

THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPACTING IGEN: MINISTERING TO GENERATION Z
THROUGH WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

BY
WILLIAM D. SCHUBERT

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

DR. E.A. SORUM, ADVISOR
WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY
MEQUON, WISCONSIN
MARCH 7, 2018

ABSTRACT

Millennials are no longer the newest generational cohort. Generation Z is on the rise. This generation grew up knowing technology before learning to speak. They have mastered the smartphone, but has the smartphone mastered them? It certainly seems that way. The smartphone has hindered their ability to develop personal relationships with other people. Social media and the internet have made them targets for dangers of every kind. The pastor seems ill-equipped to minister and relate to this generational cohort. Through this paper, I aim to provide pastors with material that might aid them in their ministry to the up and coming Generation Z. Now, I do want everyone to be open to reading this paper. I especially want you to consider what this paper offers if ministry to Generation Z is something you feel passionate about. However, in this paper I have made some assumptions and speak rather strongly on some matters. This paper is designed to be used as a tool. Take this paper for what it is and feel free to utilize its contents at your own discretion.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: GENERATION Z BACKGROUND.....	4
CHAPTER 2: GENERATION Z AND THE SMARTPHONE	9
CHAPTER 3: GENERATION Z VS. THE SMARTPHONE.....	13
CHAPTER 4: THE CHURCH’S ONLINE PRESENCE VIA WEBSITE.....	24
CHAPTER 5: GENERATION Z AND SOCIAL MEDIA.....	30
CHAPTER 6: GAMEPLAN FOR GEN Z.....	36
YouTube	39
Snapchat	39
The Church Website	40
Conquerors through Christ	42
Google Review and Yelp	42
Be Open	43
CONCLUSION.....	44
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	46

Jim is your typical American belonging to the “Baby Boomer” generation. He has known peace and prosperity his whole life. He has worked faithfully at the same job for forty-one years and is now thinking about how his life will change in retirement. As he is sitting at the table this morning and reading the newspaper while sipping his coffee, he glances over at one of his kids glued to their smartphone, the others haven’t even gotten up for breakfast, mind you. Jim is frustrated and thinks to himself, “My generation made America a superpower and my kids can’t even stay off their smartphones for five whole minutes!” Meanwhile, Lisa, the young adult glued to her smartphone, has made her phone an extension of herself. She uses each app with ease and has hundreds of friends and followers on Facebook and Instagram; something Jim has no familiarity with at all. The differences between the two generations are clearly evident. In social interaction: Jim’s generation would have gone to parties and other social gatherings, while Lisa is content to stay in her room and use Snapchat to communicate with her friends. In motivation: If Jim needs something, he jumps in his truck and travels wherever he needs to go to find it, while Lisa doesn’t care about getting her driver’s license any time soon. In maturity: Jim got married at age eighteen and lived on his own from that point on, while Lisa is twenty-three and still living with her parents. The battle between generations rages on in homes all across the country. However, the home is not the only battlefield where this conflict is being fought.

This conflict has now spread to the church. The older pastor, who has no experience with new technology, tries his best to relate to the young “punk” high school kid, who knows nothing but technology. The other major obstacle the pastor must also overcome is the difference in cultural perspective between generations. Many pastors are significantly older than the children of Generation Z. These pastors grew up in a time when being a conservative Christian was generally accepted. America was a superpower with an overabundance of resources. Americans

were united against common enemies. Now, Generation Z has grown up and been molded in cultural diversity. The children of Generation Z or “iGen”, do not remember a time without rights for homosexuals. They do not remember a time before an African American president. This generation did not live through terror attacks such as the one on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001; they read about it in books or learned of it in history class. Generation Z is thusly named because it follows the Millennial generational cohort also known as Generation Y (Y2K Generation). Generation Z is nicknamed “iGen” because they are often observed viewing their smartphones.

The pastor’s challenge will be to relate to and reach out to a generational cohort that prides itself on diversity, social progress, and an independence from religion. The question remains: How will our pastors go about overcoming this challenge?

Over my vicar year, I served at Faith Lutheran Church in Mount Pleasant, MI. Throughout that year, I worked with a large group of students attending Central Michigan University. We met every Thursday night at 7:30p.m. for Bible Study and fellowship. As I spent more time with them and observed how they acted and interacted with each other, I drew many conclusions as to what may be done to reach such a generation as Generation Z. Throughout this paper, it is my goal to give the pastor a better understanding and a “game plan” to effectively reach Generation Z. Through the use of articles and books, I will provide insights for the pastor, so he may effectively minister to this upcoming generation. My findings and research have concluded the following: the pastor must reach out to Generation Z by having an engaging website and a constant presence on social media along with proper etiquette. Before proceeding into the first chapter of this paper, allow me to provide some clarification to that word, “etiquette.” Proper etiquette on social media is conducting yourself in a classy and civilized

manner while on sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. Proper etiquette, especially in the realm of Facebook, is of vast importance. Your profile on social media is a virtual representation of yourself in reality. How people view your profile is how they will see you as a person. If you wouldn't act a certain way in reality, don't act that way on social media. Having proper social media etiquette will open the door to Generation Z.

CHAPTER 1: GENERATION Z BACKGROUND

Spend some time talking with people categorized into the “Boomer” generation (those born between 1946 and 1964) and one of the first complaints you will hear from them contains the word, “Millennials.” Why do “Boomers” complain against and make fun of Millennials (those born between 1977 and 1994)? It simply comes down to the fact that the average Millennial has zero life skills and foolishly hopes to be a millionaire through his start-up coffee shop by the time he reaches his thirties. In reality, he cannot even change the tire on his own car. Millennials go into life with eyes wide open, but do not anticipate the often-cold fist of reality punching them in the face when life becomes increasingly difficult. This, of course, is only a popular stereotype. Millennials are able to function as well as any other generation in the world.

Generation Z is projected not to mimic their Millennial counterparts. Instead, they will mimic past generations like the Baby Boomers and Generation X, who raised them. Generation X refers to the generational cohort coming before the Millennial Generation Y (X, Y, and Z). Generation X was born between 1965 and 1980. A recent white paper from the Center for Generational Kinetics reports that “one of the most startling discoveries from this year’s new national study: Gen Z is shaping up to be the Throwback Generation. They are exhibiting attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that combine their tech-saturated world with elements of generations past.”¹ To put things into a Millennial perspective, Generation Z will be better at “adulting” than Millennials were. Unlike Millennials, Generation Z sees the grittiness of the

¹ The Center for Generational Kinetics. “Gen Z White Paper-The State of Gen Z 2017 National Research Study,” <http://genhq.com/gen-z-2017-research-white-paper/> (accessed November 11, 2017).

world. Their mindsets and worldview have been affected and shaped by matters pertaining to social justice. They watch the news. They have seen or perhaps experienced racism and the violence that often follows, firsthand. Generation Z is adamantly opposed to racism in American culture because this cohort cannot remember a time before the Obama administration, America's first African-American president.

Many researchers have tried to pinpoint the exact years that set Generation Z apart from Millennials. The line which distinguishes Millennials from Generation Z is often blurred. According to The Center for Generational Kinetics, Generation Z started in 1996. A statement from them reads, "We believe Gen Z was born from about 1996 to somewhere between 2012 and 2015. We are not certain of the end date yet but will discover it as the generation continues to emerge."

Social justice ranks high on Generation Z's to-do list. According to Mary Meehan, the author of the Forbes article "The Next Generation: What Matters to Generation We", Generation Z is "Socially just, and not just social." She had this to say about Generation Z.

From an early age, Gen We has been raised to be empathetic, to spot and stamp out bullying, to know that 'It Gets Better' and now to see that Black Lives Matter. As part of the most ethnically and gender aware cohort, teens are exposed to more, asked to understand more, and driven to fight for more. It's only natural that teens are passionate about equality and justice of every kind. They fight for themselves, their friends, their classmates and others they see treated unfairly, whether due to issues of gender, sexuality, race, pay, or environmental.²

Again, Gen Z has grown up in the age of "American Cultural Diversity", for lack of a better term. It's hard for them to picture marriage between a man and a woman, how God

² Mary Meehan, "The Next Generation: What Matters to Generation We," *Forbes – Tech*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marymeehan/2016/08/11/the-next-generation-what-matters-to-gen-we/#57ca6e297350> (accessed February 2, 2018).

originally instituted and intended it. Instead, the young people belonging to this generation have grown up being taught that a homosexual or transgender lifestyle is not only accepted, but broadly encouraged. Generation Z is tolerant of all people and walks of life, even walks of life contrary to Scripture, because they have been conditioned for this way of thinking. They are tolerant because there is no other option. Tolerance is default for them.

Through tolerance, Generation Z generally believes in earthly utopian ideas such as world peace. In this way, Generation Z is similar to their Millennial predecessors because their ideology surrounding their thought process is more steeped in wishful thinking instead of realism. Not many Gen Z'ers will take a look at the concept of world peace and think to themselves that this goal is impossible. The secular world of Generation Z believes firmly that God is love. He does not send people to hell but accepts them for who they are and whatever gender they decide to be. Secular Generation Z believes that everyone is basically good. There is no darkness embedded in the heart. Darkness and hate are not innate but learned. They do not believe that the world is corrupted and tainted by sin.

However, Christian Gen Z'ers do. They recognize that while sin is in the world, world peace is an impossible task; a pipedream. But that won't stop them or hinder their desire to help make a difference in that same world. Many of these youths belonging to Generation Z are interested in going to do mission work overseas because of their concern for social change. Groups in WELS send high schoolers and college kids to go work under Kingdom Workers and other organizations that could potentially send them around the world that they may shine as gospel lights to countries in spiritual darkness. They require assistance to help them go on these trips and make a difference. Many are too young and/or broke to be able to afford these large

mission trips and projects on their own. They are still financially tied to their parents as their primary source of income.³

This is due to the fact that Generation Z is more concerned about money than their Millennial predecessors. Due to the impact of the economic recession in the early 2000's, Generation Z has made greater efforts to achieve financial stability and security. They have observed how Millennials have struggled in arenas like the housing market and have vowed not to follow them down the same path. Generation Z has also noticed the decline in Social Security payouts. As more and more of the Baby Boomer generation are entering into retirement, Social Security benefits are rapidly declining. The money needed to payout allotted retirement funds is simply not being replenished into the system. Generation Z will essentially be on their own to establish their legacy in retirement financially speaking. The Center reports:

Discovering that Gen Z is already thinking about retirement bodes very well for both Gen Z and the US in general. Recognizing the need to save for retirement early is the key to being prepared if Social Security or other government programs are not available 50+ years from today. Gen Z needs to be saving for retirement early. It appears this message has started to get through to them even though the very oldest members of Gen Z are still only college age.⁴

In keeping with saving for retirement, Generation Z is also horrified of being buried by crippling debt. In fact, 1 out of 5 Gen Z'ers believe that debt should be avoided at all costs.⁵ How did these young kids learn what it means to be in debt? They learned it from their parents. They observed their parents' reaction to debt and how it was such a tremendous issue in life. They saw

³ The Center for Generational Kinetics. "Gen Z White Paper – The State of Gen Z 2017 National Research Study."

⁴ The Center for Generational Kinetics. "Gen Z White Paper – The State of Gen Z 2017 National Research Study."

⁵ The Center for Generational Kinetics. "Gen Z White Paper – The State of Gen Z 2017 National Research Study."

the stories on the news about the debt crises and they also lived through the recession which destroyed multiple markets throughout the American economic system. For fear of debt, both Millennials and Generation Z are hesitant to use credit cards. The Center reaffirms this by showing that “taking on, managing, and paying down debt has, despite its dangers, historically proven important – if not essential – to building credit history needed to make large purchases such as cars and houses. Many Millennials have found themselves with limited credit histories because they have not used credit cards or other forms of revolving credit.⁶ But Generation Z is different than the previous generation. Generation Z does most of their banking digitally.

⁶ The Center for Generational Kinetics. “Gen Z White Paper – The State of Gen Z 2017 National Research Study.”

CHAPTER 2: GENERATION Z AND THE SMARTPHONE

Gen Z'ers are able to stay up-to-date on their banking activity even more so today due to all of their account information being directly at their fingertips in app form. All major banking branches have apps for their customers and clients to use: Wells Fargo, JP Morgan Chase, Bank of America. However, this is only due to the rise and utter takeover of the world as we know it by smartphones. According to The Center, "Banks may be one of the major legacy institutions that will have to adapt in order to best fit Gen Z."⁷ Nearly everyone in the world today has a smartphone. Through our devices, we are able to have a computer in the palm of our hands and thus have instant access to any information we desire. All one has to do is open an internet browser on your phone, type in that which you seek, and you'll be taken to a suggestion page of thousands of different possibilities and sources.

Generation Z has a natural knowledge of the smartphone because they grew up in the internet age. Boomers (1946-1964), Gen X'ers (1965-1980), and Millennials (1981-1994) did not; they had to first experience this new technology and then choose either to adapt or stay with whatever technology they were used to operating. Generation Z, on the other hand, will never be able to look back on the early days of the internet. They will never understand the thought of parents screaming at their kids to get off the phone so they could use the internet. Ask a Gen Z'er what "dial up" or "DSL" is. They won't be able to answer. All they will know about this early

⁷ The Center for Generational Kinetics. "Gen Z White Paper – The State of Gen Z 2017 National Research Study."

technology is its lack of speed in downloading. The ever-changing world of technology and the internet belongs to Generation Z.

If you don't believe that statement, just look at the ages of the youngest smartphone users in this Generation. Look around and you will see children as young as two operating or sometimes even owning a tablet or some form of handheld device. Kelly Wallace, a journalist for CNN Health reports that "53% of tweens – kids 8 to 12 – have their own tablet, and 67% of teens have their own smartphones. Mobile devices account for 41% of all screen time for tweens and 46% for teens."⁸ These children will have no problem figuring out this technology because this is all they have ever known. Due to their prowess in figuring out the newest technology concerning smartphones, computers, and tablets, Generation Z has also been dubbed "the screener".

The "screener" however, has been *forced* to grow up with the smartphone. It is a wonderful blessing and an easy convenience to be able to have whatever we need right at our fingertips on screen in a matter of seconds, but to the developing Gen Z'er, they pay a hefty price. What is often forgotten is the dark side of the web. Predators seeking young children in chatrooms. Websites containing the most depraved forms of pornography imaginable. Deplorable acts of violence flooding the screen without censor. If you, as a parent can access all those things from your devices, you can bet that your children also have access to those very same things. Their developing brains, emotions, and thought processes are all being shaped by things they do not understand. All it takes is a simple typo and they could go down a deep rabbit hole that will affect them tremendously for the rest of their lives.

⁸ Kelly Wallace, "Teens Spend a 'Mind-Boggling' 9 Hours a Day Using Media, Report Says," *CNN Health*, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/03/health/teens-tweens-media-screen-use-report/index.html> (accessed November 30, 2017).

But keeping up with teens on social media and tracking what they are seeing and doing proves a daunting task for parents. In fact, this endeavor is almost impossible. You, as a parent, might think of ways to “hack” your child’s Facebook profile or Instagram page. However, your teenager takes this into consideration as well. Teens know their parents are monitoring them on these sites. So, in an attempt to throw their parents off, modern teenagers have created multiple Facebook accounts and secretive groups where the only way to access them is to be invited by another member of that group. Even on Instagram your child can quickly ditch your ever-watchful eye. Parents ought to be informed of the “rinsta” (real Instagram) and the “finsta” (friends-only or fake Instagram). A parent should automatically assume that their child has both. Ana Homayoun, in her article “The Secret Social Media Lives of Teenagers” for the New York Times, gives further explanation about this secrecy.

Many teens use shortened versions of their names or aliases for finsta accounts, which they often see as an opportunity to share a less edited, less filtered version of their lives. They might spend a lot of time trying to capture the perfect Instagram photo for the ‘rinsta,’ which reaches a wider general audience, while a finsta might reveal, as one high school sophomore girl declared, ‘my innermost thoughts.’ Like the teens in the Harvard Facebook group chat, those using finsta accounts can have a false sense of confidence to say and do things they might not want a wider audience to see. And because so much of today’s teen social media use is rooted in a fear of getting caught, many teens have detoured their online activity to different ways of cloaked communication. Closed and secret Facebook groups are one way teens (and adults!) privatize communication to a select group – a closed group feels more private because it allows an administrator to approve new users and monitor content. Secret Facebook groups remain unsearchable, and members can only be added or invited by another member. Another trick is to use hidden apps like Calculator% and Calculator+ that look like regular calculators but require users to enter their passcodes to reveal a back-storage area containing private photos.⁹

⁹ Ana Homayoun, “The Secret Social Media Lives of Teenagers,” *The New York Times – Family*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/07/well/family/the-secret-social-media-lives-of-teenagers.html> (accessed February 4, 2018).

As much as I would like to give you a few different steps on how to successfully monitor your teen's social media usage, I don't have a solid answer for you. As soon as parents feel they have gained the upper hand in this ongoing battle, a new app or device is developed and new instructions have to be learned and mastered. Parents will always be playing a nasty game of catch up. Old apps will give way to new apps and the teenager will almost always master it before their parents even become aware of it. Parents, this is why teaching your children the truths of God's Word from an early age is of such great importance. Teach them how Christian young adults go about life and they may apply those same truths to their lives on the smartphone.

CHAPTER 3: GENERATION Z VS. THE SMARTPHONE

Generation Z's structure has already been heavily influenced by the smartphone and not in a productive, healthy, or safe way. All data extrapolated from iGen, which correlates with the use of smartphones, has pointed at an extreme downward trend. The ultimate verdict is: iGen is unhappy because they use the smartphone so much. Dr. Jean Twenge in the article, "The Decline in Adult Activities Among U.S. Adolescents, 1976-2016, sheds some light on what might be going on with Generation Z.

The social and historical contexts may influence the speed of development. In seven large, nationally representative surveys of U.S. adolescents 1976-2016 (N=8.44 million, ages 13-19), fewer adolescents in recent years engaged in adult activities such as having sex, dating, drinking alcohol, working for pay, going out without their parents, and driving, suggesting a slow life strategy. Adult activities were less common when median income, life expectancy, college enrollment, and age at first birth were higher and family size and pathogen prevalence were lower, consistent with life history theory. The trends are unlikely to be due to homework and extracurricular time, which stayed steady or declined, and may or may not be linked to increased internet use.¹⁰

So, the research concludes that Generation Z, though appearing to be more wise and responsible than their Millennial predecessors, does not do all the other things their parents used to do when they were their age. Generation Z is taking longer to grow up. They don't have that rush to get their driver's license and go cruising down the road with a carload of their friends. Why would they? They have their parents to chauffeur them around everywhere. They don't go

¹⁰ Jean Twenge, "The Decline in Adult Activities Among U.S. Adolescents, 1976-2016," *Child Development*, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cdev.12930/full> (accessed November 25, 2017).

to malls with their friends anymore and shop until they run out of money. That trend has died. Once shopping apps like Amazon came onto the screens of smartphones, Generation Z can do all their shopping from the comfort of their own home. Twenge suggests, “The allure of independence, so powerful to previous generations, holds less sway over today’s teens.”¹¹ A more promising stat in the eyes of pastors and parents of Generation Z can potentially be found in the data which shows Gen Z’ers to be having less sex than their predecessors. As refreshing as this statistic might seem, it’s not very truthful. Gen Z’ers may not be spending their time having sex, but that’s because they are either sexting, sending provocative Snaps to each other, or watching pornography on their devices. Some teens are even going so far as to seek out sex from complete strangers by way apps through their smartphone. A study by Live Science gives further insight. “About one-third said they had a smartphone, 5 percent said they used the internet to seek sex partners, and 17 percent said they had been approached for sex online. For comparison, a Nielson survey released in September found about 58 percent of 13- to 17-year-olds now own a smartphone. Differences in demographic factors may have also played a role in smartphone ownership.”¹² If the statistics from this study were from 2012, it is safe to say these percentages have increased tremendously from five years ago. Generation Z doesn’t always comprehend the dangers of the internet.

The internet is the domain for Generation Z. This makes sense because Generation Z spends more time online than their predecessors ever did. Dr. Twenge explains, “They spend so much time on the internet, texting friends and on social media – an average of about six hours

¹¹ Jean M. Twenge, “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?” *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/> (accessed November 11, 2017).

¹² Rachael Rettner, “Teen Sex Risk Rises with Smartphone Use”, *Live Science – Health*, <https://www.livescience.com/36713-teen-sex-smartphones.html> (accessed February 5, 2018)

per day – that they have less leisure time for everything else.”¹³ However, all of this time spent in their own little world online has brought on a mental health crisis containing depression and anxiety the likes of which we have never seen before. Twenge points out, “iGen shows another pronounced break with millennials: depression, anxiety, and loneliness have shot upward since 2012, with happiness declining. The teen suicide rate increased by more than 50 percent, as did the number of teens with clinical-level depression.”¹⁴

But why are these numbers rising with Generation Z? Why are they committing suicide or going about their lives with crippling depression? They don’t understand the real world. Their life is based in the internet. Their identity in reality is not as important to them as the identity which they hold online. Those belonging to Generation Z are depressed because they go on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook and compare their lives to everyone else on those social media sites. They take in the images of people who have dedicated their lives to fitness and have worked on their lifestyles and bodies, while those who don’t have wish they had. Through Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms, the children of Generation Z fall into the trap of only seeing the beautified and glorified parts of peoples’ day. They don’t see the everyday struggle and turmoil that they face also. Gen Z’ers only get a glimpse. So, by seeing the glamorous side to everyone else’s life, they start to see the inadequacies and shortcomings of their own.

As a result, they slump into a depression due to their heavy social media use, especially on Facebook. How frequently are these “screenagers” of Generation Z checking Facebook

¹³ Jean Twenge, “How the Smartphone Affected an Entire Generation of Kids,” *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/how-the-smartphone-affected-an-entire-generation-of-kids-82477> (accessed October 6, 2017).

¹⁴ Twenge, “How the Smartphone Affected an Entire Generation of Kids.”

statuses? “A Deloitte survey found that for many smartphone users, checking social media apps is the first thing they do in the morning – often before even getting out of bed.”¹⁵ The brain becomes wired and addicted to social media. As a society, Generation Z has gone from a generation able to think for themselves critically to a generation which allows Facebook to do their thinking for them. Facebook has re-wired the brain of Generation Z. This re-wiring has increased depression in the minds of this cohort. Shakya and Christakis explain their findings on this matter.

Overall, our results showed that, while real-world social networks were positively associated with overall well-being, the use of Facebook was negatively associated with overall well-being. These results were particularly strong for mental health; most measures of Facebook use in one year predicted a decrease in mental health in a year later. We found consistently that both liking others’ content and clicking links significantly predicted a subsequent reduction in self-reported physical health, mental health, and life satisfaction.¹⁶

For personal reasons, I myself, have given up Facebook. I have not stopped using it for a week or two but have terminated my account and have cut Facebook out of my life altogether. What I have felt is an upheaval in every single aspect of my relationships with other people. I have felt so much happier than when I had a Facebook account. My personal findings also correlate with Dr. Jean Twenge’s, when she reports: “A 2016 study randomly assigned some adults to give up Facebook for a week and others to continue using it. Those who gave up Facebook ended the week happier, less lonely, and less depressed.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Holly B. Shakya and Nicholas A. Christakis, “A New, More Rigorous Study Confirms: The More You Use Facebook, the Worse You Feel,” *Harvard Business Review*, <https://hbr.org/2017/04/a-new-more-rigorous-study-confirms-the-more-you-use-facebook-the-worse-you-feel> (accessed November 30, 2017).

¹⁶ Shakya and Christakis, “A New, More Rigorous Study Confirms: The More You Use Facebook, the Worse You Feel.”

¹⁷ Twenge, “How the Smartphone Affected an Entire Generation of Kids.”

Wrapped up in this reduction of reported physical health, mental health, and life satisfaction is a creeping form of self-harm that threatens to engross Generation Z completely. This form of self-harm rears its ugly head within a malicious form of bullying contained only to the internet world. Cyberbullying is on the rise in our country and has taken the internet by storm. With so many accessible things made impersonal that were once closely guarded secrets in our lives, what we now can see and share is limitless with social media. The pictures we take, the statuses we post, can all be seen by anyone today in the world. All it takes is someone with the skill required to hack a computer and all closely guarded things in life are displayed for the entire internet world to see and use against you.

So many lives have been ruined and lost through cyberbullying. Texts sent between naïve teenagers in a relationship have been intercepted by trusted “friends” and shared around schools across America. Provocative pictures have been leaked from Snapchat and used to blackmail unsuspecting teens. Eventually the information that teenagers and young people post online can come back to haunt them; it often does. Cyberbullying can hurt most, because it comes from all directions and from all people, even those in whom you trusted most. It also stays there long after the bullying occurred.

Some young adults of this group of Gen Z’ers might even take to social media as a weapon of self-harm. This concept is on the rise and growing ever more popular amongst teenagers. Think of it this way, before the internet, self-harm used to consist of cutting and other forms of bodily mutilation, in order to escape from reality and ease pain and suffering. Now, with the invasion of social media and the use of different apps and sites to express oneself privately, one can cause a lot of harm, especially to himself or herself. In fact, that’s exactly what they want. An article from USA Today explains Cyberbullying Self-Harm in greater detail.

About 6% of kids from the ages of 12 through 17 have bullied themselves digitally, according to research conducted by Sameer Hinduja, a professor of criminology at Florida Atlantic University and co-director of the Cyberbullying Research Center. ‘It’s a new phenomenon, and this is definitely happening’ for teens across the U.S., Hinduja said. ‘We have a tendency to demonize the aggressor, but in some cases, maybe one out of 20, the aggressor and target are the same.’ Researchers are calling this behavior ‘digital self-harm.’ Teens who identified as non-heterosexual were three times more likely to bully themselves online, while victims of cyberbullying were 12 times more likely to cyberbully themselves. A strong link already exists between physical self-harm and suicide attempts, and researchers are concerned that the same connection could exist with digital self-harm.¹⁸

After glancing at this new phenomenon, one might think, “What would drive teenagers and young adults to even consider doing this to themselves? Why would they purposefully go online and tear themselves apart?” This phenomenon might be occurring because these kids wish their voices to be heard. Perhaps they are crying out for someone to help them? The article from USA Today goes on:

The question perplexing researchers is why teens would do this. When asked why they engaged in digital self-harm, boys were more likely to say they did it as a joke or to get attention, while girls often said they did it because they were struggling with depression. ‘There’s that same phenomena that’s going on; it’s akin to physically wanting to feel pain,’ said Patricia Cavazos, an associate professor of psychiatry at the Washington University school of Medicine. The rates of physical self-harm are similar, as well. About 8% of children ages 7-16 surveyed in a 2012 study said they’d engaged physical self-harm, or non-suicidal self-injury. ‘There is a growing body of evidence that suggests social media plays a role in increasing mental health issues among young people,’ she said.¹⁹

¹⁸ N’dea Yancey-Bragg, “Cyberbullying’s Chilling Trend: Teens Anonymously Target Themselves Online, Study Finds,” *USA Today*, November 8, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2017/11/08/cyberbullyings-chilling-trend-a-growing-number-teens-anonymously-bullying-themselves-online-study-find/831070001/> (accessed November 30, 2017).

¹⁹ Yancey-Bragg, “Cyberbullying’s Chilling Trend: Teens Anonymously Target Themselves Online, Study Finds.”

Social media has played into the allure for this type of mentality. Facebook and Twitter have a direct impact on these children and young adults, who spend hours posting and tweeting about their days. The rise of certain shows and their hype on social media platforms have also glorified teen suicides due to cyberbullying; one such show being “13 Reasons Why”. A brief synopsis of the show includes the following storyline: Teenager Clay Jensen, returns home from school to find a mysterious box with his name on it lying on his porch. Inside he discovers a group of cassette tapes recorded by Hannah Baker. He had crushed on her in high school and Hannah had taken her life two weeks earlier. On the tapes, Hannah gives 13 reasons as to why she ended up committing suicide. Through Hannah and Clay’s dual narratives, *Thirteen Reasons Why* weaves an intricate and heartrending story of confusion and desperation.²⁰

This show, popular and easily accessible on Netflix, has been cast in controversy. Many fans of the show, as well as those who produced it, praise the show for boosting awareness of the increasing rate of teen suicide. However, a number of school counselors and mental health physicians say the opposite. Lauren Camera, for U.S. News, reports on what the counselors and physicians have to say on this matter.

In a statement given to *The Washington Post*, a Netflix spokesperson said that the producers worked with mental health experts ‘to show how these issues impact teens in real and dramatic ways.’ The spokesperson also pointed to the show’s TV-MA rating, and its publishing of a website to help people find local mental health resources. It also recently updated the warnings that run at the beginning of each show.

But mental health professionals, including high-school social workers and others who help counsel children, argue the show misrepresents the resources available to students who are feeling helpless and maybe struggling with suicidal thoughts.

‘It really didn’t reflect enough that there are lots of supports for people who are feeling that there are no alternatives,’ says Danielle Buckley, a clinical director for a therapeutic program housed within a public school for students with social

²⁰ Studio. *13 Reasons Why – Plot*. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1837492/plotsummary> (accessed December 2, 2017).

and emotional issues in grades 7 through 12, located just outside Boston. ‘Kids shouldn’t be scared to talk to guidance counselors.’ Buckley also laments the fact the series romanticizes suicide. ‘It’s a great thing to bring up as a topic, but to me there was a much better way to do it,’ she says.²¹

Whatever your opinion on the show, the controversy still stands. In my experience after watching only 4 episodes, I came to the same conclusion as the counselors and high-school social workers did. In my opinion the show broaches an important subject that needs to be discussed, but it could have done so much more effectively. Teen suicide needs to be discussed because similar to what drove Hannah Baker to suicide is happening all across our country on the smartphone and computer screen with teenagers.

“Kill yourself.” That’s what is found in the comments section of middle schoolers as they tear some poor kid apart online. They literally tell him to end his own life. It’s through social media that they are able to do this. For instance, take the example of Mallory Grossman from Roseland, NJ. She was only 12 when she took her own life after constantly being bullied on social media and at school. Justin Zaremba, wrote in an online news report about what lead to this tragedy.

Despite messages saying she had no friends, calling her ‘a loser,’ and saying ‘why don’t you kill yourself,’ Bruce Nagel, the Grossman’s attorney, said, the school failed to take any action.

The Grossmans said the bullying of Mallory took the form of ‘mean texts’ and posts on Instagram and Snapchat, along with ‘dirty looks, humiliation and exclusion at school. Two of the last Instagram posts, they said, were taken on school grounds.²²

²¹ Lauren Camera, “School Officials, Counselors Slam 13 Reasons Why for Glorifying Teen Suicide,” *U.S. News – Education News*, <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2017-05-05/school-officials-counselors-slam-13-reasons-why-for-glorifying-teen-suicide> (accessed February 5, 2018).

²² Justin Zaremba, “Why Don’t You Kill Yourself: Bullies Urged 12-Year-Old Who Committed Suicide” *NJ.com*, http://www.nj.com/morris/index.ssf/2017/08/family_of_12-year-old_girl_who_committed_suicide.html (accessed February 6, 2018).

On Facebook and Twitter, you don't have to be yourself; you can be anyone or anything you desire to be. You can set up fake accounts and mercilessly torment someone through offensive memes as a troll. You can talk "smack" about anyone online and hide behind your Twitter handle. What's the appeal? You don't have to risk having an actual social interaction face-to-face with another person. If you so desire, you can write scathing remarks about someone from the comfort of your own home and never see that person in reality. Through this ability to be portrayed in whatever way you want through the internet, a teenager on the internet is able to say whatever they want to whomever they want. The antagonist doesn't have to worry about the feelings of the person on the receiving end of their insults. The internet is on its way to turning Generation Z into a generation of sociopaths; those who do what they want without taking into consideration the feelings of others. They completely lack empathy towards other people. Kelly Wallace explains further by stating, "The implications of this digital transformation are huge for tweens and teens, educators, policy makers and parents. For one, living and communicating via mobile devices gets in the way of empathy. Add in the issues of digital addiction and the attention and distraction implications that come with mobile devices, and empathy is really, really, under siege."²³

This is why Generation Z suffers from social awkwardness. They have failed to develop strong social relationships with other people because they don't want to talk to other people face-to-face; they wish to do so online or via a computer and/or smartphone screen. Jean Twenge explains further: "Spending less time with friends means less time to develop social skills. A

²³ Kelly Wallace, "Teens Spend a 'Mind-Boggling' 9 Hours a Day Using Media, Report Says," *CNN Health*. (accessed November 30, 2017).

2014 study found that sixth graders who spent just five days at a camp without using screens ended the time better at reading emotions on other's faces, suggesting that iGen's screen-filled lives might cause their social skills to atrophy."²⁴ However, face-to-face relationships with Generation Z are not the only things to have been affected by the smartphone. Overall health and wellness have taken tremendous damage through smartphone use as well. Many of America's teenagers today are not physically fit. Many are overweight and suffer from hypertension, high cholesterol and varying forms of heart disease. All because Generation Z fails to exercise due to the fact that they are constantly on their smartphones instead of participating in active lifestyles.

Prior research has shown that the use of social media may detract from face-to-face relationships, reduce investment in meaningful activities, increase sedentary behavior by encouraging more screen time, lead to internet addiction, and erode self-esteem through unfavorable social comparison. Self-comparison can be a strong influence on human behavior, and because people tend to display the most positive aspects of their lives on social media, it is possible for an individual to believe that their own life compares negatively to what they see presented by others.²⁵

Generation Z also loses out academically in their prolonged exposure to the smartphone. The smartphone has actually made this cohort dumber instead of smarter. How is it even possible for that to happen to this generation when they have access to all the information they could ever want through search engines on their phone? They have lost the ability to think critically. If they don't know the answer, they think to themselves, "I'll just Google it. My phone will tell me." Along with the loss of critical thinking, Generation Z has lost the ability to focus on tasks due to loss of attention span. Twenge reports, "iGen reads books, magazines and newspapers much less

²⁴ Twenge, "How the Smartphone Affected an Entire Generation of Kids."

²⁵ Shakya and Christakis, "A New, More Rigorous Study Confirms: The More You Use Facebook, the Worse You Feel."

than previous generations did as teens: In the annual Monitoring the Future survey, the percentage of high school seniors who read a non-required book or magazine nearly every day dropped from 60 percent in 1980 to only 16 percent in 2015.”²⁶ The smartphone and its direct uplink to the web have hurt the children of Generation Z in more ways than previously thought. The smartphone has also affected them on a spiritual level. The devil is the prince of this world and he is also the prince of the smartphone world too.

²⁶ Twenge, “How the Smartphone Affected an Entire Generation of Kids.”

CHAPTER 4: THE CHURCH'S ONLINE PRESENCE VIA WEBSITE

Generation Z spends much of their time on their smartphone, but they are not always caught up in all the negative things discussed in prior chapters. Many Gen Z'ers use their smartphone to pull up different web pages, not just apps. As I mentioned previously, Generation Z rules the internet world. They spend most of the day online and trust Google to find the answers to all their problems. But Generation Z uses the vast world of the internet for other things as well. They do all their shopping on Amazon to find the best deals and have the products, which they so desperately want, delivered right to their door. Generation Z doesn't have to worry about driving to an outlet or store to acquire what they need; the product goes right to them through the mail. Due to Generation Z taking over online shopping, many retailers have since gone out of business. They cannot compete with companies who sell their same product online.

When it comes to problem solving or fixing something they have never encountered before, Generation Z goes straight to online videos for answers. The Center for Generational Kinetics reports:

Where does Gen Z go to learn skills? It's not just college. In fact, 85% of Gen Z watched at least one online video in the past week to learn a new skill. While we don't know how much of this viewing is done on YouTube, it paints a picture of how integral the digital world is to the life of Gen Z – even in seemingly simple things like learning a new skill – and how this might translate to trust, even trust in advertisements.²⁷

²⁷ The Center for Generational Kinetics. "Gen Z White Paper – The State of Gen Z 2017 National Research Study."

Generation Z likes to do their homework. They want to know every possible thing before committing to one of their options. The pastor must advertise his church online. If he does not, he is setting himself up to lose out on his opportunity to witness and minister successfully to Gen Z.

In light of the fact that Generation Z trusts heavily in advertisements, both on television and online, it is vital for the pastor and his church to have high reviews and ratings like Yelp and Google Reviews. If the church website has a section demonstrating that their site is accredited by many people who have visited prior, Generation Z will trust those reviews and take a serious look at attending that church for worship. Generation Z trusts advertisements and reviews, so don't be afraid to put ads up on Facebook or work with a company to promote your church website online.

Generation Z uses the internet to go "window shopping." You won't find Generation Z taking a walk to explore an unknown area or to check out a new local restaurant. Why would they when they could pull up their phones and go to that location's specific website. They can peruse the menu, place their order, and even pay their bill all on their phone. Generation Z does virtual window shopping. They will check out your website, see how many recommendations the establishment has, and then decide whether or not that place is worth a visit. Generation Z does this for all websites of all different businesses including churches.

Unfortunately, some WELS churches are operating online with outdated and forgotten websites with sermons last updated five years ago or more. Some are often lackluster and were put together by a congregation member with little to no experience in website construction. I do not have a solid statistic to back up this criticism. However, it has been my observation upon viewing a number of church websites that not enough time, skill, and money have been spent on

them to make them effective. If I can point this out, so can Generation Z. Sometimes, the congregation doesn't even know the church has an available website. Through this "portal" if you will, the pastor should strive to please his congregation members with the church website, and also grab the attention of the visitors who are "window shopping" online.

Kevin Deyoung, in his article entitled "Be Welcoming, Get a Good Website," includes a few items on church websites that might scare off potential website "window shoppers" from your church. The first thing he warns against is an extremely dated design. He says, "You don't need to be cutting edge with all the latest gizmos. But if you haven't changed your site in five years, you're almost certainly aging rather poorly."²⁸ Deyoung has a point. If the church's website is outdated by 5 years or more, the people accessing it will wonder whether or not it cares about the work it's doing. If the church is not serious about ministry, the public will not be serious about the church. Another point Deyoung makes about the effectiveness of a good church website is that people can smell a fake. They can also easily distinguish how much the church spent on its website. If it reeks of cheap quality, they will know. He explains:

Getting by on the cheap. Sometimes even newer websites look dated because they were designed by a beloved 55-year-old from the congregation with a little web know how and some time on his hands. Not trying to knock 55-year-olds, but your website will be used primarily by the young, so make sure it doesn't feel old. Again, you don't need to spend a lot of money, but the difference between \$2000 and free will convince you that \$2000 was worth it.²⁹

The third piece of advice that Deyoung gives to the builder of the church website is a strategy that WELS has invested heavily in; a strategy that is working. He suggests that the

²⁸ Kevin Deyoung. "The Importance of a Good Church Website," *M&R Marketing Group*. <https://www.mandr-group.com/the-importance-of-a-good-church-website/> (accessed November 13, 2017).

²⁹ Deyoung. "The Importance of a Good Church Website."

church provide adequate information on childcare. He writes, “Not enough information on childcare. Parents want to know what is available for their kids and whether they will be lovingly cared for or sold to Ishmaelite traders.”³⁰ While many of Generation Z are not old enough to have children at this point in time, there are some who do. Times will change and Generation Z will have children in a number of years. While I seriously doubt that parents are worried about their children being sold to Ishmaelite traders headed to Egypt, they are worried about the care and education which their children will be receiving from the church if they have an established school. After the mass failings of the public-school systems in America, parents are now turning toward private schools to educate their children. If a congregation and pastor can open that door simply by providing information about its childcare services and school, they can capitalize on ministering to the family as well as the child.

Evangelism and outreach is an exciting part of ministry; it also proves difficult. The pastor can go door-to-door and talk with people one on one with Jesus on their porch step but depending on the demographic and the location he may find the effectiveness of this type of outreach to vary. That’s the difficult part of evangelism and outreach. If one thing doesn’t work with one demographic and location, the pastor needs to find another way that does. Evangelism has spread online. People “window shop” churches and find out where they stand on certain things, where they are located, and what they believe. They want to be able to find out more about the church in the privacy and comfort of their own home. The issue with Generation Z is that they might become intimidated when standing face-to-face with a pastor at their doorstep. If the pastor shows up at their door, he might be perceived as a threat instead of a loving under-shepherd doing his work diligently for the Lord out of concern for the soul.

³⁰ Deyoung, “The Importance of a Good Church Website.”

How does the pastor and/or his congregation build an effective website to reach Generation Z and others online? Jonathan Howe, in his blog titled “Eight Things Your Church Website Must Have”, includes the following list: “Staff names and titles, information about your Children’s Ministry and Youth Ministry, Sermon Archives, Church Calendar, Contact Info, a statement of beliefs, links to social media profiles, and major church news items.”³¹ A few things on which I wish to focus from this list are: Links to social media profiles, church calendar, and contact info.

Howe reinforces the importance of these links: “The inclusion of this item would mean that your church would need to be active on social media. These links do no good if your social media channels are inactive or defunct. At the very least, a church should be present where its people are – and that place is on social media.”³²

In view of events and the day-to-day happenings at a congregation, Jonathan Howe gives further credence as to why the pastor needs to have a church calendar on his website. He writes, “You can only mention so much in your announcements, and only so many things can fit in a bulletin each week. But with an online calendar, you can list as much as you’d like. The key is keeping the calendar up-to-date. Weekly calendaring meetings might be necessary at first, but once a routine is established, your church members and guests will always have the most up-to-date information at their fingertips.”³³ Another tip for pastors would be to keep your church calendars organized as you put them online. If the pastor is unorganized, he is not considered professional in the mind of Generation Z. He won’t come across as legitimate to them. This

³¹ Jonathan Howe, “Eight Things Your Church Website Must Have,” *Thom S. Rainer* <http://thomrainer.com/2016/01/eight-things-your-church-website-must-have/> (accessed October 9, 2017).

³² Howe, “Eight Things Your Church Website Must Have.”

³³ Howe, “Eight Things Your Church Website Must Have.”

particular cohort is depending on the pastor to be their spiritual leader. A non-existent church calendar or one wrecked by disorganized information will destroy that image they hold him to.

When the pastor is disorganized, follow-up is hindered and sometimes non-existent. Jonathan Howe also stresses the need for swift action in responding back to visitors in a timely fashion. This can easily be accomplished through a Contact Information spot on a website. He writes, “This may seem like an obvious inclusion. But if it were obvious, I wouldn’t visit so many church websites that lacked a contact page or contact information. An important follow-up to this item is having someone responsible for responding to inquiries. Every contact to a church should receive a response within 24 hours, if not sooner. We live in a connected society, and there is no reason why a church can’t respond to inquiries in a timely fashion.”³⁴ Following-up indicates to Generation Z that the pastor cares about reaching out to them. He is reliable and real.

Generation Z will not want a personal visit and one-on-one conversation with the pastor if they have concluded the pastor doesn’t really care or relate to them. As I said before, Generation Z feels most comfortable on their smartphones. They won’t come to you. You have to make the first move. You must go to them, initially. The website is how the pastor can get his foot in the door in this digital age. If he creates an effective website, Generation Z might check it out. Contact can be established and relationships can be started and built up. Once the pastor has a strong relationship with Generation Z, he can minister to them more effectively than he could before. Trust and rapport have been established and strengthened.

³⁴ Howe, “Eight Things Your Church Website Must Have.”

CHAPTER 5: GENERATION Z AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is constantly changing. There are new sites and apps. It's not only about Facebook anymore. Social media has adapted and now Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram are the three big players. What I am about to say may make pastors of different generations uncomfortable, but that's ok. If you're a pastor who wants to shepherd Generation Z, you **MUST** be on social media. There is no other way. You must take your shepherd's staff and venture out into the internet world; a world often misunderstood. Why? Gen Z's world doesn't exist on the same plane as reality. Their world is the world of social media. They feel most "at home" talking to their friends via Facebook Messenger. They keep up with their friends and seek popularity on Instagram. They enjoy the brief pictures and snippets they can share with those close to them on Snapchat. They feel comfortable expressing their political views and other beliefs for all to see on Facebook and Twitter. Jean Twenge, provides us with a fine example of the day in the life of a Gen Z'er on social media, as she shares the details of a recent interview with a teenager known as "Athena."

Unlike the teens of my generation, who might have spent an evening tying up the family landline with gossip, they talk on Snapchat, the smartphone app that allows users to send pictures and videos that quickly disappear. They make sure to keep up their Snapstreaks, which show how many days in a row they have Snapchatted with each other. Sometimes they save screenshots of particularly ridiculous pictures of friends. 'It's good blackmail,' Athena said. (Because she's a minor, I'm not using her real name.) She told me she'd spent most of the summer hanging out alone in her room with her phone. 'That's just the way her generation is,' she said. 'We didn't have a choice to know any life without iPads or iPhones. I think we like our phones more than we like actual people.'³⁵

³⁵ Twenge, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?"

But, as in all things, the world of social media, in which Generation Z finds comfort and safety, has been invaded by older generations; parents and sometimes even grandparents. The statement was made long ago and still holds true to many that “old people” have killed Facebook. What was once an outlet for sharing pictures and clever statuses with friends, has now become a cesspool filled with the stench of political advertisements, grandparents leaving personal messages on News feeds, and the oversharing of posts involving phrases like: “Who Remembers?” The list of examples of Facebook faux pas runs on and on. As a result of this invasion, many Gen Z’ers feel the need to leave Facebook and have moved on to Twitter and other platforms of social media. As much as the truth may hurt, Generation Z doesn’t want to be Facebook friends with their parents.

But parents are not the only ones to blame for pushing away from Generation Z on social media. Many pastors, some belonging to our synod and some belonging to other denominations, have committed many cringe-worthy crimes on the internet as well. Don’t believe me? Type in “Rapping for Jesus” on YouTube and see if you can sit through the whole thing. I just recently watched a YouTube clip where an Anglican priest dressed up as “The Cat in the Hat” and distributed the Lord’s Supper in Dr. Seuss rhyme. This video is on the internet for the world to see! These are some of the reasons people laugh at the church and don’t take us seriously. The pastor must be extremely careful as to how he presents himself on social media. Thom S. Rainer gives a few warnings in his article, “Seven Warnings for Church Leaders Who Use Social Media”. His first and most important warning to us is this, “Consider anything you say on social media to be permanent. Yes, you can delete or scrub regretful things you have said on social media, but more times than not, the information can still be retrieved. And countless people take

screen shots the moment they see something unwisely posted.”³⁶ Consider the internet to be just like the Miranda Rights you see on all the crime shows on television. I’m thinking especially of the first few words, “You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say and do can be used against you in the court of law.” The court of the internet is a far less forgiving place. Be careful what you post! If you do decide to post something, make sure you read it over a few times, so you know that you are crystal clear in what you’re saying. “You can be misunderstood often on social media. The readers or viewers usually cannot see your body language. They don’t know your humor or sarcasm. If you have any question about something you will post, don’t post it.”³⁷

“Attacks on other people’s character or positions are considered cowardly by many. The reader or viewer typically sees the person writing the information as one who hides behind a keyboard or microphone. They wonder if the writer would have the courage to say the same things in person.”³⁸ Also, equally important, don’t attack other denominations online in social media venues because other churches and organizations can see that. Background checks are now more commonplace and those background checks involve a thorough investigation into social media profiles too. If you post in the heat of the moment and that post is derogatory in any way, your entire ministry could be in immediate danger.³⁹ Finally, pastors should be wary of attacking others and of what they post in general because ultimately the non-Christian world is watching Christians attack each other on social media. “Our Christian witness is compromised again and again by our social media actions. When we say or write scathing attacks on others,

³⁶ Thom S. Rainer, “Seven Warnings for Church Leaders Who Use Social Media,” *Thom S. Rainer* <http://thomrainer.com/2014/08/seven-warnings-church-leaders-use-social-media/> (accessed October 9, 2017).

³⁷ Rainer. “Seven Warnings for Church Leaders Who Use Social Media.”

³⁸ Rainer. “Seven Warnings for Church Leaders Who Use Social Media.”

³⁹ Rainer. “Seven Warnings for Church Leaders Who Use Social Media.”

non-believers see us as hypocritical, inconsistent, and unworthy of emulating.”⁴⁰ If you claim to be a man of God, yet your social media posts show a different side of you, your ministry will not be very effective.

But, if you’re a pastor who has committed a cringe-worthy crime online, fear not! There are ways for you to be effective in the social media world and even have the etiquette to boot! The first way to be effective on social media, as Ed Stetzer states in his article on the Exchange, is by not assuming social media to be a horrible thing. Don’t be scared of it. Stetzer explains, “Social media is like a phone, car, newspaper, magazine, hammer, weed whacker, or skillet. It can be used constructively or destructively, but it has no inherent morality. Blaming social media for being misused is misguided.”⁴¹ Know the dangers of what could happen if you misuse Facebook, but the venue itself is nothing to be afraid of. Facebook is not the anti-Christ; it is not the root of all evil. Facebook is a means to an end; a tool to reach others with the Gospel. Don’t be afraid of it, rather embrace it! Get on Facebook and let your light shine as a child of God! Stetzer explains further, “A pastor who is not on social media could be compared to a pastor not using the telephone, computers, or microphones when they preach. Social media gives each pastor the equivalent of their own TV station, radio station, and printing press. This is one area of our culture pastors cannot afford to sit out. The potential reach of social media is far more than the average pastor will personally minister to personally in their lifetimes.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Rainer. “Seven Warnings for Church Leaders Who Use Social Media.”

⁴¹ Ed Stetzer, “Five Mistakes Pastors Make on Social Media,” *Christianity Today: The Exchange* <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/november/five-mistakes-pastors-make-on-social-media.html> (accessed October 9, 2017).

⁴² Stetzer. “Five Mistakes Pastors Make on Social Media.”

Once you have immersed yourself in the world of social media, be consistent. Nothing is more frustrating for the people who wish to follow you when they find you on whichever medium and see nothing on your profile. Don't post once a month or twice a week, post often; every day if you are able. Your material doesn't have to be repetitive. "Pastors need not be involved in every social media platform in order to be effective in one or more. Consistency is a big factor. Logging on to Facebook every week or two or tweeting once a month is nearly pointless. People prefer engagement, which requires consistency."⁴³ Gen Z'ers, when they see you actively on social media, will interact with you. They will see it as an attempt at solidarity. Your youth groups will engage you once they find out their pastor is on Snapchat. Social media opens up the channels to those whom you once had difficulty relating to. Consistency is key to keeping those channels open.

Lastly, the Lord has blessed you with a sense of humor, so go ahead and show your sense of humor on social media! Of course, the warning is not to overdo it, but if it is clean and is understood correctly, be witty. Now, wittiness does not equal sarcasm. Pastors are quite capable of being clever without dishing out back-handed compliments or being crude. "It is obvious not all people have great senses of humor. Not everyone could be a stand-up comic. That does not mean, however, that pastors need to be dour. The plethora of memes, videos, and other people's humorous content available for sharing gives a lot of opportunity for making people laugh. Proverbs says, 'it is laughter, not complaining, that does good like medicine.'⁴⁴ Many believe that internet memes are a waste of time and energy, but to Generation Z, they are a means of communication. As a pastor, if you perfect your "meme game", Generation Z will respect you

⁴³ Stetzer. "Five Mistakes Pastors Make on Social Media."

⁴⁴ Stetzer "Five Mistakes Pastors Make on Social Media."

and find you to be relatable. If you can create “dank” memes with the best of Generation Z, they will be more apt to listen to what you have to say. Be bold. Let your memes be funny.

CHAPTER 6: GAMEPLAN FOR GEN Z

Now that the data has been introduced and brought forth and the reasons why Generation Z needs attention, here is my game plan for ministering to Generation Z through websites and social media. Again, these are only suggestions from me, you do not have to follow them. They are here as a tool for potential use. Do with them what you will.

Social Media

The world of social media does not have to be this big scary monster to us if we don't understand it. One major way you as a pastor could minister to Generation Z is by having them run your social media pages at your church. This would be done under your supervision of course. If you don't understand Facebook and Twitter and Snapchat, why would you stumble through trying to learn them and use them effectively when you have someone in your congregation who understands that world to do it for you?

This is a fantastic way to get your Gen Z'ers involved and make them feel important and vital to the ministry. Not only will they be able to post in a timely manner, but they will also know how to post things and where your post will be most effective at reaching people. Letting them have control over the church's social media accounts will clean them up because Generation Z knows how to make them sleek and pleasing to the eye.

Facebook

Thanks to Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook has become its own world. I challenge you to name a group or a person that doesn't have a Facebook page. A trend that I see developing recently among churches are Facebook devotions written by the pastor and then posted according to schedule on the church's main feed. With a short devotion of a few hundred words and an appropriate picture to match, the pastor can spread the Word of God all over Facebook reaching all sorts of people. Since Generation Z is a socially just cohort, it would benefit the pastor if those devotions were based on current national and world events. Both Christian and secular Generation Z are focused on worldview.

You don't have to stop at devotions either! Sermons can be uploaded just as easily for people who might have missed them a few weeks back. Some pastors have even used Facebook to livestream their entire service making it shareable to anyone interested in listening in.

Does your church wish to schedule an event and broadcast it? Facebook allows you to send mass invites for a small fee that will reach hundreds of other people in your area as a pastor. These events can range from church picnics to teen bible studies; from introductions to new sermon series to soccer camps and Vacation Bible School.

Facebook Messenger is also an effective way the pastor can reach out to his congregation members personally, including Generation Z. While working with a core group of college students attending Central Michigan University, I found it easiest to communicate with them via Messenger instead of through texting. If you do resort to texting, use it at your own discretion. Through personal experience, my college kids hated group texts. If I sent out a group text, they often ignored them. Messenger allowed me to connect to college students even if I didn't have their phone number. If you become friends with someone, you are automatically connected via

Facebook Messenger. Consider it a back channel that's always open for your Gen Z college student or high schooler to contact you.

Before moving on, pastors should uphold proper etiquette while on social media sites, especially Facebook. Here is a quick list of things he should stay away from. Doing so will establish credibility and not annoy Generation Z by clogging their news feed with garbage.

- "Vaguebooking" – Say what you are going to say in your post. Don't assume that everyone can read your mind as to what you're thinking.
- Chronic complaining – the rest of Facebook doesn't care about your personal problems.
- "If you want to...do this...who's with me?" posts" – Generation Z is leaving Facebook partly for this very reason. Stop it.
- Oversharing/Too Personal Posts – Again, say what you're going to say. Facebook is not a place for full disclosure. Keep personal things to yourself and off your Facebook page.
- Political posts – Generation Z has had enough of the political ads on Facebook. Besides, pastors should keep their political opinions to themselves.
- Language – Be professional. You're a pastor. There is no need for foul language in your Facebook posts.
- Requesting complete strangers – It's creepy and will turn off Generation Z from wanting anything to do with you.

Be classy and professional. If you send out a friend request and get rejected, accept it gracefully and move on. Play by the rules of Facebook and it can be an invaluable tool for your ministry.

YouTube

Perhaps the statistic that surprised me most was that Generation Z uses YouTube more than their Millennial counterparts. The pastor certainly can use this to his advantage much like Facebook. The pastor would certainly not be lacking anything if he developed a YouTube channel for his church. Online videos are a great place to start ministering to Generation Z online. A five-minute devotional, in which you broach specific scriptural topics or parse a few verses for consideration is a giant step in the right direction. Pay special attention, however, to the time taken to get through the devotion. Remember that Generation Z's attention span does not last that long, so keep it short. The online video doesn't have to solely be a devotion either. As a pastor, you could produce a few promotional videos which would introduce your church to the public. Viewers would get a chance to come into your church without having to go into your church awkwardly for the first time.

Snapchat

This next form of social media might be a hit or miss among your college kids because they might be passed the Snapchat phase, but for your teens and high school groups, Snapchat could be another open door for the pastor into Generation Z. While I don't believe the church could use Snapchat as a whole to minister to Generation Z, the pastor could use it to build a relationship with the various youth groups at his church. You might be thinking you can't relate to your high schoolers, but that all changes when you are on Snapchat. You'll become the coolest pastor in the world in their eyes.

Of course, as in all things, proceed with caution when using this app. You need to be crystal clear. Snaps can be saved and also can be used against you. If you come across as too forward or foul with college kids and high schoolers, you could end up forfeiting your entire ministry. Be advised.

The Church Website

The church website is your billboard in the internet world. It's how you advertise yourself to everyone else on the web; it's your identity. If you don't have a functioning church website, your church is either non-existent or it's stuck in the Stone Age. Here's what you should consider when developing a successful website for your congregation.

If you wish to evangelize and make Generation Z feel important and involved within the church, perhaps it would not be a bad idea if you, as the pastor, asked them to build the church website. Generation Z is a tech savvy generation, capable of achieving great things with technology. I'm fairly certain they will understand the internet better than you, their pastor.

A must-have for any pastor on the church website is a Contact Information section. Over my vicar year, when we had new visitors, we operated on the card system to keep track of them. The cards asked for basic information regarding your home church and address through which we could reach you. The challenge in this system was not in trying to get enough information, but in trying to keep track of all the cards. We, as a congregation, did not have a set-in-stone contact page where people could email us and ask us questions. Nor did we have a solid way of responding to their emails and questions. When re-designing the church website, I made sure that we had a contact info section for those visiting online. This section was placed strategically above the section about our pastor, near the bottom of the site page, so visitors had a chance to

peruse all our information. Once there, all the visitor had to do was provide an email address, add their name, and type a quick message to us. Once sent, the information would be delivered directly to our church secretary in an orderly fashion, so she would be able to take adequate stock of messages received from visitors.

Continuing on our list of vital and essential things required in a church's website, we move on now to the importance of the church calendar. Sure, you can send out a newsletter to every member in your congregation, but let's be honest, the only place it will end up is the garbage can. Generation Z will not want to keep track of a piece of paper with every important date listed in order. What they will appreciate is an online church calendar, which is updated frequently. If they want to know more about events taking place at their church, they will go to website and check the calendar. However, if you don't have said calendar, how can you expect them to show up for those events?

Lastly, consider your church's website as a hub. You can put links to other areas of the web and have it all connected to your site as a quick resource. For example, throughout my time site building for Faith Lutheran Church over vicar year, I made sure that the Central Michigan University group found a place on our website. I didn't stop there. I also made sure that I had a link to the "Faith Alive CMU Group" Facebook page. The link was established for any other students who did not know of us, so they could potentially click the link and become more informed by being redirected to our Facebook page and finding out more about our group and activities. It works! Even as I returned to Seminary, students attending CMU for the first time still requested to join the group via Facebook. As I was still the "admin" for the page, I was able to then pass their names along to my fellow co-workers, who then in turn met with them and got to know them. As far as I know, those students are still a part of the core of the group to this day.

Conquerors through Christ

As I mentioned earlier in the paper, Generation Z is in danger of all the addictions the internet has to offer; the biggest threat being pornography. Conquerors through Christ is an effective organization that shows God's grace to sinners caught in sexual sins. You can use them as a powerful resource when it comes to talking with your college kids and teenagers on otherwise taboo topics involving sex.

I recommend them because they do excellent work and their speakers are experienced and real in their conversations on these matters. Over my vicar year, I called them and told them I wanted to have a representative from Conquerors through Christ come over and speak with us. They provided handouts and a full PowerPoint presentation with Scripture backing up every reason for this type of ministry. Their message is simple: you are not alone in your struggle against sexual sin. Promote them on your website and provide links to their materials. They are an effective tool for you to minister to Generation Z.

Google Review and Yelp

Generation Z is extremely careful when it comes to trusting businesses and institutions. They want the best possible bang for their buck. How will they go about making sure they get it? They check out reviews on apps like Yelp and check to see how Google has rated them. That being said, make sure that you are accredited online by means of some form of advisor app. If Generation Z recognizes that you are legitimate, you increase the potential of them walking through your doors on Sunday morning or whenever your next event takes place.

Be Open

Generation Z is looking for a pastor they can trust. They are wary of fakes and want a pastor who genuinely cares about what they are going through. They don't want to be judged; they want to feel welcomed. They want to be a part of something great and yet do their own thing. I observed all of this through our Thursday night Bible Study for Campus Ministry over my Vicar year. Every Thursday night, we would order pizzas, the students would gather, and we would study a specific portion of God's Word and get to know each other as we spent that time in the Word together.

The whole area was lined with sofas, couches, and recliners with a huge open space in the middle. Throughout the Bible Study, everyone could sit and study in comfort and discuss openly without fear of judgment by the pastor or vicar. Quite often, the pastor and vicar would also disclose that they struggled with the same things the students were dealing with. Building relationships is key to ministering to Generation Z.

On occasion, I would have pasta dinners for the students some weekends over at my apartment. I would feed them, have a little devotion, and then spend time playing games with them and checking on how things were going with school and their personal lives.

With Generation Z, show that you care and they will open up to you. Be a voice and a beacon in their lives with God's Word in reality and also online. Be there for them when they need you and the walls will come down. Be Christ to them online where they are struggling with sin in a whole different world. Be there for them and they will trust you and open up to you.

CONCLUSION

Over past years, the church has struggled immensely with trying to minister to the Millennial generation. Numerous studies have given us conclusive evidence to work with, but the church is still failing to appeal to Millennials. I suggest it is time for pastors to look beyond ministering to Millennials. I'm not saying they should overlook them but look for opportunities beyond them. The focus is shifting toward Generation Z. If pastors spend too much time trying to appeal to the Millennial cohort, then it might very well happen that the pastor loses out on his chance to minister to Generation Z. Be mindful of the Millennials. Every soul is important to God. We have to be careful, however, to make sure not to miss out on the up and coming generational cohort.

“Generation Z is on the brink of the biggest mental health crisis in history,” reports Jean Twenge.⁴⁵ Who will be there to help them? Their doctors? They will give them some medication and perhaps talk to them about depression, but that's about it. How will they cope with everything Satan will throw at them in life? How will they find relief from the pain and suffering in the world around them? They can find true peace and comfort in the arms of their Savior. How will they know about him? Through their pastors. Generation Z will not come to us face-to-face; they are a timid and socially awkward generation. They feel uncomfortable in personal situations with other people. No, we must go to them through their smartphones, computers, and tablets.

⁴⁵ Twenge. “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?”

We must connect with the generation that struggles with connecting to other people, and then establish the one-on-one personal relationship with them.

Jesus sent his disciples and all of us out into “the harvest field”. We are to go out and share the saving message of what he has done for us all. We are to ease burdened consciences with the full forgiveness of Christ. We are to comfort those who mourn. We are to spread the Word of God to all nations, throughout the entire world. This command includes the world of the internet; this command includes the children of Generation Z.

Therefore, in order to effectively reach this particular generation, the pastor must have an engaging church website and have a strong, constant presence on social media along with the proper etiquette. The harvest is plentiful, so go and reap bountifully and faithfully

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Shakya, H. B.; Christakis, N. A. A New, More Rigorous Study Confirms: The More You Use Facebook, the Worse You Feel. *Harvard Business Review*.
2. Deyoung, K. Be Welcoming. Get A Good Website. *The Importance of a Good Church Website* 2011.
3. Rainer, T. S. *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap*; Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2005;
4. Yancey-Bragg, N. *USA Today*. November 8, 2017.
5. Howe, J. Eight Things Your Church Website Must Have. *Thom S. Rainer: Growing Healthy Churches. Together* 2016.
6. Stetzer, E. Five Mistakes Pastors Make on Social Media. *The Exchange* 2015.
7. Twenge, J. M. *The Atlantic*. 2017.
8. Twenge, J. M. How the Smartphone Affected an Entire Generation of Kids. *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/how-the-smartphone-affected-an-entire-generation-of-kids-82477>.
9. Twenge, J. M. *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us*; Atria Books, 2017; ISBN 978-1-5011-5198-9.
10. White, J. E. *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*; Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 2017;
11. Anderson, J. *Quartz*. September 19, 2017.
12. Camera, L. *U.S. News*. May 5, 2017.
13. Rainer, T. S. Seven Warnings for Church Leaders Who Use Social Media. *Thom S. Rainer: Growing Healthy Churches. Together* 2014.
14. Rettner, R. *Live Science - Health*. October 30, 2012.
- 15.

- Wallace, K. Teens Spend a “Mind-Boggling” 9 Hours a Day Using Media, Report Says. *CNN Health*. 16.
- The Center for Generational Kinetics*; 17.
- Twenge, J. M. The Decline in Adult Activities Among U.S. Adolescents, 1976-2016. *Child Development* 2017. 18.
- Meehan, M. *Forbes*. 19.
- Homayoun, A. *The New York Times*. June 7, 2017. 20.
- Rainer, T. S. *The Unchurched Next Door: Understanding Faith Stages as Keys to Sharing Your Faith*; Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003; 21.
- Zaremba, J. *NJ.com*. August 1, 2017. 22.
- Twenge, J. M. *TIME*. August 22, 2017.