

GROWING SMALL GROUPS

Harnessing the Power of Churchwide Campaigns

BACKGROUND

The churchwide campaign is the most effective way to increase leadership and participant engagement in small groups at your church. Since spiritual growth often begins with connection, churchwide campaigns ultimately foster greater spiritual growth in your church.

From the beginning of Milestone Church, we have used churchwide campaigns to help people connect and engage in small groups. We didn't invent the churchwide campaign model, but we have utilized and adapted it to suit our needs over the past twenty years.

Whether you already know something about churchwide campaigns or this is the first time you've heard the term, this document will give you an overview of what you need to know to get started.

WHAT IS A CHURCHWIDE CAMPAIGN?

A churchwide campaign is a spiritual emphasis series for the entire church. The power of the campaign is the momentum it generates. A churchwide campaign includes **three components**, lasting **six weeks**, taking place **one time per year**. Let's break down each of these elements.

THREE COMPONENTS

The three components of a churchwide campaign are:

(1) A Message Series

Each message during the campaign kicks off the topic for the week and sets the stage for everything that takes place. Churchwide campaign bundles from Milestone include message manuscripts, outlines, and a graphics package for your church to use.

(2) A Resource

The second component to a churchwide campaign is a resource to engage with during the week. The resource could be a book, a workbook (we call them "guides"), or a daily devotional. We've used all three types of resources. The idea is to give people something they can read and engage with throughout the week. The resource

corresponds with the weekend messages and helps prepare people for their small group discussion.

(3) A Small Group Experience

The heart of the churchwide campaign is the small group experience. People grow when they take steps with others. But many people are apprehensive about trying a small group for the first time. The momentum generated by the campaign helps people take the step to join a group.

The campaign resource provides discussion questions for groups to discuss each week. Many campaigns also include videos to play at each small group. These videos explore new aspects of the topic and help kick off the small group discussion.

Summary

The three components of a campaign are (1) a message series, (2) a resource, and (3) a Small Group experience. You'll want to talk about these components to drive engagement. A memorable catchphrase like, "Attend the Series, Get a Guide, Join a Group," can help.

SIX WEEKS

A churchwide campaign is short, typically six weeks. The length is intentional. Long commitments hinder engagement. A shorter six-week timeframe encourages participation.

The timeframe also becomes a promotional tool. "Anyone can commit to something for six weeks" should become a common refrain as you talk about the series. Use this refrain when recruiting leaders as well as encouraging people to join a small group.

Note: A campaign typically begins with two intro messages to prepare everyone for the series and encourage them to join a small group. These intro messages take place two weeks prior to the small group launch. So, the message series lasts eight weeks, while the Small Group study only lasts six weeks.

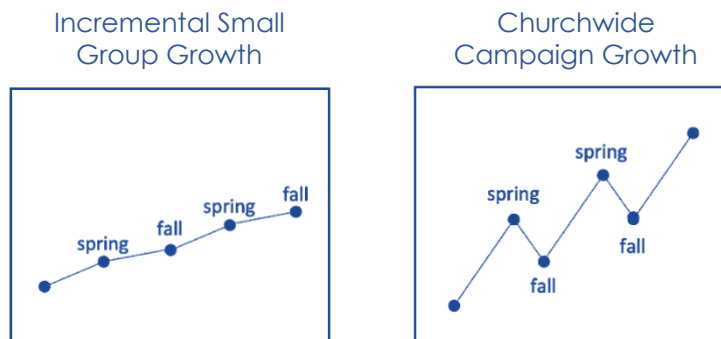
ONE TIME PER YEAR

Churchwide campaigns are most effective when used only one time per year. Campaigns are a classic example of "less is more." You might be tempted to think, "If campaigns are so effective, why not run one every semester?" But the thinking is backwards. There is something special about the entire church going on a spiritual journey together. You want to limit the use of campaigns in order to maximize their impact.

GROWTH TRENDS

Conducting a churchwide campaign will impact the growth of your small group ministry. It is not uncommon for churches to double their numbers of small groups, leaders, and participants during a campaign.

Growth from campaigns, however, is not linear. The charts below represent the incremental growth you might see semester to semester using traditional small group studies vs. the exponential growth of a campaign.



As you can see from these growth trends, rather than experiencing incremental growth every semester, you can expect exponential growth during a campaign, followed by a period of leveling off. As such, you'll want to measure growth year-over-year not semester-over-semester.

With a churchwide campaign, your goal is to launch as many groups as possible during the campaign and then retain as many of those groups as possible throughout the rest of the year.

KEYS FOR SUCCESS

The following keys for success will help you launch a churchwide campaign.

1. SELECT THE RIGHT CAMPAIGN AND RESOURCES.

Selecting the right campaign is the first step. Pick a topic that creates excitement and enables people to invite unchurched friends and co-workers to join them. Then, invest in quality resources that will keep people engaged throughout the study.

2. THE LEAD PASTOR MUST CHAMPION ENGAGEMENT.

The Small Groups Pastor or Director works behind the scenes to recruit leaders and bring the components of the campaign together. But no one can replace the role of the Lead Pastor as the campaign champion. For the campaign to succeed, the Lead Pastor must exude excitement for every component—the message series, the resource, and small group engagement.

The Lead Pastor must champion small group leaders from the platform, asking past leaders to step up and lead again, while inviting first time leaders to step out. He must encourage everyone to get a resource and join a group. Remember the key phrase, “Anyone can commit to something for six weeks.” This phrase must become the Lead Pastor’s mantra in the weeks leading up to the campaign. Nothing replaces his voice. The Lead Pastor is the vision caster to the church. The Small Groups Pastor or Director is the vision implementor.

3. MAKE CLEAR ASKS OF LEADERS.

When recruiting leaders, be specific in what you are asking them to do. You are asking for a **six-week commitment to lead a specific Small Group**.

You can use the name of the campaign when asking people to lead. For example, if you select the *Seeds* study, you can say, “We’re asking you to lead a six-week *Seeds* Small Group.” This defines the term of the commitment and makes it more likely for people to lead.

When asking people to lead a small group, be sure to mention that the **Leader Guide** has everything they need to lead a group and that the **Small Group videos** provide the teaching for the group. This eases any tension potential leaders might feel. Leading a small group really can be as simple as “pressing play and reading the discussion questions.”

Finally, you must **determine the leadership requirements** for the campaign. At Milestone, we allow anyone to lead a small group with their family or friends, but if someone wants to lead an “open group” (open for anyone to join), then we have three requirements: (1) church Membership, (2) completion of the Growth Track, and (3) completion of our New Leader Onboarding process.

4. FOCUS ON INVITING OTHERS.

The goal of a churchwide campaign is not to provide another study for your current small groups. The goal is to increase small group participation exponentially in your church.

To accomplish this goal, focus your leaders on inviting others. This should always happen, but campaigns provide the opportunity to increase your focus on inviting others. Encourage leaders (and group participants) to think outside the box. Ask neighbors, co-workers, family members—anyone—to join their small group.

Campaigns also provide a unique chance for small groups to multiply. If you have groups that have been together for years and never invite anyone new, then a campaign might be your new best friend! Use the campaign as an opportunity to tell your leaders:

“We expect more people than ever to join a Small Group! This means we need to make room for everyone. I’m asking every group to multiply for six weeks. Who in

your group can step out and lead their own group and make room for new people to join? You can get back together after the six weeks ends."

After years of doing campaigns, we have seen many groups multiply following this strategy. But groups that multiply never go back afterwards. Campaigns are the most effective way to get new groups.

5. RAISE UP A TEAM OF SMALL GROUP COACHES.

It is not uncommon for small group participation to double during a campaign. Once the small groups ministry grows beyond about twenty groups, it becomes important to start raising up Small Group Coaches to help support and oversee the leaders.

The purpose of this document is not to cover the topic of Small Group Coaching. But recognize that a churchwide campaign provides an opportunity to test new Small Group Coaches. Identify potential coaches and ask them to walk with some new leaders for six weeks during the campaign. See how they do. If they have a knack for coaching, and they enjoy it, then invite them to continue Small Group Coaching after the campaign ends.

6. CREATE A PLAN FOR RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION.

Administering the distribution of resources to the church is no small undertaking. Most churches sell the resources "at cost" to the people in their church. First, you must determine how many books you need in inventory. Next, develop a gameplan for selling books while launching small groups. You want book sales to be fast and simple. Every book sale is an opportunity to promote joining a small group.

7. OFFER CLEAR NEXT STEPS.

When the six-week campaign ends, what will your small groups do next? Of course, you want as many of the groups you've launched to continue, so providing clear next steps is paramount.

In the last three weeks of the campaign, start coaching your leaders on what to do when the current study ends. We encourage groups to do two things:

(1) Do something fun together. At the conclusion of the study, it's always good for small groups to celebrate and have fun. It doesn't have to be complicated, but this gives everyone a chance to connect and laugh.

(2) Select your next study. The next study is the most critical step following the campaign. You can direct everyone to a specific study, give them an option of studies to choose from, or ask groups to discuss the weekend messages.

Whatever you decide, make their next study options clear.

Of course, your leaders only made a six-week commitment, and some of the groups might wrap up after the study ends, and that's okay. But the goal is to retain 80-90% of the groups that you launched at the start of the campaign. Having clear next steps will help small groups continue meeting.

TIMELINE

Here is a sample timeline for launching a churchwide campaign.

Timeframe	Actions
2-6 Months Prior to Campaign Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Select curriculum and order resources.• Talk to current Small Group Leaders about the upcoming study and dates.
1 Month Prior to Campaign Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote the upcoming series. Use video, graphics, and platform announcements.• Tell people the study will include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">(1) A Message Series(2) A Resource(3) A Small Group Experience• Recruit Leaders.
2 Week Prior to Campaign Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start Intro Messages for the series.• Sell resources.• Help people join a Small Group.

FAQ

When is the best time to do a churchwide campaign?

Churches typically do a campaign in the spring (January-March) or the fall (September-November). We've found that launching in January is because people are more receptive to joining a group at the start of a new year. Also, attendance in the spring is typically higher for us, whereas fall attendance is lower due to football and hunting (a reality in Texas!). These factors make January a better time to launch a campaign in our setting. But you can evaluate the timing and decide what works best for you.

Is there a way for kids to participate?

Children's resources are a key part of a churchwide campaign. This aligns the entire church and gives parents something to talk about with their kids. All Milestone Church campaign resources include a children's bundle with everything you need to integrate the study for preschoolers through elementary school. Middle school and high school students are encouraged to join student small groups and follow along with the adult resources.

How do I recruit leaders?

Utilize a twofold approach to recruit leaders. Your Lead Pastor must repeatedly call people to lead a small group from the platform, and you must follow up with personal asks. Be sure to make signing up to lead as easy as possible.

What do leaders receive?

Milestone Church campaign bundles include digital Leader Guides with everything your Small Group Leaders need to lead a successful group. The digital Leader Guide includes helpful tips as well as information on what to communicate, what to pray, and what to expect each week. It also provides an in-depth discussion guide.

Do people have to join a Small Group to participate in the study?

No, there will be people who want to purchase a resource and read it on their own. That's okay. Hopefully the sermon series and resource will make them want to join a small group.

Can someone go through the study with their family instead of a small group?

It's fine for families to go through the study together. We ask families to register their group as a closed group, so we know who is participating and can provide leader resources to them. These groups would not be available for others to join.

Does every Small Group have to participate in the campaign study?

We never force our leaders to do a specific study, however we encourage all small groups to participate. The campaign builds its own momentum, and we've found that close to 100% of our small groups want to participate. The few groups that do not participate are typically men's or women's groups where the members are already going through the study with another group (for example, with their couples Small Group).

Why should my church do a churchwide campaign?

If you're wondering whether to try a churchwide campaign, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you want greater weekend service engagement?
- Do you want to see Small Group participation increase exponentially?
- Do you want to recruit more Small Group Leaders?
- Do you want your people to become outward-focused and invite others to go on a spiritual journey with them?
- Do you want your best small groups to multiply and make room for new people?
- Do you want to do something that will galvanize your church and help people grow?

If you answered yes to these questions, then you need to do a churchwide campaign!