

WHY ARE YOUNG PEOPLE SO LONELY?

*"All the lonely people
Where do they all come from?
All the lonely people
Where do they all belong?"*

Those questions raised by the Beatles have never been more urgent.

All the surveys show that young people are the loneliest people in the nation.

In a recent poll by the Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School, it was found that nearly half (47 percent) of 18-to-29 year olds (Generation Z) reported "feeling down, depressed, or hopeless," and a quarter of them (24 percent) have had thoughts that they would be "better off dead, or hurting themselves in some way at least several days in the last two weeks."

The poll further disclosed that 44 percent have been bothered by loneliness at least several days in the last few weeks; 46 percent reported "little interest or pleasure in doing things"; and 55 percent said they felt "nervous, anxious or on edge."

This is consistent with the findings of a 2019 survey conducted by Cigna. It found that a "loneliness epidemic" had gripped the nation. This obviously had nothing to do with Covid, as the lockdowns had yet to happen.

"Unfortunately," the researchers said, "it seems that the younger generations are feeling this the most. The study found that Loneliness scores [based on the UCLA Loneliness Scale]

rose among the younger generations, with the youngest generation, Gen Z, feeling the loneliest." Millennials were the runner-ups.

We know from many studies that the most lonely people are also the least religious, and vice versa (see Bill Donohue's book, *The Catholic Advantage: Why Health, Happiness and Heaven Await the Faithful*).

In a study conducted last year by the Survey Center of American Life of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), it concluded that "Generation Z is the least religious generation yet." Indeed, 34 percent of them are religiously unaffiliated. Moreover, 18 percent identify as either agnostic or atheist (split evenly between the two). "In contrast, fewer than one in 10 (9 percent) baby boomers and 4 percent of the silent generation [those in their eighties and nineties] identifies as atheist or agnostic."

Not surprisingly, the AEI study also found that Generation Z was the most likely to say they were lonely, followed by Millennials.

The Cigna study revealed that social media is driving much of this mental health problem. "Gen Z and Millennials were identified as the loneliest generations and social media is thought to be the main contributing factor of loneliness in these younger generations." That's because they spend more time on social media than any other generation.

"Gen Z spends less time with their friends face-to-face and more time online and on social media. As we know from decades of research, people who interact with others face-to-face are less likely to be lonely. Recent research suggests that those who spend more time on social media, in contrast, are more likely to be lonely."

Virtually all of the research in this area shows that young girls are the most likely to use social media; they are also

more likely than boys to feel lonely.

It all comes down to bonds. Bonding with others, and bonding with God.

Humans are social animals. When, for whatever reason, a sense of community is absent, serious mental issues arise. In Donohue's study comparing Hollywood celebrities to cloistered nuns, he found that the nuns were healthier and happier, by far. Yet our society prizes the "freedom" that the celebs enjoy. But are they happy?

Parents, teachers and the clergy have to do a better job ensuring that young people spend more time interacting with each other face-to-face and less time on social media; the bonds they would form pay big psychological dividends. It would also behoove them to nudge young people to spend more time alone bonding with God.

If this were done, we would be less likely to ask who the lonely people are, and where they all come from.