ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Embracing AI in Church Ministry

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AI Artificial Intelligence (**AI**) is rapidly transforming many parts of society. Church ministry is no exception. Understanding and embracing AI can help Christ-followers leverage technology to increase their efforts to make Christ known. Let's explore what AI is, address common misconceptions, and discuss how it can be safely, effectively, and ethically incorporated into ministry.

What is AI?

AI refers to the development of computer systems that perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence. This includes activities such as visualization, speech recognition, and language translation. In simpler terms, AI involves getting computers to perform tasks that humans usually do.

Common AI Misconceptions

Despite its growing usage in our daily lives, AI is often misunderstood. Here are a few common misconceptions:

Misconception 1:

AI is conscious or sentient. AI lacks self-awareness. It cannot experience emotions, intentions, or awareness. It operates purely on programmed algorithms and data input.

Misconception 2:

AI has emotions or intentions. Sometimes Hollywood makes it appear as if AI has an agenda all to itself. AI

doesn't have the ability to feel or have personal motives. It doesn't have independent thought. It's not RoboCop!

Misconception 3:

AI will replace human jobs. Many fear that AI will take their jobs. Like many other innovations, AI will automate certain tasks, but it is best seen as a co-pilot, working alongside humans to make jobs easier. There should always be a human in the loop when utilizing AI solutions.

What Do We Believe About AI Safety and Ethical Considerations?

As Christians, we should approach AI with both enthusiasm and caution, recognizing its potential while being mindful of ethical implications.

Intelligence Given by God:

The creativity and intelligence required to develop AI are gifts from God (James 1:17). Using these gifts to create tools that further His kingdom honors that divine inspiration. We are given the mandate by God to be stewards of creation (Genesis 1:26-28).

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical issues surrounding AI should be discussed both within the church and in broader society. The SBC passed a resolution about AI at the 2023 convention, providing a great starting point for discussion. As Christ-followers, we should ensure that AI is used responsibly and in ways that uphold Christian values (Micah 6:8).

AI is a Tool, Not a Replacement for Humans:

AI should be seen as a tool that enhances our capabilities, not as a replacement for humans. It can support ministry efforts but cannot replace the spiritual leadership provided by human ministers nor the fellowship found in the body of local Christ-followers. Whatever we endeavor to do, including our use of AI, should be done to honor God and serve others (Colossians 3:23-24).

AI into Ministry

AI offers numerous opportunities to enhance church ministry and outreach. Here are a few practical applications:

Translation:

AI-powered translation and transcription tools can help break down language barriers. Tools like polyglossia.io can facilitate real-time translation of worship services. AI can also provide translation drafts of other documents and studies, though these should always be checked by a human.

Administrative Tasks:

AI tools can automate routine administrative tasks, such as scheduling, member management, and content creation, freeing up church staff to focus more on pastoral care and community engagement.

Ideation:

AI can be a valuable tool for coming up with new ideas. If you have a question about making plans for an event or are stuck on something, ask AI for help. Some describe AI as an ever-energetic college intern full of ideas. Like an intern, not all AI-generated ideas will be useful, but many will be. Talk to AI like you would an expert and see how it can help you.

AI is not a substitute for human activity and interaction. We shouldn't be looking to AI to act by itself. Likewise, we shouldn't be afraid of AI. At some point, churches didn't have electricity. There were probably churches that were afraid of adding lightbulbs. The first time someone suggested buying a computer for the church, there was probably pushback. Today, these are part of everyday life. AI will be much the same.

By understanding and embracing AI, Christians can enhance their ministry efforts, reaching more people and meeting their needs more effectively. AI is a powerful tool that, when used wisely, can support and strengthen the mission of the church. ■