

Pastoral Strategies for the Loneliness Epidemic of the Digital Generation

Joni Manumpak Parulian Gultom^{1)*}, Fredy Simanjuntak¹⁾

¹⁾ Sekolah Tinggi Teologi REAL, Indonesia

^{*)} Corresponding author: jonimanumpakgultom@gmail.com

Received: 06 January 2022/ Accepted: 17 March 2022/ Published: 07 April 2022

Citation (APA Styles): Gultom, Joni M. P., Simanjuntak, F. (2022). Pastoral Strategies for the Loneliness Epidemic of the Digital Generation. *Jurnal Jaffray*, 20(1), 17-37.
<http://doi.org/10.25278/jj.v20i1.640>

Abstract

In the frenzy of technological advances and the massive capabilities of social media, it turns out that there is a dangerous space that this generation often doesn't realize, namely loneliness. Since the discovery of internet technology, lonely sufferers have experienced a spike among digital people. They often feel lonely and seemingly asymptomatic. If pastoral stewardship does not address this problem, the digital generation is bound to feel lonely and depressed, which can lead to suicide. They experience a decreased quality of life despite being in the church and parental care. The question is, what are the causes and effects of this problem of loneliness? What practical steps can shepherds take? And what kind of pastoral strategy is there to tackle the loneliness epidemic ravaging the digital generation? The purpose of this study is [1] to describe the causes and adverse effects of loneliness problems. [2] Describe simply practical steps a shepherd can take in dealing with loneliness. [3] Describe her pastoral and stewardship strategies that a solution to the problem of loneliness among this digital generation. The method used in this research is Systematic Literature Review (SLR) for journal papers published in 2016-2021. Contribution of this research ; [1] For spiritual practitioners and educators who are directly related to recovery from the loneliness of the digital generation, [2] as a reference for pastoral teams and pastoral candidates in local church stewardship, [3] practical steps for parents in overcoming loneliness problems digital child they experienced.

Keywords: Pastoral, loneliness, digital generation, church, social media

Abstrak

Dalam hingar bingar kemajuan teknologi dan kemampuan massif media sosial ternyata terdapat ruang berbahaya yang seringkali tidak di sadari oleh generasi ini yaitu kesepian (*loneliness*). Sejak diketemukannya teknologi internet, jumlah penderita kesepian ini mengalami lonjakan hebat di kalangan generasi digital. Mereka sering merasa kesepian yang tidak dapat dihindari, dan seperti tanpa

gejala. Apabila penatalayanan pastoral tidak menyentuh problem kesepian ini, maka generasi digital terikat dengan perasaan kesepian, depresi, dan dapat berujung bunuh diri. Mereka mengalami penurunan kualitas hidup meskipun berada dalam gereja dan asuhan orang tua. Pertanyaannya adalah apakah penyebab dan dampak buruk dari problem kesepian ini? Langkah praktis gembala yang bagaimana dapat dilakukan? Dan strategi penggembalaan seperti apakah dalam mengatasi epidemic kesepian yang melanda generasi digital? Tujuan penelitian ini adalah [1] Menggambarkan penyebab dan dampak buruk masalah kesepian. [2] Mendeskripsikan langkah praktis gembala yang sederhana dalam mengatasi masalah kesepian. [3] Menjelaskan strategi penggembalaan dan penatalayannya yang dapat menjadi solusi untuk masalah kesepian di kalangan generasi digital ini. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah Systematic Literature Review (SLR) untuk makalah jurnal terbitan tahun 2016-2021. Kontribusi penelitian ini [1] Untuk praktisi rohani dan pendidik yang berkaitan langsung dengan pemulihan dari rasa kesepian generasi digital, [2] sebagai referensi untuk team pastoral dan calon gembala dalam penatalayanan gereja lokal, [3] langkah praktis bagi orang tua dalam mengatasi masalah kesepian anak digital yang mereka alami.

Kata-kata kunci: penggembalaan, kesepian, generasi digital, gereja, media sosial

Introduction

In this Digital Age, there have been significant changes in the lifestyle and community of the millennial generation. Humans whose physical instincts tend to have less intensity in shaping social life with personal activities, surfing in the media world without real people. Advances in artificial intelligence open up vast spaces in individual abilities and capacities without caring and paying attention to the surroundings. The positive impact globally does occur in the effectiveness and efficiency of almost all daily life activities in society. The digital generation formed about 20 years ago has become a bright, energetic generation that likes challenges, full of creative ideas and manoeuvring in global activities without limits and without stopping.¹ Start-up machines that are formed make them consumptive, imaginative and creative. Instinctively this opportunity is open for comprehensive open collaboration and the formation of a larger community. However, in the frenzy of technological progress and the massive capabilities of social media, it turns out that there is a dangerous gap that this generation is not aware of loneliness. They often feel a shortage at a particular time

¹ Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," *On the Horizon* 9, no. 5 (2001): 1.

and cannot be avoided even though supportive things surround them. Victims fall without any external symptoms because they have not recognised what is happening and what they are experiencing. The danger is loneliness, and this happens in almost all elements of society in the digital era.

In the study of *The Loneliness Epidemic*, loneliness is the pressure people feel when their social relationships do not meet their need for emotional closeness. It was something they realised; even with full awareness, they could call it lonely. Loneliness is the thirst that drives us to seek friendship or better fellowship. Because living connection shows normal human beings need others and seek steps for that need. Mettes study in the winter 2020 and spring of 2020 showed that 3 out of 10 Americans feel lonely at least once every day. Loneliness does not come alone but is often accompanied by varying degrees of pain. Those who are constantly lonely in the relatively long term can experience decreased health and depression.²

The authors have reviewed and synthesized extensively related literature among young adults associated with loneliness. Louise C. Hawkley and John T. Cacioppo related research on loneliness over the life span concluded that loneliness was highest in late adolescence, gradually decreasing during middle adulthood, and then increasing for late adulthood.³ Whilst, Matthew Pittman & Brandon Reich stated “Social media usage is growing at a remarkable rate predominantly among young adults, surprisingly in spite of having greater interconnectivity, the present young generation is lonelier than other groups and even loneliest ever.”⁴

Furthermore, Ellie Lisitsa et al, indicated that young adults were lonelier than older adults during the pandemic, showed a greater

² David Kinnaman, “31% of U.S. Adults Report Feeling Lonely At Least Some of Each Day,” *Barna Group*, last modified 2021, accessed December 27, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/mettes-lonely-americans/>.

³ Louise C. Hawkley and John T. Cacioppo, “Loneliness Matters: A Theoretical and Empirical Review of Consequences and Mechanisms,” *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 40, no. 2 (October 2010): 218–227.

⁴ Matthew Pittman and Brandon Reich, “Social Media and Loneliness: Why an Instagram Picture May Be Worth More than a Thousand Twitter Words,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 62 (2016): 155–167.

increase in social media use, and lower social support seeking.⁵ Another study conducted by Laura Deckx, Marjan van den Akker, Frank Buntinx & Mieke van Driel is emotional loneliness, linked to the absence of an intimate figure such as a partner or best friend, and social loneliness, related to deficits in a broader group of contacts or social network such as friends and colleagues.⁶

Research on loneliness over the life span concluded that loneliness was highest in late adolescence. Gradually decreasing during middle adulthood and then increasing in late adulthood.⁷ Adults ages 18–22 in 2018 were identified as the loneliest generation of Americans.⁸ The world wide web has enabled Churches to make use of exploring the ministry in a new way. This is a challenge for the church to respond to the responsibility to serve. Technology development undoubtedly has influenced how the church responds to its congregation. According to Reimann, new forms of communities are being formed through the digitalisation of society. Authors agree with Reimann that the church must understand the developing change we are going through and become part of it.⁹ Digital media, which has significantly changed the social values of society, is important to anticipate. As Widjaja et al. say, the church needs to capture and understand how Culture works. This is necessary to achieve a cultural paradigm with the message of the Gospel and the challenges facing the church today.¹⁰ Furthermore, Adebayo explained that the church should embrace the use of the Internet and

⁵ Ellie Lisitsa et al., “Loneliness Among Young Adults During COVID-19 Pandemic: The Mediational Roles of Social Media Use and Social Support Seeking,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 39, no. 8 (2020): 708–726.

⁶ Laura Deckx et al., “A Systematic Literature Review on the Association between Loneliness and Coping Strategies,” *Psychology, Health & Medicine* 23, no. 8 (September 2018): 899–916.

⁷ Louise C. Hawkey and John T. Cacioppo, “Loneliness Matters: A Theoretical and Empirical Review of Consequences and Mechanisms.”

⁸ *Cigna U.S. Loneliness Index* (New York, 2018). Retrieved from https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/docs/IndexReport_1524069371598-173525450.pdf

⁹ Ralf Peter Reimann, “Uncharted Territories: The Challenges of Digitalization and Social Media for Church and Society,” *The Ecumenical Review* 69, no. 1 (March 2017): 67–79.

¹⁰ Fransiskus Irwan Widjaja, Fredy Simanjuntak, and Noh Ibrahim Boiliu, “Repositioning Mission in Postmodern Culture,” in *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Education, Society, Economy, Humanity and Environment (ICESHE 2019)* (Paris, France: Atlantis Press, 2020).

other technological tools in their pastoral ministry. The traditional physical is a pastoral ministry that continues as much as possible. Pastors should consider making Internet ministry an alternative ministry and supplementary to the conventional ways of pastoral ministry.

This internet pastoral ministry, otherwise referred to as pastoral psychology, aims to help persons with their religious and non-religious challenges through a spiritual framework of interdisciplinary work of theology and human/social sciences. Researchers at the University of Copenhagen and their international staff say people under 30 experienced the highest levels of loneliness and fear during the COVID-19 blockade. Fear of losing a job, worrying about loved ones getting sick, and not seeing each other on their own have become widespread in their aftermath. It is not only the general public who feel this way, but they can attack church members and spiritual practitioners to become an epidemic. Loneliness is an ongoing problem among spiritual practitioners and has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its impact on the life and work of the church is burdening personal life, insecurity.¹¹

This research is essential considering the development of the loneliness epidemic, and the number of sufferers continues to grow. This problem has experienced a significant spike since the discovery of internet technology with the development of great social media. The digital generation had shown symptoms of loneliness before the COVID-19 pandemic. All the difficulties exacerbated it during the time COVID-19 occurred. High rates of depression with high suicide rates are a frightening spectre among today's digital generation. If the church and pastoral care do not touch the side of life and become a solution, the digital age cannot escape the constant and chronic feeling of loneliness for a relatively long period. This generation experienced declining levels of mental health and damaged quality of life despite being in church and parental care. The practice and growth of faith are severely stunted. The story of the commitment of those who identify as Christian has decreased. Spiritual and social life such as worship, service, and the community began to dim and disappear. All of these levels of decline are highly dependent on how often or how significant the level of loneliness problems they face is.

¹¹ Christian Standard, "An Antidote to Loneliness' for Pastors," *Christianstandard.Com*, last modified 2021, accessed December 28, 2021, <https://christianstandard.com/2021/03/an-antidote-to-loneliness-for-pastors/>.

What are the causes and effects of this problem of loneliness? What theories related to loneliness in the era of the digital generation? What is the pastoral strategy for serving the lonely in the digital era? What pastoral strategies are appropriate for the digital age based on Bible findings? The objectives of this study are to [1] Explain the causes of loneliness experienced by the younger generation in the digital era with a theoretical basis regarding loneliness, [2] Describe pastoral strategies for serving lonely youth in the digital age, [3] Explaining pastoral strategies that are appropriate and can be used in the digital age following biblical truth. The research method is descriptive qualitative. Contribution of this research; [1] For spiritual practitioners and educators who are directly related to recovery from the loneliness of the digital generation, [2] as a reference for pastoral teams and pastoral candidates in local church stewardship, [3] practical steps for parents in overcoming loneliness problems digital child they experienced.

Theory

Loneliness is a subjective negative experience resulting from inadequate meaningful connections.¹² Loneliness, however, is usually defined subjectively as a painfully experienced absence of social contact, belongingness, or a sense of isolation.¹³ Moreover, loneliness is an emotional state, reflecting the subjective experience of suffering from social isolation.¹⁴ In addition to the previous definitions above, Sadler and Johnson's define: loneliness is an experience involving a total and often acute feeling that constitutes a distinct form of self-awareness of signaling a break in the basic network of the relational reality of self-world.¹⁵ So it can be said, loneliness is a social problem that refers to the mental or emotional state of people.

There has been increasing interest in digital tools as a means of social connection both informally to stay socially connected and in more

¹² Linda Fried et al., "A Unified Approach to Loneliness," *The Lancet* 395, no. 10218 (January 2020): 114.

¹³ Raheel Mushtaq et al., "Relationship Between Loneliness, Psychiatric Disorders and Physical Health ? A Review on the Psychological Aspects of Loneliness," *JOURNAL OF CLINICAL AND DIAGNOSTIC RESEARCH* 8, no. 9 (2014): 1-4.

¹⁴ Robert S. Weiss, "Reflections on the Present State of Loneliness Research," *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* 2, no. 2 (1987): 1-16.

¹⁵ W. A. Sadler and Jr T. B. Johnson, *From Loneliness to Anomia in The Anatomy of Loneliness*, ed. J. Hartog, J. R. Audy, and Y. A. Cohen (New York: International University Press, 1980). 34-64.

formalized digital interventions.¹⁶ digital technology consists of more than just artefacts or technological objects that are used for information gathering purposes as it affects us on an existential level. The availability of advanced technology is therefore reshaping what it means to be human.¹⁷ Technology has its own set of values and is transforming the very nature of being human as it impacts the way we think about ourselves. Technology is no longer a luxury, but forms part of what is needed for survival.¹⁸

The changing global media environment is characterized by the coexistence and co-evolution of media forms, the gradual metamorphosis of new media forms from old ones and the challenges brought about by the adoption of new media.¹⁹ In order to overcome the loneliness problem in the era, The Church can utilize digital technology to form communities in the digital age for the purposes of spiritual formation, ethical decision-making, theological training and religious leadership.²⁰ Several necessary studies were made regarding the loneliness epidemic and the digital generation. Neal's research was published to look at the involvement of religion related to loneliness and health, how significant the relationship of the impact of religion that affects it. Is it an immense faith emotional support from believers to make a person's person not lonely and tend to enjoy better health.²¹ While Verena, Nancy, Corey et al. looked at the relationship between social isolation and loneliness, the results showed that social isolation and loneliness could occur due to the significant impact of social support gaps, with the possibility of increasing psychological distress? In addition, the lonely group was more

¹⁶ Julianne Holt-Lunstad, "Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors: The Power of Social Connection in Prevention," *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* 15, no. 5 (September 2021): 567–573.

¹⁷ Jan-Albert Van den Berg, "Theoretical Signposts for Tracing Spirituality within the Fluid Decision-Making of a Mobile Virtual Reality," *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 68, no. 2 (February 2012).

¹⁸ Elaine Graham, "Being, Making and Imagining: Toward a Practical Theology of Technology," *Culture and Religion* 10, no. 2 (July 2009): 221–236.

¹⁹ AN Nwammuo, "Mediamorphosis: Analyzing the Convergence of Digital Media Forms alongside African Traditional Media," *African Research Review* 5, no. 2 (2011): 115–125.

²⁰ Anita L. Cloete, "Living in a Digital Culture: The Need for Theological Reflection," *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (February 2015).

²¹ Neal Krause, "Assessing the Relationships among Religiousness, Loneliness, and Health," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 38, no. 3 (2016): 278.

likely to experience psychological pain than others.²² Beller and Wagner investigated the supposed synergistic effect of loneliness and social isolation on health by predicting mortality rates on the impact of loneliness and social isolation. The higher the social isolation, the greater the impact of loneliness on death, and the higher the loneliness, the greater the impact of social isolation.²³ Meanwhile, Sandra and Christianity explained, even though the digital generation is in urban crowds, feelings of loneliness can still occur in teenagers. Relationships with friends and parents can be an indicator of the cause of youth loneliness. From the several studies above, no study has discussed the pastoral team's strategy in church stewardship against the feelings of loneliness of this digital generation. Pastoral steps and actions are needed with the pastoral team personally, structurally, and in the community both physically and virtually in dealing with the loneliness epidemic of this digital generation.

Method

This study uses a systematic literature review method by synthesizing research on loneliness, its causes and impacts on the digital generation. Data retrieval is done through internet surfing from google scholars, sciencedirect.com. The data comes from various international journals that discuss how to overcome loneliness. The data used comes from journal papers published in 2016-2021. Furthermore, reading resources are divided into small groups of loneliness and digital generation; pastoral care and loneliness.

Result and Discussion

Loneliness is a mental disorder of a person that social developments can cause. The response occurs in the formation of self by autonomizing and building an identity that goes out of the family scope to mingle with peers in an increasingly broad physical and virtual world. But there is self-synchronization, rejection, and failure in roles.

²² Verena H. Menec et al., "Examining Social Isolation and Loneliness in Combination in Relation to Social Support and Psychological Distress Using Canadian Longitudinal Study of Aging (CLSA) Data," *PLOS ONE* (2020): 1.

²³ J Beller and A. Wagner, "Loneliness, Social Isolation, Their Synergistic Interaction, and Mortality.," *APA PsycArticles* 37, no. 9 (2018): 808–813.

According to psychologists, loneliness is an unpleasant subjective experience that occurs when a person does not reach the desired level of social contact

Causes and Impacts of Loneliness on the Digital Generation

Triggers may include moving away from home, divorce, illness, death of a spouse, friend, or relative, becoming a parent, moving away from home, starting a new job.²⁴ Whilst, The risk factors associated with loneliness include health including physical, mental, cognitive health; and brain, biology, and genetics; and socio-environmental factors including digital communication; and the workplace.²⁵ So based on the opinion above, the author emphasizes that loneliness is caused by the intensity of social relationships that are expected to be inconsistent with reality, lack of association, conflict in family relationships, and health problems. A strategy that may be relevant in a digital context is the use of the internet as an alternative means of pastoral ministry.²⁶

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that there are at least five leading causes of loneliness in the Digital Generation. The first is that although their interest is high in solidarity with others, unity in hobbies, and freedom of expression in ideas and creations, psychologically, this generation needs a central spiritual figure who can be a role model and direct them in the digital world. The second thing is a problematic interaction or commonly referred to as hyperconnected.

Next, the third part is the social pressures faced. Community and communication are very different between physical and virtual. Global values that are freely influenced without boundaries and clarity of value create doubts and worries. The fourth is the use of social media itself. The digital generation cannot balance the life of the virtual world with the real physical world. The ability of logic and the growth of reason that is so fast is not accompanied by a strong mentality and spiritual strength.

²⁴ Michelle H. Lim, Robert Eres, and Shradha Vasan, "Understanding Loneliness in the Twenty-First Century: An Update on Correlates, Risk Factors, and Potential Solutions," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 55, no. 7 (July 2020): 793–810.

²⁵ Liesl M. Heinrich and Eleonora Gullone, "The Clinical Significance of Loneliness: A Literature Review," *Clinical Psychology Review* 26, no. 6 (October 2006): 695–718.

²⁶ Adebayo Ola Afolaranm, "Towards the Possibility of Internet Ministry as an Alternative Pastoral Ministry in Nigeria during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *International Journal of Information Technology and Language Studies* 4, no. 2 (2020): 12–26.

And the last cause of loneliness is a crisis of self-confidence; the digital generation finds it difficult to express themselves freely without being haunted by worries and fears. This generation has lost the elements of normal developmental psychology that were generally experienced by the previous generation. The human element as a social and religious being with acts of physical gathering, sharing actual and equal values with fellow human beings, and aspects of privacy in worshipping God with transcendent and immanent elements are getting dimmer.

The Bible and Teaching of the Digital Generation: Anticipating Loneliness

Pastors can take several personal approaches in ministry so that this digital generation does not experience prolonged loneliness. Literacy in God's Word as the primary solution to the problem of loneliness has become an urgent matter. There are a few things to pay attention to it. Tulgan's article uncovers five keys that makeup Generation Z, first that social media is their future. Parents, in particular, have the responsibility to control every response and action they take in cyberspace. Second, it is essential to bring this generation into contact with others in physical or face-to-face spaces. Third, pay close attention to skill gaps. This generation seeks to transfer skills such as interpersonal communication, culture at work, critical thinking, and technical skills that require a lot of effort. Fourth, considering the global thought that enters and is adapted to local realities. This generation can easily communicate without borders through cyberspace, with less geographical exploration. The five stimuli to infinite diversity. On the other hand, openness and acceptance of differences makes it difficult for Generation Z to define themselves.²⁷

However, the researcher provides an additional alternative solution that the best step to get out of loneliness is the shepherd leading this generation to improve interactions with oneself first with the teachings in the Bible. There are several solutions [1]. Take a simple time to rest, relax with God. Not an act of meditation or some yoga but taking the time to do nothing, just sitting still, contemplating spiritually and uniting with God in an approach of faith (Psalm 62:1.5; 116:7; Proverbs 14:30; Ecclesiastes 4:6; Isaiah 7:4, 30:15, 38:15; 1 Peter 4:7). The critical key

²⁷ Bruce Tulgan, "Meet Generation Z: The Second Generation within the Giant 'Millennial' Cohort," *RainmakerThinking*, last modified 2013, accessed January 1, 2022, <https://grupespсихотерапija.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Gen-Z-Whitepaper.pdf>.

is praying and looking back at the Word as the best solution for strength. [2] Guide them to become aware physically. Realize yourself honestly in God's grace. An attitude of trust by seeing and evaluating the five senses and their functions in simple daily activities. It is like seeing the natural beauty of God's creation (Psalm 104:16-18, 24, 92:12, Genesis 1, 2). Other things like giving thanks in praise while playing music and dancing (Psalm 22:3, 34:1-2, 44:8, 51:15; Psalm 66, 71, 100:4; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Or in simple terms, enjoying food and drink freely without worrying thoughts (Ecclesiastes 4:24, 3:13, 18; 8:15, 9:17), even giving a high meaning to be able to spend the night sleeping soundly (Job 4:12-13, 33:15-18; Isaiah 29:10; Romans 11:8). [3] Bringing this generation to appreciate the breath of life without technology. They must be conscious of being able to articulate the functions and roles of the body daily, able to take deliberate action about appreciating every moment that occurs (Isaiah 57:16; Psalm 34:12; 119:5; 133:3; Ecclesiastes 2:3; Romans 14: 8; Galatians 2:19-20; Ephesians 2:10, 5:2; Philippians 1:27; 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 4:11, 5:10). [4] Giving understanding to them to learn to be aware of the essential thoughts and feelings. Some moments open from the past without being fought but only reminiscing. Any form of memory can connect something and provide a meaningful lesson without feeling disappointed with yourself (Psalm 90; Hebrews 10:32). That's why we can trust churches, pastors, ministers and families and even the closest community about the meaning of true friendship to this digital generation. There are some additional steps required to get there, such as showing friendliness and comfort, investing time to get to know them regardless of being single or already married, and so on. We can explicitly promote deep friendship through media creativity or fellowship. Avoid projects in lonely groups of people or having them watched uninvited, but we should also listen when people are ready to say something.

Digital Expression Preferences; Pastoral Stewardship Room

The preference for digital expression as a medium of spiritual communication needs to be developed in various adaptive forms to the needs of digital natives. The pastor can use good cooperation in developing technology to achieve particular goals in this digital generation. Initial goals may differ significantly across generations, such as parents using technology to keep in touch with their children. Yet

children use it to improve relationships with their peers as they try to escape the clutches of their parents or caregivers. Technology, however, is not a neutral instrument. Many social actors are pursuing desired goals through this medium. Intrinsic usage rules govern the technology platform, for example, in Twitter for short-term communication. The use of email, phone calls, or blogs may be for long-term or more intense contact.

Another still being maintained is that face-to-face communication is more intimate than phone calls or messages. The Pastoral Team must be aware of the rules governing the use of technology and be mindful of the choice of technology media due to generational differences. It is related to the digital generation's distinctive preference for expression. The ultimate goal of shepherding is not just dealing with loneliness but aiming at holiness, love for others, friendliness and human peace. Generally, when describing someone as lonely, the stereotype exists like an older man living alone and rarely seeing anyone. Meanwhile, data released by the BBC news agency shows that the highest level of loneliness lies in digital natives aged 16-24 years. The modern life they live in can't prevent loneliness from happening. Nearly 40% said they felt lonely very often. But the factor that causes the high number is related to their personality that 41% of them believe that loneliness is positive. It concluded that the digital generation does not have a clear standard and understanding of harmful loneliness acts.

Pastoral ministry is self-sacrifice. It must be able to survive in all processes and circumstances. According to Gultom, religious stewardship is effective when the shepherd can position himself as God's family in a bond of sincerity and pure love. Some of the essential things in the interaction relate to (1) what we think, (2) what we say, and (3) what we do with the digital generation regarding God's vision and mission. The deeper the attention and the depth of communication in the face-to-face process, the more significant the impact of transferable leadership.

Pastors and pastoral teams should be pioneers and direct breakthroughs in anticipating this loneliness epidemic in the younger generation in the existing local church. In the space of religion and faith-building, which is the only one mandated by God through the church, the pastor as the primary leader is obliged to take responsibility and bring the digital generation out of this epidemic of loneliness. There are

several important reasons, and firstly pastors have lost the main focus of ministry in the digital age. Mariani and Budiatman said it was a challenge for pastors to rethink their model of pastoral ministry. It is due to the vigilance of being tempted to become popular preachers as spiritual community leaders with the trap of leading themselves (Ezekiel 34:2) and being caught up in the temptation to “seek the Name” (John 11:4). The second has to do with the actions of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. As a church leader, the pastor maintains the conditions for the existence of a dynamic institution that can continue to grow and develop. Its development this time involves changes in building architecture, improving the quality of infrastructure, organizational restructuring, doctrinal reform, and includes the church's efforts to modernize and contextualize its pastoral model and its ministry to the digital generation. And the last thing that is why pastors are directly related to this generation is that the world of technology has separated the spiritual and stewardship elements. Pastors must be able to guide progress in the world of technology to align spiritual growth into new service segments when dealing with the paradigm of understanding generations that are considered skewed.²⁸

Some of the steps and breakthroughs that can take are: [1] The pastor and pastoral team are committed to being the primary leader in personal recovery at all times. It has become necessary and urgent to be done in the era of comprehensive and global church ministry. Routine services without direction, vision and mission without practice and church building that is physical and not human must be corrected immediately. Shepherds must be the answer to every need and challenge of the spiritual life of the digital generation, both in the physical space and especially in the digital area. [2] Activate pastoral counselling services that specifically focus on digital youth. Not only will it periodically occur in physical play, but the same quality can obtain the same qin massive virtual space. [3] Minimize the generation gap. If the pastoral team cannot bridge the generation gap, it creates an empty and rigid space that hinders verbal communication and spiritual transfer. The digital generation itself cannot adapt communication and personal approach to the older generation. Still, the pastoral team can start by

²⁸ JMP Gultom, “Penggembalaan Yang Efektif Bagi Generasi Milenial Di Era Society 5. 0,” *Shiftkey* 11, no. 2 (2021): 101.

trying to humble themselves-become identical to them. The philosophical principle of moving from top to bottom is powerful in the stewards of God's church in outreaching the digital generation. [4] Make God's friends and co-workers digital age, not helpers or small children. The digital people are very close to openness that previous generations have never existed. It is undoubtedly influenced by the vast and unlimited virtual space and social media activities. But all of these things fade when it comes to the church and pastoral care. Jesus said that Abraham was God's friend (James 2:33). A sincere and pure friendship must be able to be expressed in a physical encounter, and that continues in virtual communication.

Attention Investment: Pastoral Priority to the Digital Generation.

The Great Commandment states that you should love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:39-40; Mark 12:33; Luke 10:25-28). With all its most simple forms of stewardship, the church should have been a solution to be able to anticipate feelings of loneliness. Jesus stated that righteous actions toward God would lead to virtuous actions toward others. Like Jesus, who never left believers alone but gave the Holy Spirit a true comforter and helper in all ages (John 14:15-31, 16:4a-15). Apart from the Sunday Worship meeting, Church stewards also open spaces for in-person meetings such as Bible Study classes, prayer, and mid-week worship services. Likewise, cell groups or outbound community services such as visits and fellowships have at least anticipated a lonely gap in God's congregation. However, what happens is that all forms of activity with a large number of meetings only end up with positive psychological values. The church and its stewardship look excellent and valuable to the congregation. But over time, the number of services may remain available, but the quality of spiritual growth between generations is problematic.

The pastor's step in paying attention to digital children is to encourage them to join small groups or cell communities. It is certainly not easy, but it has become the leading solution to form them in a small spiritual family, which copies Panakmota's idea of network church.²⁹ Of course, the first step that can take is by maintaining close relationships with them. Building relationships with this generation can also be a

²⁹ Gerardus Hadian Panamokta, "Menuju Gereja Terjaring (Networked Church)," *Jurnal Teologi* 7, no. 1 (2018): 9.

solution to block the unwitting feelings of loneliness from shepherds. Yet often, so much pastoral stewardship tends to have nothing to do with the care and burden of this digital generation. They are afraid of being criticized and judged by others who are much more favourable than them. Pastors and pastoral teams must set aside personal needs to give warm, deep and targeted attention. Reviewing Daniel Ronda's article in *3 Steps of Pastoral Leadership in Technological Disruption*, [1] an educational approach where pastors are required to develop Christian ethical guidelines in using social media and encourage responsible communities to avoid sharing harmful content. [2] The benefit-principal method uses technological advances that can be a solution in various ways. The Church provides resources, tools and opportunities in generational outreach. [3] The humanistic approach that this generation is a human being who must serve with love.³⁰ Shepherds must be prepared to spend more time with a generation that needs leadership, whether we need them or not. Failure to pay the best possible time and attention can get in the way of tangible steps towards a healthy, quality relationship.

The second thing the shepherd must be able to forget in the past. Pastors and pastoral teams cannot be separated from memories, which, although small, can be natural or imaginary—stories of disappointing friendships or relationships that went wrong. The third thing the shepherd understands is function and position. Sometimes they shy away from building friendships in their church because of their unique place in the congregation. There are reasons for spending time, being away from family or reducing meeting time, and evangelism or discipleship activities. Fourth, some pastors are too tired to build meaningful friendships after leading their teams and fulfilling the responsibilities that come with ministry. The fact that not a few shepherds must survive on their own makes them seem isolated and vulnerable. The fifth thing is that a quality connection requires intention and persistence.

The next thing is that pastoral care in the long term inevitably costs a lot. The spiritual ethos of Christian service implies excellent sacrifice. The cost of discipleship of the digital generation becomes a model case of an unexpected magnitude, so many wrong thoughts to doubt the post of financial expenditure there. Discipleship and mentoring spend a lot of time understanding their basic needs. And the last part is pastors build friendships by opening up opportunities for the

³⁰ Daniel Ronda, "Kepemimpinan Kristen Di Era Disrupsi Teknologi," *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat* 3, no. 1 (2019): 5-7.

digital generation to join in the ministry. An important strategy is for pastors to open and provide the best pulpit, stage and time for them. Allow this generation to serve from an early age. For this generation to take part optimally, the Shepherd opens comprehensive classes for service preparation classes, discipleship classes (mentoring), leadership classes, etc. Include them specifically in forming mentality and spiritual sensitivity in prayer activities and evangelistic mission classes. The collaboration shown here leads to a shared ministry between the pastoral team and the digital generation. The pastor can collaborate with his children on the pulpit to serve God together. Show deep spiritual cooperation despite different ages, have a high degree of unity and show mutual respect. But the essential collaboration is cooperation to win souls. The pastoral team provides an example and full support in motivating and strengthening the digital generation's call to missionary work.³¹

Pastoral's Multidimensional Ability in the Digital Age

Multidimensional communication skills are becoming increasingly important—combining technology integration and hybrid work culture to adapt to the physical and virtual world together. Pastors need to move effectively in these two spaces to serve the digital generation to the fullest. These three multidimensional executive sections talk about intellectual, social and digital skills. Academic skills are essential in various matters concerning spiritual development and contemporary response. Sitepu stated that leadership is capable of continuing to apologetics with the outside world and the challenges of heretical teachings, as well as spiritual growth born of renewal and contemporary hermeneutics.³² While social skills refer to the writings of Cincala and Chase, that shepherds with social skills lead to a servant leadership model (Matthew 20: 26, 27). Jesus taught His 12 disciples about being the leader of one's group or individual, not only humanly but also from God's point of view. The vital point that must hold is the heart of the servant. The glory is only for God, leading with a heart of service. Servant

³¹ Gultom, "Penggembalaan Yang Efektif Bagi Generasi Milenial Di Era Society 5.0." : 102

³² Nathanael Sitepu, "Relasi Intelektualitas Dan Spiritualitas Dalam Berapologetika: Suatu Tinjauan Injili," *VOX DEI: Jurnal Teologi dan Pastoral* 1, no. 2 (2020): 122-123.

leadership is an honour built on the value of the sacrifice of Jesus, who bore the sins and shame of humanity on the cross.³³

While shepherds have digital skills is a necessity in the development of technology. Shepherds are not required to be technology experts. Still, the reflection of their ministry can demonstrate resilience, coexistence, and hope as key theological components to navigate the uncharted realm of the digital era.³⁴ The understanding is that shepherds can adapt to substantial changes in all aspects of life as a result of the negative impact of the digital era. Another critical factor is how leaders adjust their emotional rhythm because being in two worlds can be exhausting. Leaders face different member characters in real and digital worlds. If leaders cannot cope with their emotions, the rhythm of work is broken, and social and professional relationships between leaders and members weaken. Virtual spaces can help with assignments, services, and communication but cannot replace physical fun. Mental health issues are essential to consider, especially loneliness and isolation. Lack of interaction makes people lonely easily. Multidimensional leadership is a solution and a need for shepherding the digital era that is open to continuous renewal and growth.

Pastoral Counseling in Virtual Space

Most digital kids generally want to avoid long-form expressions. Instead, they prefer communication that can deliver more concise and virtually. The consideration also influences digital expression preferences that this generation discusses and can express themselves more boldly through messages than face-to-face conversations. The form of pastoral relationship fosters pastoral cohesion with the digital generation. The patterns that reinforce this cohesion are more evident when this generation is in their homes, either with their families or alone. The use of technology plays an essential role in creating continuous connections that make steady and ongoing interactions. Pastors initiated counselling service rooms and other spiritual services in virtual spaces. Not only in social media but also with YouTube, Instagram and Facebook channels and other applications. Churches can

³³ Petr Cincala and Jerry Chase, "Servant Leadership and Church Health and Growth," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 12, no. 1 (2018): 82.

³⁴ Antje Jackelén, "Technology, Theology, and Spirituality in the Digital Age," *Zygon* 56, no. 1 (2021): 6.

collaborate with Christian influencers on media room content. This element of flexibility is key to ensuring that Christian influencers stay connected to this generation without feeling rigid and formal. Recent presentations and all forms of expression can provide a different atmosphere. Christianity is an uplifting and technology-friendly science that helps people to thrive. Anything that relieves suffering and is suitable for the most vulnerable is a sign from God's realm. If engineering serves this purpose, it makes a meaningful and responsible change reflecting deep human values. The Church is responsible for responding to other people, words, glances, gestures, emotions, needs, or demands. The digital world and social media have become a new communication pattern that cannot be separated from the life of the digital generation. All of this can use to help and anticipate their loneliness.

Conclusion

Pastoring in the digital era must have a strategy to answer the loneliness problem experienced by this digital generation. The first thing is faith which comes from the Bible and its practice as a source of answers to the problem of loneliness problems. The pastoral team provides continuous and continuous teaching, ministry, and preaching, both physically and virtually. The second thing is in the form of digital expression preferences. The pastoral team is a breakthrough in the personal recovery of generations by activating counseling services that focus on digital youth. The next is to reduce the generation gap by making them friends and co-workers of God both onsite and online. The third thing is prioritizing the investment of shepherding services to the Digital Generation in a massive and structured manner. And the fourth is the urgency of multidimensional shepherd leadership abilities. The pastoral team should have high intellectual capability, social, and digital capacity. One of them is by holding pastoral counseling in physical and virtual spaces. This study recommends quantitative research to measure how much influence the herding strategy has on the symptoms of loneliness experienced by this digital generation.

Bibliography

Afolaranm, Adebayo Ola. "Towards the Possibility of Internet Ministry as an Alternative Pastoral Ministry in Nigeria during the COVID-

- 19 Pandemic.” *International Journal of Information Technology and Language Studies* 4, no. 2 (2020): 12–26.
- Beller, J, and A. Wagner. “Loneliness, Social Isolation, Their Synergistic Interaction, and Mortality.” *APA PsycArticles* 37, no. 9 (2018): 808–813. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hea0000605>
- Cigna U.S. *Loneliness Index*. New York, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/docs/IndexReport_1524069371598-173525450.pdf.
- Cincala, Petr, and Jerry Chase. “Servant Leadership and Church Health and Growth.” *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 12, no. 1 (2018): 81–89. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1406&context=jacl>.
- Cloete, Anita L. “Living in a Digital Culture: The Need for Theological Reflection.” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (February 2015): 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i2.2073>
- Deckx, Laura, Marjan van den Akker, Frank Buntinx, and Mieke van Driel. “A Systematic Literature Review on the Association between Loneliness and Coping Strategies.” *Psychology, Health & Medicine* 23, no. 8 (September 2018): 899–916. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2018.1446096>
- Fried, Linda, Thomas Prohaska, Vanessa Burholt, Annette Burns, Jeannette Golden, Louise Hawkey, Brian Lawlor, et al. “A Unified Approach to Loneliness.” *The Lancet* 395, no. 10218 (January 2020): 114. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(19\)32533-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(19)32533-4)
- Graham, Elaine. “Being, Making and Imagining: Toward a Practical Theology of Technology.” *Culture and Religion* 10, no. 2 (July 2009): 221–236. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610903077588>
- Gultom, JMP. “Penggembalaan Yang Efektif Bagi Generasi Milenial Di Era Society 5. 0.” *Shiftkey* 11, no. 2 (2021): 95–108. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/5puqj>
- Hawkey, Louise C., and John T. Cacioppo. “Loneliness Matters: A Theoretical and Empirical Review of Consequences and Mechanisms.” *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 40, no. 2 (October 2010): 218–227. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-010-9210-8>
- Heinrich, Liesl M., and Eleonora Gullone. “The Clinical Significance of Loneliness: A Literature Review.” *Clinical Psychology Review* 26, no. 6 (October 2006): 695–718. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2006.04.002>
- Holt-Lunstad, Julianne. “Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors: The Power of Social Connection in Prevention.” *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* 15, no. 5 (September 2021): 567–573.

- Jackelén, Antje. "Technology, Theology, and Spirituality in the Digital Age." *Zygon* 56, no. 1 (2021): 6–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12682>
- Kinnaman, David. "31% of U.S. Adults Report Feeling Lonely At Least Some of Each Day." *Barna Group*. Last modified 2021. Accessed December 27, 2021. <https://www.barna.com/research/mettes-lonely-americans/>.
- Krause, Neal. "Assessing the Relationships among Religiousness, Loneliness, and Health." *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 38, no. 3 (2016): 278–300. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15736121-12341330>
- Lim, Michelle H., Robert Eres, and Shradha Vasani. "Understanding Loneliness in the Twenty-First Century: An Update on Correlates, Risk Factors, and Potential Solutions." *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 55, no. 7 (July 2020): 793–810.
- Lisitsa, Ellie, Katherine S. Benjamin, Sarah K. Chun, Jordan Skalisky, Lauren E. Hammond, and Amy H. Mezulis. "Loneliness Among Young Adults During COVID-19 Pandemic: The Mediation Roles of Social Media Use and Social Support Seeking." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 39, no. 8 (2020): 708–726. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2020.39.8.708>
- Menec, Verena H., Nancy E. Newall, Corey S. Mackenzie, Shahin Shooshtari, and Scott Nowicki. "Examining Social Isolation and Loneliness in Combination in Relation to Social Support and Psychological Distress Using Canadian Longitudinal Study of Aging (CLSA) Data." *PLOS ONE* (2020): 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0230673>
- Mushtaq, Raheel, Sheikh Shoib, Tabindah Shah, and Sahil Mushtaq. "Relationship Between Loneliness, Psychiatric Disorders and Physical Health? A Review on the Psychological Aspects of Loneliness." *Journal Of Clinical and Diagnostic Research* 8, no. 9 (2014): 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.7860/jcdr/2014/10077.4828>
- Nwammuo, AN. "Mediamorphosis: Analyzing the Convergence of Digital Media Forms alongside African Traditional Media." *African Research Review* 5, no. 2 (2011): 115–125. <https://doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.v5i2.67309>
- Panamokta, Gerardus Hadian. "Menuju Gereja Terjaring (Networked Church)." *Jurnal Teologi* 7, no. 1 (2018): 9–30.
- Pittman, Matthew, and Brandon Reich. "Social Media and Loneliness: Why an Instagram Picture May Be Worth More than a Thousand Twitter Words." *Computers in Human Behavior* 62 (2016): 155–167. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.084>
- Prensky, Marc. "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants." *On the Horizon* 9, no. 5 (2001): 1–6.

- Reimann, Ralf Peter. "Uncharted Territories': The Challenges of Digitalization and Social Media for Church and Society." *The Ecumenical Review* 69, no. 1 (March 2017): 67–79.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12267>
- Ronda, Daniel. "Kepemimpinan Kristen Di Era Disrupsi Teknologi." *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat* 3, no. 1 (2019): 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.46445/ejti.v3i1.125>
- Sadler, W. A., and Jr T. B. Johnson. *From Loneliness to Anomia in The Anatomy of Loneliness*. Edited by J. Hartog, J. R. Audy, and Y. A. Cohen. New York: International University Press, 1980.
- Sitepu, Nathanail. "Relasi Intelektualitas Dan Spiritualitas Dalam Berapologetika: Suatu Tinjauan Injili." *VOX DEI: Jurnal Teologi dan Pastoral* 1, no. 2 (2020): 118–130.
- Standard, Christian. "An Antidote to Loneliness' for Pastors." *Christianstandard.Com*. Last modified 2021. Accessed December 28, 2021. <https://christianstandard.com/2021/03/an-antidote-to-loneliness-for-pastors/>.
- Tulgan, Bruce. "Meet Generation Z: The Second Generation within the Giant 'Millennial' Cohort." *RainmakerThinking*. Last modified 2013. Accessed January 1, 2022. <https://grupepsichoterapija.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Gen-Z-Whitepaper.pdf>.
- Van den Berg, Jan-Albert. "Theoretical Signposts for Tracing Spirituality within the Fluid Decision-Making of a Mobile Virtual Reality." *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 68, no. 2 (February 2012).
<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i2.1290>
- Weiss, Robert S. "Reflections on the Present State of Loneliness Research." *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* 2, no. 2 (1987): 1–16.
- Widjaja, Fransiskus Irwan, Fredy Simanjuntak, and Noh Ibrahim Boiliu. "Repositioning Mission in Postmodern Culture." In *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Education, Society, Economy, Humanity and Environment (ICESHE 2019)*. Paris, France: Atlantis Press, 2020.
<https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200311.038>