

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Opportunity and Challenge for the Church: Resource plan

Session 4 – Theology and AI

Learning outcome: How AI can be used in the context of pastoral care and worship.

Summary paragraph: There is no doubt that AI is here to stay and it may develop in ways which we can only hesitantly sketch at present. Could robots, one day, have some form of feelings or understanding? This might bring some benefits, but there are risks of potentially destructive forms of AI with which humanity will need to grapple. For the Church, we must ask where AI is within the bigger narrative of redemption and reconciliation for Creation and relationships, and of its role in the building of the Kingdom of God. Should this be of concern to theologians, or to ministers and members of congregations also?

Video: Session 4 - AI in our Church

Bible passage: 1 Timothy 6:11-19

Discussion questions:

1. Are any forms of AI used already in your congregation?
2. What new ways can you envisage AI could be used for worship and mission in the future, when we know robots and chatbots can plausibly mimic humans?
3. a) What benefits do you think there might be in engaging with these new types of pastoral work or even church services?
b) Can you think of any moral and ethical questions that this might raise?
4. Could you envisage a time when your minister or mission worker is assisted by a robot or chatbot?
5. How does this challenge us to reflect on what it means to be a person made in the image of God?

Prayer:

God in whose image we are formed,
we rejoice to be a part of your creation,
and for the calling we receive
to serve that creation.
Give us a humility of spirit to recognise
the limitations of our own understanding
and the openness to acknowledge
that your creation is a work in progress.
May those who work on artificial intelligence
remember their responsibilities:
not just to humanity,
but potentially also to those intelligent beings
created through their work.
May we all think carefully about the nature of life,
of intelligence,
and of our place within a universe
that enables such extraordinary complexity to arise.
Amen.