

Systems for . . .

Weekend Experiences

*“If an unbeliever comes in, he is convinced ... and, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.”
(1 Corinthians 14:24-25)*

Table of Contents

Getting Started	3
Using this Module	3
Introduction to Weekend Experiences	4
Section 1: Compelling Weekend Experiences	6
What Does It Mean to Be Compelling?	6
The “3 & 1” Format	7
Keeping It Simple	8
Feedback – The Breakfast of Champions	10
Section 2: The Elements of Worship	17
Teaching of the Word	17
The Spiritual Gift of Teaching	19
Options for Weekly Sermons	19
Music in Worship	21
Biblical Principles for Music	22
The Other Components of Worship	24
The People Up Front	25
Section 3: The Environment of Worship	32
The Meeting Place	32
The Ambiance	34
Set-up and Take-down	35
Section 4: Children’s Worship	42
Leaving a Legacy	42
Ready-to-Use Forms and Samples	47

Getting Started

Using this Module

The LaunchTicket coaching system *Weekend Experiences* module is a tool designed to enhance the effectiveness of your church for the glory of God. From the outset (and throughout the resource), we want to repeatedly encourage you to lay all of your planning before God and seek His wisdom and guidance. Nothing in this module can substitute for the crucial task of submitting yourself to the direction of Jesus Christ. Although the purpose of this module is to help you with basics of launching your new church, we firmly believe that prayerful submission to God is critical every step of the way.

This *Weekend Experiences* module covers a great deal of information, which is broken down into topical sections in the module. Each section has one or more “Implementation Tasks” associated with it to help you put what you learn into immediate action and create and/or implement your own leadership system.

Because of the quantity of information covered in this program, it is important that you pace your learning to absorb and implement as much of each topic as possible. We recommend the following system to help you achieve the maximum benefit from this program:

1. Scan this entire module to gain an overview of its content and specific relevancy to the needs of your situation.
2. Discuss your implementation priorities with your coach.
3. Read the material and complete the implementation tasks assigned by your coach.
4. E-mail or fax each completed implementation task to your coach.
5. Be prepared to discuss your progress and questions related to each task during your next coaching session.

Your LaunchTicket coach is a critical part of this experience and is committed to helping you apply each task to your specific needs. If you have any questions while going through this program, don't hesitate to call for assistance.

Introduction to Weekend Experiences

Module Objectives

At the completion of this module you will be able to:

- ◆ Establish your weekend planning team.
- ◆ Select and prepare the venue that best contributes to the growth of your weekend experiences.
- ◆ Leverage your talent and limited numbers to provide maximum impact while avoiding volunteer burnout.
- ◆ Prepare weekend experiences that people are proud to attend.
- ◆ Continually add musicians and other volunteers as God sends them your way.

Purpose of the Weekend Experiences Module

The first angel of Revelation 14 commands us to worship. “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come. And worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the fountains of waters” (vs. 7).

The Christian’s central act is worshipping God. When we decide to accept salvation through Jesus Christ, we join the family of God that consists of Christians from every part of the globe. In eternity, we will join every person who ever accepted Christ, unfallen angels and even created beings from other parts of the universe in worshipping the sovereign God. Over and over in Scripture, we read the accounts of prophets who were taken to heaven in vision, caught a taste of worship, and tried to explain it to the rest of us.

Today, Christian worship happens in two ways. First, individuals worship God privately. A sold-out follower seeks God and praises God each and every day in his or her own personal way. But worship happens at a second level when believers gather to praise, petition, learn, and be encouraged. It was God’s idea that the church should serve as the venue for corporate worship. In this spirit, the writer of Hebrews instructed, “Don’t forsake the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is, but encourage one another even more as you see the Day approaching” (10:25).

You’ve attended churches where worship swept you into God’s presence. You felt an overwhelming awe; the deepest part of your spirit was stirred with a passion to love and please God. You could hardly find words to explain what happened, but you knew you had experienced God. Maybe it was the teaching or the drama. It could have been a testimony, the music or someone’s word of support. But when it was over, you knew you were cherished by the strong and loving God of heaven. Your faith was stronger. Your trust in God was intense.

In contrast, you have attended other churches where God seemed distant, impersonal, unconcerned; when the service finally ended, your soul felt cold.

Something (or Someone) was missing. You asked yourself: *Was it worth it? I fulfilled my duty, but how often can I do this?*

Here is reality: True worship brings joy to the believer. It's one of the ways God nudges people closer to Himself and prepares them to make an impact in the world. But true worship has another result: the growing of the church. When people's hearts are encouraged, when they learn and they find the experience compelling, they not only return themselves, they invite a friend. The weekend experience, while an occasion for believers to connect with God, becomes one of the church's most powerful and effective tools of evangelism.

Your church may organize effective ministry teams, your bridge events may be awesome, and everyone may invest in relationships with people who need Jesus, but if the weekend experiences are forgettable, your church will not reach the lost. If, on the other hand, corporate worship is truly compelling, people will make it a priority to be there.

Section 1: Compelling Weekend Experiences

What Does It Mean to Be Compelling?

If you could clone the worship experience at another church and import it into your own, what church would you choose? Why? What words would you use to describe what happens there week after week?

We have chosen “compelling” as the adjective that best captures what we wish would be true of the experiences we offer on the weekend. Dictionary.com defines compelling this way: “To exert a strong, irresistible force; to sway: *The land, in a certain, very real way, compels the minds of the people.*”

The *measurement* of compelling is simple: do regular attenders invite their friends?

The *definition* is this: A compelling weekend experience inspires a person to make or deepen his relationship with God. The teaching is biblically faithful, substantive and relevant to everyday life. The atmosphere includes a balance of celebration, contemplation and commitment. Each component is offered with intensity and presented with excellence. Attenders feel an impatience for next week’s worship and a strong desire to invite a friend. The result is changed lives.

It’s time to start dreaming. What if people who attend your church felt that way about your weekend experiences? Easy answer: they will be back. And most likely, they won’t be alone.

Here’s what you’re thinking: *Sounds wonderful, but you must have confused us with Willow Creek. Have you forgotten that we’re just getting started and we only have a handful of people?*

Notice what “compelling” does not mean. It does not mean complex. It does not mean you need a live orchestra, multiple drama teams and a fulltime worship pastor. Simple can be powerful. Jesus has offered to be present when as few as two or three gather in His name.

Also, “compelling” has little to do with worship style. Your service can be traditional, retro, contemporary, postmodern or blended; each of them can be compelling. So don’t be intimidated. Keep the goal clear: to create compelling weekend experiences. Ask each other: *Is it possible to create experiences in our church during the pre-launch phase that fit the definition? With our limited resources? With just a few musicians and other volunteers?* (Hint: the correct answer is Yes.)

Take Action!

Turn to the end of this section and complete Implementation Task 1: Getting Started with Your Weekend Experience Team.

The “3 & 1” Format

One of the mistakes most new churches make is trying to pretend they are a full-fledged church before they really are. Remember that during pre-launch, you are focused on doing a few things well: investing, bridge events and weekend experiences. The only other activities you will do are related to programming for children and the systems to support everything. If you're not cautious, you will spend too much time pouring yourselves into creating heart-stopping worship each week to the neglect of other things. On the other hand, not paying enough attention to what happens on the weekend will doom all of your other efforts. Think balance. Keep the weekend experiences in perspective and do the best you can with what you have.

This need for balance is precisely why you will follow the “3 & 1” format during pre-launch. Here is what that means. **Once a month** between now and preview month (the month before grand opening), you will offer the very best worship experience you can. Your musicians will rehearse and your techies will test and retest everything. You'll pull out all the stops to have a worship gathering where everyone is drawn to God and they are delighted they came. Your numbers may still be small, but you're doing the best you can with what you have. Just for fun – and to give the monthly worship its own label – we call the monthly worship the “preview service.” Feel free to use this label or create one of your own.

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. The gatherings can be just as compelling, but they differ from preview services in two ways. First, your input is significantly less. People who attend are blessed and challenged, but you and your team didn't stress themselves out with multiplied hours of preparation and rehearsal.

The number of options for the weekly launch team worship and training seems limitless. You can conduct a “Just Walk Across the Room” seminar. You can offer “Good Sense,” “Marriage Matters” or any of the outstanding resources available from Zondervan, Pastors.com, other Christian ministries, or your local Christian book store.

The second difference between monthly preview services and gatherings is the way you position it in the minds of your attenders. You explain that the church is in pre-launch, and that you offer worship once a month. On the other weekends, you dial back so the launch team has time to do everything else that has to be done as you build toward grand opening. When preview month rolls around, you will abandon the “3 & 1” format – hopefully forever – and begin having compelling worship every week.

An additional word about the gatherings: In no way should you compromise the content of what you offer. The label is simply a way of expressing that you lighten up on yourselves three out of four weekends so that your launch team

doesn't burn out. That gives you the chance to spend your efforts on investing, setting DNA, creating momentum, and building the systems for a church that never stops making an ever-larger impact for the kingdom.

For suggestions on implementing the "3 & 1" format, see the section in the Handbook entitled "The 3 & 1 Format for Weekend Experiences."

Take Action!

Turn to the end of this section and complete Implementation Task 2: Planning Your Weekend Experiences.

Keeping It Simple

A lot of thought goes into compelling worship. It doesn't just happen by choosing a few hymns and a Scripture. If you have any chance at all of creating compelling weekend experiences with a small team, you have to keep it simple. And everything you do has to emerge from a common understanding of what worship really is and what should happen when believers and seekers gather. Here are 11 assumptions about worship that will guide your team:

1. The goal of worship is to focus on the greatness of God rather than on ourselves or our needs.
2. The result of worship must be healing and power for living transformed lives. It must bring us into closer relationship with Jesus and with other worshipers, and then challenge us to purposeful service in the world.
3. Worship must clearly tell the story of Jesus Christ as our only hope and must show how His story can become ours.
4. Worship must examine and affirm what we believe about God.
5. Because worship is an offering to God, it must be taken seriously and done with excellence.
6. Each worship experience must be carefully and purposefully planned.
7. Each element of worship is important and must contribute to the goal of that particular service.
8. The atmosphere of worship must include celebration, contemplation and commitment.
9. Worship must be participative for all present, not a performance for spectators.
10. Each worship experience must be intensely interesting and take advantage of the curious power of variety.
11. Each aspect of worship must be understandable and useful for the first-time guest.

Once your weekend planning team agrees on the assumptions of worship, it is ready to dive in, unleash the creativity, and design your weekend experiences. If you have the right people on the team, if you visit successful churches and learn from them, if you give people permission to think outside the box, you'll be amazed at the fantastic ideas that emerge. Your team will have fun and people

will love coming together for worship. Be aware of this: Once a few months go by, your team will tend to get in a rut. A new rut, of course, but a rut just the same. Stay vigilant about creating an environment of creativity week after week. If something is fresh and different, it can make an impact even if it seems small and insignificant.

The following five questions can serve as a framework for your thinking.

1. Is the environment appealing? Is the room suited for what is about to happen? (*More on the venue under section 3.*)
2. Is every component presented with excellence? It is important how you define excellence. If the benchmark comes from a mega-church, you're probably in trouble. If excellence means perfection, you might as well throw in the towel. But if you define excellence properly, you can do it – week after week, month after month. Forget dictionary.com on this one. Instead, in the context of your new church, define excellence as “doing the best you can with what you have.” When you come to worship God, never settle for anything less than your best, whatever that means with the talent God has sent you. Whatever you do, don't bring a blemished lamb to His sanctuary. (See *Leviticus 22:21 and Deuteronomy 15:21.*)
3. Does each weekend experience offer the element of surprise? Does something unexpected happen each week? The rule is simple: *the higher the predictability, the lower the impact.* If people can predict exactly what will happen next each week, the majority will tune it out. Words like “boring” will be spoken in cars driving home. Younger worshippers and guests will vote their opinion by staying at home or attending a different church. Think back to that church where you'd love to clone their worship. Are they stuck with the same order of service every weekend?
4. Are the music, the arts, and the message engaging? You know when it is, and you know when it isn't. Make every experience intensely interesting. Think of ways to make everything that happens experiential, participatory and image-based. We don't like to call the worship time a *service*; it should be an *experience*. Pay attention to capturing the mind and the heart.
5. Is the message compelling? Is the content helpful? Does it connect with real life? Is it presented with internal passion? Can people relate to the sermon and will they take some encouragement, counsel and information with them that helps them next Tuesday?

Take Action!

Turn to the end of this section and complete Implementation Task 3: Keeping It Simple.

Feedback – The Breakfast of Champions

One of the five gauges you will watch during pre-launch is Compelling Weekend Experiences. In the midst of the dozens of tasks you must do, five gauges or critical success factors will determine if you are making progress toward grand opening. Think of them as your church's vital signs. (The other four are Investing, Increasing Attendance, Grand Opening Ministry Teams, and Church Finances. See the *Strategic Planning and Implementation* module.)

Every successful church thrives on evaluation. Part of the DNA you must create throughout your church is that of continual improvement. Picture that Olympic athlete on the parallel bars or members of the synchronized swimming team in the pool. How would they ever achieve their potential without a process of evaluating every move?

Your weekend planning team is in place. You have met to begin creating experiences that people find compelling. Maybe you have heard some unsolicited, informal feedback from someone who attended. Don't ignore it, but realize that it doesn't represent everyone's perspective. Neither should you rely on your own hunches about how things are going. One of your programming team's tasks is to intentionally, formally and regularly hold up the magnifying glass to the worship event.

Your team should evaluate preview service in three ways. First, the conception team provides overall feedback. Second, the programming team (and whomever they designate) thoroughly evaluates the service point-by-point. The third evaluation is general and is done by all attendees (or a cross section of attendees), at the preview service.

1. Conception Team – After each preview service, conception team members discuss the service by answering four questions:

- a) What went right?
- b) What went wrong?
- c) What was missing?
- d) What was confusing?

(At the end of this module is a sample Conception Team Feedback form for you to use or adapt for this monthly evaluation.)

2. Programming Team – After each preview service, your programming team takes a deeper look at the factors that make or break a weekend experience. They can use either the general or detailed sample at the end of this module.

3. Attendees – At the end of each preview service, your attendees evaluate the program in a more general manner. This evaluation is not to hone in on specific things that can be improved, but instead boils everything down to one question: *Would attenders be proud to invite a friend?* Your intent is to create the “O darn!” factor. Here's what that means: At the end of a preview service, a regular attendee declares, “O darn; that was good. I should have invited a friend to this one!” If that happens often, attenders will indeed invite their friends to your

weekend experiences. *(At the end of this module is a sample Striving to Be Compelling form for you to use or adapt for this monthly evaluation.)*

Take Action!

*Turn to the end of this section and complete Implementation Task 4:
Evaluating the Weekend Experience.*

Take Action!

Implementation Task 1: Getting Started with Your Weekend Experiences Team

Review the following segment of Section 1 in this module:

◆ *What Does It Mean to Be Compelling?*

The weekend experience team is comprised of the people who assist the pastor in planning, coordinating and evaluating the weekly worship experiences.

In the module *Starting from Square One*, you appointed a leader for Weekend Experiences. That person oversees and supports virtually everything that happens at the worship experience (except for the children's programming).

That leader should work with the pastor and the conception team to select creative and reliable people who will form the team. You may want to consider people who will be helping with the various components of worship such as music, drama, tech, etc. (*See the Pre-launch Matrix at the end of this module.*)

1. Establish your weekend planning team. Choose a leader.
2. Over the next month, visit at least two churches in your area that are attracting unchurched people. Take individual notes of what you liked and disliked, what could be transferred into your church and what probably could not.
3. After each visit to the churches in your area, get together as a team and discuss:
 - a. How would we describe their weekend experience? Capture the essence in 3-5 adjectives.
 - b. In view of our small numbers, is it possible to create experiences that accomplish that during pre-launch?
 - c. What can be transferred into our context? What probably can't, at least for now?

Take Action!

Implementation Task 2: Planning Your Weekend Experiences

Review the following segment of Section 1 in this module:

◆ *The “3 & 1” Format*

The weekend experience team and the pastor do the following:

1. Discuss the “3 & 1” format. Make sure every team member understands and is committed to the format until preview month (the month before grand opening).
2. Plan your weekend experiences for the next two months. Ask:
 - a. Which Saturday of each month will be our preview service? Which will be gatherings?
 - b. Where will we meet each week?
 - c. What format will we use for the gatherings?
 - d. What will the content be for each of the experiences? The topics? Will we do a series?
3. How will we promote these next two months?
 - monthly flyer snail mailed to certain carrier route
 - monthly flyer hand-delivered to certain neighborhood(s)
 - snail mail and/or e-mail to our special events mailing list

(See Outreach and Assimilation module, Implementation Task 3.)

Take Action!

Implementation Task 3: Keeping It Simple

Review the following segment of Section 1 in this module:

◆ *Keeping It Simple*

The weekend experiences team joins the pastor to do the following:

1. Spend some time discussing the 11 assumptions about worship. See if you can reach agreement on each assumption. Feel free to state them differently or adjust them as your group decides.
2. Do the same with the five questions that serve as a framework for thinking and planning.
 - a. The venue
 - b. The importance of excellence
 - c. The power of surprise
 - d. Create an experience
 - e. The sermon

Agree on a way of keeping these points in front of you as you plan future weekend experiences.

3. Start making a list of ideas to create a compelling experience without a major investment of people, time and resources.

Take Action!

Implementation Task 4: Evaluating the Weekend Experience

Review the following segment of Section 1 in this module:

◆ *Feedback – The Breakfast of Champions*

Discuss the following with your weekend experiences and programming teams.

1. Decide what feedback forms you will use (see samples at the end of this module), who will be asked to fill them out, and when they will be implemented.
2. Create a system to:
 - encourage and enable people to provide feedback
 - collect, tally, and report feedback results to the appropriate teams
 - discuss the feedback and identify progress and areas for improvement
 - celebrate progress and appreciate people who served
 - implement changes necessary for improvement

Section 2: The Elements of Worship

What was worship like in the New Testament church a few years after Jesus returned to heaven? Was it the same in Corinth as it was in Antioch? How similar were either of those orders of service to the one in the church you attended as a kid? Would the early Christ followers relate to what happens in growing churches today? What do those churches do today that would challenge them? What would they miss from their own weekly gatherings?

Obviously, the Bible does not prescribe an order of service. It does not, for example, instruct the elders to march single file onto the platform while the organ plays “The Lord Is in His Holy Temple.” It is silent when it comes to what kind of music should be employed and whether that music should be performed by one person, a group of persons or the entire congregation. We know there was Bible teaching in the first century church, but we don’t know how long the sermon lasted on a typical Sabbath or whether the sermon was expository or narrative.

Assemble a dozen Christians and ask each one to put in writing how he or she worships God privately. You will be amazed at the variety; there is not just one way to worship God. The same is true for corporate worship. Throughout the Scriptures you catch glimpses of believers connecting with God (Acts 2), you listen to Paul’s counsel about doing things decently and in order (1 Cor. 14), and you even have a chance to view the twenty-four elders and angels worshipping God in heaven (Rev. 4 & 5). But none of that prescribes a template that every church should follow today. In short, you’re free to start from scratch.

As a starting point, remember the definition: A compelling weekend experience inspires a person to make or deepen his relationship with God. The teaching is biblically faithful, substantive and relevant to everyday life. The atmosphere includes a balance of celebration, contemplation and commitment. Each component is offered with intensity and presented with excellence. Attendees feel an impatience for next week’s worship and a strong desire to invite a friend. The result is changed lives.

We could argue that corporate worship is built on several pillars. While you may or may not sing when you worship God privately, music is foundational to corporate worship. Another pillar is prayer, as is the teaching of the word. Other components like offering, drama, testimony and dance can all enhance the worship and lift the heart in adoration of God. This section will focus on the twin pillars of teaching of the word and music, followed by a brief discussion of a few other components.

Teaching of the Word

Preaching or teaching the word of God is one of the most fulfilling and challenging aspects of the ministry. Few things are as thrilling – or as daunting – as being a spokesperson for God. Hang this on a hook inside your mind: Prevailing churches – churches that never stop making an ever-larger impact – always have two things in place: strong leadership and effective preaching.

Effective preaching consists of the rare convergence of the activity of God, the Scriptures, human personality, a sense of urgency, and a receptive congregation. Paul called it “foolishness” because when a spiritually-gifted communicator presents the Word and God shows up, the result defies explanation. He told the Romans, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17).

If you were a baseball pitcher, you might hear your coach say something like this: “Pitching is 85% of the game of baseball. When a team has great pitching, it can overcome mediocre fielding or the semi-often hitting slump. But when the pitching is weak, the team is in trouble.” While we can’t make a one-to-one comparison between pitching and preaching, it is safe to say that a church will never come anywhere near its redemptive potential without excellent, relevant, Spirit-anointed preaching or teaching. Yes, it really is that critical.

The first rule of preaching is to keep the goal clear. What is the goal? It’s not sophisticated rhetoric; it’s not entertaining, per se. It certainly is not to impress the head elder or a seminary professor from the distant past. You don’t teach God’s Word to deliver a message that people remember or to convince the congregation of your electrifying communication skills. Some pastors admit that they preach to scratch their own itch. They find a passage in Psalms that they find interesting and they teach it in a way that makes them feel good or meets some personal need. It’s more about them than it is the lives of the people who come to church to hear from God.

Your goal is clear: to deliver God’s Word in a way that changes lives. It is important to clear up all the fuzziness and remember that while you’re praying over the outline, while you’re wrestling with a passage, when you’re thinking of illustrations, you are unambiguous that God has called you to change the lives of the people in the church. And when that’s your goal, it changes your preparation, your delivery, the way you make the appeal, and even your topic selection. What kind of preacher would you rather be: one who delivers a polished talk but no one’s life is impacted, or someone who breaks a law of communication here and there, but his teaching changes lives?

The second rule of preaching is to preach with internal passion. What is internal passion? It’s the rock-solid conviction that what you’re about to say is absolutely vital for everyone to hear. You *know* God gave it to you and you can hardly wait to say it. If the people in the audience get this, they’ll be much better off. If they don’t, they’re in big trouble!

It has nothing to do with preaching style. It has everything to do with that deep belief that the stakes are high and if you say it well and the Holy Spirit shows up, lives will be changed forever. How do you get internal passion? You spend time on your knees. You prepare a simple, clear and compelling message. You speak from a heart that’s in love with God and you *know* that God will use His word to save someone’s soul.

The third rule of preaching is to preach to two people. Don’t worry about anyone else in the audience. Preach to two people: Someone who is hearing the gospel for the very first time, and someone who is hearing the gospel for the very last

time. Let them know how to become a follower of Jesus and how to lock up their eternity with Him.

Preach with the goal of changing lives, preach with internal passion, and preach to two people. The audience will be on the edge of their seats. When unbelievers worship with you, they'll get in the car after the service and say, "That was good. I learned something new about God today. Now I have hope. Now I know how to deal with mom's cancer or with that difficult person at work. I'll bet there's more where that came from. I'm coming back next week."

The Spiritual Gift of Teaching

How do you know if you have what it takes to be an effective teacher/preacher? Here are a couple of hints. First, what kind of feedback do you get when you preach? Not the off-the-cuff comments that people make when they shake your hand at the back of the auditorium after church. You can discount 95% of what you hear back there because it's socially acceptable – even expected – to say something nice to the preacher. (What do you expect them to say, "That was one of the lamest talks I ever heard?") It's much more important to ask: What kind of unsolicited feedback do I get from people, especially people who will tell me like it is? What does your spouse say? Your kids? That rare friend who feels it's safe to give you the unvarnished truth?

Second, how do you feel about preparing a new message every seven days? Are you energized by the process of seeking God, reading and researching, and preparing the outline? Or do you dread the thought of cranking out another sermon next week – and the week after that, and every week from now on? If you love investing the time and effort in getting ready for the weekend, if you're fired up about every aspect of preparing and teaching, you may have the gift. If you'd rather visit the dentist than have to prepare another talk, you probably don't.

Third, are peoples' lives changed when you teach God's Word?

Options for Weekly Sermons

You've decided that the teaching in your new church has to be excellent. That is not negotiable. Fortunately, you have some great options. Before you get too far along in your new church, consider the best way for your church – with the talent God has given you – to offer life-changing teaching.

1. Lead Pastor Is the Primary Teacher – As we've already discussed, one option is for the lead pastor to be the primary or even the exclusive communicator. If you are the lead pastor and one of your top spiritual gifts is teaching/preaching, you may be called to tackle most of the teaching yourself. You'll need to devote some fairly serious time to preparing messages that challenge people and change their lives. The good news is that during pre-launch, you'll only need to do this once a month, providing you have a good alternate plan for Bible teaching on the other weekends. Once preview month rolls around, you'll need to order your schedule so that you can prepare an excellent message every single week.

You don't have to be original; there is nothing new under the sun. It's great when you come up with that new thought or a sermon just flows, but virtually every effective communicator learns from others. In his early years of planting Willow Creek Community Church, Bill Hybels listened to hundreds of sermon tapes by great preachers to learn from them and gain ideas. You can be creative and original if you like, but don't be ashamed to listen, borrow, and adapt the good work someone else has done.

Most large churches make their sermons available on CD or DVD. A number of preaching resources are available including the *Preaching Today Audio Series* from ChristianityToday.com. You should also check out www.lifechurch.tv, which makes Pastor Craig Groeschel's sermons available for free. If you intend to do the lion's share of the teaching, do whatever it takes to get your hands on some great resources. And remember that your goal is life change, not total originality.

2. Team Teaching – Willow Creek was one of the pioneers of team teaching. For years, Bill Hybels did virtually all of the sermons for their mid-week worship as well as their weekend seeker services. That meant preparing and delivering two new messages every week. It is amazing that Bill was able to keep that up for almost 15 years before burnout nearly brought him down. Conventional wisdom and all the experts said that if he shared the preaching load with two or three others, the church would suffer. People wouldn't tolerate it. The church's growth would be stilled.

The leaders of Willow Creek counted the cost and decided that they would take the risk. The result was the opposite of the naysayers' predictions. Not only did it save Bill from meltdown, but the church actually thrived. Team teaching worked because the other preachers/teachers delivered messages with the same quality as Bill's. If you go with team teaching, make certain everyone is spiritually gifted as a teacher and is well above average in his or her communication skills.

3. Team Sermon Preparation – Community Christian Church in Naperville, Illinois is a multi-campus church. As of late 2006, they offered 20 weekend experiences on eight campuses, yet the same sermon is delivered at each of the services. Every Tuesday, the teaching team meets to prepare the sermon for the coming weekend. They agree on what they call "The Big Idea" – the one main point they want to get across. Then they wrestle together with preparing the message. On the weekend, several different pastors present the same message at different campuses.

"None of us were outstanding preachers," lead pastor Dave Ferguson explains. "But we knew we had to have outstanding messages if we expected people to grow spiritually and seekers to return. So every week we pool our knowledge, creativity and ideas and produce a sermon all of us are proud of. It really works, and we have a lot of fun!" In the pre-launch phase of your church, you will likely be meeting on a single campus, but the lead pastor could still gather another person or two to assist in preparing the message for the weekend.

4. Video Teaching – Now it gets interesting! Who would imagine that people would listen to a canned sermon and be eager to invite their friends? In 1998, a

small group of people started a church in Rockford, Illinois. The leader was a layman who was successful in business but had no experience in pastoring or preaching. A few families started praying and dreaming and concluded that they had everything they needed except for a preacher. They called Willow Creek and asked if they could show Willow's sermon videos for their teaching. To make a long story short, Heartland Community Church has thousands attending each week and they still don't have a live preacher.

Everything else that happens at the church is live, but each week, the sermon is presented by Bill Hybels or Mike Breau (one of Willow Creek's teaching pastors). The message is projected on four big screens and is introduced by one Heartland's staff. After the sermon, someone steps on the stage and makes an appeal. God is obviously blessing as the church has outgrown one facility after another and continues to make an ever-larger impact on the Rockford area.

If you decide to use video teaching for your sermons, contact the Mission Catalyst office and ask about some of the options. One is the weekly teaching of Craig Groeschel, lead pastor of a multi-campus church in Oklahoma that has grown to become one of America's largest churches. (See www.lifechurch.tv.) Remember that the teaching in your new church has to be excellent, and you do have options!

Take Action!

*Turn to the end of this section and complete Implementation Task 5:
Your Church's Sermons.*

Music in Worship

"Someone's got to take a stand!" the wealthy churchman must have thought. "The church should be a place of purity and holiness, separate from the world and its secular entertainment. How could good Christians conceive of welcoming this worldly instrument into the Lord's house?" The churchman did all that he could to thwart the efforts of the misguided group that accepted the sinister gift, beseeching them with tears and even offering to refund the entire price if someone would only dump the ill-fated cargo – a musical instrument – overboard during its transatlantic voyage.

What was this instrument of such vile association and shady history that it elicited such opposition? The electric guitar or drums? Hardly. The churchman's pleas were left unheeded; the instrument arrived safely in the New World, and the Brattle Street Church of Boston made room for the controversial instrument: the organ.¹ This incident was not isolated. All across the country, many of the first church organs met an untimely death at the hands of well-meaning, over-zealous Christians.

¹ Edward S. Nindle, *The Story of the American Hymn*, p. 94-97.

Today's controversy follows a historical pattern. The musical styles of the church and the world began to overlap as early as the fourth century A.D. Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) produced what became known as the Gregorian chant. All voices sang in unison, all musical instruments were restricted, and only men were allowed to sing. Once Gregorian chant became firmly entrenched in the church, changes from this "sacred" style were strongly resisted.

Martin Luther marveled that in secular art there were "so many beautiful songs, while in the religious field we have such rotten, lifeless stuff." His objective became to make the music appealing to the simple, common folk. "The devil has no need of all the good for himself," Luther wrote, and proceeded to release these tunes from their secular or unbiblical words and unite them with words consistent with the evangelical faith. Thirty-six hymns are ascribed to Luther, including "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," although most were expanded or revised from preexisting material. Jesuit Adam Conzenius lamented, "Luther's hymns have destroyed more souls than his writings and speeches."

John Calvin's popular tunes – derived from the Psalms – were scorned as "Geneva Jiggs." Louis Bourgeois was arrested and imprisoned in 1551 for changing the melodies of certain psalms without permission. When Isaac Watts broke from the past and set poems to music, he was accused of taking "the precedence of the Holy Ghost" and "thrusting Him entirely out of the church." Charles Wesley and Charles Finney faced similar opposition to their musical innovations. Ira Sankey's pump organ was labeled "a devilish pump machine that wheezes out blasphemously." William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, took catchy tunes from the music halls and saw multitudes saved. As L.P. Hartley wrote in his novel *The Go-Between*, "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there."

What can we learn from history? Just this: The controversy over music will continue until we stand on the sea of glass with all the redeemed from every age and place. God invented music and He intends us to use it for His glory. Whether it's the style of music, what instruments you use, or whether or not the lyrics rhyme, some will always have a contrary opinion and an air of holiness to support their view. As the lead pastor of a new church, don't let the music become controversial. Discuss the issue with your conception team, decide on the parameters, and consider the issue settled.

Biblical Principles for Music

A powerful tool must be used in a proper way. In the hands of a chef, a gas flame is used to prepare a feast. In the hands of the ignorant, the same flame can be dangerous. Give a fire to a fool and it becomes deadly. Likewise with music. Here are a few principles to guide you as you plan.

1. Fit your music to your target. When Paul was around Jews, he became as a Jew. When he ministered to Gentiles, his method changed so that his message of grace was not obscured by forms that appeared legalistic to them. Ask Paul what music is best for the church and he would answer, "Give me your target group, tell me your intended result, and then we will

decide.” Proverbs 25:20 says: “Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar on soda, is he who sings songs to a troubled heart.”

2. Focus on God. Worship music is directed toward God. It addresses Him directly and/or dwells on His greatness. Songs sung to one another are appropriate in other settings, but they are not worship. Having said that, the focus on God is not limited to the words in the songs. Those who lead or perform music must do their best to guide the congregation in embracing God. Too many Christian artists are filled with pride and love to be up front so they can draw attention to themselves. Pride is a serious sin. Every musician is a humble servant whose heart longs to nudge someone in the audience closer to God.
3. Prepare diligently. Like it or not, we live in a consumer society. The high caliber of musical entertainment that is constantly paraded before people in the Western world has spoiled the public. Secular musicians take their performances seriously. Many concerts are an astounding display of music, light and techno-electronic wonders. It’s not a mystery why many people are underwhelmed when they endure poorly performed music in church. You should not expect perfection, but you can expect every musician to do the best she can with what she has.
4. Communicate clearly. Paul prayed in Colossians 4 “that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should” (vs. 3,4; NIV). Choose lyrics consistent with what you want to communicate. Then go the extra mile to make sure that everyone understands. Even when singers do their best to enunciate their words, some people may struggle to hear them clearly. Especially when using heavier styles or beats, project the words on the screen – not only for worship songs, but special songs as well – so that everyone benefits from the message of the music.
5. Demand spiritual qualifications. One of the issues your church must decide is who can serve as part of the up front team for the weekend experience. Depending on the role he or she will play, the person up front represents your church. The worship leader may be held to a higher standard than the other singers or the drummer. Wrestle with questions like: Are the singers’ lives congruous with their lyrics? Does the worship leader make worship a priority in his or her personal life? What spiritual message do we send when a non believer participates on the stage? (See the sample “People Up Front Process” flow chart at the end of this section.)

Take Action!

Turn to the end of this section and complete Implementation Task 6: Music in the Church.

The Other Components of Worship

Most people arrive at the worship experience stressed out. They fought traffic to get to church and they may have fought with their spouse or their kids in the car. In a small church like yours, most of them probably signed up to help with set-up or they're serving in another way. Some of the people who come are facing extraordinary challenges in their personal lives. Maybe they or a loved one is struggling with a life-threatening illness. They may have been laid off at work, or they're in the final, ugly throes of a divorce. They got out of bed and came to worship to find peace, hope, guidance and courage.

As mentioned earlier, worship takes place when someone connects with God and pours out his heart in gratitude or petition. Everything that happens during the weekend experience should be done with the notion that the sovereign God of heaven is eager to embrace and restore.

You have to be intentional. Your planning team has a vision of what God wants to accomplish, and a virtually blank sheet of paper. Don't just cut and paste the worship from that church where you attended in the '80s, or even the worship from last month. Traditions are fine as long as they connect people with God help them understand His goodness. But be careful about mindlessly doing something just because it has always been done.

To illustrate, the congregation at one old Methodist church always recites the Apostles' Creed. When the congregation stands to repeat the creed, they always turn around and face the back of the church. When it's over, they turn back around and sit down. Weird tradition, right? Where did it come from? A century ago, the church had no books so they hung the Apostles' Creed on the balcony; worshipers had to turn around to see it. By the time the balcony came down – and the Creed with it – the habit was too firmly entrenched to change!

Your worship time will always include music and teaching. Prayer will most certainly surround all that you do. You can also include artistic elements like drama, dance, and video clips. You'll call for an offering, and occasionally do an interview or listen to a testimony. Some components will be energetic and participative. Others will be solemn and will call for reflection. There really are a hundred ways to usher people into the presence of God.

When designing a weekend experience, consider dividing the time into two basic sections, each of them consuming roughly half of the time. During the first section, your objective is twofold: (1) lead them to connect with God; and (2) get beneath their fears, questions and trials, and behind their defenses, so that their heart is prepared for the message. During the second section, your goal is to present the Word of God as a two-edged sword that challenges, instructs and encourages.

One pastor said it this way, "If the planning team did their job, the first thirty minutes moves the heart of the worshiper closer to God. Like the ball on a grid iron, they've already moved down the field; they've already been blessed. Maybe they've laughed or cried, praised God or silently reflected on His

goodness. Their heart is tender. Their mind is open. By the time my thirty minutes arrives and I stand up to preach, I feel like a quarterback with first and goal on the one-yard line. All I have to do is get a good grip on the ball and fall somewhere – and we score!”

Any preacher knows that sometimes it’s almost impossible to reach people’s hearts because the things that preceded the message were so inappropriate or so poorly done that people felt cold and distant from God. They can only absorb so many screw ups and when the teaching time begins, their heart still carries the burdens they brought to church. Be ruthless about what you do before the message; examine how it fits into the overall experience of worship, and always do the best you can with what you have.

How long should your weekend experience be? That depends on the culture of your community and your congregation. North Americans tend to live in one-hour chunks of time. A rule of thumb is about one hour, especially in churches where the majority are Anglo. If you go longer, make sure that what you do is engaging – and be sure to monitor the length of your service every now and then.

Take Action!

*Turn to the end of this section and complete Implementation Task 7:
Analyzing an Order of Service.*

The People Up Front

Every church has a point of view regarding who can serve in certain positions. In the context of the weekend experiences it is especially vital that church leaders discuss and agree on their approach. Who is invited to be up front? Anyone? Only people who are committed to Jesus as Lord of their lives? One perspective seems to hold a lot of wisdom until another viewpoint is shared. Failure to do so will often result in hurt feelings, misunderstandings and maybe even the unwanted screening out of people God sent your way.

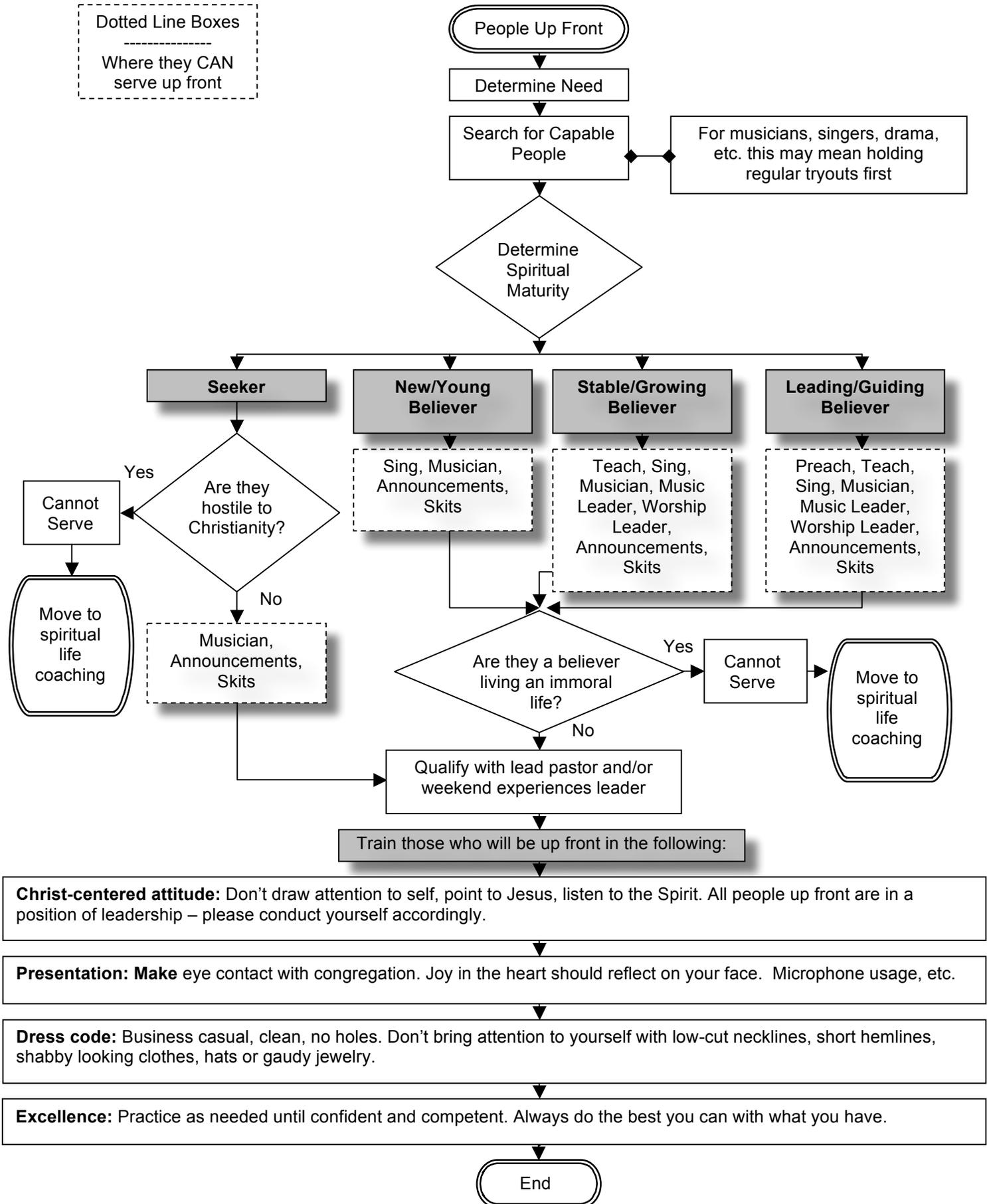
Below is a flow chart. Look it over, discuss it, and adopt your own. Place it in the hands of your programming team.

Take Action!

*Turn to the end of this section and complete Implementation Task 8:
Creating Your People Up Front Process.*

People Up Front Process

Dotted Line Boxes
Where they CAN
serve up front



Take Action!

Implementation Task 5: Your Church's Sermons

Review the following segment of Section 2 in this module:

◆ *Teaching of the Word*

Assemble your lead pastor, conception team and weekend planning team.

1. As a group, listen to the audio cassette "Teaching; The Catalyst for Life Change" by Bill Hybels and Lee Strobel. Take notes as you listen, then discuss what you heard. (*Part of the Defining Moments series, #DF9910; available from www.willowcreek.com.*)

2. Discuss the following questions:

- a) Considering the people and gifts God has brought together, which of the options for sermons fits our situation best?
 - ◆ Lead pastor is primary teacher
 - ◆ Team teaching
 - ◆ Team sermon preparation
 - ◆ Video teaching
- b) What should we aim for once we arrive at preview month and our grand opening? In the long run, what is the best way to leverage the people and gifts of our team while offering transformational teaching?

Take Action!

Implementation Task 6: Music in the Church

Review the following segment of Section 2 in this module:

◆ *Music in Worship*

Assemble your lead pastor, conception team and weekend experience team.

1. Discuss the five principles of music from the narrative above.
2. Describe your anticipated music style as specifically as possible. What instruments will you use? Are any instruments “illegal?”
3. Who will make the decisions about what is acceptable in your worship experiences?
4. How will you deal with the person who insists that your music has crossed some sacred line?

Take Action!

Implementation Task 7: Analyzing an Order of Service

Review the following segment of Section 2 in this module:

◆ *The Other Components of Worship*

Get your lead pastor and programming team together.

1. Analyze an order of service, preferably for a future worship experience. Ask of each component: *Why is this in here? In what way does this contribute to creating compelling worship? Does it fit with the theme of this particular service?*
2. Answer honestly, *How does this component or activity usher people into the presence of God? Does it get behind the defenses and prepare the heart for the message?*

Take Action!

Implementation Task 8: Creating Your People Up Front Process

Review the following segment of Section 2 in this module:

◆ *The People Up Front*

Assemble your lead pastor, conception team and programming team.

1. Review the sample “People Up Front Process” flow chart. Discuss each detail and create your own chart.
2. Decide who will receive copies of the chart and distribute them. If necessary, take the time to help each person understand the position your church has taken.

Section 3: The Environment of Worship

The Meeting Place

The first Christians met in homes and public spaces. Today, you have more options. If your group is small, you may meet in a home for the first few weeks. As you grow, you will need to find a public place that provides room to grow and sufficient accommodations for a corporate worship experience for adults and children.

Newly started churches have met in a variety of buildings: empty churches, converted garages, funeral homes, office buildings, vacant bowling alleys, movie theaters, hotel conference rooms, public and private schools, pre-school buildings, steel sheds, and even on the beach.

Real estate affects congregational life. The building where you meet shapes your thinking. This is another area in which you have to think outside the box. If you're not careful, you'll find yourself trapped in something that will restrict rather than liberate.

For starters, think multiple locations. You will likely settle on one location at first, but there are a couple of reasons why you need to have additional options. First, you don't own the building so there may be times when you find out on Thursday that the facility is not available this coming weekend. Be prepared ahead of time. Second, you may outgrow your initial location. Third, the owners may decide that the rent you pay isn't worth the hassle to them and they bid you "Good-bye."

Ralph Moore recommends that you create a notebook with descriptions and photographs of all of the locations available to you for ancillary church meetings. Speaking of a church he planted in Hawaii, he says, "Our extended campus included three community centers, a Catholic seminary, various hotels and camps, four public schools and many great homes – if we had owned them it all, it would have been worth more than a quarter of a billion dollars. We rejoiced that our heavenly Father made so many resources available to us at such a low cost and virtually on demand. But we would not have had so many possibilities if we had restricted our activities to a traditional church campus."²

Making wise decisions about where to meet will free you to grow at God's pace.

What do you look for in a place to meet? Here is a partial list:

1. Accessibility – Is it easy to get to from anywhere in your city? One pastor says that people will drive 50 miles to church, but they will rarely pass through more than 12 stoplights.
2. Visibility – Is it hidden behind a warehouse where no one can see it?
3. Location – What part of town is it in? In most cities, there are parts of town where people are less likely to shop, visit or attend a church. Is it on a street

² Ralph Moore, *Starting a New Church*, p. 117.

that most people in your community recognize?

4. Appearance – Is the building as attractive as the homes of the people you are trying to reach? People will drive up to church, but they won't drive down. What does that mean? They will attend a church that looks better than the homes they live in, but they won't attend a church that looks shabbier.
5. Cleanliness – If it isn't clean, can your group make it clean? That includes the grounds, all of the rooms, and the restrooms. Be ruthless about making your facility as clean as your own home when you're expecting important guests. Pay attention to the smells. Don't meet in a place that smells musty or has sour-smelling restrooms.
6. Parking – Is there adequate off-street parking? If you can't park people, you won't need to. In suburban areas, the average car brings 1 ½ to 2 people to church. Count the off-street parking spaces, multiply by two, and you know your maximum attendance in that location. Regular attenders will always find places to park their cars. First-time guests will not.
7. Size – Is the main worship room adequate for your group? If it's not big enough, the room will stifle your growth. If it's too large, you'll look lost and forsaken in that great big room – and that sends the wrong message.
8. Additional rooms – Are there rooms for your children's ministry? Are they clean, do they smell fresh? What about a place to serve refreshments or have a fellowship lunch on occasion?
9. Storage – Will you be allowed to store your sound system, materials for the children's ministries and other supplies on site? If not, that may not be a deal breaker, but it certainly adds extra work and stress to your team.
10. Cost – Can your group afford it? Is it possible to negotiate a lower price during the pre-launch phase of the church?

If you can, sign a short-term lease that takes you at least a month beyond grand opening. As mentioned above, have Plan B ready that includes an alternative location as well as a plan to communicate the change to those who attend. At the end of each weekend experience, leave the facility better than you found it. If it wasn't really clean when you showed up, make sure it's cleaner when you leave. If someone spills juice on the carpet and you can't get it up, initiate a call to your contact person and offer to cover the cost of professional cleaning.

What about office space? An office provides four basic functions: communications, storage, meeting space and a mailbox. Create a virtual office by finding a way to supply each function at little or no cost. Don't even think about paying for office space during pre-launch until you have thought it through carefully and exhausted every other option. Your money is limited and you want to spend as much of it as you can on whatever directly affects reaching people.

Someone said that the amount of money spent on office space is a predictor of success or failure in a start-up business: the fancier the office, the more likely the failure! Cell

phones and e-mail work from just about anywhere. A coffee shop is a great place for counseling or vision-casting meetings with one or two people. Private homes provide an excellent venue for conception team meetings. You can collect mail through a P.O. Box.

Take Action!

*Turn to the end of this section and complete Implementation Task 9:
Finding a Place to Meet.*

The Ambiance

The weekend experience is the time when you publicly display your congregation's soul. It's the face you present to the public. This is the time when the people of your city get a chance to participate in the life of your church and connect with God together with you. If this works, everything else pivots from it.

Atmosphere architects plan things from the beginning. You are creating an environment to which people will want to return. It's a place where people find grace and peace. When you are starting out, these are high aspirations. You are building habits and a way of thinking that will influence your church for years. You are deciding the impression you will leave with people who visit your church, their assumptions and opinions. These are important times.

Challenge your team by comparing two stores. The first is K-Mart. When you think of K-Mart, what comes to mind? Good prices? Disorganized shopping carts with spastic wheels? Inexpensive merchandise? White linoleum floors with black scars? Now imagine Nordstrom. How are the employees dressed at Nordstrom? Or Saks Fifth Avenue? How is the customer service different? How do you feel when you walk in the door? You feel classy when you shop at Nordstrom. No one but you knows that you probably can't afford very much. But you love being there because of the ambiance. It's obvious someone cares. The little things are important.

Of course, your church is small and your resources few. But you and your team have the chance to be atmosphere architects. Without a lot of effort, without a lot of expenses, you can create a K-Mart church or a Nordstrom church. It's all about the little things, the simple touches, the music that plays as people come in, the flesh flower on the information table, the way the bulletin is laid out.

In the context of new churches, Steve Sjogren has some good advice. "Do people want to stick around when your services are over, or do they quickly leave? In the final analysis, it's all about atmosphere. Do you have a buzz about your place or don't you? This is the difference between an OK gathering time and seeing something special going on with your new church" (*Community of Kindness*, p. 163).

Assign someone to bring refreshments every time you meet. They needn't be expensive, but they are important. Decide whether to offer them before the event, after the event or both. Offer kid-friendly snacks and beverages that adults like to drink. It's amazing how a 250 pound man feels nervous with a group of Christians, but put a hot drink in his hand and he feels at ease. Make sure that someone hovers around the

refreshment table and cleans up the spills and dusts away the crumbs. Remember, you're Nordstrom, right?

Which business will people experience when they walk into your church each weekend?

Take Action!

*Turn to the end of this section and complete Implementation Task 10:
Creating the Ambiance.*

Set-up and Take-down

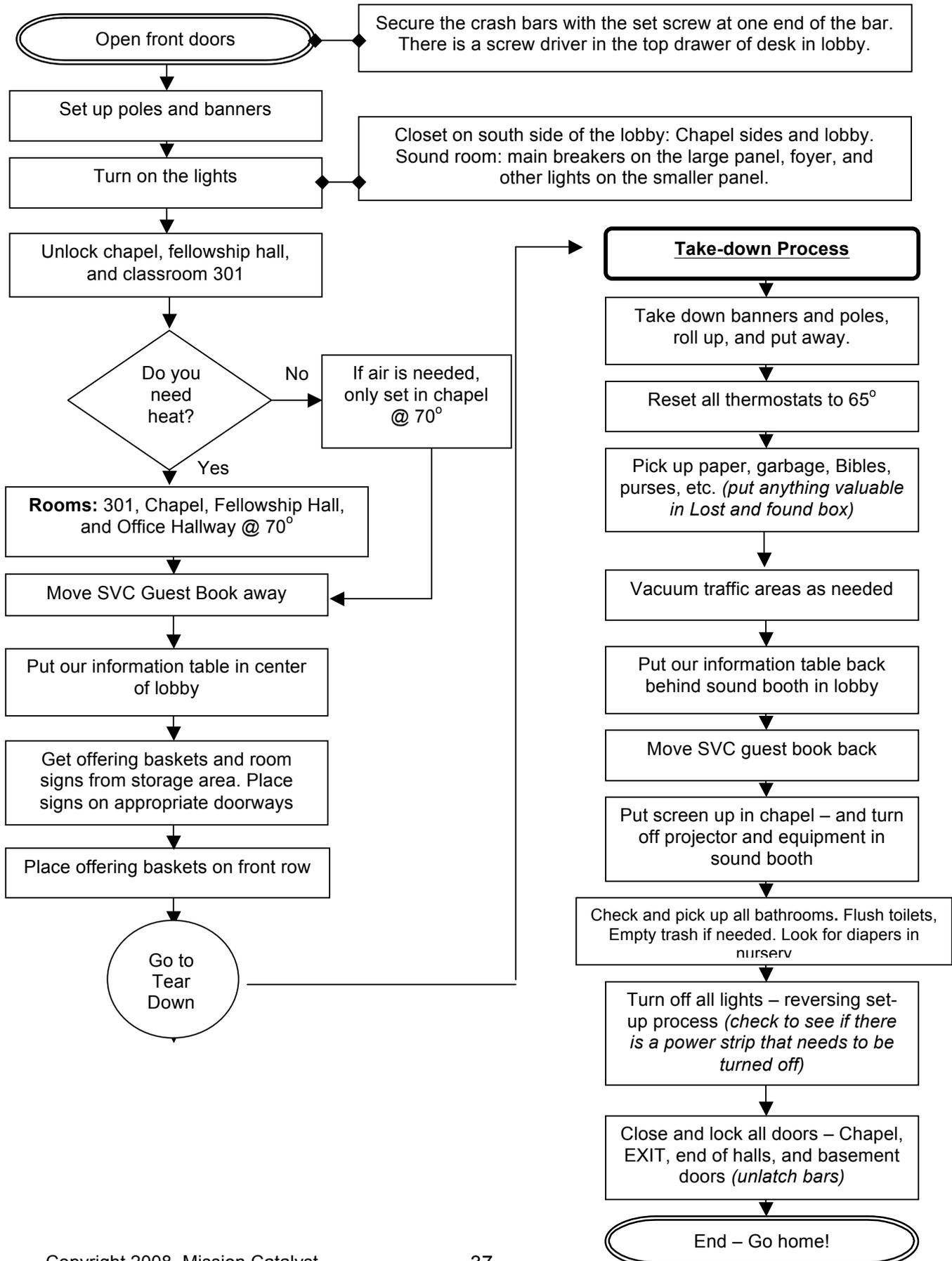
One of the eleven critical tasks that your church will do during pre-launch is set-up and take-down. (See the *Pre-launch Matrix at the end of this module.*) In fact, you'd better get used to it, because you will be doing this one well beyond grand opening and maybe for a number of years. Everyone who serves in the church is priceless, but without a reliable set-up and take-down crew, your work as a lead pastor is much harder. Make sure you go overboard to show them how much you value them.

As soon as you arrange to begin renting or leasing a building for weekend experiences, select a task leader for set-up and take-down. If he needs it, help him assemble a small crew of people who will help. Then sit down with him and develop a flow chart that illustrates exactly what needs to be done each weekend. A sample is below.

Take Action!

*Turn to the end of this section and complete Implementation Task 11:
Set-up and Take-down Process.*

Set-up and Take-down Process



Take Action!

Implementation Task 9: Finding a Place to Meet

Review the following segment of Section 3 in this module:

◆ *The Building*

As a conception team, do the following:

1. Discuss the following statement by Ralph Moore: “We control the initial decision as to where we will meet. But from that point on, our location controls us. Be sure you are controlled in a manner that ensures rather than hinders growth” (*Starting a New Church*, p. 126).
2. Talk about the options for a place to conduct your weekend experiences. Agree on the date when you will begin renting or leasing.
3. Select the person or persons who will scope out the options. Begin to create a notebook of all possible options. Even if you won’t use them in the short term, you may need them in the future.
4. Once you agree on a place and sign a lease, ask the following question: *What will we need to do to the facility (if anything) to prepare for our first week there?* Schedule a work bee to do it. Be proud of the place where you will meet.

Take Action!

Implementation Task 10: Creating the Ambiance

Review the following segment of Section 3 in this module:

◆ *The Ambiance*

1. Discuss what store you want to emulate at your weekend experiences.
 - a. K-Mart
 - b. Nordstrom
 - c. Olive Garden
 - d. Starbucks
 - e. Other _____

2. How can you create that atmosphere each weekend, especially at your preview services?

3. If you haven't already, select your Impressions team leader and assist her or him in plans to create a high standard when it comes to ambiance.

Take Action!

Implementation Task 11: Set-up and Take-down Process

Review the following segment of Section 3 in this module:

◆ *Set-up and Take-down*

1. As soon as you secure a place to hold your weekend experiences and you have a chance to settle issues like (a) what rooms you will use, (b) if you will have keys to the building, and (c) if your supplies will be stored on site, the lead pastor and weekend experience team leader will appoint a task leader for set-up and take-down.
2. If necessary, help the task leader assemble a team to help with the process each week.
3. Review the sample Set-up and Take-down Process flow chart. Create a chart that fits your situation and distribute it to the appropriate persons.

Section 4: Children's Worship

Think of a place where children have so much fun learning about how awesome God is that they don't want to miss a single week. Imagine that the music is so fun and engaging that children leave humming the words all week long that embed Biblical truths into their hearts. Picture the kids enjoying an experience of video, drama, teaching and prayer while learning how to live the Christian life at home, at school and in their neighborhoods.

A common mistake among church planters is to spend all of your money on adults and to spend the minimum amount possible on children. All too many treat children's worship like it's only a babysitting service. The rationale is that when resources are at a premium, children are not a good investment. Wrong!

Here is the problem with that perspective. The kids who attend your church are not just children, they are Christ followers of a different age. They matter to God as much as any adult in your city. For heaven's sake, take another look at how Jesus related to children. He put them in the center and told the adults to become like them! Do as Jesus did and embrace the young people God sends you as full-fledged followers of Jesus. They can and do hear His voice. They can and do serve and contribute to the kingdom. They have significant clout in the present – they influence their parents – and they are literally the present and future of the church.

Leaving a Legacy

What is the goal of ministering to children? Keep them out the parents' hair for an hour or so? Provide some wholesome entertainment? Teach them a craft? The team that serves your children must be clear about its goal. Here it is. It's a bit audacious, but it's worth setting it up as a target:

The goal of the KidZone ministry is to implant into the hearts and lives of children the qualities that will make them successful in this life, equip them to serve others, and prepare them for eternal life with God. Character, vision, relational skills, and discipline are among the qualities that we specifically aim to pass along.

1. Every parent needs a church that will help them know how to be a spiritual leader. Amazingly, two of three parents with small children attend church in America. Those numbers indicate that the vast majority of parents believe they are responsible for the moral and spiritual development of their children. But what do they do about it? They take their kids to church.

It never occurs to most parents that they themselves should assume responsibility for the spiritual growth of their kids. Their plan for spiritual growth is to take them to church and drop them off in the kids' room. In turn, churches assume that parents won't take responsibility for their own children's spiritual growth, so they view their ministry as a one-hour-a-week substitute for the parent. Not good!

A far better plan is for the church to partner with the parents. The church must redefine the parent's role as the primary source of spiritual leadership and instruction. The activities and programs that you plan should be planned around that objective.

2. Every kid needs a parent who will help them advance in their relationship with God. No one has as much potential to influence a child's relationship to God as their parents. In a best case scenario, your church has 40 hours a year to influence a child; the parents potentially spend 3,000 hours with their kids each year. Through the KidZone ministry of your church, the parents must understand that they hold the cards when it comes to helping their kids spiritually. You can help them accept the challenge, and you can equip them to make it happen.
3. Every church needs to make an intentional switch from serving kids to equipping families to serve kids. It's fine to serve kids. You want to do it well so they love coming to church and they intend to return. But think of the spiritual growth of the kids. Ask a few questions. What if you could excite the kids about Jesus for an hour on the weekend, while the parents make a positive impact all throughout the week? What if Dad and Mom got energized about helping their child and took the initiative seriously? You just might see revolutionary change in families. You just might be the catalyst for parents to leave a legacy in the lives their kids.

Teach the parents to ask three questions: (a) What do we want our kids to become? (b) Where are they now? (3) How can we help them take the next step?

As with everything else during pre-launch, you have to the best you can with what you have. Find a leader (or three) who loves Jesus, loves kids, and would knock themselves out to serve them. Put as many resources in their hands as you can, then turn them loose to create a strong, thriving ministry where kids are loved, volunteers are valued, parents are equipped, and the life-changing truth of Scripture becomes a reality for every child who walks through your door.

When the weekend gathering is over and the families are headed for home, parents will ask their children two questions: *Did you have fun?* and *What did you learn?* If you can pass the test on those two accounts, you will pass the test with the parents. It's not more complicated than that. And when Saturday rolls around and the kids beg Mom and Dad to take them to church, Mom and Dad will comply.

Here are some guidelines for children's ministry:

1. Spend a little money on making the room(s) where the kids meet bright and attractive. Remember that kids will destroy their physical environment twice as fast as adults. If something gets broken in the room where you are renting, don't freak out, just make sure one of your team repairs it, or cover the cost of replacement.
2. Even more important to parents than what their children learned or if they had fun is *Are my kids safe?* Make sure the room and all of the equipment is safe. Never allow a child to leave a supervised area alone or with anyone but the child's parent or guardian. And unless you have known someone for a very long time, always do a background check on anyone who volunteers to

serve. (Contact your local police department or a large church in your city for advice on how to do background checks.)

3. Keep the program simple. You don't have a large team, so do a few things well.
4. Look at the ages of the kids who attend and target them for now. Don't try to offer separate classes for too many groups until you reach critical mass in your serving team and in the kids who attend.
5. Consider shadowing the adult worship times in the "3 & 1" format. When the adults have preview services, offer all-out children's programming. On the "gathering" Saturdays, invest less time to save your team from burnout.
6. Use a well-known national curriculum. Very few people could ever create a curriculum as engaging and impactful as KIDMO (kidmo.com) or Willow Creek's Promiseland (promiselandonline.com). More great resources are Flipt (part of Promiseland), Praise Baby Collection, Seeds Family Worship (seedsmusic.com), Gospel Light, David C. Cook, Pioneer Clubs (pioneerclubs.org) and Faith Weaver by Group, Inc. Check out your local Christian bookstore and get the recommendations from children's ministry leaders from other churches. If you can pull it off, send your KidZone team leader to the Promiseland Children's Ministry Conference at Willow Creek or to a similar conference elsewhere.
7. Make sure that the children have the opportunity to do outreach. Help them form their own impact list and make sure they participate in the church's strategy of invest and invite. Depending on the age of the kids, they can even plan their own servant evangelism projects. (See *the Outreach and Assimilation module*.)
8. Spend a considerable amount of time thanking and praising anyone who contributes to the children's worship or serves on the KidZone team. They are truly indispensable and are your heroes.

Take Action!

*Turn to the end of this section and complete Implementation Task 12:
Kicking Off Your KidZone Ministry.*

Take Action!

Implementation Task 12: Kicking Off Your KidZone Ministry

Review Section 4 in this module:

Assemble your lead pastor, KidZone leader and conception team.

1. If you haven't already, select the KidZone team leader. (*See Pre-launch Matrix at the end of this module.*)
2. Make a list of people who might be willing to serve on the KidZone team.
3. In the context of your church's target person, discuss the priority of kids in your new church. How important are they? How much of a financial investment can the church make in this ministry? What would be the consequences of not prioritizing the children?
4. Read the text in Section 4 of this module and discuss its implications.
5. What ages should we target during the first few months of the church?
6. Appoint the person who will set up the process of performing a background check on volunteers.
7. Visit a large, growing church in your vicinity. Arrange beforehand to visit the children's ministry and meet with some of the leaders. Seek their advice, then spend some time discussing what you can do in your context.

Pre-launch Matrix

In order to have an effective grand opening, eleven critical tasks must happen well. Having grand opening teams in place that perform these tasks with excellence is one of the five gauges you will watch to determine if you are ready for grand opening.

As the church enters the pre-launch phase, its leaders must decide when each of the tasks will begin and who is responsible for it. Sometime during the early months of pre-launch, you will begin to measure the readiness of each task for grand opening. For now, you must set a target date for each task to begin to happen, and you will add the names of those responsible for each team and task as that person comes on board.

Area / Task	Area Leader	Task Leader	Team Members
Weekend Experience			
<i>Programming</i>			
<i>Music</i>			
<i>Tech</i>			
<i>Set-up & take-down</i>			
<i>Impressions</i>			
Outreach			
<i>Bridge events</i>			
<i>Marketing</i>			
Operations			
<i>Data management</i>			
<i>Financial systems</i>			
KidZone			
<i>Programming</i>			
<i>Impressions</i>			

Conception Team Feedback

Today's Date _____

Name of Evaluator _____

What went right?

What went wrong?

What was missing?

What was confusing?

Striving to Be Compelling

Today's Date _____

We want to offer an experience to which you are proud to invite a friend.
As you think about bringing people, how would you rate today's experience?

Poor		Average		Great
1	2	3	4	5

What did you like about today's experience?

How can we do better?

Comments:

