

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

FAMILY MINISTRY ANALYSIS PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO DR. RON BRUNER  
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BIBM 693 – CHURCH AND FAMILY MINISTRY

BY  
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## FAMILY MINISTRY ANALYSIS PROJECT

In her book, *Family Ministry*, Diana Garland describes family ministry as, “any activity that directly or indirectly (1) forms families in the congregational community; (2) increases the Christlikeness of the family relationships of Christians; or (3) equips and supports families for the work to which they are called together. In other words, family ministry includes everything that a congregation does that has an impact on the formation, development, and ministry of families.”<sup>1</sup> When it comes to family ministry, McKnight Crossings Church of Christ is a faith community that strives to uphold the practices and theology of family ministry. This Family Ministry Analysis will seek to understand the current state of the faith community’s theological and theoretical framework of family ministry and support them in moving toward the practice of family ministry.

To fully understand the family ministry practices of McKnight Crossings, we must first understand who McKnight Crossings is. A family ministry survey was sent to congregants to aid in the Family Ministry Analysis. Results from the survey will be utilized throughout the analysis.

McKnight Crossings (MX Church) Church of Christ is “a mid-size, multi-generational, and multi-ethnic congregation in suburban St. Louis. Members come from a host of backgrounds – some from “restoration churches” (Churches of Christ/Christian Churches), and others from Protestant, Catholic, and unchurched backgrounds.”<sup>2</sup> The goal and vision of MX Church is as follows: “Our goal is to be followers of Jesus by honoring God and loving one another. As the

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<sup>1</sup> Diana R. Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 120.

<sup>2</sup> McKnight Crossings (“MX Church”), “About Us,” accessed August 1, 2025, <https://www.mxchurch.org/about>.

world is filled with distraction and disconnection, we seek to promote the oneness Jesus has won through his love. Our heart's desire is to keep the Word of God central, our form remain simple, and our love for one another always growing deeper.”<sup>3</sup> Following the goal and vision of MX Church is the mission statement: “Our mission is to be a church family welcoming others into a growing relationship with Christ and his community through God’s radical hospitality. We desire to carry out this mission through ministry at four crossings: our buildings, our homes, our community, our city.”<sup>4</sup> Finally, MX Church has an approach to this mission, which is to, “DELIGHT in God. ENCOURAGE one another. SERVE eagerly.”<sup>5</sup> Additionally, MX Church has seven key values that drive their decision making: “**Spirit-Led** - prayerfully following the direction of God. **Next Gen** - investing in the next generation. **Family** - having a common Father to deeply love one another. **Diversity** - sharing in our oneness; appreciating our differences. **Adaptable** - changing to better honor God. **Generosity** - eagerly giving time, talent, and treasure. **Missional** - purposefully sharing the good news as you go.”<sup>6</sup>

MX Church is a faith community that consists of different backgrounds. They have congregants that come from wealthier areas (based on household incomes) such as Chesterfield, Ladue, and Clayton, as well as areas that are not very wealthy such as North St. Louis, Affton, and Maplewood.<sup>7</sup> While the church itself sits in a more high household income region, they are not made up of one kind of people, making it economically diverse. When it comes to age, the congregation currently lacks in ages 20-30 but has many people in the ages before and after. Of the estimated 150-200 MX attenders, 63 filled out the family ministry survey. Demographically,

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<sup>3</sup> McKnight Crossings, “About Us.”

<sup>4</sup> McKnight Crossings, “About Us.”

<sup>5</sup> McKnight Crossings (“MX Church”), “Our Core Values,” accessed August 1, 2025, <https://www.mxchurch.org/our-core-values>.

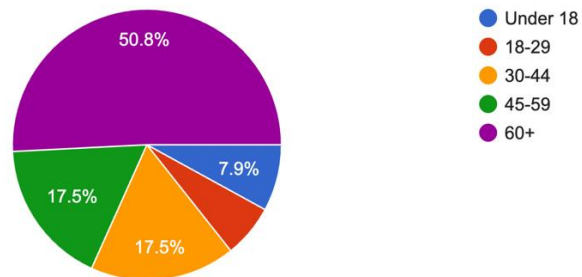
<sup>6</sup> McKnight Crossings, “Our Core Values.”

<sup>7</sup> BestNeighborhood. “The Best Neighborhoods in Rock Hill, Missouri.” *BestNeighborhood.org*. Accessed August 1, 2025. <https://bestneighborhood.org/best-neighborhoods-rock-hill-mo/>.

the small sample size may reflect the true makeup of the congregation (see Figure 1). There is a large population of members over the age of 60, with a small population in the 18-29 range. Additionally, the congregation is made up of many families, most of which are married (see Figure 2).

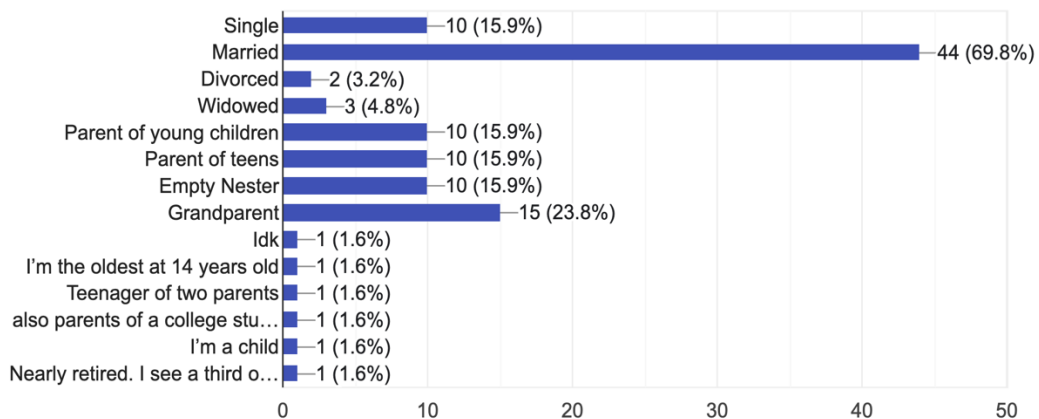
**Figure 1**

What is your age group?  
63 responses



**Figure 2**

What is your family situation? (Select all that apply).  
63 responses



Historically, the church was born from a merger in the early 2010s that consisted of a church that was more rooted in traditional Church of Christ practices, and a church that was not. One church did not use instruments or let women serve, while the other did. Today, as McKnight Crossings, a worship service does consist of both instruments and women using their gifts to serve the body. The service consists of prayer, singing, scripture readings, taking the Lord's Supper, a sermon, and a shepherd's prayer.

Finally, MX Church's leadership consists of elders, and then the ministry staff that consists of a lead minister, youth minister, and interim part-time children's minister (as of April 2024). These three positions makeup the family ministry team, or as MX Church labels their family ministry, "NextGen Ministry." This is the core focus of the congregation, led by these three positions. NextGen ministry is a new-aged, fancy term for family ministry, so the analysis will be examining the NextGen practices of MX Church and see how they align with true family ministry.

This is MX Church's statement on their NextGen mission: "At McKnight Crossings, we believe in the next generation. That's why we've modeled our infant through high school programs to keep the big picture in mind by paying more attention to how our individual programs impact a child's spiritual walk at the appropriate developmental stage. Using a NextGen Ministry Model allows our staff to come together as a team and ensure that each program is working to complement each other. Every week our NextGen Ministry staff meets to consider MXkids and MXyouth, including curriculum, how we can better serve families, and making sure we are effectively communicating and utilizing our volunteers."<sup>8</sup> Their vision for the NextGen states: "Our vision is to journey together as a diverse Spirit-led family, generously

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<sup>8</sup> McKnight Crossings ("MX Church"), "NextGen," accessed August 1, 2025, <https://www.mxchurch.org/nextgen>.

reaching the next generation for Christ. We propose to do this in three ways: **You are God's child, loved by God. We see you and we hear you. I will help you do your parts as you help me do mine.**<sup>9</sup> MX Church believes that focusing on the next generation will strengthen the congregation and its ministries.

To analyze the NextGen (family) ministry practices of the church, the first thing that must be defined is the definition of family. This will answer the question of “who is the family ministry directed toward?” In the FMAP Reflections leading up to the final analysis, it was discussed how Jesus redefines the definition of family in Matthew 12. “While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’ He replied to him, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers.’ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”<sup>10</sup> Jesus is teaching us that family goes beyond the walls of legality and biology, it’s something deeper that makes family. For Christians, and even for a lot of non-Christians, family is defined more by behavior. In *Family Ministry*, Garland defines the functional family as, “the organization of relationships that endure over time and contexts, through which persons attempt to meet their needs for belonging and attachment and to share life purposes, help and resources. A family is thus defined by observation of behavior, not by role designations.”<sup>11</sup> The first step that MX Church must take is ensuring its congregants recognize the whole church as *family*, not just people related legally or biologically. In the New Testament,

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<sup>9</sup> McKnight Crossings, “NextGen.”

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 12:46-50 (New International Version).

<sup>11</sup> Garland, *Family Ministry*, 56.

Paul refers to believers as the “body of Christ.”<sup>12</sup> While nuclear families still exist, it’s important to view all believers as making up the body of Christ.

Now that the term family has been defined, family ministry can be defined. Garland gives a great definition of family ministry, as stated at the beginning of the analysis. Does her definition apply to just nuclear families or the whole church? Just because everyone in the church is considered family, does that mean we need to neglect the nuclear family entirely when it comes to family ministry? Absolutely not. In *FMAP Reflection 1*, there were two types of family ministry definitions given – one where the focus is on that of the nuclear family, and one where the focus is on that of the family that is the body of Christ.<sup>13</sup> Which definition of family ministry does MX lean toward? Which one should they be leaning toward? To answer that question, one must first recognize the different models of family ministry.

In *Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views* by Paul Renfro, Brandon Shields, and Jay Strother, (edited by Timothy Paul Jones), the authors present three different models of family ministry. Covering these three models will help MX Church discover which model they currently use, and which one they should maybe be using. The two models of family ministry from the book that are more focused on the nuclear family are the “Family-Integrated Ministry” model and the “Family-Equipping Ministry” model.

A family-integrated practicing church is one where “families attend services together rather than children or teens attending their own Sunday school, children’s church, or youth group separate from their parents.”<sup>14</sup> In this model of family ministry, there are no age-segregated ministries, the father is expected to lead the family, parents are the main disciple

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:27 (New International Version).

<sup>13</sup> Nathan Strickland, *FMAP Reflection 1* (unpublished manuscript, June 2025), 2.

<sup>14</sup> GotQuestions.org, “What Is a Family-Integrated Church, and Is It Biblical?,” *GotQuestions.org*, last updated January 4, 2022 (accessed August 1, 2025), <https://www.gotquestions.org/Family-Integrated-Church.html>

makers of the children, and everything in the church is done together as a family. A family-equipping practicing church is one that “retains some age-organized ministries but restructures the congregation to partner with parents at every level of ministry so that parents are acknowledged, equipped, and held accountable for the discipleship of their children.”<sup>15</sup> In this model there are age-segregated ministries, but every ministry turns their focus to equipping parents to be the main disciple makers. All the ministries of the church partner with parents to raise disciples at home.

The final model of family ministry, which best represents family as the whole church, is the “Family-Based Ministry” model. “Family-based churches retain separate age-segmented ministry structures. The difference between family-based models and typical programmatic models is that family-based churches intentionally include intergenerational and family-focused events in each ministry.”<sup>16</sup> This model does not support the idea that parents are the main disciple makers of their children, rather, the church through its intergenerational relationships and family-focused events are what help guide discipleship to younger generations.

The question for MX Church is, “Which family ministry model do we practice?” The answer is the family-based model. While that is a great answer, each model has pros and cons of their own. The family-integrated model is great because all generations worship together, but there is benefit in age-segregated ministry outside of the worship setting. This is not to say that all ministries should be age-segregated, because there is also so much, if not more benefit in doing spiritual formation together. In fact, in *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, the authors state that, “Ministering by age cohorts can yield unintended consequences: generational

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<sup>15</sup> Jay Strother, “A Family-Equipping Model,” in *Perspectives on Family Ministry: Three Views*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 144.

<sup>16</sup> Brandon Shields, “A Family-Based Model,” in *Perspectives on Family Ministry: Three Views*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 100.



fragmentation, silo mentality, and an involuntary ignorance of all others not in one's own age group.”<sup>17</sup> The authors also mention that people learn best when they're with people who are in the next stage of life ahead of them.<sup>18</sup> Worship, fellowship, and service projects can and should be done together as a church family, but again, there is benefit in age-segregated ministry. It's a benefit for those teenagers that meet every Wednesday night and learn about navigating faith at their age, and for the group of widows that meet for breakfast every other Thursday morning who are learning how to grieve, and for the group of young adults that meet every Monday night who are all trying to figure out their lives. The family-integrated and family-equipping models have the right ideas but may neglect those who don't fit into a nuclear family at times. Do these models address the teenager who has no father and comes to church with another family because their mom at home struggles with substance abuse and doesn't care about God? Do these models address Christian parents who are brand new to the faith and don't know much and lean on the church for spiritual growth, not being ready to disciple their children at home? Even while the family-based ministry model does more so address these issues, it does neglect the fact that parents *do* have a lot more time with kids than the church does on a weekly basis. This model does not equip parents and expect them to be the primary disciple makers, but it does focus more on those beneficial intergenerational relationships. This is great for that teenager who comes with another family, because that family becomes their family who can be disciple makers in their life. This is great for those new-to-the-faith parents who are being taken care of and discipled by an older couple in the church, showing them the way to follow Jesus. While these intergenerational relationships are great, there will most likely be more nuclear families within a congregation than non-nuclear families. Looking at the data from the family ministry survey, it's

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<sup>17</sup> Holly Catterton Allen, Christine Lawton, and Cory L. Seibel, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023), 29.

<sup>18</sup> Allen, Lawton, and Seibel, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 225.

safe to say that nuclear families make up the bulk of the congregation more than non-nuclear families. This is not to say that the family-based model should be completely ignored, but that MX Church does need to have *some* focus on equipping parents to do discipleship at home.

What is the answer? Based on MX Church and the provided family ministry models, the church should move toward a model that incorporates the pros from all three models. This will be a model that focuses on intergenerational ministry but continues to equip parents and even non-parents to do discipleship to others. The authors of *Intergenerational Christian Formation* define truly intergenerational communities as those who “welcome children, emerging adults, recovering addicts, single adults, widows, single parents, teens whose parents are not around, the elderly, those in crisis, empty nesters, and struggling parents of young children into a safe but challenging place to be formed into the image of Christ.”<sup>19</sup> Intergenerational ministry is true family ministry, and it’s this form of family ministry that the NextGen ministry practices of MX Church will be measured.

In *FMAP Reflection 1*, it is stated that “true family ministry is intergenerational ministry. This is not to say that we should completely disregard and do away with age-segregated ministries, because they have their place and time. We also cannot disregard equipping families to raise and disciple their children, but when we focus on this intergenerational idea of family ministry, family is created within the faith community, which fills in the gaps of those who may not have an *ideal* or nuclear family.”<sup>20</sup> The manuscript concludes with the vision of family ministry – “the vision of family ministry can be summed up in this way – intergenerationally worshiping, fellowshiping, and serving together, while understanding and respecting certain

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<sup>19</sup> Allen, Lawton, and Seibel, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 60.

<sup>20</sup> Strickland, *FMAP Reflection 1*, 3.


aspects of age-segregated ministerial practices.”<sup>21</sup> Recognizing the importance of intergenerational ministry will be the key factor going forward for MX Church. The question is, does this model of family ministry align with the church’s ideology of their NextGen ministry?

The foundation of NextGen ministry at MX Church is the **NextGen Discipleship Milestones Model** (see Figure 3). This model was crafted to envision what a graduating senior should look like by the time they leave the church after high school. This model touches on the actual milestone moment, the goals of the moment, the family emphasis, and the Sunday emphasis. This is a great representation of what true family ministry looks like because it touches on both family in the nuclear model but also family in the church model, celebrating the milestones along with the rest of the body. The model represents what it means to bring children and youth into service as more than spectators. In the last few decades, the young people have been more segregated from the rest of the body, as well as looked down upon in the sense that they can’t contribute anything to the church. As many would say, the young people are the “church of tomorrow” or the “church of the future.” At MX Church, that couldn’t be farther from the truth. The idea of young people in the church should not be that they are spectators who are learning how to lead the church in the future, but that they are *participants* learning how to lead the church *today*. MX Church practices this well by having children and youth lead and serve in multiple ways.

### Figure 3

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<sup>21</sup> Strickland, *FMAP Reflection 1*, 6.

 <b>Discipleship Milestones</b>				
Our vision is to journey together as a diverse Spirit-led family, generously reaching the next generation for Christ.				
Pledge	"You are God's child, loved by God."	"We see you and we hear you."	"I will help you do your part as you help me do mine."	Psalms 78:4-8
	Milestone Moment	Milestone Goals	Family Emphasis	Sunday Emphasis
<b>Beginners</b> (0-2 years old)	Parent Commitment	Inducted into the Church Family	Learning Bible stories as a family	Celebrate Parent Commitment as a family
	Participate in MX Beginners Nursery	Charge the church to help raise MX children to know Christ	Find a Connect Group for family faith journey	Members take an active role in memorizing children names
<b>Explorers</b> (3 years-5 years old)	Transition to MX Exploreres Classroom		Reinforce the Lord's Prayer and the monthly memory verse	
	Preschool Graduation	Teaching children to pray and pray with them. They will focus on the Lord's Prayer during this time.	Join a Lifestage Parenting Group	Recognize the children who were promoted in Sunday worship
<b>Wonderers</b> (Kindergarten-2nd Grade)	Participate in Children's Worship			
	Recite the Old Testament Books of the Bible		Reinforce Bible Class during the week	Allow children to recite/sing the Old Testament during worship
	Recite the New Testament Books of the Bible	Attend Sunday Bible Class Memorizing scripture & books of the Bible	Nightly Bible Study with your child	Allow children to recite/sing the New Testament during worship
<b>Navigators</b> (3rd-5th Grade)	Participate in Third Grade Bible Adventures	Reading the Word and learning God's stories	Invite Church Leadership into your home	
	Participate in STAMPED			Highlight videos during worship and call out the goal and mission during service.
	Participate in Passing The Torch	Seeking out a faith influencer in preparation for adolescence	Participate weekly in your Connect Group	
<b>Passion</b> (6th-9th Grade)	Induction into Youth Group Activities	Intro and comprehension of the 6 Pillars Discipleship Model		
	Middle School Mission Trip	Begin serving in Church	On-going faith conversations with teens at home	Sit with the Youth Group during Worship
	Spiritual Gifts Test	Learn how to utilize my spiritual gifts	Follow up with students on what they learned about in class Sun/Weds	Serve on the Greeting Team
<b>Pursuit</b> (9th-12th Grade)	Transition into High School	Understanding my role in the church	Talk about individual Bible reading or God-sightings as a family	Serve Communion/Offering Trays
	High School Mission Trip	Learning to pursue a personal relationship with Christ and strengthening the ability to share that faith with others	Serve together as a family	Give Communion Thoughts
	High School Graduation	Knowing how I pursue God on my own and seeking my place within God's Church		Read Scripture during Worship
<b>Ideal Graduating Student</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has 3-5 faith influencers</li> <li>• Has made a confession of faith and has been baptized</li> <li>• Seeks to strengthen and share their personal relationship with Christ</li> <li>• Makes Christ-centered decisions</li> <li>• Takes ownership of their role in the church</li> <li>• Understands and applies spiritual gifts</li> <li>• Practices spiritual disciplines</li> <li>• Faith influencer for others</li> </ul>			
	12th Grade - Graduation Sunday Participation			

The NextGen mission at MX Church is also scripturally supported by Psalm 78:4-8 –

“We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy

deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. They would not be like their ancestors— a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.”<sup>22</sup> It is this scripture that drives the NextGen mission at MX Church.

After reviewing the model and understanding the practices of the church, here are some recommendations:

**Define the purpose.** In *Faith Forward*, Paul-André Durocher states, “For some people of faith today, symbolic ritual isn’t a significant avenue for having and holding or expressing faith. But in Europe in the Middle Ages it was the primary way of expressing faith. One of the problems that the church in Medieval Europe was facing was that so many people had grown used to symbolic ritual that it had become detached from scripture, detached from the Word of God. The balance between scripture and ritual had become so lopsided that the latter seemed to overshadow the first, leaving scripture at the sidelines of faith.”<sup>23</sup> There are a lot of great practices in this model, but one thing that must stay in the conversation is the *why* behind each practice. The general model has Psalm 78:4-8 to refer to, but each practice within the model should have a defined purpose. This could be conveyed on a separate sheet while this current model simply contains the practices, but the purpose of each practice should be reiterated often along with the practices. Even if most of the practices had the same scriptural backing, it would still be beneficial to keep

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<sup>22</sup> Psalm 78:4-8 (New International Version).

<sup>23</sup> Paul-André Durocher, “Ritual, Participation, and Formation,” in *Faith Forward, Volume 2: Re-Imagining Children’s and Youth Ministry*, ed. David M. Csinos and Melvin Bray (Kelowna, BC: CopperHouse, 2015), 142-143.

the theological purpose at the forefront, while giving brief explanations of why they conduct that practice. For example, in the Family Emphasis for the Wonderers group, parents should be having nightly Bible studies with their children. Why? Or is it just something that they should be doing because church people read their Bibles? What if a scripture like Deuteronomy 6:6-9 was tagged onto this practice on the model to show the purpose in it? “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”<sup>24</sup> This could help remind parents the purpose in what they’re practicing, opposed to practicing it and eventually losing the intention behind it.

**Equip the families.** Using the previous example of nightly family Bible study, the church must support parents in these practices by providing resources and material to conduct such practices. It’s easy to write down what families should be doing in the Family Emphasis section, but the church must also support families by telling, rather showing them how they could be doing these practices. For example, in the youth group (Passion and Pursuit) section under Family Emphasis, the model states to conduct on-going faith conversations with teens at home. This is easier said than done. How should parents be doing that? Where do they begin? What should they be talking about? This is something that can be handed to parents in the form of a resource of how they could be continuing faith conversations at home.

**Building intergenerational relationships.** While the vision states that they are reaching the next generation for Christ, it is important to note that it should be done through building intergenerational relationships. It’s not just about pouring into the next generation by celebrating

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<sup>24</sup> Deuteronomy 6:6-9 (New International Version).

Parent Commitment during a Sunday service or allowing children to recite books of the Old and New Testament, but doing so by having relationship with them. MX Church does a great job with intergenerational events, such as: (1) *Level 50 Game Night*, where children and teens serve dinner to members who are 50+ years old and play games with them. (2) *Faith in Action*, a twice a year service event where families are either sent out to work at peoples' homes or stay at the building to serve there. (3) *Faith Through Generations*, an intergenerational Bible class (Summer 2025) with the purpose of multiple generations understanding their faith differences and bridging the gap between them. (4) *Vacation Bible School*, where kids from the church and community are served but all generations come together to help make the event happen – even having classes for parents at times. This is a short list of the many NextGen efforts of MX Church. While the children and teens have become more participants than spectators in this NextGen model, how much emphasis is on building those intergenerational relationships? The model contains a Family Emphasis which is beneficial for the families and continuing discipleship at home, and a Sunday Emphasis which is beneficial for making the next generation into participants. The model should also adapt an Intergenerational Emphasis – one that purely focuses on building intergenerational relationships, and where older members of the church can find their place in getting involved in the lives of children, teens, and their families. This would be more than just serving in the children's or youth ministries on a Sunday morning, this would be more focused on finding those 3-5 faith influencers that a graduating senior should have. There would be practices of church members attending sports games and choir concerts of the next generation or finding a student to pray for throughout the year and checking in on them with calls or texts, or finding whole families whose lives they can be a part of and mentor them, or having occasional intergenerational small groups or worship nights with children and/or teens. While one might see the Sunday Emphasis as intergenerational, and it is, for the children it's more about being

recognized, and for the teens about how they serve and participate during service. Adding an Intergenerational Emphasis would help drive the NextGen mission by focusing on the relationships within the whole church family. The congregation itself desires intergenerational relationships and activities, as some responses from the family ministry survey would inform you. Here are a few responses from the question, “What types of family ministry programs or support would you like to see more of?”

- “Just more generational classes.”
- “Maybe have a mentor program where an older person has a young person they can pray for, talk to, encourage and spend time with.”
- “More of the class like this one.” (In reference to the *Faith Through Generations* Bible class).
- “Parenting, developing intergenerational interpersonal relations, studying the word together.”
- “More of this recent class format. Encourage small groups to be intergenerational. Have parent support groups that are intergenerational. More activities like the put-put golf we had. Opportunity for new parents to have support from older parents and grandparents and exposure to information regarding child development both from lay and professional sources.”

The NextGen Discipleship Milestones Model is a great place to begin the family ministry conversation, but there is much that is not recognized in this model. In relation to family ministry as intergenerational ministry, MX Church has created a culture where all generations serve in multiple capacities together, such as the greeting team, the tech team, the worship team, passing communion trays, food pantry, etc. MX Church, as mentioned before, does believe that focusing on the NextGen will strengthen the congregation and its ministries, and this is true as seen in the



ministries listed above. The church has poured into and mentored, trained, and equipped its young people, trusting them to serve in these ministries, making them stronger. The authors of *Intergenerational Christian Formation* state that, “Intergenerational service and mission activities provide all these generations with opportunities to come together under a single purpose that enables individual giftedness and generational characteristics to be used to serve others – and be the body of Christ.”<sup>25</sup> As stated before, all generations should worship, fellowship, and *serve* together. This is a good practice that MX Church has, and one that it continues to grow in.

MX Church is beginning to grow in spiritual education of all generations as well. When it comes to Bible classes, the children’s and youth ministries have aligned their Sunday morning curriculums to study the Gospel Project together (during the school year since 2022). This creates a beautiful opportunity for families who have children and teens to all be able to discuss what they learned on the way home from church. Since they learned the same stories/material, it creates a great space for the whole family to focus in on one subject and debrief it together. The gaps in this model, as great as it is, are found in: (1) teens (or maybe children) who may come without family in general, and (2) not having a Gospel Project option for adults. For those young people who come without family, how are they going to debrief the lessons they learned? While the answer could be “through intergenerational relationships,” there is no adult class option for the Gospel Project. Even if those young people who come without family had parents to discuss it with, the parents may be ill-informed of the material and not be able to discuss it. The Gospel Project takes you through the whole Bible, covering most stories, but not every adult is a “grew up in the church” Christian. Some parents are new to the faith and learning, so a Gospel Project option for adults could help create a culture where all people within the church can discuss Bible

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<sup>25</sup> Allen, Lawton, and Seibel, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 247.

events together. A Gospel Project class option for all ages would help align to the vision of intergenerational ministry.

Outside of that, there are multiple changing adult class options throughout the year. Some classes are more theological, and some are more practical. With the children and teens being in the Gospel Project most of the year, there is little to no opportunity for all Bible classes to align. There are pros and cons to this, because as stated before, there is benefit in age-segregated ministry. Some adults may be in a class that helps with whatever topic they're struggling with, and that's great. The recommendation is not even to *only* have a Gospel Project option for adults, but to leave one open during the school year for parents who may want to continue the conversation of what they learned with their kids throughout the week.

When discussing the family ministry models, we touched on three primary ones that we should blend to fully draw out the potential of family ministry: family-integrated, family-equipping, and family-based. It was mentioned how the proper model should be intergenerational ministry that still focuses on equipping parents, and the families of MX Church seem to be in the same state of mind. Going back to the earlier question of, "What types of family ministry programs or support would you like to see more of?" here are some responses that were recorded:

- "We have done a parenting class in the past. It is helpful every so often to hear from each other that we are going through similar challenges and joys."
- "Classes for parents on how to make time for family Bible study when everyone is so busy."
- "Faith based parenting of teens in this world workshop."

- “Perhaps some parenting classes. Discussions on how to raise teens and pre-teens. I think it would also be beneficial to give parents the essence of our faith. Classes on Discipleship 101. Who are the great characters of the Bible. What are some of the foundational passages. What are the essentials of faith (and what are import but non-essentials). I think it would also be helpful to have a class, or a space, where parents can discuss and find ways to communicate with their children who are questioning theology. How do I give my child space to believe for himself and not push him but still guiding him towards Christianity?”
- “Maybe parents support - how to better parent; bringing Jesus home with you. I would think these would be outside of the Bible Class times due to the amount of parents that serve then.”
- “More home Bible studies.”

For another survey question that asks, “In what ways could our church better support families?” here are some responses about parenting:

- “Helping families with their home spiritual life & practices.”
- “We focus on the youth and children but not very much on parenting. It has been said that the church will have our children for a couple hours a week, and we need to make wise use of that time, but the parents will spend 7/24 with those kids. The parents will have a major impact on the faith and character of their children, and we need to help parents grow in their parenting and passing along their faith to their children.”

- “Maybe more parent focused events as we currently have a lot of YG and KidMin events.”
- “Supporting parents in faith development in the home (teach the parents how to make Spiritual matters a part of daily family life i.e. dinner table conversations.”

Based on these responses, the church does need to lean more into the family-equipping ministry model practices. While the church does focus on intergenerational ministry, it cannot forget that parents are with the next generation more throughout the week than the church itself. At the very least, the children’s and youth ministries should begin to provide more resources for parents to continue discipleship at home. Parenting Bible classes should be done occasionally throughout the year, making sure to focus on the theological purpose of at-home discipleship, not just stating that they should be doing it.

In relation to the different family ministry models, the biggest change that MX Church has an opportunity to make is in relation to the family-integrated model. Like many churches, MX Church has a separate time for children’s worship. This was a cultural shift that was made within the church because the church progressed along with society in age-segregation, which the church did with good intention of helping people be transformed in Christian formation within someone’s age and stage of life.<sup>26</sup> The problem is that the church went a bit too far with society. As the economy changed, society moved from a one working parent household to a two working parents household. Families started having less time together, which means less time for learning and growing together. As society does with most things, you turn to professionals to get tasks done. Need a haircut? Go to a barber. Need a toilet fixed? Call a plumber. You call

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<sup>26</sup> David M. Csinos, *A Gospel for All Ages: Teaching and Preaching with the Whole Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022), 14.

professionals to get stuff done when you have no time. So, what did parents start doing? Need children disciplined? Call a children's or youth minister. As David M. Csinos says in his book, *A Gospel for All Ages*, "This economic outlook made its way into churches with a boom in the hiring of youth ministers, children's pastors, and other paid leaders to help people become formed in the Christian faith."<sup>27</sup> As stated before, age-segregated ministry can be beneficial to a certain degree, but it can't be the end all be all.

Granted, MX Church is better at letting children be a part of worship than other congregations who send their kids out at the beginning of worship. Children at MX Church get to sit in for most of the worship songs, as well as communion. They are released after communion, which at that point there's typically one more song, and then the sermon. Following the sermon is one final song and the shepherd's prayer. This is the part of the family-integrated model that should be adopted – the whole family worships together. MX Church is currently at a point where keeping children in worship the whole time would have more benefits than problems. The problems might be adults being distracted by children, and children being "bored" or ill-equipped to sit in worship, but Csinos implies that if one generation is comfortable all the time, then it might be a good indicator that the practices of the church are based on the needs of one group over others, and that we've got more work to do to become a church shared by all ages.<sup>28</sup> Another benefit is a *part-time children's minister* having to find less resources and less volunteers to take out of worship on a Sunday morning. There are children's Bible classes following service that they'd still need to find resources and volunteers for, but at the end of the day everyone gets to worship together (as part of the worship, fellowship, and serve together model).

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<sup>27</sup> Csinos, *A Gospel for All Ages*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Csinos, *A Gospel for All Ages*, 32.

Why should children be kept for the entire service, including the sermon? Csinos identifies three broad goals of Christian preaching: “preaching as testimony to God’s story, preaching as empowering transformation, and preaching as an encounter with God.”<sup>29</sup> He also says that “from the first days of the church, the act of preaching has been a means to convert, instruct, and inspire the faithful in the ongoing journey of discipleship.”<sup>30</sup> Somewhere along the way, the sermon became the de facto pinnacle and central practice of a faith community’s liturgy, something that can’t be changed like how we pray or how many songs we sing.<sup>31</sup> With the adoption of societal practices in age appropriate development, the church found the sermon to be better geared toward adults. Was this the model that Jesus adopted as well? “Using parables, one-liners, allegory, object lessons, questions, and countless acts of love, Jesus taught that the realm of God was at hand.”<sup>32</sup> Jesus was an intergenerational preacher who used these methods to preach. When he preached, he preached to everyone. It is likely that there were children in all the crowds he preached to. When the disciples rebuked the children for running up to Jesus, he told them to let the little children come to him, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.<sup>33</sup> If Jesus cared about children in this way and preached to them as well, why can’t the modern day church? When did the church decide that the sermon should only be for adults and maybe teenagers?

On every 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday throughout the year, MX Church holds what they call a “NextGen Sunday” worship service. There is no children’s worship on these days, everyone worships together. You can tell by the energy of the congregation on those days that they are some of the favorite worship services of the congregation – children are involved, they may conduct one of

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<sup>29</sup> Csinos, *A Gospel for All Ages*, 35-36.

<sup>30</sup> Csinos, *A Gospel for All Ages*, 36.

<sup>31</sup> Csinos, *A Gospel for All Ages*, 4-5.

<sup>32</sup> Csinos, *A Gospel for All Ages*, 58.

<sup>33</sup> Mark 10:13-16 (New International Version).

the milestone practices like saying the Lord's Prayer, families may do a scripture reading together, teens serve on the praise team (although that happens often), etc. The church has witnessed what it's like to have no children's worship and seem to prefer it that way, so it all comes down to the sermon – the piece that seems unchangeable. The question is, do we need to be preaching sermons that are completely not comprehensible to children if Jesus was able to preach to them? This is not to say that the children understood everything Jesus said, but that we've intentionally made the sermon the centerpiece of worship that must be complex, as if congregants can't spend any other time of the week studying or learning on their own. Everything they need to learn must be wrapped up in a 30-minute sermon. Or, what if the sermon was simpler and relatable to all, and the church encouraged study outside of the sermon, meeting with small groups, reading books, listening to podcasts, etc.? Again, the sermon should convert, instruct, and inspire, which are all things that children should be a part of too. "Learning happens when we try things that challenge us to move beyond our existing abilities but that we are able to accomplish through collaboration with and assistance from more capable persons."<sup>34</sup> The question is, is MX Church willing to let the children learn by being a part of the whole service and collaborate with them and equip them to do it? Are the parents willing to learn how to sit with their children? Is MX Church willing to help the parents learn how to sit with their children in service? Children, along with everyone else, must be formed into being a part of the faith community – spectators to participants. "In order for people to be formed into members of a faith community, old-timers and newcomers alike must have access to its practices so that they can all participate in them as legitimate and valued members."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Csinos, *A Gospel for All Ages*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Csinos, *A Gospel for All Ages*, 27.

The whole family worshiping together also has the most theological grounding. One can look back to scriptures already stated such as Psalm 78:4-8 and Deuteronomy 6:6-9. Then there are passages about the early church in Acts, where all generations met together to break bread, pray, and minister to one another within the home.<sup>36</sup> When Paul sent letters to house churches, the whole family would be gathered for readings, because Paul addressed the whole household.<sup>37</sup> MX Church seems to be in a great spot to make this transition, considering all of the work they do for intergenerational ministry, and the fact that they've already done much practice in not having children's worship (5<sup>th</sup> Sundays).

In conclusion, MX Church is a place that practices great intergenerational ministry. There are areas in need of improvement, but that's every church. We find imperfect places to worship a perfect God. MX Church is heading in a good direction, as even stated by some members in the family ministry survey. The authors of *Intergenerational Christian Formation* end their book with a charge for intergenerational ministry that greatly speaks to the work being done at MX Church and is what will conclude this Family Ministry Analysis – "Intergenerational ministry is an idea whose time has come. Though age-and-stage ministries will (and should) continue to have an important formative role in faith development, it is our belief that intergenerational Christian experiences especially and uniquely nurture spiritual growth and development and equip for discipleship across all ages."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Acts 2:46-47; 4:32-35; 16:31-34 (New International Version).

<sup>37</sup> Colossians 3:20-21 (New International Version).

<sup>38</sup> Allen, Lawton, and Seibel, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 289.