



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI):

Opportunity and Challenge for
the Church: Facilitator's Notes

Session 1 - What is Artificial Intelligence?

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Background Reading: [Artificial Intelligence Report \(churchofscotland.org.uk\)](https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk) Introduction (Page 1 &2)

Discussion:

This process is simply to stimulate discussion about the opportunities and challenges that artificial intelligence brings to all our lives. It's not directed to a conclusion. Instead, its objective is to help us ask questions about something that shapes all of our lives and our thinking.

Read this paragraph:

A broad definition of AI is when machines perform tasks which, in the past, only people could do. Algorithms are the sets of mathematical operations that enable a computer to perform these tasks. These can include the rapid analysis of huge data sets and the operation of robots, autonomous cars and drones.

Play the video: Session 1 - What is AI?

Read the Bible passage

Proverbs 1:1-7

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

For learning about wisdom and instruction,
for understanding words of insight,
for gaining instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice, and equity;
to teach shrewdness to the simple,
knowledge and prudence to the young—
let the wise also hear and gain in learning,
and the discerning acquire skill,
to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Begin by asking each participant, individually or in small groups, to answer the following question:

1. What technologies do you know that use AI and how do you feel about them? E.g. driverless cars, chatbots, robotic medical operations and the use of algorithms to analyse big data in ways that affect us daily e.g. weather forecasting, operating vaccine passports and the security cameras on our streets.

Read the following paragraph:

We share our personal data with every web page we visit, every time we shop online, each internet search, each "like" or "share" on social media, every question offered to a digital personal assistant or as our phones track our location.

The following article gives an example of where AI is taking over a role normally done by humans:

Why artificial intelligence is being used to write adverts, by Michael Dempsey, Technology of Business reporter,
Published 6 August 2021, BBC News website

Ask the following question:

2. How aware are you of how social media platforms, phone voice recognition assistants and smart TVs function, and how they use your data for targeted advertising? E.g. Facebook, Siri on your phone, or Amazon Alexa in the home.

Read the following paragraphs:

Internet-based new technologies are rapidly changing the way we live and have become a remarkable lifeline to people socially isolated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Machines with artificial intelligence (AI), at the heart of search engines, voice assistants and speech and face recognition on mobile phones, are powering much of this

revolution.

AI is used in business and government administration, including the assessment of social security, employment and loan applications.

AI algorithms also underpin some impressive innovations in healthcare, assisting doctors to diagnose illness, discover new drugs, read medical images and use robots in surgical operations.

However, the pernicious use of false information for an individual's own purposes is becoming a mainstream behavior. The spreading of false news in social media is having an effect on society, particularly to young people.

One example of this is the way algorithms are more likely to promote negative, fear-based news stories or posts to readers because they will illicit greater interaction and engagement. While this positively affects advertising income, it negatively affects social stability.

Ask the question:

3. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of AI technology?

Read the following paragraph:

The Church has many reasons to celebrate and embrace these technologies, but some difficult questions arise about the implementation of the digital revolution.

Ask the following questions:

4. Should we be fearful that runaway technology will move beyond human control?
5. How does increasing reliance on technology and AI implementations affect who we are as relational human beings, made in the image of God? Is there a place for AI in church?

Reflections

Reflecting on the ethics of AI, we should be thinking about how our data is being used when deciding on which services we use. This is similar considering if the products we buy are Fairtrade or if our savings and pensions are invested in ethical funds.

Prayer

God of all creation,
we give thanks for the world around us
and for the extraordinary gift of intelligence
that allows us to understand and grow in wisdom
as we learn more.
We recognise that this gift
has brought us to the point of creating artificial intelligence
and we pray that you would help us
wisely to use these innovative technologies
to bring benefit to the entire world.
Open us up to understand the blessings
and the challenges that AI brings.
Amen.