

The NextGen Academy Experience - A Parent's Perspective

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June 11, 2013



Betsy Halpert Orman (left) with her son, Sam, and her daughter, Virginia, both of whom have participated in NextGen Academy.

Three years ago my twins decided they wanted to attend one of our church affiliated programs that provided service learning training after high school. My son seeking world travel joined Special Task Force (STF) Europe. My daughter seeking a smaller, more familial environment chose NextGen Academy (NGA) in Seattle and California. After one year on European STF my son returned, having fundraised and witnessed in more than 25 countries, which he loved. However, although he found “God” in the midst of his deepest suffering, he seemed unable to adapt his experience to life in the real world. Meanwhile, his sister who could sense the struggle he faced coming “down off the mountaintop” suggested he join her on NGA. They eventually both became program coordinators during their second year there. Their transformation was nothing less than amazing. After attending the NGA Parents Workshop and week-long Fusion Camp in California, I could understand why.

These two workshops recreate a condensed version of NGA’s year-long training programs. They involve being challenged to the very limit of one’s faith, not only physically but emotionally and spiritually. Together, families are presented with lectures filled with powerfully transformational content. Then we are given follow-up activities to actualize the principle-based information. The family together faces their fears, expectations, limitations and conflicts using critical thinking and active listening skills. All interaction occurs in a very supportive and caring environment, led by our own second-generation Unificationists acting as facilitators. They recreated their year-long training which was so impressive and professional.



NGA participant and parent engage in authentic communication during one of the activities at the NGA Parents Workshop.

The results for families were profound breakthroughs in authentic communication. Deep, emotional wounds stemming from separation, abandonment, misunderstanding and miscommunication issues were healed in one week.

Often, as first-generation Unificationists, we tend to justify our front-line mentality without explaining what or why we do what we do. Satan uses this miscommunication to prevent us from moving forward on the family level. We find ourselves living together but never really understanding the course we both experienced - the parents going in one direction, the children in another. By creating a place where healing can take place, a shift in our awareness of how to relate to one another occurs. It brings families to

a new understanding of what a true family relationship is supposed to be and how we can support one another to build that.



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In my almost 40 years as a Unificationist I never experienced this kind of transformational family workshop. We really need this kind of experience throughout our movement if we expect our children to become part of a movement we understand one way, and they understand another. The Fusion workshop should be taught in every region and in countries throughout the world.

As someone who has worked in the field of parenting and family education for more than 25 years I was really surprised by the intensity of my own transformation and particularly impressed to see the ways in which my children had grown in their two-year experiences on NGA. My son had developed from a shy, scared, teenager into a bold and fearless God-centered leader, who now understood my faith and made it his own, in his own way. My daughter who had never walked out the door looking less than perfect was focused on the internal qualities and cared less about peer pressure and being accepted by those around her. Instead she was leading those around her to live for the sake of others. When she returned to go to college she just took over on campus. Her confidence and ability to work successfully with students and administrators in such a professional manner was amazing.

Both my children not only developed personal relationships with God and True Parent's but a new respect and understanding of their parent's life and values. They also learned about creating pure and true relationships as brothers and sisters, not just isolating themselves from one another, but seeing each other from Gods viewpoint learning to work together as a real family. And their sense of "American teenage entitlement" dissolved into humility, having worked in Africa, Nepal, the Philippines and having visited our church home in Korea. I was so grateful for this. They learned to understand the value of our international family and the role it plays in building the kingdom of heaven on earth.



Orman and her son, Sam, at the week-long 2013 NGA Fusion camp in California.

When Virginia, my daughter, returned after two and half years on NGA, a slough of NGA grads came pouring through the house and I could see the kind of confidence they had *all* developed and the deep unity and support they provided each other. I knew then it wasn't just my kids but NGA had helped all these kids blossom into what God was hoping for them to become - leaders. I deeply repented, realizing that had never really taken the time to understand the work of these two remarkable and sacrificial leaders, Jeff Adshead and Eric Bobrycki and their incredible wives and family. They had given up everything for the last seven years to help our second generation develop into the leaders they were meant to be. At NGA's five year reunion more than 90 percent of all NGA graduates returned – at their own expense - to plug into the NGA experience once again.

This summer there will be several workshops led by NGA with openings in the Ignite Camp (a week-long high adventure camp that kick starts the participants desire to find and develop their faith) and also the year-long NGA training program. I urge every parent *not to send their child to college directly after high school*, no matter how many scholarships are waiting for them. By deferring and spending one - or I suggest at least two - years on one of our service learning programs, the path their lives take will grow closer to God and True Parents and to us. Although it took many of us seven years to develop a foundation of faith and substance, our children can do this in two years on programs like NGA, Generation Peace Academy (GPA), European STF and Oceania Leadership Training (OLT). College can wait. It will always be there. However, unless our kids get the training they need to find and develop their faith while they are searching, after college it becomes much, much more difficult.



NextGen Academy participants and their families.

I urge all parents to take advantage of all these programs that help transform our kids and NGA is one that I can personally highly recommend.

For more information about Ignite or any of NGA training programs check out these links nextgentrainings.com/trainings/ignite or for the NGA year-long program click on this link: nextgenacademy.com/full_year_program.html.

Even though we want to give our children our faith we can't, they must find it for themselves. NGA shows them how, and for this I will be forever grateful.

Contributed by Betsy Halpert Orman from Milford, Connecticut, who is Blessed to Larry Orman and has one son, Sam, and one daughter, Virginia.