

GCLI—Fall 2011--2020 Plan: *Reaching the Next Generation*

John Hopley, GCC Director

At the 2011 GCC Pastors Conference we presented our “2020 vision” for reaching the next generation for Jesus Christ. Our prayer is that every Great Commission church will be effective over the next decade with young people—both inside the church and outside the church—by leading them to Jesus Christ and discipling them to obey all that Christ commanded.

The goal of this GCLI is to unite GCC churches around the 2020 vision and to encourage each other to fulfill this vision. In this paper, I focus on four points:

- I. The vision to reach the next generation for Jesus Christ
- II. The need in the USA today
- III. The Biblical strategy for reaching the next generation
- IV. Action plan in fulfilling the 2020 vision

I. The Vision to Reach the Next Generation for Jesus Christ

God’s heart has always been to advance His glory to every nation and to every generation:

*And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of **all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Matthew 28:18-20

*“Listen, O my people, to my instruction; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should teach them to their children, that **the generation to come** might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children, that they should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.”*

Ps. 78:1-7

*“To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to **all generations** forever and ever. Amen.”*

Ephesians 3:21

For this reason, at the first sharing of the gospel in Acts 2, Peter proclaimed to the people in Jerusalem that the promise of forgiveness and salvation was for them “*and their children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.*” (Acts 2:39). God’s intention and desire is to save our children and all people who are near or far off. The goal is that God is glorified throughout the world and throughout all time, in every location and in every generation.

II. The Great Need Today

In America today, there is a great need to reach the next generation for Jesus Christ, both within the church and outside the church. Consider the following statistics:

**In 2002, the Southern Baptist Convention on Family Life reported 88% of evangelical children are leaving the church shortly after they graduate from high school. The Assemblies of God estimate that number to be about 66%.*

**In Family Driven Faith Voddie Baucham writes “it takes two Christian families in one generation to get a single Christian into the next generation... At this rate our current evangelistic strategies amount to little more than pouring water into a bucket with a giant hole in the bottom. The only way for the church to remain even is to reach three lost people for every one Christian. There is just one problem – the best we can muster right now is reaching one lost person for every forty or more Christians. In short, if things do not change, the church in America will continue to decline precipitously over the next few generations.”*

**According to his research and standards for a Biblical world view, George Barna’s states that only 9% of adults and only 19% of born again Christian have a Christian world view. Less than ½ of 1 % of people between the ages of 19 and 23 have a Biblical world view.*
<http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years>

**In contrast, GCC elders were surveyed in 2010. Of the 344 children who are 19 or over, 91% were believers, actively involved in an evangelical church, and 72% were actively involved in their parent’ church or another GCC church.*

We ask every GCC pastor to wake-up to the great need that exists in churches and in our communities to reach and disciple the next generation for Christ.

III. Biblical Strategy for Reaching the Next Generation for Jesus Christ

In Great Commission Churches, we have seen fruit as we follow two Biblical strategies for reaching the next generation for Jesus Christ.

A. First Strategy: To reach the next generation within the church, we prioritize building godly Great Commission families by equipping and supporting parents, especially fathers.

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the family is God’s “Plan A” for training children in the faith:

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and

shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.” Deut. 6:4-7

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:4

In his book, “Revolutionary Parenting,” George Barna discovered:

1. Churches had little spiritual impact on children compared to the influence of parents.
2. Most parents tend to allow “paid professionals” to give spiritual training to their children .
3. Parents of godly children spent 600% more time daily in dialogue with their children.
4. Parents who raised spiritual champions made their children’s spiritual and character development their primary focus during their parenting years.
5. Parents of godly children tend to focus on spiritual matters as a family unit rather than merely as individuals.
6. Under 20% of the parents believed that they were doing a good job at building godly character and spiritual values into their children.

Yet many churches have naively and unwittingly adopted methods for training the youth from the world, rather than the Scriptures.

1. The world separates parents and children, as Pharaoh sought to with Moses and people of Israel:

“Moses said, “We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we shall go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD. Then he [Pharaoh] said to them, “Thus may the LORD be with you if ever I let you and your little ones go!” Ex.10:9,10

2. Systems are not neutral. Churches are to build the “system” of the family where parents disciple children and children respect parents. The world tends to build large organizational systems where parents abdicate their roles and children have a greater respect for people other than their parents. Samuel warned against this in 1st Samuel 8:10,11:

“So Samuel spoke all the words of the LORD to the people who had asked of him a king. He said, “This will be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots and among his horsemen and they will run before his chariots.”

Therefore, under this first strategy, we urge pastors to do the following:

1. In reaching the next generation, prioritize the equipping of the parents. Have it as a goal that every father and mother will be a Christ-filled discipler of their children.
2. Be careful what church systems you build. Make it your goal that every young person will see their parents (not the pastors or a youth leader) as their primary spiritual leaders. Youth ministries are to be a supplement, not a substitute to parental discipleship.
3. Encourage family members to be actively teaming together in the gospel for their lifetime.
4. Focus on the heart. Pray that parents and children would have a heart for their heavenly Father and that God would restore the hearts of parents and children towards each other. (Mal. 4:6.)

B. Second Strategy: For the next generation outside the church, we prioritize having a long-term commitment to building intergenerational churches that are effectively relating to and reaching next generation unbelievers with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament, we see that churches were both intergenerational with older men, younger men, older women and younger women being together:

“Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.”

1 Timothy 5:1,2

“Older men are to be temperate...Older women likewise are to be reverent....so that they may encourage the young women...Likewise urge the young men to be sensible...” Titus 2: 1-6

At the same time, churches were exhorted to relate to the culture they were trying to reach:

“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.”

1 Corinthians 9:19-22

The Great Commission church movement began on college campuses in the 1970s. For over 40 years, GCC churches have been effective at reaching young people through youth relevant outreach and ministry. We continue to affirm this strategy. We also value churches that are intergenerational, according to the New Testament pattern where older believers are able to mentor the youth. Therefore we ask GCC pastors to avoid the two extremes of “next gen only” ministry and “next generation-irrelevant” ministry. Some ways that is worked out today in GCC are:

1. Start in-house campus and next generation ministries that reach unbelievers.
2. Adapt the main worship service to relate to the next generation (music and dress, style and content of preaching, etc.)
3. Start next generation congregations, and churches for young adults or college students that remain connected to an intergenerational church or region. Under this approach, older leaders focus on discipling and mentoring young leaders who are building churches that will become more intergenerational over time.
4. The pastors follow the Lord’s unique plan for their church, in reaching and discipling next generation unbelievers in an intergenerational way.
5. The main goal is love: Parents loving children, children loving parents, older believers and younger believers loving each other, and all church members loving unbelievers, young and old, by adapting the church to reach them with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

For more information about this strategy, listen to the 2011 Pastors Conference teachings on “Reaching the Next Generation for Christ.” (<http://gccweb.org/media-resources/media>)

IV. 2020 Action Plans: We are asking each GCC church to develop its own 2020 action plan:

I. Families on Mission: Building families on mission for Jesus Christ by equipping Great Commission parents, particularly fathers.

In building Families on Mission, here are some ideas to consider:

1. *Inspiring the parents, especially fathers, to be devoted to the Great Commission (giving fathers the CDs of the 2011 Pastors Conference, promote the “Courageous” movie, have a father’s retreat to exhort the fathers, encourage fathers to attend GCLI regionals, etc.)*
2. *Prioritize one-on-one pastoring of parents—visiting their homes.*
3. *Training times for fathers and mothers (e.g., a monthly “dads’ meeting”)*
4. *Promote family house churches/home groups with fathers leading spiritually and reaching out with his family through house church outreach activities.*
5. *Promote parent-led education (especially home schooling).*
6. *Encourage parents to lead out in teen ministries and to go to HSLT.*
7. *Organize mission trips/outreaches for whole families to work together.*
8. *Encourage parents to attend Faithwalkers and other conferences with their teens and college age children.*
9. *Generally, encourage families to be teamed together for the gospel for life—whether living in different cities or living together in the same city.*

II. Churches on Mission: Building an intergenerational church that is effectively reaching next generation unbelievers for Christ.

In building Churches on Mission, here are some ideas to consider:

1. *Start up an in-house, college-age ministry.*
2. *Mobilize empty nesters for ministry with the next generation.*
3. *Promote regional HSLTs and Faithwalkers.*
4. *Make church services next gen friendly (dress, music, preaching styles, message content).*
5. *Start an in-house summer training program in churches.*
6. *Start an in-house, church-based intern program for the youth.*
7. *Equip young people with discipleship materials (Life Now studies; Truth Project).*
8. *Train young people in evangelism (Outreach Program, Way of the Master, etc.).*
9. *Participate with the GCC National Campus ministry in reaching college campuses in the U.S.*

Write out your church’s 2020 plan for reaching the next generation for Jesus Christ:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this GCLI teaching?
2. Jesus said “*A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.*” Luke 6:39,40 Therefore, a father’s discipling of his children will only be effective to the extent that he is a disciple. How is the church doing in helping fathers becoming disciples themselves?
3. How are the fathers in your church doing in discipling their children?
4. What is the church doing to equip parents in discipling their children? What added steps can be taken to equip parents?
5. At times a youth leader unwittingly and unintentionally takes on an influencing role that results in fathers being displaced or disrespected in the home. Have you seen this take place in your church? How can your church avoid this from occurring in your church?
6. How effective is your church in reaching the next generation outside of the church? What steps can be taken to improve outreach to next generation unbelievers?