

# NEXT GENERATION 101

Common Ground's philosophy on kids & teens ministry

If you're reading this, you no doubt have an interest in loving and serving the next generation. That's wonderful! We do too. This handbook will hopefully be a helpful resource as you serve the Next Generation. It will begin by taking you on a journey into Common Ground's Next Gen strategy and then drill down into some very practical and logistical elements that will hopefully help you to hit the ground running.

#### CONTENTS:

1. Our Next Gen Strategy
2. Our Ministry Philosophy
3. Healthy Transitions
4. Small Groups

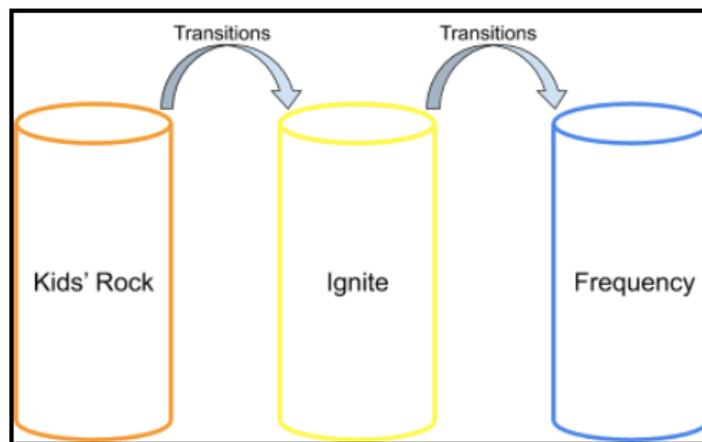
## 1. OUR NEXT GEN CORE STRATEGY

These are our 'big rocks' that we all seek to build our ministries on. In a nutshell:

*"We exist to serve the next generation so that they may be rooted and established in the gospel."*

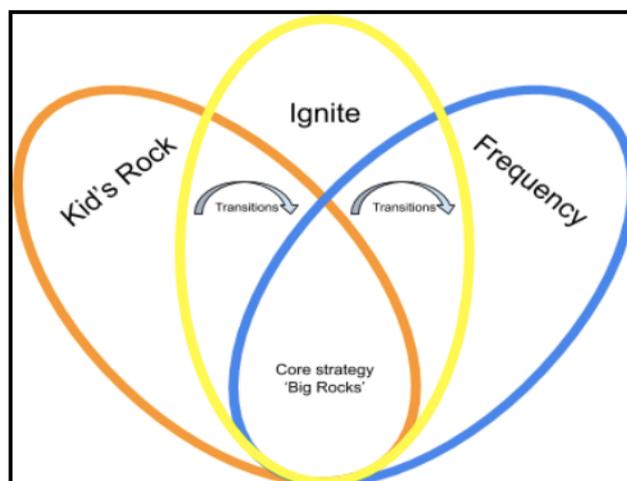
This is the basic mandate in Scripture around evangelism and discipleship, and it fits under the overall mission of Common Ground Church to fill the city with the life, message and fame of Jesus.

Furthermore, why does the Next Gen team exist as one team rather than multiple separate ministries? We are convinced that the best way to serve the Next Generation is not to function as separate ministry silos (see below) where everyone is on their own mission and where there are big gaps between the different age groups (making transition from one to the next difficult).



This is a silo approach to youth ministry.

Rather, we are convinced that we are more effective when we function as one team across multiple age ministries. This calls for unity on a broad partnership level across the city-wide Next Gen team, and a close teaming across ministries with each congregation.



Our preferred approach.

When we team together, within our congregation and across the city, we:

- *Create alignment* - We want all of the Next Gen ministries to be serving with the same end in mind. We want Next Gen ministries to use the same language in that process and to have shared processes or ideas around the 'big rocks'.
- *Create continuity* - we want to ensure that there is effective transitions between the distinct ministries for children, families and leaders.
- *Create mutual sharpening* - we want to help each other grow in our leadership and ministry through training, brainstorming and problem-solving together.
- *Create awareness and support* - we want to encourage practical support and teaming between the ministries.
- *Create a louder voice* - we want to have a greater voice/influence in Common Ground as one team, rather than in smaller teams.

## **2. OUR MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY**

The following principles form our core ministry philosophies that govern how we approach ministry to the Next Generation. They serve as the guardrails and a decision-making framework across all our ministries and congregations. We use the acronym GRAPHS to help us remember the six principles.

**Gospel Centered** - *we must have the gospel at the heart of everything we do and every lesson that we teach.*

**Relational Discipleship** - *we are convinced that the Next Generation will be reached and disciplined through relationships rather than through programs.*

**Age-appropriate ministry** - *we recognise that each ministry needs to be specifically tailored to reach and meet the needs of that specific age group. Kids Rock will look vastly different to Ignite and Frequency.*

**Parent Partnership** - *we believe that parents should be the primary disciplers of their children and that parents will be far more influential in the faith development of their own children than we will be. So we aim not to be substitutes for that parental influence, but rather supplements to it as we seek to engage with and equip the parents.*

One of our core convictions is that we will be far more effective in discipling the Next Generation if we foster and leverage healthy partnerships with parents. We want to team with, equip, encourage and teach parents to be discipling their own children. Although this is not exclusively your role, you can and should play a part in it by:

- Being intentional about developing relationships with the parents, and encouraging your team to do the same.
- Develop systems to effectively communicate with your parents, specifically to get 'Parent Cues' into their hands where appropriate. Whatsapp groups and broadcast lists seems to be working well at this point.
- Encourage and team with your eldership to explore Family Discipleship moments (where we practically equip parents to disciple their kids), parenting events (equipping parents to be better parents) and all together family moments (picnics, family services, special events)

**Healthy Teams** - *we recognise that we need healthy teams to reach the Next Generation, so we intentionally want to build volunteer teams and develop leaders for this mission.*

**Spirit and prayer dependence** - *we can only be successful in this mission through a reliance and dependance on prayer and the Holy Spirit's empowering.*

As we break all of this down, we get to this question of what do we give our time and energy to doing at a very practical level. As a ministry teams we 'do'....

**Healthy Transitions** - we make it our aim to put much effort and energy into making the transitions from one age group ministry to the next as smooth as possible. Our transition period runs for the full length of the fourth term each year.

**Small groups** - We believe that two potent catalysts that we can give young people in their faith journey are a person to invest in them and a place where they belong. We believe this best happens in small groups. A small group is when a leader intentionally invests in 'their few' to encourage authentic faith so that they may be rooted and established in the Gospel. We are convinced that this view of small groups (a shepherd investing in 'their few') is one of the primary vehicles of discipleship within the Next Generation's Ministries.

Over the final two chapters, let's look at each of these two key factors in more depth.

### **3. HEALTHY TRANSITIONS**

A vital aspect of our role is to lead children/highschoolers, leaders and families through the annual transition process. The transition process refers to the process in which children make the move from one ministry to the next. These are critically important transition because if not well led, they can result in people slipping through the cracks. We have a few principles which inform what and how we do these transitions.

Upon much reflection, this is what we have learnt:

- Longer is better - we take a whole term to help young people to transition effectively, we don't try to rush it in a week or two.
- Reach down, don't push up - traditionally it was the responsibility of the ministry 'below' to push the young people 'up' into the next ministry (Kids Rock pushing up into Ignite). We want to turn that around and say it is the responsibility of the 'higher' to draw new people into their ministry (Ignite pull Kids Rock into their ministry).
- Collaboration is critical - since we are convinced that our Next Generation ministries are isolated silos, but rather a part of a bigger team and family, we need to fight for high levels of collaboration between the various Next Generation ministries and with congregational leadership.
- Parents matter - we want and need parents to be as involved in the process as possible.

Our strategy is to have staggered process starting from week one of the fourth term, culminating in our 'Celebration Sunday' in week 5, where the children are officially transitioned into their new group.

#### **What can you do to ensure healthy transitions?**

- At the end of term 3, speak to your church's leaders about the importance of the process and describe how it will work. Set the date (week 5 ideally) in the fourth term for the Celebration Sunday. First prize is to have all the Next Gen in for the whole service, or for the first part of the meeting at least, and you get all those transitioning to stand, then you pray and celebrate the new chapter in their lives.
- Also, connect with any other Next Gen ministry leader in your congregation to work out how you are going to team together in the transition process.
- At the start of the fourth term, brief and envision you volunteer team around the importance of this process. Communicate with your parents about the process and invite them to engage in the process by talking to their kids, building a sense of excitement, being consistent in attendance and giving you feedback around any fears or hesitation their kids may have.
- Plan and manage the five week process outlined in the transitions document in partnership with other Next Gen ministries.
- Help plan and host the Celebration Sunday. You may wish, as budget allows, to give those transitioning a small gift.

## **4. SMALL GROUPS**

Our mission is serve the Next Generation so that they may be rooted and established in the gospel. This essentially incorporates the dual role of evangelism and discipleship. In the past, our approach to reaching these aims has rested predominantly on large group, up-front model of ministry. We are convinced, however, that there are some elements of discipleship that cannot happen in a large group setting. Therefore, we now want to make a ministry shift to a more 'relational discipleship' model, that is centered around small groups. We believe that two potent catalysts that we can give young people in their faith journey are:

- a **person** to invest in them and
- a **place** where they belong

We believe this best happens in small groups.

***A small group is when a leader intentionally invests in 'their few' to encourage authentic faith so that they may be rooted and established in the Gospel.***

We are convinced that this view of small groups (a shepherd investing in 'their few') is one of the primary vehicles of discipleship within the Next Generation's Ministries.

Small groups are not defined by a time or a place (it is not a meeting), rather it is defined by a relationship, an investment of a leader in 'their few'. Small groups will meet in predictable rhythms and structures, but it must not be limited to those structures and rhythms, but should overflow (to varying degrees) into everyday life.

We see the role of the small group leader to be the 'shepherd' of 'their few', rather than just a leader who talks to them in a set slot each week. We want small group leaders to facilitate experiencing God through the ministry of prayer, expression of the spiritual gifts, facilitated times of response, times of worship and an application of God's Word.

However, we recognize that these small groups will look and function very differently at each age level within Next Gen. So we aim to build small groups into our strategy from the youngest kids through to high-schoolers, but in an age appropriate manner (and with consent of parents in the case of minors):

Pipsqueaks and Jumping Beans - We **CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT** where the kids experience the idea of community and small groups. This is very relaxed and is centered around a consistent leader who loves and engages with 'their few'. This happens almost exclusively on a Sunday morning.

Army Ants - We **INTRODUCE** the kids to small groups, where we have intentional connecting and discipleship times on a Sunday morning with consistent leaders investing in 'their few'. This happens almost exclusively on a Sunday morning but can extend beyond that as the relationship allows.

Big Oaks - We **ESTABLISH** small groups as a normal part of the discipleship process. This happens primarily on a Sunday morning, but can also extend beyond that to phone calls, sports matches etc.

Ignite - We **DEEPEN** the small group experience by creating more space for these questioning pre-teens to explore faith, relationships and their identity. This overflows from 'meeting times' into other areas of life through avenues like Whatsapp groups, social events, sports matches, etc.

Frequency - We **PRIORITISE** the role of small groups as a place where truth and faith is applied to reality and where relational discipleship happens. We also **REACH OUT into**

**schools** by forming '**EXPLORE**' small groups with highschoolers. This is way more than just a weekly meeting, it is being available to 'do life' with 'their few' through social events, sports matches, one-on-one moments etc.

We see these different stages of small groups as a series of building blocks - as each element builds on the next.

In each stage of this small group journey, we ask and expect the small group leaders **to be led and empowered by the Spirit** as they **shepherd** 'their few'. We define that shepherding role by calling each leader to the following six actions:

1. Be Present - be prepared for these times, and consistently present in the lives of your few.
2. Create a safe place - where your few can explore faith, be vulnerable and feel secure.
3. Partner with Parents - in age appropriate ways.
4. Live it out - intentionally invest in your own faith journey so that you are discipling your few out of your own real relationship with God.
5. Move them on - intentionally help your few to transition into the next Next Gen ministry, onto another leader, into ministry opportunities or into a new season of life, as appropriate.
6. Bring the Bible to life – try to instil a wonder, love and respect for the Bible as God's authoritative Word to us on all matters in life.