

Handbook

*“So the churches were strengthened in the faith,
and increased in number daily.”
(Acts 16:5)*

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Getting Started

Using this Handbook

The LaunchTicket coaching system is a tool designed to enhance the effectiveness of your church for the glory of God. From the outset – and every day from now on – be sure to lay all of your planning before God and seek His wisdom and guidance. No amount of information or skill can substitute for the crucial task of submitting yourself to the direction of Jesus Christ. The purpose of this handbook is to give you an overview of the five modules, but simply possessing the knowledge is insufficient; prayerful submission to God is critical every step of the way.

We recommend the following to help you achieve the maximum benefit from this program:

1. Read this entire handbook so you understand the LaunchTicket coaching system. As necessary, refer to the five modules for a more complete picture.
2. Remember that the handbook does not stand alone. It is not a substitute for the modules. It simply condenses and introduces entire package.
3. If something is not clear as you read the handbook and cross reference the modules, discuss it with your coach.
4. If you strongly feel you should deviate in some way from the system, be sure to consult with your coach ahead of time. He has traveled the road before you and has substantially more experience than you do. If he concurs that you should approach things differently, go for it. If he doesn't, don't be foolish and ignore his counsel!
5. As you begin to get your mind around everything, be aware that the modules are topical but not necessarily sequential. *Starting from Square One* contains basic first-tier tasks for you to accomplish, but much of the teaching and tasks in the other modules are relevant from day one as well.

Keep in mind your goal: to start a church that never stops making an ever-larger impact for the kingdom. In order for that to happen, this pre-launch phase is absolutely crucial. Now is the time when DNA is formed, systems and teams are put in place, and momentum is created. Consider these foundational realities to be non-negotiable:

1. Godly, visionary leadership. (If you are the leader, the buck stops with you.)
2. DNA of "invest and invite." (Teach and model the example of Jesus: getting up close to people who need eternal life.)
3. Compelling bridge events and weekend experiences.
4. Ministry teams and systems that leverage and focus the spiritual gifts and energy of everyone God sends your way.

This handbook will help you do the right things, steer you away from doing the wrong things, and maximize your kingdom impact. Have fun as you pursue God's dream for your church and your city!

Why a Nine Month Pre-launch?

Why not just 'start' the church from day one?

When you first arrive on site, do not try to pretend that you are already a full-fledged church. You aren't, so the things you do and the way your church functions must be different during the first nine to ten months. Be assured that you will go to work immediately and you will work hard, but if you bypass this stage, there are substantive consequences.

Even as a newly-conceived baby does not pretend to be a full-fledged child for a number of months, a church plant must experience a pregnancy phase in order to become healthy and viable. While in the womb, the baby is growing constantly and is increasingly active. But if it emerges too soon, its chances of survival are diminished. Even if it survives, it often suffers lifelong disabilities. Whenever a "preemie" is born, the health care professionals and parents are forced to rally around the baby to help it do what should have happened naturally in the womb.

The pre-launch phase is characterized by these points:

1. The group follows the "3 & 1" format for worship. Once a month, the church does its best to offer a compelling worship experience which we call the "preview service." On the other Saturdays of the month, the launch team meets for vision casting, training, and preparing for the next bridge event or preview service; we call this event the "gathering." This format continues until preview month when compelling worship happens every weekend.
2. The church offers a monthly bridge event, which is an easy place to invite a neighbor or friend.
3. The planter and launch team place a very high priority on investing.
4. The conception team meets regularly to develop the core ethos and make strategic decisions.
5. The church begins to develop their systems, teams, and identity.

All of this builds toward a grand opening when everyone invites their friends, the church advertises their presence, and the church is officially launched. If the baby grew during the pre-launch phase, the church already has momentum, its primary ministry teams are functioning, and it is able to consistently offer compelling weekend experiences.

Here are three reasons why your church should function differently during pre-launch:

1. If you don't, your church will almost always end up as a permanent preemie. If you start pretending too early, the few people on the launch team have to operate in crisis mode to make sure the baby survives. This is a recipe for burnout. Even if the launch team does not burn out, they are forced to spend nearly all of their time preparing for the weekend worship experiences and they neglect all of the other things they must do during the church's early months (such as outreach and building ministry teams).

Pretending sets the DNA of smallness. New churches that start small attract, among others, people who prefer a small church. Even if they say they want the church to grow, they inadvertently keep the church small. Pretending churches function like a small family rather than a growing church, and virtually everyone assumes that this is the way the church will always operate.

2. A pre-launch phase allows you to position your church in the minds of your members and guests. Whatever the size of your group when you first begin, you cannot compete with churches in your area that are making an impact. Guests who visit the church get the impression that nothing much is happening. Under their breath, they mutter, “Wow. The church has already started and look at how few people are here. They certainly don’t have much going on. I don’t think this thing is going anywhere.”

When your church is in the pre-launch phase, it’s easy to say, “Welcome to Community Fellowship. We are in the pre-launch phase of planting a new church. We started three months ago with just a handful of people, and we’re building toward a grand opening next October. We’re delighted you are here and we’d love for you to help us build momentum as we move toward our exciting future!”

The way you position your church to those who visit your church – as well as to the people in your launch team – makes a huge impact on how they perceive your church and whether or not they feel like being part of it. Perceptions are everything. Position yourself by putting your small numbers into perspective.

3. A healthy pre-launch phase allows you to get your systems in place and create your teams. Operating differently during the first nine to ten months gives you the time to build teams naturally as the church begins to grow. Church shoppers expect compelling weekend experiences and excellent programming for their kids. If the new church tries to pretend too early and doesn’t work hard at this, they set a DNA of mediocrity that is nearly impossible to change. If they do work hard at this, their people tend to overextend themselves and burn out.

Rick Warren says, *“I’ve noticed over and over that if a church doesn’t get beyond 200 within about a year and a half, it usually doesn’t happen at all. On the other hand, churches that get over 200 in the first year just keep growing and growing.”*

The key word in Rick’s statement is ‘usually.’ You must do everything you can to use the pre-launch phase wisely, and then launch at your grand opening as big as you can. Setting the DNA of constant growth during pre-launch is by far the best predictor of whether the church will plateau early or continue to make an ever-larger impact on its community.

The “3 & 1” Format for Weekend Experiences

How do we implement it?

When starting a church, your launch team is almost always comprised of a high percentage of Christians. Even as Jesus’ custom was to go into the synagogue every Sabbath, they are accustomed to meeting every weekend for worship. The notion of having a worship experience once a month and doing other things on alternate weekends is foreign.

One of the tasks of the leader is to explain that during pre-launch, the church must not fall into the trap of trying to pretend it is a full-fledged church. The consequences are launch team burnout, setting the DNA of mediocrity, or both. Fact: Your church is too small to have a compelling weekend experience every weekend.

In our experience, launch team members ‘get it’ quickly once it’s explained to them. They agree with the 3 & 1 format. Those involved in weekend experiences actually are relieved that they have to tackle it only once a month. But the day almost always comes when someone complains that she feels cheated. Someone else wonders aloud if the pastor is lazy or else he would be willing to preach every weekend! People actually bail out because, in spite of your most eloquent explanations, they forget that things are different by design on three out of four weekends.

Every pastor feels, at times, that his church should make an exception to the 3 & 1 format. *My launch team is used to worshipping every weekend. How do I keep them happy when they insist on worshipping every week? Where would we invite people who show an interest if we worship only once a month? Won’t we kill our momentum if we worship only once a month?*

Here is some wisdom from those who have gone before.

1. Once a month, the church does its best to offer a compelling weekend experience. Your monthly preview service gives launch team members and guests a preview of the style, creativity, energy, and biblical teaching that you offer in worship.

Make it an actual worship experience with music, message, and some creative elements. Do your best to inject energy and fun. Make it a high priority to challenge people from the Bible. (Remember what Paul says about the ‘foolishness of preaching.’) If your long-term plan is to use live preaching, use live preaching in the preview service. Choose a theme and build your service around the theme. (Check the websites of growing churches for theme ideas.) Don’t do anything haphazardly. Rehearse ahead of time with the goal of doing the best you can with what you have. Evaluate afterwards so that next month’s preview service is even better.

Internally, call the preview service “The Big Thing!” Build anticipation of what God will do at this event. Pull out all the stops to get people there. Expect that everyone on the launch team will help in some way, and include people who have attended only once or twice.

2. On the other three weekends of the month, offer a gathering instead of a preview service. Strategically use those times to (a) cast the vision and exchange stories that reinforce it, (b) do something fun and creative that teaches launch team members to fulfill the launch team commitments (see ‘The Big Eight’ in this handbook), and (c) prepare logistically for the next Big Thing.

It is important to distinguish the gatherings from the preview services. One option is to meet on the same day and time as the monthly preview service, but don't meet in the same place. Another option is to meet in the same place as the monthly preview, but don't meet at the same time. Whichever you choose, be consistent. Make sure the preview services are the same time and day each month. And make sure the gatherings are at the same time and place each week.

Your agenda at the gathering could look like this:

Week One:

- a) Have a 5-10 minute devotional and time of prayer. Don't do random devotionals. Make this time relate to the launch team commitments or core ethos. Remember you are building DNA with everything you do.
- b) Discuss the ministry teams. Review the fractal and pre-launch matrix. Give people an opportunity to volunteer to lead or serve on a team.
- c) Prepare for the next Big Thing. Find a way for absolutely everyone to contribute to the success of the next Big Thing. Encourage people to unleash their creative ideas. Take volunteers for one-time assignments.
- d) Have fun. Make homemade ice cream, play *Pictionary*, or have a 10 second chess tournament (every play has to be made in 10 seconds or less). Be creative and keep it unpredictable from one week to the next.

Week Two:

- a) Talk about assignments and other logistics for the next Big Thing. Make sure everything is on track. Make adjustments as necessary. Pray.
- b) Go on a field trip to a new church or a growing church. Gather for lunch or snacks afterward and talk about what you learned.

Week Three:

- a) Have a ten minute Bible marking class or trivia game. Don't make this random, but relate it to the launch team commitments or core ethos.
- b) Do whatever you must to prepare for the next Big Thing.
- c) Cast vision, have fun, and care for internal business.

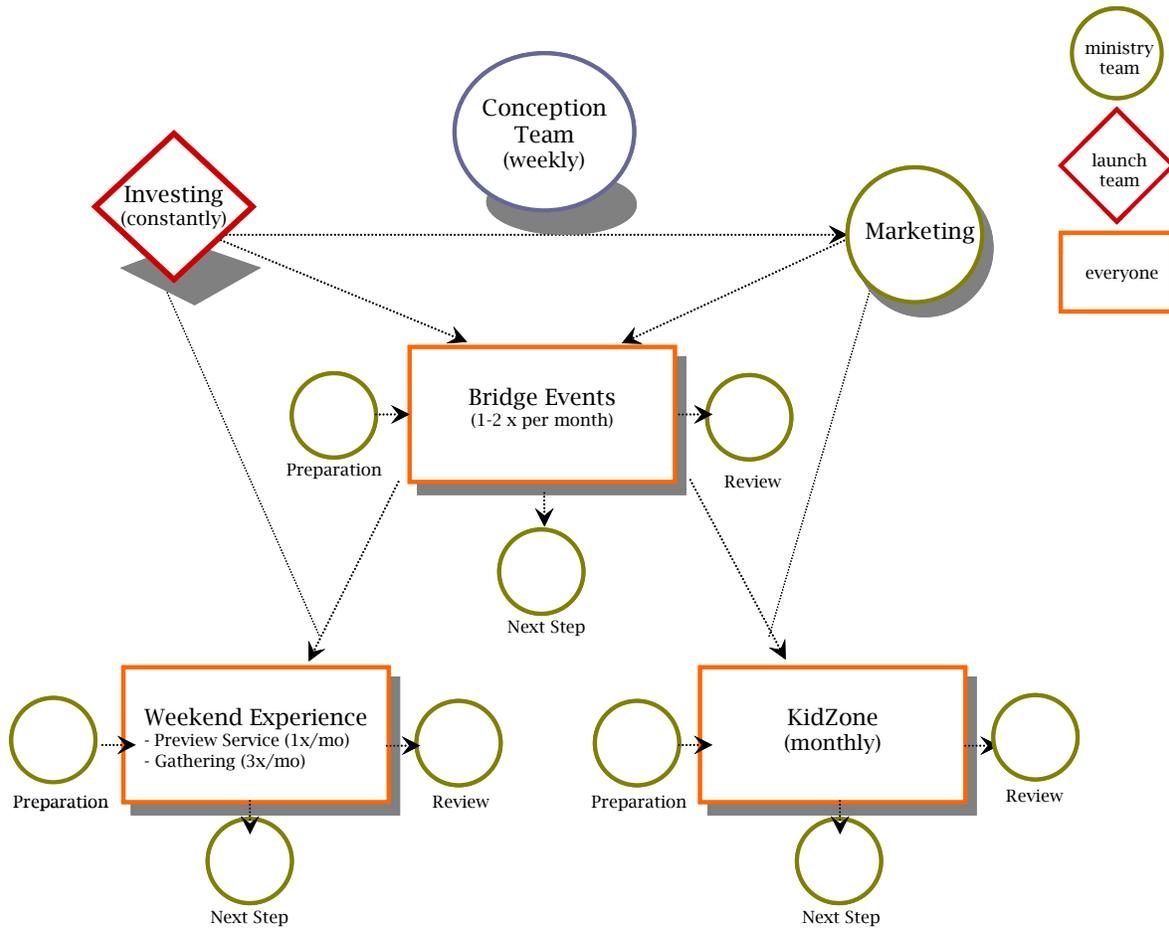
Here are some other ideas for gatherings: share the Lord's Supper, share testimonies, tell investing stories, and pray for people on impact lists and guests who attended recent events.

When you meet someone who is interested in your church, explain to them the "3 & 1" format for weekend gatherings. If you sense they're ready, invite them to join whatever's next: the gathering or a preview service. They may be eager to serve on a team, make friends, or start learning more about the Bible.

What do you do with kids during the gatherings? Talk it through with your KidZone team. Older kids will enjoy most of what you do and even could help with ideas or serve on a team for the next Big Thing. Younger kids can meet separately all or part of the time.

Keep the focus of your church on people who will not go to heaven unless something changes. Perpetually build anticipation of the next Big Thing. When it's over, send everyone a report of all the good things that happened, and be generous with your thanks for their participation. Your best friend is momentum. Create it through anticipation and by celebrating and building on every success.

Pre-launch Ministry Flowchart



Conception Team – The conception team brainstorms, develops, and oversees everything that happens in the church during the pre-launch phase. The team is not a governing board, but serves to advise. The lead pastor selects team members with a variety of giftedness and ages, but who share a nearly identical heart and DNA. At the very beginning, the team may consist of the pastor and spouse, but it should grow to five to seven members.

Investing – The foundation for a healthy, growing church is a culture of investing in the lives of people who need Jesus. Everyone in the launch team creates his/her impact list* and prays every day for the people on the list to eventually come to Christ. In addition, launch team members invite people on the impact list to be on the church's **Special Events Mailing List**.* Investing will eventually lead to invitations to **Bridge Events** or **Preview Services**.

**Sample in appendix*

Marketing – All marketing campaigns, including those directed to your special events mailing list, a list of investing contacts who have agreed to receive correspondence from the church. No one visits or calls them, but every time the church does something special to which the public is invited, the church sends an invitation by e-mail and/or snail mail.

Bridge Events – Events to which launch team members invite their friends, family, and persons they meet through investing. Persons on the special events mailing list will also receive an invitation by snail mail or e-mail. Examples include social times, IP (interesting people) parties, servant evangelism projects, ice cream with the pastor, etc. These events are an easy place to invite someone who may not be ready to attend the weekend worship.

Don't even consider having bridge events until you have a team in place that is ready to: (a) plan a quality event; (b) implement a next step plan; and (c) review and evaluate the event.

Weekend Experience – Once a month during pre-launch, the church does its best to offer a compelling worship experience. This preview service gives launch team members and guests a preview of the style, creativity, energy, and biblical teaching that you offer in worship. Launch team members invite their friends, family and persons they meet through investing. Persons on the special events mailing list will also receive an invitation by snail mail or e-mail.

On the other Saturdays of the month, the launch team meets for vision casting, training, and preparing for the next bridge event or preview service. We label this event the "gathering." This format continues until preview month, when compelling worship happens every weekend.

Don't even consider having monthly worship until you have a team in place that is ready to: (a) plan a quality weekend experience; (b) implement a next step plan; and (c) review and evaluate. *(See Module 3, Section 4, for next step; see Module 4, the last several pages, for evaluation forms.)*

KidZone – Once a month during pre-launch, the church offers a compelling experience for children. The KidZone team should be ready to prepare, assimilate, and evaluate before starting monthly KidZone services. Kids should have their own impact list and participate in investing and inviting.

Invest, Invite, Include – Equally as important as the activities of the church – and possibly more important – is the DNA or culture. The pastor and conception team must constantly *knock themselves out* to create a culture of invest, invite, and include.

Small Groups – Don't implement a small groups strategy until after grand opening. Stay focused on investing, bridge events and monthly worship. The mantra: permit small groups, but don't promote them.

Building the Ministry Teams

How do you organize the ministries of the church during pre-launch? Three rules. First, every task is ideally done by a team. Serving solo may be inevitable in some areas at first, but as quickly as possible, a task is accomplished best when tackled by a group of people working together.

Second, don't spread yourself too thin by attempting to do everything you wish you could. Instead, focus on 11 critical tasks organized into four ministry areas. These aren't just 11 random tasks. They represent the core activities your church must do to prepare for grand opening.

Third, by building these 11 ministry teams, you create the structure that will support and multiply the growth God wants to grant your church. Even though only a few persons may be serving when you first start the project, putting this structure in place allows the teams to grow in proportion to the number of people willing to serve. The result is that if a hundred or two hundred people show up at your grand opening, you will be prepared.

Failing to build the teams has some predictably harmful results.

1. The pastor and spouse do virtually everything themselves (a great recipe for building a small group instead of a church). People who are willing to serve end up watching instead of participating.
2. Tasks are assigned randomly to willing people, but no one knows exactly how that person's activities fit into the overall structure, who supports them, or to whom they are accountable. The pastor ends up responsible for every task (a great recipe for building a small group instead of a church).
3. Important tasks simply don't get done or they are done poorly (a great recipe for building a small group instead of a church). In either case, you will never be able to build momentum or be ready for grand opening.

The circle on the next page illustrates the four ministry areas during pre-launch. Each of the ministry area is further broken down into the 11 critical tasks. (After grand opening, the fractal will expand.)

1. Weekend Experience – Your critical tasks for this area are: programming, impressions, set-up & take down, music, and tech.
2. Outreach – The critical tasks for this area are: bridge events and marketing.
3. KidZone – The critical tasks for this area are: KidZone planning and impressions.
4. Operations – The critical tasks for this area are: financial systems and data management.