

Integration of Pastoral Counselling and Christian Leadership Spirituality In Addressing the Moral Degradation of Generation Z

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Abstract:

The moral degradation of Generation Z poses a challenge for society and the church due to the increasing identity crisis, inconsistency with ethics, and even the weakening of spiritual orientation in their lives. This condition is exacerbated by rapid digital cultural changes, so that traditional Christian leadership mentoring patterns are no longer able to respond to the moral development needs of the younger generation. As a result, the church needs an integrative approach that combines pastoral counselling and Christian leadership spirituality to facilitate the formation of Christian character and values. This study aims to examine in depth the integration of pastoral counselling and Christian leadership spirituality as a relevant approach in addressing the moral degradation of Generation Z. It uses a qualitative-descriptive method with a literature study approach. The results show that the integration of pastoral counseling and Christian leadership spirituality provides a solid theological foundation for forming an assistance approach that holistically touches on the psychological and spiritual aspects of Generation Z. Through a deep understanding of the dynamics of moral degradation and the application of an integrative model that includes counselling, spiritual guidance, and leadership role models, the church obtains a relevant and transformative intervention pattern. The implementation of this model in church ministry enables the creation of sustainable moral restoration and the strengthening of the capacity of Christian leaders in guiding the younger generation to face the complexities of digital culture.

Keywords:

pastoral counselling, leadership spirituality, Generation Z, moral degradation, pastoral theology

Article history:

Submitted: 05 June. 2025, Revised: 10 Dec. 2025, Accepted: 15 Dec. 2025

How to cite this article:

Silaen, R. (2025). *Integration of pastoral counselling and Christian leadership spirituality in addressing the moral degradation of Generation Z*. TELEIOS: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen, 5(2), 201–211. <https://doi.org/10.53674/teleios.v5i2.299>

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of moral degradation among Generation Z, manifested in increased impulsive behaviour, identity crises, a low ability to build spiritual commitment, and even reduced social relationships, has become a serious challenge for churches and Christian leaders. Furthermore, the advancement of civilisation in Indonesia, particularly with the development of technology, has exposed Generation Z to various impacts, particularly related to the decline in morals and ethics. Gadget use can influence a person's behaviour and ethics, both good and bad. Therefore, it is undeniable that Generation Z in Indonesia is experiencing a moral and ethical crisis due to the influx of foreign culture through social media. Furthermore, they also tend to have excessive gadget use habits. (Hakim et al., 2021) Rapid changes in digital culture and weak spiritual guidance have made Generation Z increasingly vulnerable to lifestyles that are inconsistent with religious values. (Yakob & Yesaya, 2024) It's undeniable that Generation Z is the group most exposed to secular ideas. Data from the Barna Group, as reported in Yornan Masinambow's research, shows that nearly 60% of Generation Z members from Christian families chose to leave the church because they felt its teachings no longer aligned with their lives. This underscores the need for a more relevant and contextual model of Christian faith education that connects their beliefs with the realities they face. (Masinambow, 2022) Thus, a concerted effort is needed from the church, family, and community to provide relevant spiritual guidance so that Generation Z can build strong morals, ethics, and faith amidst the currents of change.

The main problem underlying this research is the weakness of the church mentoring model. (Lafau et al., 2024) That can integrate pastoral counselling with Christian leadership spirituality in addressing the moral crisis of Generation Z. Moreover, various national and global surveys show a decline in ethical sensitivity, an increase in risky behaviour, and a weakening of religious commitment in Generation Z, while exposure to social media and performative cultural pressures is actually getting stronger. (Asyahidda & Azis, 2024) Christian leaders often report confusion in navigating the moral struggles of this generation, because traditional methods are no longer adequate. In addition, the emergence of anxiety, feelings of alienation, and a loss of purpose in life (Clarine & Hidradjat, 2025) There are indicators that a partial pastoral approach is insufficient, so that integrative interventions that touch on psychological, spiritual, and character-building aspects are needed. Therefore, the church needs a new mentoring paradigm that is not only reactive but also proactive in shaping the moral and spiritual resilience of the younger generation. This comprehensive approach is expected to create a safe space for Generation Z to grow, reflect, and rediscover the direction and meaning of their lives in the light of Christian values.

The phenomenon of moral degradation in Generation Z, seen in the increasing behaviour leading to moral degradation, as well as the high exposure to secular culture and digital media, indicates that church approaches and leadership must be bold in building religious commitment among them. Based on this background, the problem to be formulated is how to design and implement an integrative church mentoring model that combines pastoral counseling and Christian leadership spirituality, in order to be able to effectively overcome moral degradation and support the growth of character and faith of Generation Z. Because the many negative influences of information technology have resulted in the displacement of character values and

morality, including students in schools. This is a significant challenge for educators in instilling character values in students in schools. (Hidayat & Subando, 2024) Thus, a holistic and contextual mentoring strategy is needed so that Generation Z can build a strong moral and spiritual foundation amidst the rapid flow of change.

Previous studies have emphasized pastoral counseling as a psychopastoral approach without incorporating the spiritual dimension of leadership as an element in shaping the character of the younger generation, such as research by Dwi Meinanto, Bobby Kurnia Putrawan, and Amran Simangunsong, which states that the development of social media has shifted people's behavior patterns, including those of Generation Z, resulting in actions such as phubbing that contradict moral values and biblical teachings about love, relationships, and respect for others. (Meinanto et al., 2022) Likewise, Elisabet Vritze Sitanggang emphasised that Generation Z, who grew up in the digital era, has a high ability to access information, but is also vulnerable to the negative influence of technology that impacts their mindset, social behaviour, and morality. Dependence on social media and exposure to content that is not in accordance with biblical values, such as bullying, pornography, and other deviant behaviour, indicate the need for more intensive spiritual and moral guidance from the family. (Sitanggang, 2024) However, the role of Christian religious education in the family becomes an important foundation for instilling the values of faith, character, and discipline through the family altar, spiritual formation, and strengthening responsibility in using technological advances wisely. (Sitanggang, 2024) From previous research, while studies on Christian leadership have focused on the aspects of shepherding and exemplary behaviour, they have not developed a systematic and applicable counselling intervention model. Thus, there is a research gap regarding how these two approaches can be synergized theologically and practically to respond to the moral degradation of Generation Z. This research is here to fill this gap by offering an integrative framework that emphasizes that pastoral effectiveness does not only depend on counseling methods, but on the spirituality of leaders who present moral authority, pastoral sensitivity, and the ability to guide ethical transformation sustainably. This research seeks to explain how the unification of pastoral counselling principles with Christian leadership spirituality can produce a more effective mentoring approach for Generation Z. The focus of the research is directed at an in-depth understanding of the role of Christian leaders in fostering, directing, and restoring the morality of the younger generation amidst the challenges of the digital era. Thus, this research is expected to provide a theoretical and practical basis for churches in formulating relevant and contextual mentoring strategies.

METHOD

This research uses the method qualitative, (Prof. Dr Sugiyono, 2016, p. 89) with a theological and pastoral literature study approach This study, compiled from various sources, including pastoral theology books, academic works on Christian leadership spirituality, empirical research on Generation Z behavior, and relevant church documents, begins with a literature review to establish a theological foundation for integrating pastoral counseling and Christian leadership spirituality. Furthermore, the study will examine the dynamics of Generation Z's moral degradation through a pastoral and spiritual perspective to understand its causes and impacts. In the next stage, the study will design an integrative model and evaluate

its implementation and pastoral implications for the contextual moral recovery of Generation Z.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theological foundations of the integration of pastoral counselling and the spirituality of Christian leadership

Christian leadership spirituality is a leadership approach grounded in the principles of Christian faith and the life example of Jesus Christ. This leadership emphasises the development of character, wisdom, (Mudak & Manafe, 2025) The integrity of leaders guided by biblical values in decision-making and guiding others. With this spirituality, a leader not only leads administratively but also fosters the spiritual and moral growth of the members they lead. (Haryanti et al., 2024) Indeed, leaders as part of church ministry not only function as a space for emotional healing but also as a vessel for spiritual formation that brings about moral transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit. The biblical foundation that underpins this integration is clearly evident in Jesus' ministry as the Great Shepherd, who not only taught but also healed spiritual wounds. (Bona Pangihutan & Munthe, 2024) , restored human dignity, and guided His disciples to grow in character and obedience. (Hondro, 2025) Pastoral counselling, from a biblical perspective, is an extension of Christ's example, (Herman, 2023) This combines empathy and biblical teaching values. Meanwhile, Christian leadership spirituality finds its roots in the command to be a leader who radiates exemplary living, moral integrity, (Arifianto & Ngesthi, 2023) And a deep relationship with God, even having the courage to be an agent of change in society. (Suhadi; Yonathan Alex Arifianto, 2020) Thus, the integration of pastoral counselling and Christian leadership spirituality becomes a strategic foundation for forming leaders who are able to restore morals, provide spiritual guidance, and become living examples for Generation Z and the wider community.

Church tradition also enriches this integration through a spiritual leadership model that emphasises the relationship between pastor and congregation, even emphasising the importance of spiritual discipline and moral virtue. The church must also be bold enough to be present for Generation Z to build spirituality and reduce moral degradation. This is because Christian leadership is truly an inseparable part of the task of healing wounded hearts, teaching congregations according to God's Word, and always building a life integrated with holiness. All three form a unity that forms the framework of pastoral theology to this day. Moreover, the modern pastoral theological framework further clarifies the close relationship between counselling and spiritual leadership. Pastoral counselling is understood not merely as the application of psychological theory in a church context, but rather as a practice of accompaniment rooted in a theological understanding of humans as *imago Dei*, wounded but called to recovery and transformation. Therefore, Christian leadership spirituality, on the other hand, emphasises the process of inner formation of leaders so that they are able to lead from integrity and live in wisdom, humility, and sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the integration of church tradition, pastoral counselling, and Christian leadership spirituality forms a solid theological foundation for restoring, guiding, and fostering Generation Z in the depths of faith, morals, and a complete spiritual life.

The integration of the two produces a holistic mentoring pattern, encompassing cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and moral aspects that are essential in responding to the complexities of the younger generation's struggles. Inner renewal is a process of reconciliation with God. (Suprpto & others, 2025) Through the restoration of relationships and identity, which not only affects emotional states but also renews one's moral orientation. Repentance from a pastoral perspective is not simply a behaviour change, but rather a change in life direction driven by spiritual awareness and spiritual guidance. (Nanariain & Pardosi, 2024) Spiritual mentoring becomes a means that allows Christian leaders to be present as facilitators of growth. (Bartolo, 2025) Moral transformation is the fruit of an integrative process that combines inner healing and faith formation. Thus, this theological foundation shows that the integration of pastoral counselling and Christian leadership spirituality is not a new model, but a continuation of the church's mission throughout history to restore, guide, and transform people towards Christlikeness. This integration offers a comprehensive approach that is highly relevant to addressing the challenges of Generation Z's moral degradation, while strengthening the church's role as a community of healing and character formation.

The Dynamics of Moral Degradation of Generation Z from a Pastoral and Spiritual Perspective

Morals are habits that are related to a person's concern for others. (Adha et al., 2019) Morals involve an inseparable interweaving of emotions, cognition, and actions. Furthermore, morals also serve as a guideline for interacting with others. The good and bad of a person's actions can be measured by moral values. In essence, a person's morals are closely related to moral knowledge and morality itself. (Surur, 2010) Morals can also be understood to provide boundaries for human activities with values (provisions) of good and bad, as well as right and wrong. When related to everyday life, a person is said to be moral if that person behaves well. (Firdaus et al., 2025) Morals in Christian education are an important aspect in shaping students' character based on Christian principles and values. (Legi & Sibarani, 2023) It reflects the complexity of the struggles of a generation born and growing up in a rapidly changing digital era. Thus, moral formation in Christian education becomes an important foundation for guiding generations to act according to the values of goodness, truth, and integrity amidst the dynamics of modern life.

Phenomenologically, Generation Z faces cultural pressures never experienced by previous generations, including unlimited information flow, normalisation of impulsive behaviour, and intense exposure to social standards shaped by digital media. (Asyahidda & Azis, 2024) This condition creates disorientation for morals and values, where the boundaries between right and wrong become blurred due to the dominance of subjective perspectives and moral relativism. (Shomali, 2011, p. 78) They tend to formulate self-identity through external validation by building several followers, looking at comments (Agma, 2025) and digital images that strengthen the identity crisis and weaken moral resilience in the face of social pressure. When moral values do not have a solid spiritual foundation, they become vulnerable to risky behaviour, decreased empathy (Samaloisa & Hutahaean, 2023) and a tendency to separate spiritual life from the digital life they live every day. From a bibliological perspective, this

moral crisis can be understood as a real manifestation of the struggle of humans to fall into sin that continues to occur in the midst of a new cultural context. The dynamics of moral degradation reflect changes in human behaviour that are increasingly moving away from the principles of truth (Patandean et al., 2025). In the context of the modern generation, especially Generation Z, moral degradation is seen from the increase in negative behaviour such as dishonesty, violence, ridicule, and misuse of technology. This phenomenon is in line with the Bible's warning that humans tend to take the wrong path when they leave God, as written in Romans 1:21, "For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks to Him, but their hearts became futile, and their foolish minds were darkened." In addition, Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us that "Before all things, the human heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" shows the human tendency to go astray without proper moral guidance.

Moral degradation not only impacts individuals but also the social and spiritual environment of society. Lack of supervision, weak role models, and the uncontrolled influence of technology can accelerate the shift in moral values. Ephesians 4:22-24 emphasises the need for a change of heart and mind in the effort of moral recovery: "That you may put away your old ways of life...and put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its Creator." Furthermore, Proverbs 4:23 emphasises the importance of guarding the heart as the centre of morality: "Guard your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the issues of life." In this regard, Galatians 6:7 also warns about the consequences of human actions: "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows, this he will also reap." Thus, understanding and strengthening moral values rooted in biblical teachings are key to facing and overcoming moral degradation in the modern era.

The Book of Proverbs and Paul's letters emphasise the importance of wisdom, discipleship, and character formation as the foundation for ethical growth; however, Generation Z often lacks spiritual figures capable of guiding them intimately and personally. The Bible also highlights the importance of faith communities as spaces for moral healing and strengthening. (Zega & Zai, 2025) Yet this generation often feels alienated from church communities due to irrelevant ministry models or approaches that lack understanding of their psychological dynamics. Therefore, a theological reading of this phenomenon must consider that Generation Z's moral needs cannot be separated from their spiritual needs. (Subowo, 2021) Thus, efforts to restore Generation Z's morals must be integrated with personal spiritual guidance, Bible-based character building, and strengthening their involvement in relevant and supportive faith communities.

A pastoral approach must be able to read these inner dynamics deeply, because their moral crisis is often not the result of indifference to Christian values, but rather the result of spiritual emptiness and a lack of guidance relevant to the context of their lives. From a spiritual perspective, Generation Z requires mentoring that not only emphasises moral norms (Sitanggang, 2024) but also provides space for the search for meaning, silence, a personal relationship with God, and the experience of faith. The spirituality of Christian leaders is crucial in this regard because the example and spiritual presence of a leader are determining factors in the mentoring process of this generation. Thus, the dynamics of moral degradation of Generation Z are difficult to separate from the urgent need for an integrative pastoral approach

that can connect psychological recovery, spiritual formation, and ethical transformation as a whole.

An Integrative Model of Pastoral Counselling and Christian Leadership Spirituality

The need for a model that combines a spiritual guidance approach with leadership development based on biblical values emphasises personal mentoring that focuses on moral recovery and character growth. With this integration, Christian leaders not only lead administratively but also guide the congregation or the younger generation in holistic spiritual and moral growth. This emphasises that leaders significantly influence the moral development of young people. (Matodzi & Mathungeni, 2025) This is built on the awareness that inner healing, spiritual growth, and moral transformation are inseparable in the mentoring process for Generation Z. This proves that the church plays a vital role in nurturing spiritual leadership among young people, emphasising integrity, humility, and empathy as key qualities. (Tarore et al., 2023) This foundation leads leaders to integrate pastoral counselling techniques with the practice of leadership spirituality rooted in the example of Christ as the Chief Shepherd. (Irawati et al., 2021) Christian leaders are trained to read dynamics with sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit, so that the counselling process is not only diagnostic but also guides clients to discover spiritual meaning and a new direction in life. Moral role modelling is an important dimension for Christian leaders. (Sumual & Arifianto, 2025) Not only provide advice but also demonstrate a life rooted in integrity, honesty, and love—values that are the foundation of Generation Z's moral recovery.

Character development in this model is carried out through ongoing mentoring, where leaders help to internalise Christian values through reflection, spiritual practices, and a commitment to spiritual life. Spiritual guidance serves as a bridge between pastoral counselling and spiritual formation, (Lake et al., 2024) Because it provides a space for young people to recognise God's presence in their life experiences, formulate a healthy self-identity, and develop moral resilience in facing digital realities and complex social pressures. In the context of Generation Z, spiritual guidance needs to be presented with a dialogical approach, (Ina & Hia, 2025) And can adapt to the language and psychological dynamics they experience. This integrative model also includes a narrative approach that sees life stories as theological spaces where God works. The relational approach focuses on the importance of safe relationships because Generation Z really needs the presence of leaders. (Rimadhani, 2024). Meanwhile, the dimension of spiritual formation is emphasised through practices such as prayer, biblical meditation, daily reflection, and the rhythm of spiritual life that helps counselees build a deep relationship with God. Thus, this integrative model of pastoral counselling and Christian leadership spirituality offers a holistic and relevant pattern of mentoring, which not only touches the psychological aspects of Generation Z, but also directs them to continuous growth in faith and moral renewal.

Pastoral implementation and implications for the moral recovery of Generation Z

The church needs to provide a safe space for this generation to express their struggles, both through individual and group counselling with church leaders. This can guide the younger generation to experience God's presence in the process of recovering their identity, finding meaning in life, and ultimately, their moral orientation. The church must offer pastoral care that is sensitive to the mental health needs of adolescents, recognising the significant physical, psychosocial, and spiritual changes they experience. (Ruimassa, 2023) And the pattern of mentoring applied must be relational, personal, and consistent. Christian leaders are expected to build mentoring relationships and empathetic feelings (Silalahi & Siagian, 2025) Generation Z highly values honesty, transparency, and real role models in everyday life. The active involvement of leaders in their spiritual lives provides a foundation for the trust and openness needed in the pastoral counselling process, so that moral transformation can occur more deeply and contextually.

Discipleship programs are a crucial pillar in implementing this integrative model. Churches need to design a discipleship curriculum that focuses not only on doctrine or theological knowledge but also emphasises character formation and spiritual discipline. Community-based discipleship can strengthen the sense of trust that Generation Z, who often feels isolated, desperately needs. (Hendrawan, 2024) In this context, Christian leaders act as spiritual mentors, facilitating the faith journey of the younger generation. (Waruwu, 2024) Through regular meetings, service projects, and shared reflection spaces. Effective discipleship must provide space for this generation to question, doubt, and discover the truth for themselves in the light of the Bible with loving guidance. The theological implications of implementing this integrative model lie in strengthening the church's understanding of humans as creatures in need of holistic restoration, both spiritually and morally. Meanwhile, its pastoral implications are evident in the increased capacity of Christian leaders to facilitate moral recovery and character formation for Generation Z through exemplary living, spiritual sensitivity, and counselling competency. In this way, the church gains a solid framework to help the younger generation grow into individuals of integrity, resilience, and Christ-oriented amidst the increasingly complex currents of digital culture.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the integration of pastoral counseling and Christian leadership spirituality forms a solid theological foundation for addressing the moral degradation of Generation Z. This approach not only emphasizes moral recovery and character formation, but also guides holistic spiritual growth through the example of Christ, pastoral counseling rooted in empathy and biblical principles, and the development of leadership with integrity and a focus on service. The church and Christian leaders have a strategic role as facilitators of moral and spiritual transformation, as well as a link between the psychological needs of the younger generation and the deepening of faith.

Furthermore, the implementation of this integrative model emphasises the importance of relational, personal, and consistent mentoring through community-based discipleship, safe

spaces for expressing struggles, and in-depth spiritual practices. This approach helps Generation Z find meaning in life, build a strong moral identity, and develop resilience in the face of social pressures and digital culture. Overall, the integration of pastoral counselling and Christian leadership spirituality offers a comprehensive strategy for churches to foster a generation of young people with faith, morals, and character, while strengthening the church's role as a community of healing and spiritual formation relevant to the dynamics of the times.

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