

The Beginnings of Outreach to the Youth (Aged 20-25)

1. Addressing the "Great Rewiring" (Isolation vs. Community)
The Problem: Gen Z is the most "physically safe" yet "socially isolated" generation due to the "great rewiring" of childhood by smartphones and social media.
The Strategy: The church should serve as a generator of "social capital" and real-world connection to alleviate the epidemic of anxiety and loneliness.
Actionable Items: Phone-Free Fellowships: Host young adult gatherings where phones are intentionally put away to facilitate "in-person socializing." Real-World Responsibility: Gen Z moves into adulthood more slowly; give 20-25 year olds actual responsibility in the parish (e.g., ushering, altar guild, or board service) to provide the "real world" engagement they often lack. Singles WELS/ELS gatherings: Work with other churches of our fellowship to help connect ELS youth to relationships. Building relationships within our fellowship facilitates for relationships formed in the Word and connected to the church.
The Real Focus: While building social capital is a valid <i>pre-evangelistic</i> tool, the Lutheran pastor must remember that the primary "antidote to anxiety" is not merely community, but the Gospel —the objective assurance of the forgiveness of sins. Community in the church is a fruit of being gathered around the Word.
2. Shifting from "Jerusalem" to "Babylon" Discipleship
The Problem: Churches often prepare youth to follow Jesus in a Christian world that no longer exists.
The Strategy: We must move from a "Jerusalem" mindset (where the culture supports the church) to a "Babylon" mindset (where the church is a distinct, minority subculture).
Actionable Items: Catechesis for the Secular World: Move beyond "basic" confirmation and offer "Advanced Catechesis" that specifically applies the Small Catechism to modern ethical and digital dilemmas. Connect the Secular College: Evaluate how many ELS congregations have campus ministries. Fund churches that are willing to serve in college settings. (WELS Campus Ministry)
The Real Focus: This aligns well with the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms . We should equip our 20-25 year olds to live faithfully in the Left-Hand Kingdom (the world) while finding their true identity in the Right-Hand Kingdom (the Church), where Christ rules through the Word.
3. Authenticity over Branding ("Killing the Brand")
The Problem: Gen Z is highly skeptical of "branded" Christianity and high-production "performances."
The Strategy: Carlson suggests "Killing the Brand" and focusing on being "Real" or authentic. We do this by prioritizing transparency and authentic relationships.
Actionable Items: Radical Transparency: In outreach materials, be honest about the "hurt" and "doubt" young people feel rather than presenting a "perfect" church life. The "Ancient-Future" Appeal: Discuss the liturgical heritage of the ELS. Gen Z is skeptical of "brands" but often respects "roots." Highlighting the historic, unchanged nature of the Liturgy can be a powerful "authentic" tool. Be who we are and use that in marketing.
The Real Focus: For the ELS, this "authenticity" should be found in celebrating the "Flavor of the ELS." Gen Z often craves the "otherness" of traditional worship. We can rejoice and be proud of our uniqueness, size, and doctrine.
4. Moving from "Consumer" to "Creator"
The Problem: Gen Z has been raised in a "consumer-driven" religious environment that prioritizes "religious entertainment" and high-production value, often treating the church as a service provider rather than a community.
The Strategy: Engage young adults as "Creators" who contribute to the mission, rather than "Consumers" of religious entertainment
Actionable Items: Content Collaboration: Instead of the Board providing all the tools, task 20-25 year olds with <i>creating</i> the Synod's digital outreach content (videos, podcasts, or graphics) that explain Lutheran doctrine. Mentorship Programs: Pair young adults with older "mentors" not just for social time, but to learn the "craft" of churchmanship—how to care for the property, be active in council as junior members or manage church finances.
The Real Focus: This aligns with the Doctrine of Vocation. Reaching 20-25 year olds is not about entertaining them; it is about calling them to their various vocations within the Body of Christ.

Suggestions for the Board for Home Outreach	
	Focus on the "Why" of the Liturgy: Gen Z is "burdened" by a lack of understanding. Use outreach tools that explain <i>why</i> we worship as we do. The Lutheran Confessions (<i>Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. XXIV</i>) emphasize that the ceremonies exist to teach the people what they need to know about Christ.
	Safe Spaces for Doubt (Law and Gospel): Carlson notes that "doubt" is a major catalyst for Gen Z leaving. Outreach should create environments where 20-25 year olds can bring their questions without judgment. Use the Law to address the "hurt" and "anxiety" they feel from the world, and provide the Gospel as the only true comfort (Romans 1:16).
	Engage as "Creators," not "Consumers": Carlson suggests moving Gen Z from "Consumers" to "Creators". In a Lutheran context, this means involving young adults in the life of the congregation, not through "entertainment-style" youth groups, but through meaningful service in the church's mission and mercy work.
	Intergenerational Mentorship: Because Gen Z is "moving into adulthood much more slowly," they need the "social connection" of the older generation. Bridge "Generation Gaps" to be bridged through one-on-one mentorship between older elders and 20-25 year olds, focusing on the study of the Small Catechism as a lifelong tool for faith.

Ideas gathered from:

1. Carlson, Reese. *Church Doesn't End with Z: Why Gen Z is Leaving the Church and How to Reach Them*. 2022.
2. Rainer, Thom S. *The Anxious Generation Goes to Church*. Tyndale Momentum, 2025.