Small-group questions can be adapted to your needs. If your campaign includes a church-wide service project (or a project for individual small groups), it should serve your particular church and community. For example, if your church has a strong presence in the homeless community, then stay true to your culture and serve those same people as part of your campaign.

4. Language Matters.

One of the most significant things we learned through recruiting for our Saddleback campaigns is that language matters. Campaign material is delivered through small groups, so it is vital that you have plenty of people ready to "lead" a small group—but "leading" can mean different things to different people.

When we asked for Lay Pastors, that didn't work well because people didn't feel they were pastors. We then changed the term to Shepherd Leaders, which failed because they didn't connect with the term "shepherd." Next we tried Small Group Leader, but nobody wanted to be the leader due to perceived inadequacies or lack of time. Then we asked for H.O.S.T.'s. We told people: "If you have a Heart for people, are willing to Open your home, can serve a Snack and Turn on a DVD player—then you can host a group of people." All of a sudden we had plenty of volunteers!

Interestingly, we never changed the duties of a small-group leader, just the language. It was enough. All of the preconceived notions of what it takes to be a "leader" just fell away. If a Host continues with the group after

the campaign, then we enter them into our Small Group Leadership Development Pathway. This pathway then provides them with the relationships and resources to nurture and build their leadership skills.

When Jesus recruit the disciples, it was simply “follow me”. Three years later it was “die for me”. Quite a gap from “follow me” to “Die for me”. Jesus had a process. Our Host strategy isn’t “light” or “not wanting to develop people”, but a starting point—“follow me”. We help a Host discovery that they really can be a leader. The problem I have noticed with many churches is they don’t recruit to “follow me” but Die for me”. Leaving many people out of the game.

5. Employ Various Avenues of Learning.

The Campaign Strategy takes a common theme and helps people learn that theme through different learning styles. People learn through listening to the weekend services. People learn through discussing topics in their small groups. People learn through doing hands-on projects. People learn through memorizing Scripture. And people learn through reading as they work through the campaign materials in their small groups and on their own.

6. Once a Year Is Enough.

I am a college football fan. As much as I love the college football season and hate to see it come to an end, there is something about the wait and anticipation of the next season. If college football was off for a month and then back on, it wouldn't be as good from month to month. Players couldn't prepare, and I just wouldn't look forward to the coming of fall like I do now.

It's the same way with campaigns. When you do too many campaigns in a year, two things happen: 1) The volunteers who pulled it off won't be able to manage another campaign so soon, and 2) Your congregation won't experience the anticipation of an upcoming event.

7. Provide a clear start and end date.

At Saddleback, our campaigns last 40 days. This is a short enough commitment that most people are willing to make it, but long enough to instill good habits. When you have a clear start and end date, it gives people an end in sight, which means they are more willing to come along for the ride.

8. Expect High Intensity for Staff, Volunteers, and Members.

The secret of a successful campaign is sustaining high intensity for 40 days and then backing off to allow staff and volunteers to recover. This recovery time also helps group members to process the experience. Give your small groups time to stabilize.

For a campaign to happen successfully, you must clear the calendar for the duration of that campaign. You need to stop programs and events that could be distracting. Sometimes "good" programs can stop "great" things from happening in a campaign.

Also, with a campaign comes the beginning of many new groups, which means that afterwards you will need time to assess where those groups are at. Some will continue and some will stop. But without the margin and infrastructure to check in on these groups, you will start a lot of groups and lose the same amount.

9. Remember to Celebrate!

Oftentimes churches are great at recruiting and getting things finished for a campaign, but terrible at celebrating a job well done. After the campaign, be sure to hold a celebration and express your gratitude for all of the hard work done by staff and volunteers. Take time to remember and celebrate God's work. Share stories of success and gratitude.

When you don't take the time to celebrate, you are increasing the possibility of burnout in your staff and volunteers. In the Bible we read of many instances when God had people stop and remember the miracles He accomplished. Why? Because He knew people would forget. When you celebrate, you etch God's work on your people's heart.

At Saddleback, we often we give out little reminders or mementos, such as key chains, so that when people see them, they will be reminded of how God moved. Help your people remember what God has done and celebrate the campaign they put so much time and energy into achieving.

10. Understand the Delivery System—Small Groups.

At Saddleback we have two delivery systems: weekend services and small groups (which comes from Acts 5:42). It is a two-punch system to help people not just learn, but also apply the Word of God. Our small groups are the delivery system of all the components of the campaign. Group life is not optional at Saddleback. It is vital.

We use a funnel to depict the strategy behind how we apply the five biblical purposes throughout the church:

- The weekend service establishes the five biblical purposes through the preaching of the Word.
- The CLASS system explains the five biblical purposes.
- Small groups give people the opportunity to experience the five biblical purposes (they help you take information and turn it into transformation).
- The life of an individual (a Purpose Driven Life) expresses the purposes.

For all of this to work, **you need to have some kind of infrastructure in place.** An infrastructure helps your new groups not go it alone. At Saddleback, we have Community Leaders who oversee new small groups. What they do is simple—check on the new groups regularly and offer encouragement and prayer. The DVD curriculum provides the material, but the Community Leader gives the moral support.

You also need a Leadership Development Pathway in place. Your small-group hosts/leaders need to know where you want them to go. If they continue to lead, what will be their journey and final destination? How will they be trained? Not providing clear direction is like asking someone to come over to your house and only giving them a city, not the address.

Also, **give your groups a next step.** Before you let a group get through a campaign, have them make a decision on what their next step will be. Will they continue to meet, or will they part ways? Around week four of the six-week campaign, we encourage groups to determine what their next study will be. We give them curriculum suggestions and encourage them to get the new material as soon as possible. Very often, just avoiding "down time" can make the difference in whether a group continues or not.

11. Give People an "Out" After the Campaign Is Finished.

That may sound odd, but chances are good that even those who drop out will eventually be back in a small group. In a campaign, you need to give people permission to stop their group.

Let me be clear: I want every new group to continue, and I want to give them every possible reason to stay together. But I don't want them to feel guilty if their group doesn't continue. Why? Because when they do what you have asked, you need to reward them and thank them, not pour on guilt for not continuing. I have learned when you give people permission to stop meeting at the end of the campaign, they will be there for the next campaign. And during the next campaign, they just might stay with that next group.

12. Budget to Remove Financial Obstacles.

When we run a campaign at Saddleback, we pay for everything. We provide the devotional reading books, memory key tags, prayer guides, small-group DVDs, and study guides to anyone who joins a small group. If people commit to a small group, we give them everything to make a spiritual impact on them—they just need to join. It's a lot of money up front, but it brings huge dividends on the back side.

Invest in your church. It shows your people you not only care about them, but you are also willing to put your money where your heart is.

—STEVE GLADEN is the Pastor of Small-Group Community at Saddleback Church and founder of the Purpose Driven Small Group Network. You can read more from Steve at www.smallgroups.net.



Beware the Campaign Half-Life

Two tough questions for churches using small-group campaigns

By Dan Lentz

I continue to be amazed at how many churches are using campaigns to launch new small groups and find new leaders. Whether it's "40 Days of Purpose" or the "50 Day Spiritual Adventure," campaigns are big right now.

The idea behind a campaign is to create church-wide unity, enthusiasm, and momentum. This is done through prayer, teaching, evangelism, special events, and personal devotions that are all aligned with the campaign themes. Many new small groups have been successfully launched using these campaigns as a way to get unconnected people into new or existing small groups.

Once the campaign period ends, however, there is normally a slow fade-out of the energy that was created. And once the energy fades, churches are faced with several new questions: How do we maintain support for new groups? How do we keep training new leaders?

In other words, churches must wrestle with that dreaded question: What do we do now?

Getting On the Merry-Go-Round

In one way this is a good thing, because it's difficult to sustain the intensity that exists during a campaign period. Slowing down may help existing groups and leaders develop a sustainable spiritual pace.

However, I keep hearing about an interesting phenomenon that pops up after churches use a campaign: in the weeks and months following the campaign, far fewer new leaders and groups are developing, and fewer unconnected people are getting connected than during the campaign period. This reduction is natural, of course, and so the natural response is often: "We need to do another campaign."

And many churches do just that. Most don't do the same campaign over and over; instead, they choose another campaign or develop their own material based around a theme or teaching series. I have talked to some churches that are now doing campaigns three times per year to match their ministry seasons. And yet, almost all of them say the same thing: "The more we do campaigns, the less effective they become."

It's like taking a prescription drug with a half-life. The first time you take it, you receive the maximum healing benefit. But the next time you take it, the benefit is good, but far less than the first time you took it. The third time is even less beneficial, and so on.

I think that's why so many church leaders are desperately looking for something "new" that will put energy back into their system. Simply put, their system has become dependent on campaign strategies as the method for starting new groups and assimilating members.

Moving Forward

So what's the deal? The problem is not with the campaigns themselves. They are only a tool, like a group agenda or study guide. Rather, what makes the campaign momentum sustainable is the relationship-intensive process of building discipleship systems and values in your church that continually foster leader development and new groups. In other words, your church needs to have a sustainable way to start and support new small groups that is separate from campaigns, but that can be complemented by campaigns.

So here's my takeaway. Before doing your next (or first) campaign, take a serious look at the discipleship systems and values that are in place in your church. Then ask yourself another tough question: Are these values and systems sustainable and reproducible over time?

—DAN LENTZ is an Editorial Advisor for SmallGroups.com and the author of [Let's Get Started: How to begin your small-groups ministry](#) (Standard, 2007).



Small-Group Leaders Versus Small-Group Hosts

A quick overview of the issues and advice to help you make a decision

By Bill Search

One of the greatest revolutions in small-group ministry has been the development of the "host strategy." For generations church leadership has been reserved for trained members. That was a safe (and biblical) approach. However, as the emphasis on small groups has increased, the presence of affirmed, trained leaders has not. So what is a church to do? How can a pastor tell the congregation you need a small group then turn around and apologize that there are no leaders for the new small groups?

Then came the host strategy. Forget about leaders—all you need is a person or two willing to open their home, turn on a TV, hit play on the DVD, and facilitate a discussion. Presto, you have a group.

I am decidedly non-committal when it comes to the idea of small-group hosts. My church has gone back and forth on the use of hosts, and we currently use a modified approach to small-group leadership that I will describe at the end of this article.

Ten Issues

To start, however, let me identify ten issues that often come up when churches try to choose between group leaders and group hosts. The goal is not to say that one approach is better than the other, but to provide you and your leadership with different items to keep in mind as you approach this decision.

1. **Qualifications.** The first issue that usually comes up is what qualifies someone to lead or host a group. Typically a church that uses small-group leaders requires that the leader become a member of the church, fill out an application, and complete some level of training. While this process can be cumbersome, it serves as a filter so that the qualified emerge as leaders.

Meanwhile, hosts are usually recruited simply based on their willingness to open their home and operate a DVD player. Some have derogatorily referred to this as the mirror-fogging test: if you can fog a mirror you can host a group! The qualification for a host is a pulse.

2. **Expectations.** A second issue related to small-group leadership is the expectations. Traditional group leaders basically operate as lay pastors. They shepherd their groups. They don't just host an event; they invest in the spiritual lives of the people in the group. Some say the expectation of a host is to press "play." Of course, this is oversimplifying. A host really has to have the gift of hospitality. The teaching and shepherding will be done through the DVD.
3. **Duration.** A third issue is the expected duration of a group. Host-led groups are typically short-term. If the curriculum is eight weeks, the group lasts eight weeks. This is not to say that a host-led group must end as the curriculum ends, but in my experience these kinds of groups will fold if you don't provide the next curriculum.

Meanwhile, a traditional small group will last from 18 months to several years. The expectation of many who enter a traditional small group is that they are joining a community, not just going through material.

4. **Curriculum.** This is related to what I mentioned above. In a typical host-led group, the curriculum drives the group. Since the hosts are not teachers or pastors but hospitality leaders, they rely heavily on the material provided. This can be disastrous if the curriculum does not fit the group or flow well. A traditional small group operates off of a shared mission that is usually articulated in a covenant. The group together agrees what their purpose is and curriculum is a tool to accomplish that purpose.
5. **Coaching.** The fifth issue in the host/leader debate is the importance of coaching and developing the "leaders." In my years of ministry I have found that the less you train leaders before the group starts, the more important it is that you train the leaders while they lead. In other words, on-the-job training

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is essential for untrained hosts. So, if you employ hosts it is vital that you stay connected with them week to week while they are meeting. Small-group leaders, on the other hand, have more training in advance and therefore need less frequent coaching (notice that I did not say "no coaching").

6. **Growth.** The sixth issue worth exploring is how each strategy helps the ministry grow. The host strategy allows a ministry to grow in participation. Since most churches have people with homes and DVD players, each church has countless potential hosts. More hosts equals more potential participants. However, traditional group leaders grow depth. If a lay pastor actually shepherds their group, they will help their people grow deeper roots in the Gospel. This depth should produce spiritual fruit.
7. **Accessibility.** The seventh issue of the host/leader conversation is the accessibility of leaders. The host strategy was designed to help churches get past their leadership vacuum. The churches I have served began using modified forms of the group host strategy because we didn't have enough people willing to lead. Traditional small-group leaders are harder to find, slow growing, and tend to be reluctant to lead.
8. **New leaders.** The eighth issue is the most exciting to me: identification of potential group leaders. As I just said, leaders tend to be reluctant to lead, which means recruiting hosts is a great way to "trick" people into leading. Many group hosts make great small-group leaders, but they are intimidated by the idea of leading. Hosting allows them to put a toe in the water and try out leading before committing. Some of my best small-group leaders started out as hosts.

The flip side can be true as well: some small-group leaders are terrible leaders. They may complete a process but in their exuberance to lead (and our desperation for leaders) we affirm people without pastoral gifts.

9. **Risk.** If you haven't yet faced the ninth issue by now, you will soon. I call it the "risk factor." If you run a potential group leader through church membership, the application process, and training, you have a good chance of identifying potential problems. However, since hosts usually just sign a piece of paper and then pick up their curriculum, they are a bigger risk.

This risk makes church leaders nervous. More than once I have had to explain to elders that we will coach hosts and leaders while they lead and to try to identify concerns. And let's be honest, we wouldn't have most of the New Testament if it wasn't for rogue group leaders and hosts (see 1 and 2 Corinthians for examples).

10. **Fatigue.** The final issue in the host/leader debate is fatigue. Hosts-led groups tend to run on semesters. The ramp up to group launches, the identification of the next curriculum, the coaching of independent-minded hosts can be exhausting. Many churches across America have seen huge small-group launches followed by big crashes because maintaining momentum drains the church (and the leaders).

Traditional small-group leadership isn't easier, but tends to be spread out the effort. It doesn't require massive build up and advertising. The energy of church leadership isn't focused on fall and spring launches as much as continual development of the leaders.

A Southeast Snapshot

I like to modify. I'm more of a remodeler than I am a builder. I have owned three homes over the years and I did work on each one. From simple projects like painting to massive projects like ripping off part of the front of a house, I like to tinker with an existing home to make it better. I do the same thing in ministry.

To meet the relentless demand for new leaders, I have modified the host and traditional group-leader strategy into an event we simply call Community Group Connection. It is somewhat similar to what Northpoint Church in Atlanta calls GroupLink and what Saddleback Church calls Connections.

This is how it works:

- We invite everyone who wants to join a small group to a two-hour event at the church campus to meet others who want to join a group. Once there, we divide into groups of 8–12 people around their stage of life and region.
- Next they respond to a handful of questions that move from light-hearted to sharing their testimony (if they have one).

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- If we don't have pre-selected leaders, we conclude by having the group choose a short-term leader that night. We then grab the newly minted leaders, give them an application for membership, invite them to training the next week, and begin a week-to-week coaching conversation with them.
- Along the way, if the new leader doesn't meet our expectations, we help the group choose a new leader.

It's not perfect and it is risky, but this method has worked well for us for several years.

—BILL SEARCH is author of [Simple Small Groups](#) and small groups pastor at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, KY. Copyright 2010 by the author and Christianity Today International.



Recruiting New Small-Group Leaders

Here are five steps that will guide you through the process.

By Rick Howerton

When leading a church-wide campaign, one of the most important responsibilities of the small-group pastor (or point person) is recruiting group hosts and group members. The good news is that recruiting new group members is usually pretty easy; the bad news is that recruiting new group leaders is almost always a tough task. It's hard to find fully formed, spiritually mature Christians who are ready to lead others during normal circumstances—which means it's much harder to find a several of them at the same time prior to your church's campaign.

One way to resolve this dilemma is to recruit small-group hosts instead of small-group leaders. Here are a few of the differences between those two roles:

- Group leaders have a long-term commitment; hosts commit to the campaign only.
- If people can push a button and/or read questions from a sheet of paper, they can host a small group.
- Hosts do not have to be spiritually mature and ready to take on the full responsibilities of a small-group leader.
- Hosts do not need much training. In fact, the less amount of time they have to commit to training experiences, the easier it will be to recruit hosts.

This does not mean you are lowering the bar when it comes to expectations for your small-group leaders. You are recruiting hosts that will serve a new role during the campaign. That being said, it should certainly be your goal to help many of those hosts transition into fully formed small-group leaders after the campaign.

Here are five important things to keep in mind when recruiting small-group hosts.

1. Vision Casting

Nothing is more vital to the recruitment of passionate hosts than the communication of a compelling vision. The vision for your campaign should include how these groups will impact your community, the church, and the lives of individuals. The vision should also highlight the importance of each person being in a small group, as well as the need for group hosts.

In all cases, the senior pastor needs to be the primary vision caster for your church-wide campaign. He or she should regularly communicate how many groups the church has at present and how many groups the church hopes to have during the campaign. Plus, the pastor should let the congregation know that almost anyone can be a good host, and should explain where potential hosts can get their questions answered and sign up.

2. One-on-One Conversations

Vision casting from the senior pastor is a great way to get the word out about opportunities to host a small group during your campaign. So are bulletin inserts, posters, and announcements on the church website. But the best way to "seal the deal" in recruiting new hosts is to have a lot of one-on-one conversations.

As you talk with potential hosts, be clear about the differences between a host and a group leader. Explain what the expectations would be, including:

- They are not long-term leaders. What you are offering is a short-term responsibility that carries an eternal significance.
- They are not expected to shepherd or pastor the group members—only lead the group meeting each week.
- They will not be responsible for enlisting an apprentice or multiplying the group when the campaign is over.

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Just as importantly, talk about the vision your church leadership has for this campaign—why it is so important for the church and the surrounding community. And make sure they know how, when, and where to sign up if they are interested.

3. Recruiting Hosts from Existing Small Groups

First, you want to identify key leaders within your church and enlist them in the campaign as early as possible. That way, when you speak with others about hosting a group, you can say that the senior pastor, staff members, elders, and so on are going to be participating—which is encouraging. Also, be sure to recruit existing small groups to participate in the campaign. Don't assume that they will automatically fall in line.

As you speak with existing small-group leaders, identify which ones have been training up apprentice leaders. Then approach those apprentices about hosting a group during the campaign as another component of their training. In the same way, ask existing small-group leaders which people from their groups would be good candidates to serve as hosts, and possibly as future group leaders.

Finally, ask Sunday school teachers to consider hosting a group during the campaign. And it's only natural that these teachers would recruit people from their classes as group members, which is great. Contact these individuals as soon as possible.

4. Removing Insecurity

One thing potential hosts need to hear is that they really are capable of hosting a small group. To that end, set up a table in the church where potential hosts can come before or after the Sunday service and ask any questions on their mind. Make this table available from the time the senior leadership makes the first announcement about the campaign until the weekend it officially begins. You may also consider conducting "potential host meetings" leading up to the campaign in order to communicate information and answer questions.

Another great way to remove the insecurity of potential hosts is to help them hear the stories of hosts from previous campaigns. This can be done live during a worship service or through a pre-recorded video. Either way, be sure these testimonials include real endings to the following statements:

- I didn't think I was capable, but...
- I didn't think I was knowledgeable enough, but...
- I didn't think I had the time, but...
- I didn't think anyone would want to come to my group, but...
- I didn't think I could lead the conversation, but...
- I thought I'd have to do everything, but...

5. Securing a Commitment

As you recruit potential hosts, present them with opportunities to either commit or turn you down verbally. There is a much better chance of getting a "yes" when talking in person (rather than email or social media), and people who are on the bubble will have a harder time turning you down when they can see that you care about the vision of the campaign and care about their growth and development. Talking on the phone is also effective, but be sure to call individuals personally rather than asking them to call you.

Also, don't feel like you are the only person who can talk to potential hosts. Empower your small-group leaders and Sunday school teachers to accept a commitment from those in their groups who would like to become a host. If this happens, make sure you still call the person whose name has been passed on and confirm their involvement, because miscommunications are possible.

—RICK HOWERTON is a SmallGroups.com Editorial Advisor and author of [Destination: Community](#).

LAUNCHING A CHURCH-WIDE CAMPAIGN**Recruiting New Small-Group Members***Four steps your church needs to take*

By Rick Howerton

It's true that recruiting new members for a church-wide campaign is typically easier than recruiting several new small-group leaders. But that doesn't mean people will automatically beat down your door in a rush to sign up for a new group.

Here are five necessities when recruiting new people into new groups.

Vision Casting

As with recruiting new hosts, vision casting from the senior leadership is vital. In fact, it is even more important in the recruitment of small-group members. Each time the senior leadership mentions the upcoming campaign, some or all of the following should be voiced:

- How being in a group will positively affect your life.
- How being in a group will positively affect your family.
- How being in a group will positively affect our church.
- How being in a group will positively affect our community.
- Where and how to sign up for a group (this must be mentioned each time the vision is cast).

Awareness

People must know about the opportunity before they can involve themselves in it. So, publicizing the campaign is a necessity. Be sure the campaign is noted in your church's bulletin/worship guide from the first day the senior pastor casts the vision until the campaign is officially launched.

Use video testimonials in worship services to publicize the campaign. And if possible, use banners and/or posters throughout the church building. You may even consider purchasing a few television ads as well as utilizing the local newspaper to promote the campaign and groups. Also use social networking—Facebook, Twitter, and so on.

Finally, ask group hosts to write a short letter inviting people within three blocks of their home to attend their group. You'd be surprised how many people are looking for relationship with neighbors, and a campaign offers the perfect opportunity to start a friendship without taking relational risks. You can also ask church members and group hosts to go door-to-door in the area where their group will be meeting. Nothing is more effective than a personal invitation.

Answer Questions

If you don't answer people's questions, there is a good chance they won't participate in the campaign. Prepare a list of FAQ's and give it to every group host. Make it available via your webpage and at a promotional table in the church lobby. It should include the following information, as well as anything else you believe is important for those in your demographic:

- How much of my time is this going to take?
- What are we going to do with our children during meetings?
- Will there be homework? If so, how much?
- Am I going to have to talk or can I just sit and listen during meetings?
- Will I have to pray out loud?
- Who else is going to be in the group?
- How much do I have to know about the Bible?
- How many weeks or months is this group going to last?

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- If I don't like it can I leave without people being angry with me?
- What are we going to be doing during meetings?

Make It Easy

It's essential that you give people many ways to register for a group, and that they are all relatively easy. This can include a table or booth in the church lobby, worship guide inserts that can be filled out and placed in the offering plate, invitation via e-mail, a page on the church website, or phone calls that include personal invitations.

—RICK HOWERTON is a SmallGroups.com Editorial Advisor and author of [Destination: Community](#).

Discuss:

1. Have you found that recruiting group members is easier than recruiting group leaders? Which step do you fear most?
2. If you had to give a letter grade to your church's vision for this campaign, what would it be?
3. Would you say that the sign up process for group members and group leaders is easy right now?



How to Include Existing Leaders and Groups

You can't assume that everyone will jump on board with your plans, but you can help.

By Danny R. Von Kanel

Nothing builds excitement in a church family better than uniting together in a church-wide campaign. Of course, one of the main obstacles involved with "uniting" is convincing everyone to participate. Campaigns are a great way to launch new groups, but the overall effectiveness is limited if existing small groups don't participate, as well.

The process of approaching existing small groups and small-group leaders is time-consuming. It takes effort, and it often takes a bit of convincing. But getting every existing small group to participate in a campaign is well within the realm possibility for any church, large or small. Here's how.

Casting a Vision

While support from lay leaders is not a given, you'll get a pretty good following of veteran small-group leaders if they know that your church leadership is committed to the campaign. That's because most church members embrace what their pastor senses as God's leading—meaning, they will follow the church's leadership if they know the church's leadership is serious about something. (And if that's not the case in your church, you may want to explore that a bit instead of launching a campaign.)

That's why it's so important that church leaders, especially the senior pastor, cast a strong vision for the campaign. It lets everyone know that this is a priority for the church and they need to get on board.

The vision casting for your church-wide campaign must include the purpose for the campaign, anticipated results, how it will impact existing groups, and the biblical mandate to undertake such an event. The more you connect Scripture, God's will, and pastoral leadership to the campaign, the more small groups will get on board.

That being the case, don't sugarcoat the cost of commitment. Explain clearly what it will mean to join the campaign in terms of time, energy, and finances (if the campaign requires each).

The best way to present a church-wide campaign to existing small groups is to call a meeting of small-group leaders. Schedule it at a time most can attend. Share the plan for the campaign in a professional way, and try to answer any questions that come up. It's important that the senior pastor introduce and conclude this meeting, even if another staff member or point person leads the discussion in the middle.

Cultivating New Group Leaders within Existing Small Groups

When existing small groups join up with the campaign, they become a great resource for maintaining momentum and implementing the vision of that campaign. One of the best ways they can help is in raising up a harvest of new group leaders.

Here are four keys to identifying and enlisting potential group leaders/hosts from within an existing small group:

- **Listen for God's voice.** Ask the Lord to lay someone in the existing group on your heart—someone that will be able to step up and take on a leadership role.
- **Look for maturity.** Which people in the existing group displays spiritual maturity? Who always comes ready to hear from God, relishes finding new truth, and is willing to serve?
- **Lay the seed for growth.** Once God has impressed someone on your heart, begin to plant the seed regarding the possibility of their leading or hosting a small group. Say: "Johnny, I saw how you

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handled God's Word tonight. Who knows, God may have something special for you to do in coming days related to his Word." Or: "Sally, you've taken on several leadership roles in your group. It may be God has a greater task for you. Be open to what God may be saying about your gifts and abilities and how they can best be used to further his kingdom."

- **See if there's a harvest.** Set up an appointment after several weeks of planting seeds. Walk potential group leaders through the steps you took to seek out new leaders (as listed above). Share that God laid them on your heart as a potential small-group leader. Be sure you have a job description. Go through job responsibilities and answer any questions they may have. Request that they pray about the decision. Wait a week and make contact again for their response.

If you start the process early enough, you may be able to place all of the new leaders in a "starter small group" (or turbo group) before the campaign begins. This is a low-pressure way to help people refine their skills and practice what it takes to lead a group of their own.

When Groups Choose Not to Participate

Church leaders need to face the possibility that some existing groups may choose not to take part in a church-wide campaign. In these situations, having a thoughtful response ready to go will make the best of the situation. That response is going to be different for each church, but it may include some of these ideas:

- Starting a new group should include a verbal/written covenant or contract that addresses this kind of issue. No group is an island to itself. Each functions as a part of a team effort to reach our world for Christ.
- In the absence of such agreement, a crafted response from church leaders is necessary. This reply should include: initial agreements and/or understandings, rationale for all groups taking part, and a request that they honor the wishes of church leadership.
- At the initial campaign meeting, there should be ample opportunity for voicing disapproval and/or concerns. But once the campaign is approved, there needs to be a strong call for unity. Any group sitting out becomes that proverbial "weak link," which limits the campaign's success.
- If a group still wishes to opt out, request that they pray for the campaign and not do anything to discourage others from becoming involved.

—DANNY R. VON KANEL; copyright 2010 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. If you had to grade your church's efforts to communicate the vision of the campaign so far, what would you say?
2. Is it important that all of the existing small groups in a church participate in a campaign? Why or why not?
3. Do small groups at your church sign a covenant/contract to operate under the authority of the church?



Four Important Steps You Haven't Considered

Don't get caught unprepared on this campaign.

By Alan Danielson

My first experience with a church-wide campaign was in 2002, back when I was a church planter. We were one of the first churches in the country to do the *40 Days of Purpose* campaign alongside Saddleback Church (I still have my un-proofed, spiral-bound copy of *The Purpose Driven Life*). I used that campaign to launch our small-group ministry, and I was astounded by the results. Most of our young church joined a group for the campaign, and people I never thought would lead stepped up to start their own groups. Since then I've been a huge fan of campaigns, and I have leveraged them often to help build and develop small-group ministries.

I've seen campaigns evolve considerably over the years. Many churches do them like clockwork every January and September. Many provide free video curriculum to their small groups during the campaign. Many have connection events or create special websites to promote their small groups. During campaigns, churches push for new groups to start, new leaders to be trained, and all parishioners to join groups.

All of these are great elements for a successful campaign, and there's no limit to the innovation and creativity churches use to develop them. However, there are four things that churches often overlook when planning for their campaign.

Group Training, Not Just Leader Training

Training new small-group leaders is a no-brainer—everyone recognizes that new leaders need training, so churches set up training events, create online training courses, send leaders home with resources, and provide small-group coaches. Yet with all of this training it's not uncommon for those of us in church leadership to be frustrated by the fact that a disconnect exists between what we've trained group leaders to accomplish and what the groups are actually doing.

There are a few reasons this happens. First, leader training is like drinking from a fire hose. Leaders get tons of information and don't really have time to process it before they start meeting with their groups. Second, leaders may take the training to heart, but can be afraid to ask their groups to do what they are being asked to do. For example, if groups are being asked to use a particular curriculum for a campaign, some groups won't like it. They might be in the middle of a 22 week study of Revelation and this new curriculum will mess up their calendar. Some leaders just don't have the guts to tell their group that they need to use an alternative curriculum for a few weeks. Third, some leaders simply have their own agendas. They may not like what you are asking them to do, so they just decide not to do it. After all, who in the group is going to know? They weren't at leader training. They don't know what leaders were asked to do.

For these reasons, I'm a huge believer in adding a new layer to training for a campaign: group training. It's possible to train not only the leader, but the entire group. Group training should not replace leader training—rather, it should be a complement. The great thing about group training is that it can be subliminal enough that groups don't realize they are being trained.

Here are a few ways to train entire small groups:

- Teach your church's small-group values and expectations through the weekend messages.
- Teach your church's small-group values and expectations through the curriculum you produce. (Add in material that nudges groups toward your vision of participation.)
- Give away free DVDs that share an expanded vision of small-group ministry at your church (people like free stuff).
- Share stories that exemplify the values you want your groups to live out.

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- Put a short 90-second training clip on the front end of each week's video curriculum. ([Here's an example](#) from my YouTube channel.)

The point of group training is to create another level of accountability. The more people in a group who know what is expected of the group, the more likely the group will be to live out those expectations.

Buyer Paralysis

Have you ever been to a restaurant that has so many options on the menu that you just couldn't decide what to order? That's called "buyer paralysis." The human mind has a harder time making decisions when there are too many options to consider. The solution to this problem is providing fewer options.

What does this have to do with small groups? When we ask the people in our church to find or join a group, we are asking them to make a decision. "Buyer Paralysis" comes into play when our parishioners are faced with too many group options. Many churches provide a catalogue of groups and they ask their parishioners to choose a group from the catalogue. Some of these catalogues are beautifully printed in full color and some are simple black-and-white spreadsheets. Regardless, catalogues can feel daunting to the end user because there offer too many choices.

To help people select a group, we need to think in small bites. When making a catalogue, divide it into sections like *married with children*, *everyone welcome*, *single parents*, *singles 20s, 30s, 40s*, *empty nesters*, and *senior adults*. This immediately filters the choices for the end user. If you are using a table or kiosk in the lobby, only feature 12 or fewer groups at a time. This ensures that people are more likely to choose a group, and it helps fill new groups quickly. If you're having connection events, divide people up demographically or geographically so their choices will be limited.

If you use any kind of online small group search tool or management system, ask someone outside of your organization to try finding a group online and give you some honest feedback. Whatever is not easy about your online resource needs to change! Making choices simple and making the decision making process more "user friendly" is absolutely key!

The Selfish vs. Selfless Battle

The most selfless activity that groups can embrace is mission. It's natural for followers of Christ to want fellowship, prayer, and Bible study. It's not always natural to reach out to the community. For that reason, it's imperative that groups do something selflessly missional during their first eight weeks together. When this happens, selflessness is more likely to become a part of their group DNA. There's nothing harder in small-group ministry than taking an inwardly focused group that is months or years old, and helping them become outward. So start early!

When you're preparing for your campaign, plan mission events and ask every group to participate. Don't just choose simple projects like cleaning up a neighborhood or painting a community center, though. Choose projects that involve person-to-person interaction with the community. Your groups need to interface with the people who are benefiting from their mission project. Why? Because it creates opportunities for relationships to form, and relationships make missional-DNA stick.

No group member has ever formed a solid relationship with a trash bag and work gloves. But group members feel connected to the children they are serving. They feel drawn to the single mom they met during their mission project. They feel compassion for the families they helped feed. Ultimately those feelings will draw these group members back to the mission field. After a simple community cleanup day, our sore backs and blisters are annoyances. After serving the Jones family personally, our sore backs and blisters are badges of honor. When people get to know those they serve, they are more likely to continue selfless behaviors. Those selfless behaviors open the door for conversations about the gospel and for invitations to church.

Below are just a few mission project ideas for the first eight weeks. Let these ideas fuel your own creativity.

- Paint a school and ask every group to adopt a class for the entire school year.
- Host an athletics or art camp at a low-income apartment complex and ask your group members to adopt an apartment/family.
- Serve food at a homeless shelter and ask every group member to sit and eat with the homeless people.

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- Have neighborhood block parties and ask groups to identify needs in their neighborhoods that they can meet over the next six to eight weeks.

Whatever you do, keep the projects simple. The main goal here is to get groups into the community serving real people face-to-face. This will stimulate tremendous personal growth for group members and start building missional DNA in your groups.

Campaign Over

One of the most critical things to remember about your campaign is that ministry doesn't end when the campaign does. The best way to stop your campaign momentum is to stop providing resources, training, and mission opportunities after the campaign has ended.

Here's what I mean: if you provide free video curriculum during the campaign and nothing afterward, your groups will be frustrated. Some will stop meeting altogether. So keep providing some kind of free curriculum after the campaign. If you have great mission project ideas and opportunities during a campaign but provide none afterward, your groups will stop being on mission. And group challenges don't stop just because a campaign is over, so group-leader training needs to continue, as well.

Campaigns are a great way to generate excitement and momentum around your small-group ministry. Don't let your small groups stall because of your own failure to plan ahead and lead after the campaign is over.

—ALAN DANIELSON is author of [Triple-Threat Leadership](#) and a popular speaker. You can read more from Alan at [3threat.net](#). Copyright 2010 by the author and Christianity Today International.



The Top 10 Reasons Campaigns Miss the Mark

Think through these missteps so that your church can avoid repeating them.

By Mark Howell

What is the most powerful way to impact your entire congregation? Many believe that a church-wide campaign, what Rick Warren refers to as a "spiritual growth emphasis," is the most important spiritual innovation in the last 50 years—maybe the last century. Right or wrong, there's no question that the right church-wide campaign can impact not only your congregation, but often your community as well.

There are several key steps to launching a church-wide campaign that lead to greater participation, higher follow-through, broader community interaction, and deeper values integration. But there are also some devastating missteps that cause many campaigns to miss the mark.

Here are my top 10:

1. **Choosing a topic that only appeals to the interests of the core and completely misses the point for the least connected (who are most in need of a spiritual next step).** This is huge! I call it choosing from the "hard" end of the Easy/Hard continuum. What's "easy?" A topic like knowing your purpose or learning how to live like you would if you found out you were dying. What's "hard?" Subjects like hell or judgment, or even the power of the Holy Spirit for our daily life. When a topic doesn't engage the edges of the congregation—the crowd that surrounds the "core" of your ministry—it misses a very large opportunity to connect with their friends and neighbors.
2. **Missing the strategic window of optimum launch dates when you're too impatient to wait or too slow to gear up.** It's essential to understand that the rhythms of your church community have a lot to do with how broadly the campaign will be embraced. There is a reason that Saddleback launches their campaigns in late September or early October. It gives them time to promote the series and recruit hosts, which helps them get off to a good start. Just as importantly, it gives their newest groups plenty of time to connect thoroughly before the holiday busyness interrupts in December. Although late January or early February offers an opportunity to engage fresh-start hopefuls and Easter presents some possibilities, these pale in comparison to the advantages of the fall.
3. **Failing to help your members build neighborhood or work relationships in advance of the campaign.** Once you've chosen the right campaign, you'll want to help your leaders and group members invite friends, neighbors, family members, and coworkers. A little advance preparation, plus a few activities designed to help them build neighborhood and work connections, can go a long way toward strengthening relationships and making it easier for people to invite others.
4. **Hand-selecting group leaders from the usual suspects (the core) and failing to capitalize on the relationships of the congregation and crowd.** One of the key missteps of some churches doing *40 Days of Purpose* was that they handpicked leaders from their core church members and then encouraged them to invite their friends. Why was that a problem? Because all of their friends were also in the core!

On the other hand, churches that recruited more broadly saw much greater participation. One of the little-known secrets of a campaign that impacts beyond the congregation is that making it possible for less involved members to host a group makes it more likely that people outside the congregation will be invited.

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5. **Failing to engage key opinion leaders who influence the congregation.** In order for a church-wide campaign to truly capture everyone's imagination and attention, you must have buy-in from your most visible and influential members. That includes both staff members and key lay leaders.
6. **Identifying the campaign topic too late and missing the opportunity to find testimonies that recruit hosts or members.** Whether you're recruiting hosts who will open up their homes or encouraging everyone to join a group for the campaign, almost nothing is as compelling as personal testimony. "I was afraid to try it because I didn't think I knew enough about the Bible, but I went ahead and did it and God really showed up. The group really helped me through a hard time. If you're thinking about hosting, you really ought to do it. You don't know what you'll miss if don't say yes."
7. **Failing to use key marketing options to promote the campaign more broadly and engage wider participation.** The bulletin, inserts, invitations, newsletters, all church emails, the website, and even yard signs can all play a part in getting the word out about the campaign. The key is that a church-wide campaign is not the time to pick one or two methods. Instead, take advantage of every option in order to get broad participation.
8. **Failing to choose a "next curriculum" for new groups that is similar in kind (DVD-driven and plug-and-play).** Left to their own initiative, someone in a new small group will suggest a next study that requires too much preparation on the part of the leader (or the group). Most campaigns enlist new leaders on the strength of easy-to-use curriculum (usually a DVD option that takes pressure away from a new group leader). So, switching to greater difficulty is often disastrous.
9. **Failing to introduce the next small-group material early enough to keep new groups energized and engaged.** It is very common for group members to commit to a group because it's just a six-week study, and then as quickly as the 3rd or 4th session begin to wish that it were longer. When you give new small groups something to do next and introduce it by about the 4th week, you make it possible for more groups to continue.
10. **Allowing the senior pastor to delegate the role of vision caster to anyone else.** If you want to involve everyone in your church in a campaign, you need to have the right spokesperson. There is no substitute for the senior pastor. No one else has that level of clout.

It's very common for pastors with the best of intentions to hand off the champion role only to see much lower buy-in than they expect. It's important to recognize that one of the main reasons for Saddleback's church-wide campaign success is that Rick Warren has held onto the role of chief spokesperson.

Ready to take advantage of the exponential power of a church-wide campaign? Do the thinking in advance that will help you avoid these 10 missteps.

—MARK HOWELL; excerpted with permission from www.MarkHowellLive.com.



Seven Advantages of Sermon-Based Small Groups

The lecture/lab model is great for both small groups and Sunday mornings.

By Larry Osborne

At North Coast Church, where I serve as senior pastor, we've had a long and interesting journey with small groups. We had no groups when we first started out. But after a while, I began to realize that our congregation was more of a crowd than a living, breathing community. So we launched small groups, and things began to change immediately.

For a number of years we hunted down the best curriculum available and provided it to our groups. They grew, and people's lives did change. But when I put together a sermon series called "The Company of the Committed"—in which I wanted to paint the picture of what a committed Christian lifestyle would look like on a day-to-day basis—we experimented with our first sermon-based groups. The response was off the charts. It was so positive that we never looked back.

Over the years, I've noticed that tying the study guide to the sermon has several advantages over a curriculum-based model. Here are seven of the most powerful advantages.

They Increase the Educational Impact

A number of years ago, I heard about a study that Harvard conducted for one of the military branches. Apparently the military was sending people to different conferences and training sessions, and they wanted to maximize the educational impact of those sessions by figuring out what helps people learn—and most importantly, retain and apply—the information they receive.

Some of the best minds at Harvard tackled this study, and they uncovered three ways to maximize the benefit of any training experience. The first was maintaining a high sense of expectation. The study showed that if people went into a training experience with high expectations, they generally learned and retained a lot more. Obviously, this one is common sense when it comes to churches. If people are coming to your church thinking, *Oh, this is going to be boring*, then you can probably understand why they're not retaining what you say.

But here's the second ingredient. The Harvard researchers also discovered that if people took good notes during the training experience, the educational impact and the life-change upon returning home would accelerate measurably. The third key had to do with discussing the material with others. If they got together and discussed the notes—and the broader training experience as a whole—their education impact and subsequent life-change was significantly increased. .

Strangely enough, those last two things are exactly what using a sermon-based small group model forces people to do.

They Pull in the Marginally Interested

The second advantage of sermon-based small groups is the way they can pull in the marginally interested. All churches have marginally interested people—people who come in late on a Sunday morning and slump onto a chair in the back of the sanctuary, waiting to see if a funny story or a good joke can pull them into a higher level of interest.

But it's a different story when a marginally interested person enters a sanctuary full of people who will be discussing the sermon later in the week with their small group. That's because a much higher percentage of the people will be taking notes and paying close attention in order to be prepared for their small group. There's a different feeling in the air. And so that marginally interested person—who doesn't want to stand out—tends to sit up a bit straighter and pay more attention simply to fit in. I see

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it at North Coast all the time. And since everyone else seems to be taking notes, they start doing that, as well.

They Reach More People

Sermon-based small groups also help churches reach more people in another very simple way, and it has to do with weekly attendance. Everyone misses church at one point or another. But how often do those people come clamoring to the church office to get a tape or CD of the sermon they missed? It may happen sometimes, but not often. But what if those people attend a small group later in the week and have to discuss that sermon they missed? They will almost always listen online or come by and pick up a CD.

And when those CDs are picked up, they are often passed on to others, shared, or given away. And so the end result is that more people end up hearing the message.

They Sharpen the Church-Wide Focus

In most churches, everyone listens to the same message, which does create a sense of unity. But when a church uses sermon-based small groups, everyone *interacts* with the same message, which really sharpens the focus.

I grew up in a very different style of church. We went to church on Sunday morning and heard one subject. Then we went to Sunday school and heard another subject. Then we went back on Sunday night and heard a third subject. And then we came back for the midweek service and studied a fourth subject!

I never had a clue what series we were in or what it was all about. It was just a mishmash of subjects. At North Coast, we cover less material with sermon-based groups, but our people know what we're covering. Our focus is sharper.

They Mainstream New Believers

In the small-groups world, it's kind of an unwritten rule that you don't put new believers in with a group of long-time Christians. The new believers get intimidated. They get swallowed up—especially by those overachievers who can pronounce all the big words and places properly. New believers often can't figure out if it's "Job" or "job." So we have to keep them away from the long-time Christians and start new-believer groups instead.

But does that really make sense? Is it really the best idea to get the nursery full of little kids and then make sure no adults show up? I don't think so. And it's certainly not the best way to make sure people stick with the church and grow. But sermon-based groups give us another option.

I don't watch a lot of movies, so when I come across a group of people critiquing a certain film, I generally try to stay out of their way. I get intimidated by my ignorance. But if those people are talking about a movie that I've actually taken the time to see, I'm in on the discussion. I stand my ground because I saw the film, and I have an opinion that's based on my own experience. And in our culture, everyone thinks they are an expert on what they've experienced.

The same is true of new believers who participate in a sermon-based small group. When Larry Long-Timer begins to pronounce all of the difficult words and throw out quotes from John Calvin or Chuck Swindoll, the new believer is more likely to stand his ground and offer his own opinion, because he's experienced the sermon himself. He'll feel like an expert based on his own experience, even if he feels lost when it comes to the genre of the Bible.

They Eliminate Idiot Questions

Every small-group curriculum I have ever seen has had at least one idiot question. For instance, if we're doing a study based on 1 Timothy, and the opening verse says, "...from Paul to Timothy," and then question number one in the curriculum guide is, "Who wrote 1 Timothy?" I call that an idiot

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question. It bores people to death. But there's a good reason those idiot questions are in every curriculum study guide. Because without the idiot questions, you can't set the context.

But when small groups are sermon-based, the context is set in the message. The sermon gets everyone on the same page. So group leaders are free to get right into the parallel passages and personal application.

They Help with Leadership Recruitment

If you're going to lead a group Bible study on Colossians, you need a pretty good grasp on the entire book. Otherwise you'll find yourself saying things in chapter one that don't fit with what's said in chapters two through four. You also need to understand the difference between a good question and a bad question. In addition, you'll need to bring some of your own research and ideas to the study; otherwise, you're going to be answering a lot of questions with, "I don't know." That's a pretty high bar to get over.

But if you lead a sermon-based small group, all you need to be is growing spiritually, excited about God's Word, and have the ability to draw group members together and keep them together. Unlike skilled Bible teachers, I've found that these kinds of people grow on trees!

In my experience with recruiting group leaders, there are not many people who can lead an inductive Bible study, but there are lots of people who can facilitate a discussion of a sermon everyone has heard. Few people can teach well, especially in our culture of mass media and heightened expectation. But God has always made sure there are enough shepherds for his flock. At North Coast, they are called small-group leaders. And when they aren't asked to do too much, they aren't too hard to find.

—LARRY OSBORNE; excerpted with permission from the [Small-Groups Starter Kit](#), copyright 2008 by North Coast Church.

Discuss:

1. Which of these advantages is most appealing to our church and ministry?
2. What weaknesses exist in our ministry that might be bolstered through sermon-based small groups?
3. Can we identify a couple of steps we need to take in order to start a sermon-based small groups ministry (or a sermon-based option to our current ministry)?



Questions and Answers for Existing Small Groups

Have a plan for responding to these common queries.

By Rick Lowry

Churches conducting a church-wide campaign often choose to build the campaign material around the pastor's weekend messages—a model usually referred to as sermon-based curriculum or sermon-based small groups. This method has been proven effective in several churches and ministry situations, both as a long-term plan for discipleship and a short-term experience within a campaign.

Still, the transition to a sermon-based model often raises several questions from different areas of the congregation—including small groups and small-group leaders. Below are some of the most common questions that arise during these transitions, plus some advice on how to address them. I have tried to provide several options for each question and answer, so be aware that the most effective approach for your church depends on your congregation's size, history, philosophy of ministry, and other factors.

Why choose sermon-based small groups?

There are several reasons why sermon-based groups can be a positive tool for a campaign or a long-term model of discipleship:

- **They offer a chance to go deeper.** Sermon-based discipleship helps people dig deeper into God's Word. Everyone hears Bible teaching from a skilled preacher, and then they get a chance to delve even further into the passage or topic during their small-group meeting. During weekend worship, it's impossible for everyone present to be able to interact with the person presenting the message. But everyone can "have their say" at their weekly small-group gatherings. This is especially helpful for more mature Christians who may be looking for deeper challenges from the Bible.
- **The study topic is decided.** No longer will the dreaded question have to be answered: "What is our group going to study next?" (This is a question usually decided when the only person who speaks up says, "Let's study the Book of Revelation!")
- **They provide unity.** The combination of weekend messages and small-group study helps the church move forward as a unified body. Many churches have experienced greater unity and purpose during an all-church study. Published materials (such as *The Purpose Driven Life*) serve well to move whole congregations to a new spiritual level. In addition to materials marketed on a wide scale, sometimes a church prepares a set of custom studies to go along with a message series. It might be on the topic of offerings and giving to the church, or a series about loving your neighbor, but it is written to tailor-fit the current life situation of that congregation.

This "one-two" punch of sermon-plus-small-group also enhances the relationships of the congregation throughout the week. When fellow church members run into each other at the mall or at work, they instantly have a common point of reference to use in starting a conversation.

Who should participate in a sermon-based campaign?

Each church will have its own scope of participation. In some congregations, all small groups are required to participate in the sermon-based studies. Other churches make it optional and allow groups to choose. Another question is to what extent the studies will happen throughout the different

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programs of the church. For example, will the high school or middle school small groups participate? The children's ministry groups? The missional or evangelism-based small groups?

What is the timeframe?

One of the best ways to introduce sermon-based small groups is to set it up as an "experiment" that will be conducted for an announced period of time, such as 6 or 8 weeks. That way both church members and leaders can decide if this is working before making a long-term commitment. Some churches choose not to do sermon-based studies every week of the year, but conduct a few six-week campaigns each year during which all small groups are expected to participate. The rest of the weeks the groups choose their own materials.

How will material be distributed?

Some churches make the printed lessons available as people walk into worship; they pass them out just like bulletins. Others e-mail or snail-mail the material to members during the week. Many churches make each week's study available at a special spot on the church website, where small-group leaders can download it at their leisure.

What about group leaders that don't have internet access?

Copies of the lesson can be mailed by post or made available at a designated spot at the church's building.

How soon does the material need to be made available?

I recommend that the discussion guides (and any other material) be ready about a week in advance of the message. This time frame works best for leaders whose groups who don't have much turn-around time, such as Sunday night groups.

Some churches choose to write the material on Sunday afternoon after the worship service. This allows for the material to be best matched to what happened in the sermon, but it also makes it a challenge to distribute everything in a timely manner.

Who will write the material?

Churches approach this in different ways:

- Churches with appropriate resources usually find a staff person who writes the lessons as part of their responsibilities. Some churches may be fortunate enough to have a lay leader who has the time and the talent to produce quality material.
- A team of lay members with lesson-writing skills might be assembled and supervised by a staff member.
- In smaller churches, a lay person with background in education might see this as an opportunity to use their gift for God's Kingdom.

How can group leaders prepare in advance?

It's most helpful if the lessons are written in a way that requires a minimum of advance preparation. But for leaders who would like to study and do extra research on their own, a resource section labeled "For Further Study" might be included at the end of each session within the material. Book titles, scanned articles, and free internet resource links can be listed.

What about groups that meet every other week?

They have several options:

- Study the sermon passage from the weekend immediately prior to the group meeting (and skip the alternate week).
- Pick whichever of the two previous messages the group needs most at this time.

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- Cover two sermons every meeting. (Note: I don't recommend this, as it would represent too much material to cover well.)

What about weeks when there is a guest speaker or musical presentation during the main service?

The speaker can be contacted in advance and a lesson prepared based on that info. When there is a special musical program and no sermon, a lesson can be built around the theme and specific points of the musical.

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Writing Sermon-Based Study Guides

How to adapt the weekly message into a small-group discussion

By Terry Powell

After a day of school, the first-grade boy was mentally overwhelmed by the variety of topics and lessons to which he had been exposed. When his mom asked what he had learned, he said in an exasperated tone, "Mrs. Smith taught and taught so much, I didn't have time to learn anything!"

The same thing can happen when it comes to churches. In a typical week, core members may hear a sermon, attend Sunday School, have personal devotions, participate in a small group – wait, I'm starting to feel like that first grader! Less is sometimes more, particularly if "less" includes review and mutual accountability for application of what the pastor teaches. That's why sermon-based small groups have become a popular short- and long-term option for churches around the country.

But a church can't achieve quality sermon-based study material out of thin air. Leadership must purchase pre-written campaign material (which can get expensive over the long haul), or learn how to adapt the weekly sermon material into quality discussion guides. Below is some advice for churches attempting the latter.

Two Approaches

There are two distinct approaches when it comes to written material based on sermon content that leads to effective group discussion.

The first option is for someone to prepare questions that guide members into Scripture so they can discover the insights conveyed during the sermon. The writers investigate the biblical text(s) for themselves rather than rehashing what they heard during the sermon (or what the pastor offers in terms of notes). This is an especially advantageous approach for persons who missed the sermon.

In this situation, the logical person to write the discussion guide is whoever wrote and preached the sermon. Yet the demands on a typical pastor's time may preclude his involvement. An alternative writer can be an associate staff member who is responsible for small groups or a seasoned volunteer who will assume the role as his or her primary ministry for the church. A potential deterrent to this Bible study approach is the expertise required of the writer: familiarity with lesson planning, experience with small-group dynamics, and skill in posing Biblically and educationally sound questions.

A second approach is to provide group leaders with a generic discussion guide that is usable with any sermon—a document that remains the same each week and helps small-group leaders approach the message rather than dictating what needs to be discussed. Instead of delving into Scripture to identify the principles the pastor conveyed, members discuss the effects of what they heard: what impressed, encouraged, or challenged them. They spend more time on application and mutual accountability for personal follow-through. And those who missed the worship service don't feel left out. They appreciate a review of biblical truth couched in more personal terms.

I'm advocating this second approach. It's more realistic because it saves preparation time and requires less educational expertise. It's more intimate because it demands more personal interaction and puts more of the spotlight on application. And this discussion guide is readily available for groups that meet on the same day the sermon is delivered.

Sample Discussion Guide

What follows is a *Sermon Discussion Guide* I prepared for our church's small-group leaders. I was able to explain the concepts behind it in a single training session. Feel free to adapt or revise this sample for your own purposes. You may think of additional questions to pose, or supplement it with sermon-specific material.

Sermon Discussion Guide

The best way to prepare for your group session is to take notes during the sermon and prayerfully ask the Lord to deal with you personally in light of it. Then select a few of the following questions to use with your small-group members. Base your selections on the slant of the message and its effect on you. Some questions overlap, so you won't use every question each time you meet. Pick different questions from week to week to ensure variety.

Also, be sure to model the level of transparency and accountability that you desire for the group. And as the discussion moves along, it is appropriate to supplement participants' thoughts and observations with your own recollections and ideas.

To Review Sermon Content

- If you could summarize the sermon in one minute for group members who didn't hear it, what would you say?
- Mark Twain defined education as "that which remains after you've forgotten all you've been taught." Share with the group one thing that remains with you from the sermon.
- Who can summarize in a sentence one biblical principle from the message? (Let several contribute until all main points are disclosed.)
- Think of a question that you believe the message addressed or resolved. (Pause for a moment.) Share with us your question, then how the speaker answered it in the message.
- What fresh, I-never-thought-of-that-before insight did you learn from the sermon?
- Think of a single word that captures or represents an insight you recall from the sermon. Share the word with us and why you selected it.
- What unresolved question about the topic or Bible passage did the message raise? (Give other group members an opportunity to address the question.)
- What attributes of God were stated in or implied by the message?
- What verse cited in the message do you most vividly recall? Why?

To Personalize Sermon Content

- What insight from the message left the biggest impression on you? Why?
- How did God's Spirit speak a personal word to you during the message?
- What did you hear that encouraged or reassured you?
- What did you hear that challenged or convicted you?
- How did the message increase your appreciation for God the Father, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit?
- From your personal experience, how can you illustrate a point from the sermon?
- What emotional reactions did the message cause? Explain.
- As you listened, what relationships, life experiences, or circumstances came to mind? Why?
- Who can share from experience either the positive results of heeding the message or the painful consequences of disregarding its truth?
- Did anything you hear prompt you to pray? Explain.
- What book have you read that would be a good supplement to or expansion of this sermon?

To Encourage Application of the Sermon

- What personal application of the message has the Lord shown you? How do you feel about following through with it? What obstacles do you face in your implementation of it? (Pray for contributors as needed before moving to the next probe.)

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- What personal need in your life did the message expose? How can we pray for and with you in relation to this need? (Take time to pray for everyone who responds.)
- As you listened, what needy person or group came to mind? Why? (Pause and intercede for this person or group.)
- How should the message we heard affect or change our prayers, both individually and as a group?
- If we diligently apply the message, what effect would it have on our schedule? Our choices? Our relationships? Our ministries? Our daily walk with Christ?
- If this message had its intended impact, what difference would it make in personal lives? In our church? In our families?
- What could be the personal and corporate consequences of not heeding this message?
- If we hold each other accountable for applying this message, what forms can or should it take?
- Who in your sphere of influence could benefit from the content of this message? Why? When and how can you share with this person the helpful information that you've learned? (Pray for each respondent's follow-through, and for positive impact on the recipient.)

—DR. TERRY POWELL is author of [Now That's A Good Question!](#) (Standard Publishing) and a faculty member at Columbia International University in South Carolina. Copyright 2010 by the author and Christianity Today International.



Creating Sermon-Based DVD Curriculum

Why a "group in a bag" approach is not as difficult as it may sound

By Reid Smith

Sermon-based small groups have been an effective discipleship tool for many years. That's why it was only a matter of time before churches started taking that concept to the next level and producing their own DVD-driven curriculum—what I call "group in a bag." After implementing this approach at SouthLake Church, where I serve as executive pastor, participation in small groups doubled and our members began to mobilize in new forms of outreach. And we're not the only church that has seen such results.

Two things make this approach so effective: 1) The curriculum's "home-grown" factor, where group participants get to hear and see their own pastors delivering the group content, and 2) The "campaign" factor, where the curriculum builds upon the content and insight that everyone received the prior weekend.

I first learned about this concept during a breakout session at a Purpose-Driven Church conference in May of 2006. When I considered using it at SouthLake, I didn't think we'd be able to do it. Our senior pastor created his sermon content from week to week, which is the case in most churches, and we already seemed to be tapped-out in terms of the time and personnel that would be required to pull it off. Besides, even if we made the transition to planning our sermon series 5 to 6 weeks in advance, there was still the cost factor.

I mentioned the idea to our senior pastor—just waiting for a confirming "no," really. But he loved the idea. He felt right away that the Lord wanted us to develop this approach in our church, and so he began creating his sermon outlines in advance. I'm extremely thankful we decided to try!

What Does It Take?

I would say the biggest requirement for producing sermon-based DVD curriculum is receiving message outlines at least five weeks in advance. If you can get your senior pastor aboard in that way, you're already halfway there! I say this because the way a senior pastor hears from the Lord and composes his messages is a holy process that must be respected. A "group in a bag" approach must work for the senior pastor, or else it won't work at all.

Here's a brief summary of everything that will be needed from your senior pastor in order to adopt this method of discipleship:

- Delivery of sermon content in a series format.
- Outlines (not manuscripts) of upcoming sermon series *at least* one month in advance of sharing it with the whole church.
- Advocacy from the pulpit in terms of the tie-in with your church's discipleship process, the promotional material, and the encouragement of church-wide involvement.
- Participation in a half-day video shoot.
- Allocation of resources (talented media people, equipment, money for printing and miscellaneous supplies) to produce the study materials.

What helped in our case is that our senior pastor already communicated his sermon content in a 4–6 week series format, which he was prepared to outline in advance. In addition, our church is blessed

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with a talented media coordinator who decided that she would shoot and edit the video for each series. Lastly, I write the study guides and DVD scripts. If you can get those three pieces in place, you're ready to get started.

Here is a snapshot of what the production process looks like for our church:

- **Week 1.** The writer receives the message outlines for the upcoming sermon series from the senior pastor (series theme, sermon titles, major points, and supporting Scriptures) and creates the six-session study guide and DVD script. (Research and writing for a six-week series takes me about 50 hours, or 8 hours per session).
- **Week 2.** The media team performs a one-day (8 hour) video shoot—all six sessions at one location, but using different scenes. Then they begin the editing process and introduce the concept to the church.
- **Week 3.** Continuation of video editing. We explain the concept in greater depth using church-wide promotions.
- **Week 4.** Here we complete the video editing and duplication of material (copying DVDs and printing study guides). We also assemble everything into bags. Again, we encourage church-wide participation.
- **Week 5.** This is when we distribute the bags to people who have turned in registration cards.
- **Week 6.** We begin the new sermon series and launch the groups.

You can expect at least a month-long production process involving approximately 50 hours of writing and 110 hours of media work (rendering, graphics, video editing, and DVD formatting). We use this process for the sermon series our senior pastor delivers in the fall, winter, and spring. In other words, we produce three 6-week studies a year. We don't do a summer series for a few reasons: 1) The season's erratic attendance would compromise the "campaign feel" of the study and its effectiveness, 2) The break helps to keep the approach fresh and creates a hunger going into the new ministry year in the fall, and 3) We doubt we'd get enough bang for our buck, which is a consideration because of the time, energy, and money that goes into producing each study.

Production Details

Most of the labor involves a writer (50 hrs) and media person (110 hrs). If you can identify people on staff (or volunteers) who are gifted in these skills, then your production costs will be lessened considerably. We produce 200 units, or bags, which seems to be enough for the 2,000 adults and adolescents who attend our church.

Printing accounts for a large portion of our total project cost. We plan for each bag to have four study guides, one DVD, two invite cards, and one host resource packet (this last item is included for new groups who need information on getting started). Here's a breakdown of how things work out, financially:

- \$2,800 for 1,200 study guides (\$2.33 each)
- \$315 for 2,000 invite cards (\$1.57 each)
- \$125 for 2,000 registration cards (.063 each)
- \$126 for 300 DVDs (they cost us \$42 per 100)
- \$50 for 300 bags (.16 each)
- \$30 for DVD sleeves (.10 each)
- \$35 for ink

The total cost for a completed DVD bag comes out to about \$11.60. We also spend a little on video work and posters, but those figures are not included above. Finally, we produce extra materials for

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larger groups that adopt this method, evangelistic giveaways, and future groups who might want to use older curriculum.

You Can Do It

Like most major church-wide initiatives, launching a "group in a bag" approach to discipleship takes a lot of time and money to be successful. You need to ask yourself this question: Is it worth the risk of at least 160 hours of labor and a few thousand dollars for us to possibly double the number of groups at our church and spark new outreach initiatives?

If your answer is "yes"—or even "possibly"—then I recommend taking the first step and talking with your senior pastor. I don't think you'll regret it.

—REID SMITH; copyright 2008 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. In what ways is our church prepared for a "group in the bag" approach? What obstacles will we need to overcome?
2. What staff members or volunteers might be able to help start this process?
3. What would the production costs look like when adapted to our church (number of groups, budget, amount of content, and so on)?



Further Exploration

Websites and books to help you launch a church-wide campaign with small groups

Smallgroups.com. This website specializes in equipping small-group leadership to make disciples and strengthen community.

- [Sermon-Based Small Groups](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Grow the Number of Small Groups in Your Church](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Building a Culture of Discipleship](#) (Training Theme)

LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

MarkHowellLive.com. A great resource for churches and small-group pastors.

[Creating Community: Five Keys to Building a Small Group Culture](#) by Andy Stanley and Bill Willits. The authors describe how they established a small group culture at North Point Community Church (Multnomah, 2004; ISBN 978-1590523964).

[Let's Get Started: How to begin your small-groups ministry](#) by Dan Lentz. A Help-Guide for churches who want to start, or re-start, a small-groups ministry (Standard Publishing, 2007; ISBN 978-0784720738).

[Making Small Groups Work](#) by Henry Cloud and John Townsend. 'This is a one-stop small-group leader's guide for gatherings of all sorts (Zondervan, 2003; ISBN 978-0310250289).

[Now That's a Good Question](#) by Terry Powell. A helpful guide on how to lead quality Bible-study discussions (Standard Publishing, 2007; ISBN 978-0784720745).

[Sticky Church](#) by Larry Osborne. Larry Osborne reveals the strategy of sermon-based small groups to retain members while leading your church into even deeper levels of discipleship (Zondervan, 2008; ISBN 978-0310285083).