Faith-Learning Integration and Interdisciplinary Studies

David D. Reedy

Omega Graduate School

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Professor

David Ward, Ph.D., Th.M.

**Thanks, David, for your fantastic work on your essay for PHI 805-22! This is one of the better ones I have ever received. I can see how you effectively worked your topic and thesis through the 7 Step OGS learning process. Here are a few comments on each STEP:**

**STEP 1 NEED FOR INQUIRY**

**Your topic is so timely that you would do well to build your Doctoral Research Project around this topic! With the failure to launch of Gen Z young people, you have taken the interdisciplinary pulse of a generation. This is so important for the church to be proactive with this because this generation could be transformed into change agents for Christ's kingdom in contemporary culture IF they had the right training!**

**STEP 2 (SECULAR) LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Your list of General Trends and Observations was terrific. It should not precede the Literature, but follow it to show themes emerging from the research. Separating your research areas made it easier to follow: a) Generational Studies, b) Psychology/Developmental Theory, c) management/Business Studies, d) Family Systems Theory, e) Psychology/Resilience Studies, and f) Cultural Anthropology. Your summary of insights under the six "A's" synthesized the fruit of the secular literature search VERY WELL: a) Access, b) Activism, c) Acceleration, d) Agility, e) Anxiety, and f) Aspiration.**

**STEP 3 FAITH-LEARNING INTEGRATION**

**You brought in relevant Scriptural passages and then organized your research from Christian scholarly sources in a way that showed Christian critical thinking and the shape of a future training: a) the Christian and Culture, b) the Doctrine of Vocation, the Christian Discipling of Gen Z, and d) the Christian Doctrine of Identity. You used classic authors to build your analysis: Luther, Hegeman, Carson, Menuge, Niebuhr, and Veith. Your summary at the end of the section was excellent.**

**STEP 4 SOCIAL RESEARCH PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESIS**

**This section was so clear and strong that I have no criticisms. Build on it in the research project classes to come!**

**STEP 5 CONTEXTUAL COMMUNICATION**

**You will be using this research in communication to advance your impact in your denomination, that is clear. Develop this section more in the Contextualization class.**

**STEP 6: LEADERSHIP ACTIONS**

**You used the paper to talk about your own professional goals and interests. This will unfold more as you proceed, but you derived a good plan for making a difference.**

**STEP 7 REFLECTIVE EVALUATION**

**It is clear that this course was effective in helping you develop your thinking about your work through OGS and how you are using it in your wok/ministry of pastoring and consulting as you go through.**

**I will keep and reread this assignment for reference later. I am interested in being part of your Research project committee as a result of this assignment!**

**I wish I could have had you in a live version of this class because you would have raised the level of other students through the interaction.**

**You used an exhaustive (for this assignment!) number of scholarly sources to back up your argument, and you did a great job of putting everything together into a logical argument. Your paper exceeds the required page length. Your Works Cited APA style is very good, but you have not reached the Dissertation Research Project level of accuracy yet. I will send a detailed proofing of your Works Cited form because this bibliography could be the start of your Dissertation Research Project Reference List.**

**Keep up the excellent work, David! -- Prof. David WardYou used an exhaustive (for this assignment!) number of scholarly sources to back up your argument, and you did a great job of putting everything together into a logical argument. Your paper exceeds the required page length. Your Works Cited APA style is very good, but you have not reached the Dissertation Research Project level of accuracy yet. I will send a detailed proofing of your Works Cited form because this bibliography could be the start of your Dissertation Research Project Reference List.**

**Keep up the excellent work, David! -- Prof. David Ward**

**Grade: A**

Assignment #3 – Essay From the Course Resources tab in DIAL for SR 805, download the (a) Interdisciplinary Faith-Learning Research Worksheet, and (b) Tips for answering the questions for each of the seven steps of the interdisciplinarity learning process. b. Review (a), and (b). Complete the worksheet including the top section, providing submission date, your name, educational background, social profession, and other pertinent information (e.g., I have worked/been involved with/influenced by.…) c. Answer the questions for the seven steps of the OGS Interdisciplinary FaithLearning Research Worksheet. d. Document all sources in APA style, 7th edition for in-text citations and for Work Cited. Include page numbers. e. Include a separate Works Cited page, formatted according to APA style, 7th edition. 2. Submit through DIAL to the professor.

# Appendix 4A: Faith-Learning Integration Worksheet

Date: March 1, 2024

Name of Scholar-Practitioner: David D. Reedy

Educational Background: B.A. *summa cum laude* Humanities with emphasis in philosophy (East Tennessee State University). M.Div. (Concordia Seminary St. Louis), six units Clinical Pastoral Education, Education (30 academic hours) for Intentional Interim Ministry (Lutheran Transitional Ministry Association), Military education: Commissioned Officer’s Training, Chaplaincy Course, Squadron Office School, assorted counseling courses, Religious and Cultural Awareness Course.

Social Profession: Parish Pastor of two congregations; congregational consultant.

Other Pertinent Information: Completed Cores 1-4 for OGS between 2002-2005.

# STEP 1: OBSERVATIONS RAISING THE NEED FOR INQUIRY

I am the parent of a young adult who recently turned twenty-one this year. She has been slow to engage in the adult world of employment and education. Even though she has VA benefits that would pay her tuition and living expenses, she has been reluctant to pursue higher education. She seems content with her low-paying part-time job and spends most of her time playing video games or engaging in social media with a few friends and her boyfriend, who lives a thousand miles away. This inspired my interest in failure to launch syndrome (FTL). I observe that several of the families in my congregation are experiencing similar situations. Consulting with fellow pastors in my local area, I found this is a trend also among a significant portion of their families with young adults. This problem needs additional research to explore how the church can be a resource for these families to help facilitate the members of our flocks to transition to productive and healthy adulthood. This problem is having an impact on the lives of young people, and families, and has a potential impact on society as well.

Jean Twenge (2017) wrote about a new generation of young people, she called “iGen” who she described in the book’s title as less rebellious and more tolerant but also less happy and unprepared for adulthood. Examining data from several quantitative sources comparing the behavior of young people over the past decades, she found evidence young adults are simply growing up more slowly and are desiring to stay children for longer than previous generations. (pp. 18-47) Leitner (2023) found that 17% of U.S. parents reported that young adult children living at home “felt somewhat or very negative for them…” (para. 9) Pomroy (2024) found that among parents with young adult children at home, 36% said it hurts their finances and 44% of young adults rely on their parents financially. She also found that 74% of parents and 55% of young adults found their joint living arrangements to have a positive impact on their relationships. (para. 2) Wisner (2023) examined data from the Pew Research Center and found a significant decrease in the number of young people aged twenty-two and below who were independent from their parents compared between 1980 and 2018. (para. 9) Wisner quotes Alyssa Frers, a licensed professional counselor in Texas, as defining FTL “as difficulty gaining and maintaining independence from one's family of origin and difficulty completing typical developmental tasks.” (para. 6)

In February of 2024, I had a conversation with a twenty-one-year-old who recently became engaged and is working to achieve financial independence. She communicated that 80% of her peers were living at home, not pursuing formal education, were stuck in low-paying jobs, and that many of them were blaming their parents, the town, the culture, and anything but taking responsibility for themselves. She communicated many of the same themes we shall see when examining our literature review of most of their time spent in a digital world where they feel more in control, a pervasive sense of anxiety fueled by a fear of failure compounded by a belief they are expected to be perfect. When asked where she thought this sense of perfectionism was coming from, she suggested it was from a pressure to succeed coming from parents and family as well as a fear of not being able to financially support themselves independently to the same standard of living they were used to under their parents. When asked what helped her to launch, she explained it was a near-age peer who had recently transitioned from the military who she works with who helped her see that one can make a life building one brick at a time.

The following is a list of secular disciplines that provide insight to address this problem.

* Sociology of Work & Business Studies
* Generational & Cultural Studies
* Psychology and Resilience Studies
* Family System Theory
* Cognitive Science
* Psychological Developmental Theory
* Religious Cultural Studies
* Cultural Anthropology

Integrating these secular disciplines with insight from Christian disciplines should provide insight for faith leaders and Christian parents to help their young adults become unstuck so they may pass through this time of change and development. Here various insights related to personal identity, vocation, the family, and theological guidance for the intersection of Christ and culture (how do Christians live in the world) should complement and empower faith-integration in a way that will enable church workers and parents to facilitate young adult development.

# STEP 2: LITERATURE REVIEW- HERMENEUTICAL INQUIRY OF NATURAL/SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES/HISTORICAL TRADITIONS

## General Trends and Observations

In the following literature review, several themes begin to coalesce around observations of young adult behavior in the 21st century. Not all young adults who live at home are “stuck.” Many are proactively engaging the world and contributing to the financial situation of their families. For those who are stuck the following common themes begin to emerge to understand the scope and potential sources of the problem. We shall use the term GenZ for referring to young adults in general and FTL when referring specifically to young adults who are failing to launch.

* FTL young adults are looking for meaning and purpose but are skeptical about finding it.
* FTL are hyper-connected digitally yet feel lonely and are socially isolated from real world relationships.
* GenZ is the most anxious generation.
* GenZ and FTLs specifically suffer from a sense of perfectionism which paralyzes them into inaction.
* GenZ is aware of having many choices in life, so many that for FTLs they become overwhelming leading to an inability to choose.
* GenZ is the digital generation. They are not only integrated with the digital world more than any other generation, but they are also dependent upon it.
* GenZ / FTLs suffer from a developmental paradox. Thanks to digital exposure they grew up without innocence and were exposed much earlier to adult themes and situations, but are slow to transition to adulthood, preferring to remain in a state of childlike dependency.
* GenZ were parented by parents who were influenced by a growing awareness through the media of the dangers of the world and who were far more protective of their children than their parents were of them.
* GenZ are hyper-individualists yet aware of interdependence but are skeptical of those who they feel are trying to control them. There is also connected with this a sense of depersonalization. For FTLs, this leads to a reluctance to engage in the wider world. Studies indicate that such hyper-individualism while having similarities with symptoms connected to narcissism is not indicative of an increase in narcissism in this age group.
* GenZ suffers from a paradox of awareness. They are hyper-aware in that they are aware of a great many more aspects of the world but engage with these with less depth than previous generations.
* GenZ feels less in control of their own lives and more under the whims of external forces than previous generations, with the locus of control for what will shape their lives shifting outward compared to previous generations who felt a more internal locus of control.
* GenZ have unique vocational expectations about work/life/play balance.
* Some argue that the differences observed among GenZ transcend young adults but mark the beginning of a post-generational way of engaging the world and human life together fueled by the digital age. At the very least, it is recognized that Gen Z is a different generation.
* GenZ is experiencing the emergency of a new stage of human development “emerging adulthood.”
* GenZ may mark the return of the multi-generational home as the norm for human society in contrast to the nuclear family model.
* GenZ engages the world differently requiring different strategies for those who would seek to lead and influence them.

## Literature Review

### Generational Studies

Various religious cultural studies provide important insight for understanding the landscape that GenZ and FTLs are growing up in. GenZ is shorthand in most literature to refer to people born in 1996 or later. Smith et al., (2024) note that recent studies by Pew Research indicate that 28% of adults in the U.S. identify as having no particular religious affiliation (the nones) yet most still describe themselves as spiritual. Many are looking for meaning, but are skeptical of organized religion, but also skeptical that science can explain everything. (para. 1-3) 43% of nones say organized religion causes harm, while 41% are neutral on this question. Only 14% of the nones described organized religion as helpful. (Question 2 section) Nones are less socially active than those with a religion suggesting a correlation between social isolation and a skepticism toward the provided answers and worldview of a religious faith. (Question 3 section) Kallo (2024) with the Pew Research Center reported that 41% of U.S. adults reported becoming more spiritual over their lifetime while only 24% described themselves as becoming more religious. (para. 1) Notably when looking at adults under 30, 30% described themselves as more spiritual, 20% as less. (Differences by age section) Shimron (2020) examining data from Pew suggests that the trend of increasing numbers of nones seen in previous decades is possibly leveling off, not declining by any means, but appears to be achieving a state of homeostasis. (para. 5) These studies suggest that church leaders and parents will need to take into consideration the worldview of their children and be alert for skepticism toward answers perceived as coming from organized religion. The positional authority of a Christian belief or insight may not have influence or even may influence negatively some FTLs, even if they are somewhat connected to the church.

Important insights are discovered from a survey of generational studies focused on GenZ. Twenge’s work (2017) has achieved seminal status. One of Twenge’s most important insights is related to the dependency of GenZ on digital media. Examining the American Freshman Survey over decades, she found evidence of increasing anxiety among GenZ. She describes this generation as the anxious generation. (p.103) She found a correlation with the use of digital media noting in the same time period that anxiety was on the rise among college freshmen, the smartphone became “…ubiquitous and in-person interaction plummeted.” (p. 104) She parsed various statistical data to demonstrate that youth and young adults are growing up more slowly not engaging in activities straddling teen years and adult years such as dating, driving and so forth. She found youth filling their time instead with “the smartphones in their hands.” (p. 47) Data indicated that almost all teen's leisure time is spent in multitasking interactions with digital media whether general internet surfing, interacting with more specific applications like Instagram, or watching TV. (p. 51) Correspondingly there is an observed decrease in the reading of print such as books and magazines. Books do not hold their attention because they are not “fast enough.” (p. 60). Teens were spending less time on homework, as internet resources sped up the fulfillment of their assignments. In interviews, teens admitted they only read traditional materials when required for schoolwork preferring to be on their phone and watching TV. (p. 62)

Twenge also found evidence of a developmental paradox fueled by access to the digital world. GenZ were exposed to adult ideas and situations such as sexuality and pornography at an early age, leading to a loss of innocence. (p. 18) One can posit that due to internet exposure, this generation is also more aware at an earlier age of the global world and issues such as climate change, economic challenges, and warfare contributing to the rise of anxiety noted above. Yet, Twenge notes youth are engaging in adult activities such as sexuality much later than previous generations. (p.24). They are simply taking longer to grow up (p. 42) Youth desire to remain in the “security of childhood” (p. 45)

Twenge notes that while youth are more connected with peers through digital means, they are experiencing more social isolation than previous generations. They may have heightened awareness of social problems and political issues, but this does not translate to action. They are less likely to engage in political campaigns or communicate with elected officials. They will talk about it on social media with their peers, but these conversations do not translate to action. (p.282) GenZ simply does not interact less with people including their peers in person. When looking at those who have entered the workplace, GenZ this trend is observed with GenZ communicating they are less interested in face-to-face social interactions with fellow workers. (p. 182)

Twenge hypothesis a cultural shift toward individualism is impacting the slowing development of GenZ potentially contributing to the rise of FTL. “The cultural shift toward individualism may also play a role: childhood and adolescence are uniquely self-focused stages, so staying in them longer allows more cultivation of the individual self. With fewer children and more time spent with each, each child is noticed and celebrated. Sure enough, cultural individualism is connected to slower developmental speeds across both countries and time. Around the world, young adults grow up more slowly in individualistic countries than collectivistic ones.” (p. 42)

Twenge notes that GenZ has unique vocational expectations. They are concerned that work should not crowd out the rest of their life, something they perceived as happening to their parents. (p. 182). This is related to the increased awareness of this generation of the number of potential experiences that life has to offer. Paradoxically though, when GenZ are participating in the workplace, they develop more realistic views about work and its demands than millennials. (p. 182) GenZ may be a bit more inclined than their predecessors to see the potential of work as something more than making a living, but they remain focused on not having their job take over their lives. (p. 182) In addition, expectations about vocation are compounding their general sense of anxiety. Twenge notes in interviews with youth, they are aware of their parents who in many cases did not have a college degree and still found well-paying jobs, while many of their peers with college degrees struggle to find well-paying employment. (p. 185) Twenge writes they may be “…staying away from work because they are convinced that what they do matters little in a rigged system.” (p. 190) She notes that many of these youth feel “demoralized” about whether they will succeed even if they try. She notes that this generation has an external locus of control believing their lives are overwhelmingly shaped by outside forces vs. an internal locus of control where one feels he or she is in control of their lives. (p. 191). One TikToker chronicled her struggle to find a job recording her attempts at going door to door with her resume only to be told they were not hiring, to be offered an internship to work for free, or minimum wage jobs. “I graduated [from] college, with two degrees in communications and acting. I speak three languages … I'm just going to keep trying…I felt so down again, I was like ‘Are you kidding?’” (Vacchiano, 2024, para 5, 8) “The most common jobs for young adults (ages 18-29)—such as cooks, cashiers, and waitresses are largely concentrated in low-wage occupations, but some occupations offer young adults access to middle-class earnings” (Carnevale et al., 2013, p. vii)

In a similar theme, Hodges (2023) observes that GenZ is far more aware of their world than previous generations at their age. This awareness stimulates some toward action but in others withdrawal and inaction when the world is perceived as unfair and a system that manipulates them. His data reminds us that many GenZ have launched. For example, 57% of eligible GenZers were enrolled in college and this generation is predicted to be the best educated of all generations thus far in history. He notes that GenZ young adults who are engaging the world are leaning heavily toward social causes, “…most notably healthcare, mental health, economic security, civic engagement, race equity, and the environment.” (State of Generation Z section) This suggests areas where leaders who seek to influence FTLs might be able to gain a hearing to motivate FTLs toward active engagement with the world.

Twenge notes another characteristic of this generation particularly important for our engagement with young adults. They are used to and comfortable with finding information for themselves. But with the digital world being the source of their information, and the speed at which this world operates, their attention spans are shorter, and they are far more discriminating in what they will focus on. GenZ is a bit more open to information provided by authority figures and sources than Millennials, but only if the authority is credible. (p. 307) These factors will certainly shape a strategy for engagement.

Guillen (2023) suggests that we are observing the birth of a post-generational society marked by porous boundaries between school, life, and work with the expectation that one will be able to and likely will reimage their life and careers throughout life, perhaps multiple times by going back to school and taking off in new directions, a life approach introduced by GenZ but being adopted by older people. (pp. 194-198) He also notes several negative forces experienced by GenZ that one can argue contribute to FTL. Guillen finds that anxiety driven by a feeling of having to excel at everything and any sense of falling short interpreted as complete failure is being generated by a culture of perfectionism. GenZ feel youth pressure from both parents and peers compounded by rising individualism and materialism. He believes the predominance of digital social media exacerbates this trend. (pp. 74-75)

This suggests that a form of social deflation may be operating. If economic inflation is understood as too many dollars chasing too few goods, social deflation would equate to too few hours in the day chasing too many options. Overwhelmed with options, GenZ experiences a crisis of quality (perfectionism) and quantity (so many options) leading to paralysis fueled by anxiety. **“Video and cell phone addictions, often in isolation, are absorbing a lot of time, energy, and focus, which could be used to get out of work, volunteer, or meet others. Virtual reality goggles allow for an experience of the world that isn’t real. Why climb a mountain with friends when you can strap on the goggles and fool your brain into thinking you are scaling the Matterhorn alone?” (Stoltzfus, 2023, Why is the Attainment of Full Adulthood Taking Longer section)** In an interview Jackson (2013) explained how GenZ’s digital dependency is overwhelming youth with quantity and reducing their ability to deal with matters in an in-depth way. Paradoxically this hyper-exposure of the digital world (quantity) leads to less engagement with anything in depth (quality). “Kids now spend nearly ten hours exposed to media each day, and the average person switches tasks every three minutes. There's an inattention to what's going on around us, and there's also the fragmentation of our attention: the distraction caused by hopscotching through our day. Sound-bites, data points, and skipping around are corrosive to the deep, thoughtful, focused attention we need at times.” (para. 1) “…**that although some things may not seem exciting to us at the moment, there are lots of things that are valuable that can't be digitized or downloaded.” (para. 13) On one hand is the observation that GenZ is substituting the digital world for the physical world, and on the other is overwhelmed by options.** We cannot eat an elephant, so we do not even try. We are so worried about catching all the rabbits, we wind up catching none, or it feels useless to try. Jackson suggests the importance of recovering one aspect understood by earlier generations,

Guillen is critical of the nuclear family dominant in previous decades as a form of hyper-individualism which put the focus on individual achievement and destabilized the family unit. (2023, p. 49) “The rosy notion of the nuclear family belies a reality of struggle and despair. Its emphasis on “growing up” leads to the enormous pressures placed on children to prepare for achieving as adults everything from a stable romantic relationship to professional success.” (p.49) He advocates for the value of the multi-generational household to provide interdependent economic support as well as community and emotional support. (pp. 62-67)

There has been a concern that these trends toward individualism and social isolationism may indicate a growing propensity toward narcissism in GenZ. Recent studies suggest that similarities in behavior do not necessarily indicate narcissism. GenZ is often perceived by older people as narcissistic or entitled but they are not testing out that way. (Grubbs et al., 2019, p. 1) (Wetzel, et al., 2017 p. 31) What might appear to be the inability to connect is more likely an unrealized potential for connection. GenZ is aware of this perception by others, and it fuels a sense of inadequacy and failure compounding their anxiety. (Grubbs, et al., p. 1) Pierre (2017) referencing Wetzel is critical of Twenge’s previously noted assertion that GenZ’s problems are related to childhood over-indulgence and the self-esteem movement. (para. 8) He is correct here in that what the observations are noticing with GenZ's increase of individualism, is not so much a movement toward self-absorption as understood in the framework of narcissism, but rather a movement toward introversion influenced by external pressures. Falcon (2016) reports the psychology department of the University of Georgia through multiple studies found a correlation between increased social media use and the presence of narcissism, but importantly observes this may simply indicate that narcissists find social media useful for the feeding of their narcissistic hunger rather than indicating social media increases a propensity toward narcissism.

### Psychology Developmental Theory

Dr. Jack Stotlzfus (2023) who works with parents and FTLs applies the insights of Jeffrey Arnett. Modifying traditional developmental stage theories, Arnett has proposed a new stage of development called “emerging adulthood” for those aged 18-29 in the 21st century. (How Should We Talk About This Transition Period section) McConville explains, “Arnett breaks down emerging adulthood into three substages: launching (from eighteen to twenty-two), exploring (from twenty-two to twenty-six), and landing (from twenty-six to twenty-nine).” (2020, p. 44) Stoltzfus explains this time of experimentation has been generated by the new cultural conditions of the 21st century. He writes, “We need to allow, if not support, extended efforts to define one’s identity, especially related to work, establish one’s emotional and financial independence, and create friendships, including one with a significant other. Parents need to redefine their role with young adults on their journey to adulthood and offer coaching, consulting, and collaboration. In my work with parents and young adults, I foster a partnership between the parties around the plans of the young adult. This approach works better than trying to influence or direct the young adult toward some preconceived idea of what the parent believes will lead to success and happiness. We can start using the new language of emerging adulthood, a transition period, and partnering as parents to approach this significant time in life.” (How Should We Talk About This Transition Period section) Sharon (2016) writes, “In modern industrialized societies, young people face an extended period of unprecedented freedom, and challenges, en route to fully adult roles… Results showed that the most important markers for well-being were those over which young adults have more control: relational maturity (e.g., establishing an equal relationship with parents and developing greater consideration for others). In contrast, the markers which most emerging adults had yet to attain and had relatively less control over (i.e., traditional role transitions such as being settled into a career) did not predict well-being.” (p. 161)

### Management / Business Studies

Concerns with getting GenZ into the workplace and keeping them in the workplace is a significant factor impacting the business world. GenZ not only procrastinates in entering the workplace but quits jobs easily after taking them. A key reason was a perceived lack of work-life balance. (Botezat et al., 2023, p. 646) One study sought to accommodate shorter attention spans by utilizing comics for workplace training. The study found this to be a useful technique to engage GenZ’s shorter attention spans, their entertainment focus, and their tendency to shift rapidly from one piece of information to another. GenZers noted the use of comics sparked their interest and were appreciated for being quick to understand and enabling fast learning. They also liked the interactive aspects of the format. (Chandra et al., 2023, p. 458) There are differences noted by gender in vocational expectations. GenZ women tended to value opportunities for self-development while men prioritized opportunities to make a meaningful difference. Women also rated interpersonal relationships at work as important and recognition of the value of their work as more important than men. Men focused more on meaningful difference, personal happiness, and lower stress levels. (Lasakova, et al., 2023, p. 787)

When it comes to being on the receiving end in the business world, as in being a consumer targeted with advertising, GenZ were most influenced by advertising perceived as truthful and fair. (Gajanová et al., 2023, p. 13) This suggests a correlation with the previously addressed negative response to perceived attempts at control and manipulation. This also suggests the importance of being truthful and fair when engaging GenZ and FTLs in hopes of influencing them.

Fitria (2023) found that fear of missing out (FOMO) stimulated inaction among many GenZ. The more a GenZ person feared missing out, the more their performance decreased in the workplace. (pp. 197-198) This reinforces previously discussed insight that the increased number of options and choices that GenZ experiences compared to previous generations generates anxiety leading to paralysis and inaction.

Koulopoulos (2014) also posits (similarly to Guillen) that GenZ is a harbinger of things to come across generations. He finds six forces that are driving GenZ which are not “subtle generational shifts” but rather modifications and challenges to how previous generations operated in the workplace that will likely be adopted by older people and businesses in increasing numbers. (pp. 23-31) “Define community by your age, and the generation gap will be very wide. Define it through a deep understanding of people’s interests and behaviors, and it will be far narrower.” (p. 72) He names the following six forces seeing them as positive changes for our civilization. 1. Breaking Generations. Population demographics reveal an equalization of the dispersion of human populations across age groups. 2. Hyperconnecting: humanity is moving exponentially toward hyperconnectivity among people, computers, machines, and objects increasing the potential for productive outcomes. 3. Slingshooting: wide range adoption of affordable technology allows for large populations to “catch up” with technology pioneers. 4. Shift from affluence to influence: using digital communication individuals are increasingly able to influence events on a wider scale without the need for “large pools of capital”. 5. Adopting the world as my classroom: there is a push toward the globalization and affordability of education for all levels of schooling for all ages. 6. Lifehacking: “…taking shortcuts, and otherwise outsmarting the system so that we can focus on outcomes rather than processes, making meaning and purpose the center of our personal and professional experience.” (pp. 22- 23)

### Family Systems Theory

An important aspect for understanding GenZ and FTLs is to recognize we are not just dealing with individuals but with systems. The digital world is a system. The workplace is a system. The congregational church is a system. The family is a system. With FTLs, we are working with individuals who inhabit an anxious system, where threat outweighs potential. Here the work of Peter Steinke is most valuable.

Peter Steinke was a congregational consultant who utilized the concepts of Family Systems Theory to understand congregations as a system. His basic insights also help us to understand the experience of FTL within the anxious system of their world as well as helping to bring us back to understand certain family system dynamics that will be helpful to assist FTLs to launch. Steinke reminds us that in any system we are dealing with emotional forces. “Nothing complex or controversial happens without confusion, resistance, or emotional reactivity.” (2019, p. 13) He suggests that how anxiety is addressed will have more impact on outcomes than anything else. (p. 13) He identifies six anxiety triggers that affect everyone and every system. “Disruptions (change, loss, separation, innovation, accidents) Feeling trapped (helpless, hopeless, powerless, not able to influence an outcome) Threat (real or imagined, sensing potential harm or injury, survival instincts take over, “a wolf at the door”) Differences (opposites, strangeness, diversity, contrasting ideology, values, race/ethnicity) Uncertainty (doubts, ambiguity, the unknown, the unpredictable) Depletion (lessening, deficiency, exhausting, wearing down).” (pp. 18-19) When triggered, “we relate to one another impulsively …Basically, these are lower-brain (sometimes called the lizard brain) functions. We share these neural structures with all animate life. The lower brain is hungry, horny, and scared.” (p. 6) Uncertainty breeds anxiety. (p. 6) He describes uncertain times, called liminal times or transitional spaces, as “Living nowhere between two somewhere…” (p. 3) A basic human behavior is seeking relief from anxiety. We may avoid anxiety or seek out scapegoats displacing blame. (p. 19) Steinke advocates for self-knowledge so that we become aware of these normal human processes that are hardwired into us for our survival. By intentional self-examination and practicing thinking before acting we are more likely to regulate our emotional processes and not allow our anxiety to drive behavior. (p. 51). The following observation is most crucial for church workers and parents who would seek to help their FTLs to be less anxious and get unstuck. He states that despite the influence of the six previously mentioned triggers, “…no one trigger affected the emotional system more than leadership… How any one of them handled self in the emotional system was more determinate than anything else in terms of outcome.” (p. ix) In other words if the leader is anxious the system is anxious. If the leader is calm, this will help to calm the anxious system. This is a crucial insight for church workers and parents seeking to help move FTL from paralysis generated by their anxiety about the world around them.

Compare this to a USA Today article by Carli Pierson. She is debating if she should allow her eight-year-old daughter to attend a sleepover. He recognizes that her mother who is so neurotic that if she does not phone her each day, will think she is dead, nonetheless did not worry about her attending sleepovers in the 1980s and 90s. “But times have changed.” (2024, para. 3) She writes that her daughter does not understand the risk of sexual abuse like she does. (para. 8) She writes that a friend advised her that she cannot protect her daughter from everything but writes, “But I want to.” (para 12) While the increased awareness of GenZ of the world around them enabled by the digital world is driving their anxiety, the increased awareness of their parents is helping to communicate a sense that the world is not safe, is something to be protected from, something to be avoided, and something to be anxious about. Are our children not just generating their own anxiety, but are they catching ours? I grew up running all over the neighborhood. The idea of potential abduction never crossed my mind nor likely the minds of my parents. But we became parents during the time of cable news, and we saw the birth of internet news and amber alerts. GenZ may not be the only ones feeling anxious.

### Psychology and Resilience Studies

Resilience is not a topic that originates with the emergence of GenZ. It has been around. Anxiety is a more common problem for all people than sometimes we want to acknowledge. There is much literature about how to productively approach anxiety as well as literature that specifically addresses the problem of FTL.

Post 9/11, the United States Air Force developed a comprehensive model to frame training and engagements with airmen to build resilience. The Comprehensive Airman Fitness Model focused on four interconnected areas: mental, physical, social, and spiritual. When discussing the mental aspects of resilience, the focus is on awareness, adaptability, decision-making, and positive thinking. When discussing physical resilience, the focus is on endurance, recovery, nutrition, and strength. When discussing social resilience, the focus is on communication, connectedness, social support, and teamwork. When the discussion is on spiritual resilience, the focus is on core values, perseverance, perspective, and purpose. (“Comprehensive Airman Fitness,” 2024) These dimensions which help to build resilience are helpful to consider when seeking to influence FTLs to develop resilience as a resource to help them become unstuck.

Human beings are emotional animals. Insights brought by cognitive science help us to understand our behavior. Peters (2021) provides a beneficial metaphor for simplifying cognitive science especially as it relates to understanding anxiety and non-anxious decision-making. His book is an excellent resource to assist those seeking to have a positive influence on a young adult who has failed to launch. He relates basic human decision-making as a product of three primary cognitive functions. There is the survival function of what is often called the limbic brain which he nicknames the chimp and is most associated with bare emotions and instinctual reactions. There is the human which we associate with conscious rational deliberate consideration and decision-making. And there is a regulating process that he calls the computer which is associated with memory and meaning frameworks. The computer is programmed by both the chimp and the human but also advises the chimp and the human which can sometimes result in feedback loops. (pp. 16-45) He notes the drive toward perfectionism originates with the chimp which expects perfection even with “uncontrollable”. Everything for the chimp is a matter of survival. This can be helpful if it does not remain with the chimp but is channeled by the human system which accepts that we rarely achieve perfect results. (p. 150) He also notes that the chimp by nature is focused outwardly looking for danger. When the human system is engaged, we look inward to our own values with an informed perspective. (p. 151) The chimp is inclined to compare itself to others (the outside) and usually will focus on its deficiencies and faults leading to a general feeling of being “unsettled and dissatisfied”. The human system evaluates their performance and where they are considering “…how they are living up to their own standards.” (p. 166) When working with an anxious person, such as an FTL, there is a need for understanding, acknowledgment, and recognition. He suggests the chimp will settle down if it is allowed to express its feelings, has a sense of being understood and acknowledged, and is recognized that it is trying to solve the problem. (p. 523) To help an anxious person one must first help their chimp through expression, understanding, acknowledgment, and recognition before trying to help their human to understand the facts, search for solutions, and then create a plan for action. (p. 524)

Neenan (2018) provides insight into using cognitive-behavioral approaches toward developing resilience. He introduces the basic cognitive-behavioral ABC model. Following an event that is experienced negatively, one first identifies the activating event or adversity (A). Then one examines the beliefs (B) that one holds about the event. For instance, if one stumbles in a speech and folks laugh (A) one might automatically conclude I look like a fool or I lack credibility (B). Having identified A and B, one moves to identify and examine the consequences (C) including emotions (anger, resentment, embarrassment) and actions (smiling weakly, held in anger…). (p. 45) This is a simple model, but a powerful one for helping, as Peters might say, to understand the chimp and how to program the computer of our memory and frameworks to better advise our behavior in similar situations. Neenan also proposes some specific steps that can help an individual change future behavior. “Step 1: where are you stuck in your thinking about your difficulties?” (p. 48) “Step 2: what belief would you like to hold? It’s very important to consider how you would like to respond to the situation in order to contrast it with your current response.” (p. 49) “Step 3: examining old and new beliefs New beliefs create new possibilities for your life, but the old beliefs still remain strong and ready to intrude into your life and block your progress” (p. 50) “Would you teach your belief to others? If you think your belief is reasonable (i.e. it makes good sense to you), would you teach it to others like your children, partner, friends” (p. 52) He also notes that awareness of self which is crucial is not enough to change behavior but that new knowledge has to be practiced, that is put into action regularly to strengthen the behavioral pattern for the future. (p. 55) Or as Peter might put it, we must take our understanding and intentionally program our “computer” through practice.

Gazelle (2020) helps us understand that resilience is not as simple as developing an understanding and deciding to be resilient. Our brain is a complex organ that has systems designed to take over when a threat is perceived to ensure our survival resulting in “…the fight/flight/freeze response.” (p. 16) FTLs could be described as fleeing adulthood and even being frozen into inaction. When the brain assesses a threat that is beyond our ability to fight and overcome or flee from, it will freeze, that is remain immobile. (p. 19) She explains resilience comes into play because a perceived threat not only activates the areas of our brain associated with survival instincts but also the prefrontal cortex which can make more rational decisions based on memory and facts. (p. 17) She writes, “It’s important to monitor our stress response and be sure that our sympathetic nervous system isn’t overreacting.” (p. 18) In other words, this self-monitoring can help reinforce memories and program frameworks in our “computer” so that good advice is provided to the “chimp” when a threat is perceived making it more likely the “human” or higher cognitive functions can respond. Like Steinke, Gazelle stresses the importance of a non-anxious role model. “If they model calmness, attentiveness, and empathy, we trust that we can be seen and heard. If they see our strengths and efforts, we learn to see these as well. In a sense, good parenting involves holding up a mirror to a child’s strengths and goodness. This enables children to develop those strengths, resilience included.” (p. 36) She also highlights that social isolation reinforces anxiety and its fight/flight/freeze response. She stresses “Connection to others is at the heart of resilience.” (p. 29) She suggests an approach for us to consider in helping FTLs. “In the competitive society we live in, it’s easy to focus on what’s in it for us, rather than what’s in it for others. An overly self-focused reality, centered on I, me, and mine, however, contributes to disconnection and loneliness. And paradoxically, all this focus on ourselves makes us more vulnerable because it depletes our well of resilience. To paraphrase the Dalai Lama: ‘Thinking mainly of ourselves contributes to unhappiness. Thinking of others is a recipe for happiness.’” (p. 39)

Leveraging GenZ’s concern for social and environmental issues could be an important teamwork enterprise for leaders and FTLs to help take the first steps into productive adulthood as FTLs are supported to live out their values in the real world, not just express them in the digital one. Gazelle suggests that intentionally focusing on clarifying one’s values and goals can be key to building resilience that enables translating values into action. She suggests a four-step model. 1. Think of a moment or moments in the past when you were proud of how you acted. Identify the values beneath the behavior. 2. Identify a goal one would like to achieve. 3. Describe why this goal is important. What makes this goal worth pursuing? 4. Create an action plan of small steps to help in reaching the goal. (pp. 73-74) It is not difficult to see how here an empathic parent or leader could assist an FTL with conversation and reflective listening through steps 1-3. A leader/mentor would be most valuable at step 4 where the benefit of life experience on the part of the leader can help normalize the struggle for the FTL and suggest what “small steps” might realistically be available that lead toward the desired goal.

It is here that Glaser’s (2014) insights into conversational intelligence become beneficial. She starts by pointing out that a triggered amygdala (think survival brain/chimp) generates fear, and this is a substantial boundary to building trust. An anxious person will have difficulty hearing advice from any person seeking to influence them. Building trust becomes imperative. The first step is transparency. Open and honest communication helps to calm the sense of threat as the influencer is perceived as not seeking to harm the hearer. The second step for the influencer is to take the lead in establishing or reinforcing a relationship. Here we seek connectivity over making the point that we are right. We extend trust to earn trust and respect for others' viewpoints to achieve a hearing for our own by sending appreciation messages to the hearer. The third step is to seek understanding by reflective listening and talking openly about expressed needs, fears, and hopes. The goal is to step into the other’s shoes (here the FTL) rather than expecting them to follow in our footsteps. Having achieved these connections, we are ready for step four, to work together to open minds to possibilities (both for the FTL and the influencer) and to create strategies for success, even mutual success. Then it will be safe for step five, to test assumptions, try out the plans, even fail and learn from failure, and incorporate the truth of how it worked out as the FTL works the plan or adjusts goals, plans, and strategies. (pp. 45-46)

Several experts in the field of Psychology have tackled FTL specifically. Bernstein (2023) identifies three main causes for the anxiety experienced by those who fail to launch. There is a fear of failure, overprotective parenting that shields the young person from challenges, and a lack of financial literacy. (para.1) Wisner (2023) suggests signs that a GenZer is also an FTL include the following: inability to reach developmental milestones at the same rate as their peers such as driving, going to college, and going to work. (Is Failure to Launch a Mental Illness section) Here it is important to remember emerging adults are growing up more slowly as they explore the numerous possibilities in front of them, exploration that is sometimes made difficult not just by the number of possibilities, but by economic challenges such as the cost of school and a difficult job market. Growing up slower might not necessarily indicate FTL, but comparing how one’s young adult is doing compared to others may be helpful to understand if they are getting stuck. (What is Failure to Launch Syndrome section) Wisner also suggests a difficulty in planning or navigating toward financial independence suggests a problem. Additional signs include, if a young person demonstrates a lack of motivation to explore personal interests, if they struggle with adult responsibilities, getting an oil change for instance, or if they are perceived as overdependent on parents. (Recognizing the Signs section) Wisner quotes Alyssa Frers in suggesting the following tips:

“Set clear boundaries and rules

Clearly communicate your expectations for your child

Set clear timeframes if offering physical or financial support; for example, you will provide financial support of X amount, and for Y amount of time

Provide help, but don’t enable

Only provide help if you won’t resent it

Seek counseling when needed, both for yourself and your child.” (Tips for Parents section)

Weinstein (2022) stresses the importance of family social support for young adults’ resilience. She suggests parental accommodation is helpful when modeling to a child or young adult they can cope with feeling anxiety but is unhelpful if the accommodation is such that it reinforces the idea that the person cannot cope and must avoid those situations that trigger anxiety for the child. Parental over-involvement, even with the best of intentions, often seeks to shield or protect the child, making the symptoms worse. Anxious parents normally focus on trying to get the child to change first, but solutions only come when the parents focus first on their own behavior. The parent needs to model accepting behavior acknowledging that what the child is feeling is “real and legitimate” and to not deny their experience or demean it. It is also important for the parent to model faith in the child. “I have faith in your ability. I know you can…” (The Accommodation Trap section) Weinstein notes that for many contemporary post-Covid FTLs, the pandemic not only highlighted the existential truth that there is danger in the world that we cannot control and had the logistical impact of setting back young adult development as many in college had to return home. Jobs were lost, jobs became more difficult to find, and dating and romantic relationships were placed on hold, relegated to distance/digital interaction, or ended. (para. 1) She suggests the importance of teamwork in the home to help FTLs become unstuck with conversation setting mutual expectations regarding how the work of the home gets done together, encouraging the young adult to explore the possibilities of the world while not requiring them to commit to a specific path in a specific time, helping them to set realistic goals and in extreme cases to consider family therapy. (How to Support Young Adults to Launch section)

McConville (2020) interviewed GenZ youth enabling us to see the challenge of launching into today’s world through the eyes of a GenZer. “For one thing, he believed that he was supposed to know now, at age nineteen, what he was going to do for the rest of his life. College terrified him, and even thinking about it magnified all the uncertainty and self-doubt in his brain because he didn’t know what he was ‘supposed’ to major in. Choosing a course of study had the feel to him of a high-stakes guessing game.” (p. 40) He suggests a strategy for those who would seek to help a stuck young adult to launch into the world of emerging adulthood. Those who seek to influence an FTL should communicate that the young adult’s task at this point is to “…figure out two things: what you like and what you’re good at.” (p. 41) Three goals are primary for the young adult: to become responsible, to become relational, and to become relevant to the adult world. (p. 47) These insights serve well to bridge to the next step in our interdisciplinary process as we pursue faith-learning integration to seek solutions for FTL as these points mirror well the Christian doctrine of vocation. The doctrine of vocation highlights that no one person is called to do everything, nor is everyone gifted to do all things, but everyone is gifted to do something in service to neighbor. This becomes an excellent launching point for considering an approach to solve this problem as GenZ is most aware of social and environmental issues which require people to bring their gifts to bear in the service of others.

### Cultural Anthropology

Cultural anthropology is a discipline that studies a culture from the inside. Given this research is designed to be applied to church leaders and parents in relationships with FTLs, certain insights from this discipline are suggestive of an approach toward a solution. Anthropology seeks to understand people “…in their own context, on their own terms. (Howell and Paris, 2019, p. 43) Ethnographic fieldwork is a model based that develops understanding “…based on the anthropologist's direct experience in culture.” (p. 28) “Participant observation is the primary method associated with ethnographic research.” (p. 39) Forming an understanding “…involves observing and interacting with people as they go about their daily lives…” (p. 38) As pastors, youth leaders, other church workers, and parents seek to motivate FTLs to become unstuck, they are doing so form inside and as part of the system. The influencer should be open to learning from their own direct experience and the communicated experience of the FTL to complement what is learned from our secular and religious literature reviews.

### Summation

The preceding information can be summed up with the following six As.

1. Access: Gen Z has grown up with unprecedented access to information, technology, and opportunities, which shapes their expectations and behaviors but demands their time and focus.

2. Activism: This generation is highly aware of social and environmental issues and is often characterized by their desire to create positive change and participate in activism but also exhibits a degree of skeptics toward established orders to bring change.

3. Acceleration: Gen Z experiences a rapidly changing world with technological advancements, cultural shifts, and economic transformations occurring at an unprecedented pace.

4. Agility: With the ability to adapt quickly to change, Gen Z is characterized by a flexibility and willingness to embrace new ideas, technologies, and ways of working.

5. Anxiety: Despite their adaptability, Gen Z also faces high levels of anxiety, partly due to the pressures of social media, economic uncertainty, and the fast-paced nature of modern life and the risk of becoming stuck in inaction resulting in FTL.

6. Aspiration: Gen Z is driven by a desire for personal fulfillment, meaning, and purpose in their lives, often seeking careers and experiences that align with their values and passions when they launch. With multiple options possible, to avoid being paralyzed into indecision, permission, and assistance to explore is mandatory.

# STEP 3: FAITH-LEARNING INTEGRATION INQUIRY WITH CHRISTIAN AND

The responsibilities of functioning as an adult in our families, our societies, and our world are not just matters of our contemporary world but are part of the very fabric of our creation. In the garden, Adam and Eve were created to live interdependently with dominion over the earth. Hegeman (2007) describes this moment as God giving the call to humanity to go forth and create a civilization. “The scope and richness of God’s culturative program for man implies and necessitates the involvement of a community of people with varied functions and abilities.” (p. 54) We find God working through the multigenerational family to accomplish His desires. For instance, it was Noah and his family who built the ark, and it was he, his wife, children, and their families that were saved from the flood. We see Moses called to transcend himself in service to his people, a lifelong calling to be a leader, prophet, and mediator between God and His people leading to their eventual freedom and establishment as a nation. Young David transcended his simple life as a shepherd to become a warrior, a poet/prophet, and a king as part of his vocation as the leader of Israel. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were all called to be more to serve others. Esther assimilated into her role as queen of Persia and used her position to intercede for her people and prevent their destruction. Throughout the Old Testament, we find examples of God working through people, making them to be more through the calling of vocation in service to others.

Jesus had specific teachings regarding our adult responsibilities within our vocations in the world. It could be argued that he helped to set the stage for the appreciation of carrying out one’s responsibilities in service to others. The tax collector asked, “Teacher, what shall we do?” Jesus responded, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” A soldier asked, “And we, what shall we do?” Jesus responded, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation and be content with your wages.” (English Standard Version Bible, 2007, Luke 3: 12-14) St. Paul advised people to “work with your hands”. (1 Thessalonians 4: 9-12) In First Corinthians chapter seven, Paul advised Christians not to abandon their earthly callings and responsibilities but to remain in their stations only understanding now they did so in service to God. (ESV) Paul set the example seeking to not be a burden on others but working in the trade of tentmaking. (Acts 18: 1-4, 1 Thessalonians 2:9) Paul spoke to the interdependent nature of human society and how all parts and functions serve the greater whole. (1 Corinthians 12: 12-31)

Turning toward more contemporary examinations of our responsibilities in society, the following area of theological study shall prove helpful toward understanding how God calls and enables us to serve others in society in productive ways.

* The Christian and culture: How do we live in the world?
* The doctrine of vocation
* Christian discipling of GenZ
* The Christian doctrine of identity

## Literature Review

### The Christian and Culture

Angus Menuge (1999) engaged the seminal views of H. Richard Niebuhr who explored how Christians have engaged culture throughout history. Menuge argues for the superiority of the Christ and culture in paradox model. The reformer Martin Luther articulated what has become a foundational framework within the Lutheran tradition for understanding the relationship between the church and the secular world. There are two realms, both ruled by Christ, but in different ways for differing purposes. “…the left-hand realm of the world governed by law and the right-hand realm of God governed by grace. These two realms exist side by side in a paradoxical relation…” (p. 40) Niebuhr was critical of this view believing it would lead to uncritical support of existing human institutions by the church and by Christians and social stagnation. Menuge points out that this is a misunderstanding of the Lutheran application of the paradox model. Christians are called to serve, to vocation. “Christian vocation is anything but a timid accommodation to existing human institutions.” (p. 47) He says that Luther recognized vocations as not only given by God, but as dynamic, that is they can change and adapt to serve the needs of a changing world. (p. 49) “Reform and innovation are considered good, so long as they are the fruits of a creative agape. We must however test the fruits, because we face not only the possibility of a divine transformation of the world but a satanic transformation as well.”  (p. 50) Similarly, Carson (2008) speaks of how culture can be “an enormous force for good” when it is established within the normative structure of the Biblical narrative. But it can become “both dangerous and idolatrous when it assumes independent value and constructs a frame of reference in flat contravention of Scripture’s norms.” Tensions between “Christ and culture…find their origin in the stubborn refusal of human beings, made in God’s image, to acknowledge their creaturely dependence on their Maker.” (p. 207)

When we are engaging FTLs we are engaging from the perspective of these two realms. On one hand, we want them to enter the physical world and live out their vocation in a manner that enables them to contribute to the greater good and facilitates their own lives, which is a matter of the left-hand realm. But we also acknowledge that beneath their stagnation may be more than simply an emotional response to external stressors and internalized expectations, but a sinful refusal to be what God has called us to be. Lutherans understand the paradoxical nuance of dealing with human behavior. Engage shortcomings from the perspective of the lefthand realm with a focus on law, failure, and guilt and we reinforce the sense of shame. Application of the law may lead to self-awareness and repentance, but if overdone may reinforce self-loathing, create a sense that the other person does not care for them, shut off communication, and reinforce withdrawal and stagnation. Lutherans understand the answer to awareness of failure is to hear the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ. But again, overdone, grace can become what was not intended as an enabling tolerance and acceptance of not just the person but their inadequate behavior, again reinforcing the stagnation. The key here is to exhibit the love of God and our love for our FTLs focusing not just on their shortcomings, but on the potential that God has for them through both realms: love and acceptance in the right, opportunities to make a life and to serve others in the left.

Richard Dreher advocates for 21st-century Christians to focus on building Christian communities with shared Christian values rather than seeking to transform the culture into something more hospitable to Christian life. “Could it be that the best way to fight the flood is to…stop fighting the flood? That is, to quit piling up sandbags and to build an ark in which to shelter until the water recedes and we can put our feet on dry land again? Rather than wasting energy and resources fighting unwinnable political battles, we should work instead on building communities, institutions, and networks of resistance that can outwit, outlast, and eventually overcome the occupation.” (p. 12) Could this response to worldly challenge mirror the response of FTL to challenge and tension with the world around them? Could the withdrawal from the world of adult responsibilities be understood as a manifestation of the postmodern tendency toward tribalism with the FTL living in two tribes: the tribe of his/her virtual world and the tribe of the family with a fear to journey from the tribe into the wider world? Could this also suggest that a productive approach may involve leveraging the tribe of family and the tribe of the church as a community to encourage our FTLs and help them find their own measure of courage?

### The Doctrine of Vocation

Menuge observed at the turn of the century “an age where irresponsibility, abandonment of vocation, is widespread…” (p. 49) Secular views of vocation have become divorced from God and in many cases are focused on self-service. Proclaiming and modeling the doctrine of vocation could help inspire FTLs to consider how work and adult responsibilities not only serve themselves but others and their community.

Veith (2002) discusses that Luther helped recover the idea of vocation as “…not so much a matter of what we do…” but “what God does in and through us.” (p. 10) “When God blesses us, He almost always does it through other people.” (pp. 14-15) In the modern era, this sense of vocation was eroded with a focus on the individual. (p. 22) Beneath is the truth that God is hidden in our neighbor and God acts through our vocations. (p.46) It is through vocation that people “…get their daily bread.” (p. 16) Veith suggests, “…there has never been a greater need to recover the Christian doctrine of vocation…” (p. 17) As GenZ is aware of the interdependent nature of society and is concerned with social and environmental issues, teaching and modeling the doctrine of vocation as God granting gifts and talents to each person through which we act in God’s service to serve others maybe an avenue through with to inspire spiritually attuned and Christian FTLs to see value in stepping out into the world and to develop and live out their vocation. It would also be well to remember that GenZ seeks flexibility and the possibility of multiple and differing vocations in life, which could be encouraged, but they should also be encouraged to remember that it begins with the first step.

### Christian Discipleship of GenZ and FTLs

Pastors, youth leaders, and parents are challenged by how to provide leadership and guidance for Christian discipleship of GenZ youth and adults. Meritt interviewed Pastor James Emery White who has written and spoken extensively on reaching GenZ. White finds a leverage point to influence GenZ and by extension FTLs in their “…strong desire to make a difference with their lives…” and that they “…are attracted to what will enable them to make a difference.” A further leverage point exists in their awe about the universe and “…an openness to spirituality via cosmology.” (2017, What are the unique concerns and questions Generation Z has about faith section) I have observed this firsthand in engaging youth in my congregations through exposing them to creation science events in our area as they have a strong curiosity about the wonder of it all and an appreciation for God’s hand in creating the world. White notes though one strong challenge. For them individual freedom is a “core value” and conversations about traditional morality will be “tricky” considering their emphasis on acceptance and affirming of lifestyles. (What are the unique concerns and questions Generation Z has about faith section) GenZ does not always have a positive view of organized religion and churches. White found 97% of GenZ found the church to be judgmental, 85% hypocritical, 78% old-fashioned, 72% out of touch with reality, and 70% insensitive to others. (White, 2017, p. 83) Yet GenZ is also pliable, existing in the “squishy center” between secularists and die-hard believers. White finds evidence they are highly influenced by others. (pp. 35-40) Thus while challenges remain from the influence of the post-Christian postmodern culture upon GenZ, there are also opportunities for engagement perhaps through augmenting the insights from the doctrine of vocation with how wonderful the world is that God has created to function together, from people helping people to people living as faithful stewards of the world they have been given.

Religious beliefs and resulting behaviors are often introduced and reinforced through the performance of religious rituals. An ancient theology axiom *lex orandi lex credendi* suggests that the way a community worships reflects and shapes its beliefs, and vice versa. The value of ritual is recognized in anthropology and sociology as present beyond religious domains. It could be hypothesized that the loss of the public graduation ritual for many youth in 2020-2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic may have reinforced the sense of remaining in childhood for many FTLs. Ironically though, around the same time, research was indicating at least in the realm of religion that GenZ was losing its appreciation of formal traditions. One survey found that 75% of GenZ acknowledged having a religious background but found only 18% planned to observe formal religious traditions such as a religious wedding. Additionally, the study found that while GenZ is open to utilizing religious practices and traditions from across disciplines they remain skeptical toward organized religion. (Packard & Kuile, 2021, para. 10) This suggests that transitional rituals that had a strong influence over previous human generations are losing their influence in the current generation.

There is an awareness that it is more difficult for church leaders, even those who specialize in youth ministry, to connect with younger folks. In my church body, trends over the past decades have indicated that we often lose our youth following confirmation. We struggle to keep them engaged with the church. In the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, there is a significant drop in young adults ages 18-29 in attendance and participation. Even those who do attend every week do not always find guidance for life from the church. 30% look to science, 6% to reason, and only 58% to religion. Among those who attend less frequently this drops to 30% for religion and rises to 54% for science. (“Attendance at religious services among members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod,” 2024) This is not limited to the LCMS. “Traditional forms of youth ministry are losing their effectiveness. Attendance numbers at weekly worship are [down across the board,](https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Faith-Communities-Today-2020-Summary-Report.pdf) and anecdotally, pastors, youth ministers and campus ministers are almost universally reporting greater difficulty in accessing and engaging Gen Z.” (Packard & Rusert, 2022, para. 1)

Packard and Kuile (2021) suggest two key points in reaching GenZ and by extension FTLs. First to make room for experimentation. “…make room for this generation’s organic and free-flowing approach to spirituality, in their communities and liturgy, resisting the temptation to see this as a kind of selfish spiritual path. Gen Z members are doing this expansive and curious work of constructing their faith whether or not faith leaders are showing up to guide them — but when caring adults walk alongside them and invest in their lives, it [makes a difference](https://faithcounts.com/gen-z-is-getting-lonelier-but-faith-leaders-can-make-a-difference/).” (para. 14) Secondly, to focus on building influence by gaining trust through building relationships as institutional authority or positional authority is often perceived negatively. (para. 12) Relational authority remains productive when seeking to influence GenZ. These points are echoed by Riess (2020) who also observes GenZ as having trust issues with organized religion even when they are affiliated with it. Noting they respond to relational authority, she found GenZ “…were more likely to take guidance from adults who care about them.” Studies indicate five key values that apply to relational authority: listening, transparency, integrity, care, and expertise. Listening was the most important. Expertise was the least important as 65% indicated they do not care about an adult’s expertise if the adult is perceived as not caring about them. (para. 17)

These observations taken together highlight some key points to remember when seeking to influence FTLs. For church workers or parents to engage based on expertise, or positional authority will likely be counterproductive without relational authority. Formal structured disciplining events and techniques effective with past generations may not be as effective with GenZ if are perceived as expressions of organized religion and positional authority if they are experienced as instruments seeking to control. More personal engagement focused on communicating genuine care and respect for the FTL may gain a hearing and an opening for the sharing of expertise and experience. This suggests that a mentoring model focused around joint exploration could be useful when trying to help FTLs.

Church leaders, pastors, and youth ministers are finding success in creatively partnering with GenZ youth and young adults to seek positive change in their communities. Packard & Rusert (2022) cite how one congregation took to baking bread together with their youth for local people and how “rich and honest conversations” sprang up around the baking regarding Christian concepts and questions. They conclude, “We need to focus more on the possibilities instead of the problems — more on what’s happening than what’s not happening.” (para. 16-17)

Research from the Springtide Institute finds that GenZ’s deep integration with digital communication often allows them to hear the “…stories and struggles of others” leading many to feel more connected to humanity. (Packard et al., 2021, para. 16) For GenZ who have launched, such awareness and sense of connection often translate into action. The more highly connected a GenZer felt to humanity the more likely they engaged in activity seeking to improve the situation. The same was observed when they felt connected to their natural environment. (para. 10) Interestingly, it was found the more religious or spiritual the GenZer, the more likely they were to act in the world around them. (para. 7) We can summarize this is capturing data reflecting those who have launched. But connecting this with the information coming from other studies, one can see the value in engaging with FTLs to help them move beyond social isolation to connection and value in leveraging their concerns for social and environmental issues to help facilitate cooperative action toward these issues and help get the FTLs moving into society.

### The Christian Doctrine of Identity

A complimentary issue for FTLs is not just their anxiety about who they will be when they grow up, but a lack of awareness of who they are. Here the Christian doctrine of identity may be helpful. Crouch (2022) highlights the importance of our personhood as created by God, of being recognized as a person, and how our economic systems tend to drag us into serving things rather than people. In contrast to the modtrust,ra’s emphasis on rugged self-sustaining individuality, we are created to be and are “…most alive when we are in relationships of empathy, recognition, trust and dependence.” (p. 33) Crouch believes the first human quest in life is to be recognized and known. (p. 11) He argues it is in the home in our families where we are first recognized and first begin to find our identity, a process that is most productive when the child is valued. It is also not a place of independence but dependence moving toward interdependence. (p. 141) It is not a leap to extend this insight to consider the importance of the church family in the lives of young people. As the church communicates and models what it means to be created by God in the image of God, self-value and worth should be enhanced. Crouch also points out that our economic systems offer “…abundance without dependence.” (p. 63) These systems end up putting people into the “service of things” even exploiting creation rather than serving others. (p. 142) Here again the social and environmental concerns of GenZ tie in with God’s revelation of our identity as His image called to mutual service and interdependence with one another and our world. GenZ and FTLs are communicating to us that they are aware that there should be more to life than work for the sake of work and do not desire to be dragged into the “service of things” and the exploitation of creation. They are communicating this by doing things differently and by simply not coming out to play the old games. If we seek to motivate them to move into the world in productive ways to develop their vocation, we need to focus less on “just get a job to pay your own bills,” and more on cooperative enterprises that serve our neighbor and care for our world. GenZ need to feel recognized in their equal personhood, as partners with us who are older in shaping the world, before they will see us as worthy to partner with.

Here we recall the previous data that many FTLs feel like a failure and feel inadequate to the task. Baylor’s Faith and Sports Institute (FSI) found that views of God and self influenced participation and performance in sports. Negative views of God such as God being conditional, angry, distant, or unpredictable, and negative views of self such as being unforgivable, unfixable, excluded, stuck, or alone paralyzed young people’s search for understanding of who they are. To address this underperformance, FSI created a curriculum that began with the first question, “whose are we?” (White et al., 2023, p.10) It is not a leap to conclude these insights extend beyond the world of sports into our home lives and our work lives. Highlighting essential Christian concepts of identity for FTLs will help equip them with a more true and productive understanding of themselves. These concepts could include: being created in the image of God, being gifted with talents and abilities, being called by our Creator to assist in co-creating a civilization that serves all, that we are loved and valued, that we are not perfect and make mistakes but are forgiven, picked up, dusted off, and encouraged to go forth and do better, and that we can do the same for others. Even Saul got it wrong at first. But God picked him up, dusted him off, forgave him, taught him, and sent him forth to work with the other Apostles and the first Christians to build the church.

### Summation

The following takeaways should be kept in mind for those seeking to assist FTLs.

1. The influencer must balance Law and Gospel, expectations and grace in a way that helps the FTL move forward rather than reinforcing a sense of inadequacy and stagnation.
2. We seek to leverage the influence of the tribe (the family tribe and the church tribe) to help an FTL move beyond their tribe into the world while remaining a productive interdependent member of their original tribes.
3. The influencer should seek to communicate and model that the FTL is created in God’s image with gifts and talents that can make a difference in the lives of others.
4. The influencer should help the FTL to understand vocation is more than a job to acquire things and independence but has always been about God working through us in the service of others.
5. The influencer should communicate and model that the FTL is valued as a creature of God who is created in the image of God.
6. The influencer should rely upon relational authority as a resource to assist their FTL rather than falling back on the traditional use of positional (I am the parent, the pastor, the expert) and organizational authority (the church says, society says).
7. Influencers should seek to creatively partner with their FTLs to engage the world in ways that make a difference. Influencers should communicate a belief that the FTL can indeed make a difference.
8. The influencer should model and share from their own life experience that we are all sinful human beings, no one is perfect, we all make mistakes, and must be picked up, dusted off, forgiven, and sent onward to make a go once again.
9. The influencers should consider creative ways of engaging with FTLs such as cooperative enterprises and mentoring rather than resorting to traditional ministerial approaches that may be perceived as organizational authorities seeking to exert power and control over the FTL.

# Appendix 4B: Interdisciplinary Research Worksheet

Date: March 2, 2024

Name of Scholar-Practitioner: David D. Reedy

Educational Background: B.A. *summa cum laude* Humanities with an emphasis in philosophy (East Tennessee State University). M.Div. (Concordia Seminary St. Louis), six units Clinical Pastoral Education, Education (30 academic hours) for Intentional Interim Ministry (Lutheran Transitional Ministry Association), Military education: Commissioned Officer’s Training; Chaplaincy Course, Squadron Office School, Assorted counseling courses, Religious and Cultural Awareness Course.

Social Profession: Parish Pastor of two congregations; congregational consultant.

Other Pertinent Information: Completed Cores 1-4 for OGS between 2002-2005.

# STEP 4: SYNTHESIZED INTERDISCIPLINARY FORMULATION (WITH SOCIAL RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS) CONVERTING TO A FORMAL SOCIAL RESEARCH PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESIS:

My Research Problem: Generation Z (Gen Z) experiences Failure to Launch (FTL) syndrome due to skepticism towards established structures, rapid societal acceleration, and heightened anxiety. Parents and church leaders need a more effective approach to assist youth to adult transition than has been employed in the past.

My Research Hypothesis: FTLs will benefit from a mentoring program using mentors who have trained to understand the unique expectations, challenges and opportunities present in GenZ’s approach to adult life.

Significance: What difference would the research make to change the world? FTL’s will become unstuck and enter the world empowered to live out their vocations in service to others.

Hypothetical Research Design: The researcher identified and partnered with five congregations within the Texas District of the LCMS who recognized the existence of FTLs in their midst. A two-day weekend workshop with three sessions was presented to each congregation to pastors, youth pastors, church leaders, and interested parents.

* First Session Saturday morning: Meet Gen Z and why your GenZer might be an FTL (concludes with small group table discussion of how what they learned might apply to their situations).
* Session Two Saturday afternoon: Insights from academic disciplines and Christian theology for connecting with FTLs (concludes with round table brainstorming regarding application).
* Sunday morning: Worship
* Sunday afternoon: the mentoring program – how to build and leverage relational authority to influence your FTL through cooperative life building that seeks to make a change in the real world.

Three surveys were administered in conjunction with this program. A short survey was presented in the first session evaluating the knowledge of causal factors for FTL and their perceived ability to productively engage it. A post-workshop survey was presented to evaluate changes in these two factors after receiving instruction. Six months after the workshop a third survey was presented to workshop participants to evaluate how many actively utilized the mentoring model and how successful it was.

Hypothetical Research Results: Survey results indicated a general sense of powerlessness and a lack of essential understanding regarding the dynamics related to FTL before the workshop. Post-workshop, the attendees communicated a better sense of understanding of where their FTLs are and why as well as feeling more optimistic about being able to help them. The third survey indicated that 80% of influencers (pastors, youth leaders, parents) utilized the mentoring model and that 85% of their FTLs were perceived to have benefited from the application of the model.

# STEP 5: CRITICAL (APOLOGETIC) AND CONTEXTUAL COMMUNICATION

An article was published in the LCMS periodical “The Lutheran Witness” highlighting the valuable outcomes of the approach. In addition, speaking engagements were conducted with various congregational circuits (groups of congregations within our Texas District) to expose pastors to the potential of the model. To facilitate communication of the value of the model I also created a series of YouTube presentations that could be shared by pastors and others with interested parties.

In these presentations, I highlighted the following. The existence of failure to launch syndrome is real and traditional approaches both in youth ministry and parenting have problem ineffective. This approach is supported by robust data collection and analysis and the testimonials of those who indicate that the mentoring approach is effective. Resistance is expected from those who come from previous generations who may argue it is merely a matter of accepting responsibility for oneself, stopping being lazy and dependent, and getting a job. Testimonials from those who have followed the program about the rewards associated with partnering with FTLs and GenZ can be beneficial here not only to demonstrate the value of the program to help FTL’s launch but also to highlight the real-world difference that happened in the community which could also have the element of creating positive experiences of the church in the community by GenZ and others.

# STEP 6: ETHICAL & SOCIAL ORTHOPRAXIS (i.e., LEADERSHIP ACTIONS)

In my personal life, the utilization of the model as I sought to influence my daughter was a game-changer. Reducing my expectations of time frame from my newfound awareness of the developmental tasks of “emerging adulthood” allowed me to focus on building relational authority with her so that together we could cooperatively explore her options helping her to discover what she like and what she was good at so that she could take her first steps to a vocation of service to others.

Using this model within my congregation proved also to be a game changer for many of our parents and our youth and parents were more empowered to assist their FTL and even their launching GenZers. The congregation benefited from increased GenZ participation as I and other church leaders led the congregation into cooperative work with our youth and young adults to engage in community outreach that made a difference in our local community.

Building on the success within participating congregations, I continue to engage our district and synodical leadership, as well as various institutions which help to educate and formulate church leaders regarding not only the challenges of reaching GenZ but the potential that results when approaches are productively modified and GenZ comes alongside as partners in ministry.

# STEP 7: REFLECTIVE EVALUATION

While the original research focused on giving specific influencers (Pastors, youth leaders, parents) the ability to help FTLs to launch and the mentoring model demonstrated the ability of cooperative relational leadership to generate momentum for FTLs, it came to light that aspects of this approach might also assist with the problem of helping GenZ be less skeptical of organized religion and more design to be a participant in congregational life. Further research building on the understanding gained by the success of the mentoring model of GenZ may yield a greater understanding of the challenges and provide insight into potential approaches to help reach GenZ not just for the benefit of the left-hand realm but also for the church of the right-hand realm.

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