

January 2024

The surgeon general recently released a report about the epidemic of loneliness and isolation. (Read the report [HERE](#) or google and it'll pop right up.) The subtitle to the report is, "The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community." I spoke of this report in my Advent 4 sermon and the connection/support between Mary and Elizabeth. Click [HERE](#) to hear that sermon.

I have been pondering the findings and recommendations in this report. None of it is shocking to me. As a pastor through the pandemic I commented frequently about how I saw it impacting people of different ages and wondered what the ramifications would be down the line. Now, in 2024 we are acutely seeing the effects of isolation. Some of these effects were helpful, some less helpful, and some deeply concerning. Our children and youth have been impacted developmentally, socially, and mentally. Anecdotaly, after having worked with children and youth for so many years, I can see the changes and challenges. Different age groups have been impacted in various ways. On a helpful side, many people have found new forms of connection and engagement with the ability to be present in creative ways. Others have found themselves much more disconnected and lacking human interaction.

It is important we pay attention to this as a community for community forms in many ways. In person is what we know best. On Zoom is what we are now familiar with. But there are other ways: 1:1 reach outs, letters and cards, text messages and phone calls, and social media, just to name a few.

To give time to connect face to face and engage in caring conversation, during Lent we are going to offer a midweek meal and conversation time. This will be from 6:30-7:30p in the library with a simple soup meal and conversation questions.

Additionally, we received a grant to support social media conversations, videos, and engagement. The target audience is people in their late teens, 20's and early 30's. This grant will allow us to experiment for approximately 3 months. All generations engage in conversation with their own style and preferences. Tik Tok, Youtube, Instragram, Be Real, and other social media apps are true forms of connection and community for Gen Alpha, Gen Z, and Millenials. It is important they are not discounted as real and engaging. It looks different than what anyone has known in the past, even 5 or 10 years ago.

As we prepare for Lent, perhaps this is a time to consider what connection means to you, how it is engaged in your own life, where your desires lay, and what you observe as needs for the community -- inside and outside the church walls.

Enjoy continuing to connect and experiment!

Pastor Shannyn

**Additional ideas for connection (these are experiments I, personally, have been playing with).**

- Recently, I have become a fan of the “7 minute phone calls.” When connecting with friends or family it can be intimidating to do a call. “Once I get on the phone it’s going to be an hour. I don’t have an hour or that much to say.” Thus, I have started by saying, “I’ve got 7 minutes, let’s do a quick catch up!” It’s amazing the connection that can happen in a short time and by establishing the time frame, it honors boundaries of time and energy.
- Sending memes and pictures via social media often induces brief connection and conversation. It offers time to think about another person and what they might find interesting, funny, or intriguing.
- Create a shared Spotify playlist with a friend or family member. Each day add a song based on lyrics or sound. It ends up becoming a form of story telling about what is happening in your day or your life.
- 2 minute check-ins via text or direct message, where each person writes for 2 minutes an update on life, then takes 2 minutes to respond to the other person.