**Gateway Church: Next Gen**

**Discuss:**

What would Gateway look like if Next Gen didn't exist?

What does a healthy/thriving children's and student ministry look like at a church like Gateway?

We really struggled about what to share with the staff, there is just so much that happens in Next Gen. Everyone on the Next Gen team sees what we do as Next Gen as the most important ministry of the church. If they didn’t, I wouldn’t want them on the team. However, I expect that each of you see your role/ministry in the same light… as you should. This next hour, I’m not going to try to convince you that Next Gen is the most important ministry in the church, so don’t worry. However, I do want you to see Next Gen in a totally different light. You are our teammates and I NEED you to see Next Gen through our eyes.

Next Gen represents ¼ of Gateway. That is significant. As fellow staff members, you even represent Next Gen. Unfortunately, much of the staff don’t know a lot about Next Gen and it really isn’t acceptable for PAID STAFF to not know what 25% (closer to 50% if you include parents) experience every week in Next Gen. Does that make sense?

So, during this time today, I’m going to share with you three important things that you need to know about Next Gen. These three things are in bold in your handout. If it’s all you remember about today, then that’s fine by me. I’ll post your page with the blanks filled in on the staff blog for future reference as well.

So, in the process of explaining these three things, I do want to change your perception concerning Next Gen. Everyone has pre-conceived notions or thoughts about Children’s Ministry or Student Ministry. My hope is that when we’re done here today, your thoughts/notions about Children’s Ministry and Student Ministry are aligned with what Gateway’s Next Gen is really about… that way you can represent Next Gen well!

So before we jump into shattering pre-conceived ideas about Next Gen, let me share with you the Mission Statement of Next Gen.

**Mission Statement of Next Gen:** To help kids/students connect into a growing community of multiplying Christ-followers.

#### Our mission statement is almost identical to Gateway’s mission statement of “helping unchurched people become a unified community of growing, multiplying Christ followers.”

We do this on purpose so that kids in Next Gen, volunteers/leaders serving in Next Gen and parents of kids in Next Gen are always being pointed in the same direction as our church.

Let me also introduce you to the Next Gen team.

Sarah Echelberger

* Erin Davenport

Cathy Harwick

* Katy Barrilleaux

Chad Swanzy

* Jon Evans
* Andy Baxter

Corey Schwarz

My role is that of Next Gen Pastor. There has been some confusion about my role. I was not hired to replace Matthew Haney… I’m just in his old office. My job is to unify all these ministries under Next Gen so we’re all in alignment with each other and our church. My job is to ensure that there is a clear spiritual path spanning 18 years preparing kids and students for the rest of their lives. In addition, I’m part of the directional team representing 1000+ kids/students and nearly 400 volunteers.

Okay, enough introductions.

Let's look at what some of you answered on your table cards.

What would Gateway look like if Next Gen didn't exist? What were some of the initial reactions and answers to that question?

For most people, their initial reaction involves the affect the absence of Next Gen would have on the rest of the church. We’d have less people in the auditorium, we couldn’t hear John teach and other ways the lack of Next Gen would affect the adult church population.

That’s the first misperception. Yes, having a strong Next Gen has a powerful impact on the rest of Gateway, but if that’s what first came to mind, you missed the point entirely. It’s kind of like a man who wakes up one morning who realized he’s losing his hair and his wife says, “just think of the money we’re going to save on haircuts and shampoo.” She missed the point.

This leads me to the first big thing.

**Next Gen is strategic, vital and urgent...**

Let me introduce you to a very important author. His name is George Barna. He runs the Barna Research Group which is essentially Gallup for trends within the church. For more than 25 years the Barna research group has been providing valuable information about the church and issues affecting the church.

About 6 years ago he wrote a book on accident. You see, he was doing research as normal and the information he found from the research revealed something he had never seen before. It was an epiphany. So much so, he wrote a book about it.

This expert in church ministry wrote, “In retrospect, my view was so far off the mark that I didn’t just miss the boat – I missed the entire ocean!”

This book he wrote on accident is “ Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions.”

In this book he wrote, “My thesis is that if you want your life to count for God’s kingdom, there are many viable ways to use your gifts, talents and resources. However, if you want to have the greatest possible impact (i.e., to achieve a lasting legacy of spiritual dividends), then consider employing those resources in ministry to young people.”

George Barna has researched the ins and outs of every ministry within the church and he realized that he missed something HUGE. He missed how important children’s and student ministry is not just to the church but to the kingdom as well.

Here are some of Barna’s findings:

**85**% of people become Christ followers between the ages of 4-14

**90**% of 13 year olds consider themselves to be “Christians”

In the United States:

* 5-12 year olds have a **32**% chance of becoming a Christ follower.
* 13-18 year olds have a **4**% chance of becoming a Christ follower.
* Those 19 and older have a **6**% chance of becoming a Christ follower.

Let me say this very clearly, the greatest influx of new Christ followers coming into the kingdom of God happens in Next Gen. The same Holy Spirit that raised Christ from the grave and is at work in our auditorium is also hard at work in this Kids Quest building. Kids Quest and Uprising is not the church for tomorrow, it is the church right now… alive and vibrant and growing.

So when the question is presented, “what would Gateway look like if Next Gen didn’t exist?” If we first think of how it would affect the adults, we’ve missed the point. The correct answer is that we missed the most strategic, the most vital and most effective arm of evangelism within our church. That’s HUGE!

Video Testimonial

Next Gen is strategic. Children are so pure and ready to be shaped, usually without weighty baggage.

Next Gen is Vital. Nearly every strong and growing church has a strong and growing ministry to young people.

Why urgent? – The window is small.

A person’s spiritual condition at age **13** is a strong predictor of their spiritual profile as an adult.

Statistically speaking, once a person reaches 13 years of age, reaching them for Christ become significantly more difficult.

**Table Discussion:**

Briefly describe your general reaction to the information you just heard.

What about Next Gen being Strategic, Vital or Urgent struck you the most and why?

**Next Gen isn't just about kids and students...**

Okay, here’s another misperception. If you thought Next Gen was just about kids and students, think again. Yeah, they are our primary focus, but Next Gen is a destination for people (adults) who are longing to connect.

Typically I’m on the stage one or two times a year with Kenny Martin and Stacey Brewer asking for volunteers because we have volunteer needs. Although we do have needs (any growing ministry does), a needy ministry doesn’t define who Next Gen is.

Here at Gateway we want people to get connected so they can live the “Way of Christ.” The connection path is very familiar:

Attend >> Connect in S.G. or R.P. >> Take steps toward spiritual growth >> Serve as a group.

Today I want you to see Next Gen as an alternate connection path:

Attend >> Serve in Next Gen >> Connect through serving team >> Take steps toward spiritual growth.

Gateway has a huge backdoor that we’re trying to close. When most of us think of connecting people, we think of connecting them in a small group. We all need to also see that there is another way to connect people. Some people are wired differently and would much rather sign up to serve before they would check out a small group.

At McNeil, we don’t have enough space if everyone wanted to get into a small group. However, we have PLENTY of room Next Gen or some of our other serving areas. The best part of seeing Next Gen as a place for people to connect through serving… BUILT IN CHILD CARE! Not only is serving in Next Gen another place to connect, according to different research, serving “KEEPS” people connected even better than a small group.

*"Sixty-two percent of those interviewed gave us a response that indicated their ministry involvement to be the glue that held them to the church. From the perspective of the formerly unchurched, being involved in ministry has been the key factor to their assimilation in the church. More than any other factor, the formerly unchurched told us that their service and ministry in the church keeps them coming back each week."*

*- Surprising Insights from the Unchurched by Thom S. Rainer*

Video Testimonial

I want to share one more thing about serving on Sundays. Not just Next Gen, but coming to church on Sundays with the intention to serve.

I’ve been here for almost 2 years and I’ve experienced what church is like at Gateway at the present and I’ve heard stories about Gateway in the early days. What I’ve heard about the early days is how people came on Sunday’s “on mission.” Leaders saw Sunday morning as an OPPORTUNITY. It was their chance to connect with a guest, link them to a small group. Everyone had a job to do. There was set-up and tear-down and it was exciting.

But I wonder, have our leaders lost the excitement of Sunday mornings at Gateway? We have a beautiful building that doesn’t require nearly the set-up and tear-down like the early days. Most of our leaders come, drop of their kids, attend a service, pick up their kids and then go home.

Connection isn’t happening like it did in the early days. John shared a few weeks ago about how he attended South Campus and bumped into 2-3 different people. He asked the same question to all three. “Where are you connected?” Generally, our staff an our leaders are not asking that question to very person on this campus.

Show KQ registration forms.

Here are the family registration cards we collect in Kids Quest. From February until last Sunday, we’ve collected 823 of these forms. That represents 823 families. Anywhere between 1600 and 2300 people. Obviously we didn’t connect these people.

To summarize, we must be about connecting people here at Gateway and an incredible way to connect someone is plugging them in to serving on Sunday morning.

**Table Discussion:**

What can we do to rally more leaders to being "on mission" on Sunday mornings?

**Next Gen can't do it alone…**

Okay, I’m done with smashing misperception. The first two big things are huge things to understand about Next Gen. However, this last big thing is where we are right now and it pertains even more specifically to Kids Quest than it does to the Uprising.

Next Gen can’t do it alone.

In most churches, children’s and student ministries measure success wrong. At Gateway, I don’t even have the data that would show me if Next Gen has been successful. In 2009, Next Gen saw awesome growth. For most of the year we were 15% or so above 2008. The same was true of 2008 over 2007. To most, that’s success. However, I’m going to rain on my parade.

Here is a biblical worldview. Essentially a worldview is how a person views that world and subsequently makes decisions.

**Biblical worldview**

A biblical worldview, as defined by the Barna study, is believing that absolute moral truth exists; the Bible is completely accurate in all of the principles it teaches; Satan is considered to be a real being or force, not merely symbolic; a person cannot earn their way into Heaven by trying to be good or do good works; Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; and God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today.

Here’s a true measure of success.

How many 18-25 year olds are we producing with a biblical worldview?

**<1**% of 18-23 year olds have a biblical worldview.

Just wait, it gets worse.

**70**% of young adults ages 23-30 stopped attending church regularly for at least a year between the ages of 18-22.

Basically, we’re investing in our kids spiritually for 18 years and as soon as they graduate from High School, most of them stop coming to church.

Here’s what Barna’s research found.

"But one of the lessons that emerged from the research on which my earlier book was based was that churches alone do not and cannot have much influence on children. In fact, the greatest influence a church may have in affecting children is by impacting their parents." - Revolutionary Parenting by George Barna

**85**% of parents believe they have the primary responsibility for the moral and spiritual development of their child.

**66**% of those same parents admit to handing off that responsibility to their churches.

Fewer than one out of five parents of young children believe they are ding a good job of training their children morally and spiritually.

The realization is that the way Children’s Ministry has been done for the past 20 years really hasn’t been working. True success can only be seen when parents are equipped to spiritually lead their kids. Parents must instill a Biblical Worldview. Next Gen can help. Next Gen can provide materials and support. But Next Gen can’t do it alone.

Introduce Revolutionary Parenting

You probably think I’m a Barna snob by now. I’m currently reading this book and it’s EYE OPENING! This book was written “on purpose” after his accidental book. In it he interviewed 20-30 year olds who possessed a biblical worldview and their parents who trained them. These pages simply describe what these parents did. It’s not theories or suggestions, just research findings.

Beginning in 2010, we’re putting this book in the hands of every parent who participates in child dedication. We’re also introducing something we’re currently calling the “Parenting Path” that will help prepare parents to step into this role of spiritually leading their kids.

We have a huge challenge ahead of us, but this is bigger than just Next Gen. It affects our entire church. If you are a parent it affects you as well.

**Discuss**

* Describe how spiritual training in your home (or lack of it) determined your spiritual trajectory.
* For those who didn't have any spiritual training in the home, what might be different in your life today you had experienced this training?