

36. Artificial Intelligence Report

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Conference of 2024 received a memorial from the Cambridge Circuit, drawing attention to the increasing presence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in society, and the range of theological, ethical and practical questions arising from its use. The Conference recognised that these questions extend across various areas of the Church's life, including doctrine, ministry, training, mission and public witness and directed the Secretary of the Conference to establish a working party to identify the issues requiring attention and to offer reflections, guidance and policy proposals.
- 1.2 In response, the AI working group was formed with representation drawn from across the Connexion including representation from the Faith and Order and Ministries Committees, The Queen's Foundation, and members from across the Connexional Team working in digital communications, IT and governance. This report is the response of the working group to that direction.
- 1.3 AI is developing rapidly and is already embedded in many aspects of daily life. The Church is therefore not considering an imagined future technology but responding to a present reality which is already shaping communication, creativity, work, learning and decision making.
- 1.4 The remit given by the Conference required the working group to:
- identify the theological, ethical and practical questions raised by AI;
 - assist the Church in understanding how these developments affect its ministry and mission;
 - offer guidance for the Church's life and practice; and
 - to indicate areas requiring further work.

The text of the Memorial M1(2024) is shown at Appendix 2 below.

- 1.5 This report does not attempt to provide a complete theological account of AI, nor to produce a comprehensive regulatory framework. Rather, it seeks to help the Connexion live faithfully and responsibly in a context where AI is already in use by its members, ministers and communities.

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- 1.6 The working group adopted a process of discernment shaped by listening, evidence gathering and reflection. Across the connexional year, the group met regularly for theological and practical reflection; consulted colleagues working in environmental, justice and global partnership contexts; engaged with staff about privacy, data protection and governance; gathered learning and experiences from ecumenical partners; provided opportunities for digital learning; and created a survey, which invited the participation of Methodist people across the Connexion.
- 1.7 A significant part of the group's work was the Church-wide survey exploring how ministers, office holders and members are already encountering and using AI in the life of the Church. The findings of that research form a substantial input into this report. The intention of this process has not been to reach rapid conclusions, but to enable the Church to respond thoughtfully, recognising both the opportunities and the risks presented by AI.

2. The Current Context: AI in Contemporary Life

- 2.1 AI is already part of everyday life. Many digital services now include systems that write text, summarise information, suggest ideas, help with messages or carry out routine tasks. People often use these without realising they are using AI. For example, text messaging might suggest spelling or a reply or finish a sentence; sat-navs estimate journey times based on traffic; shopping and video websites suggest things to watch or buy; some search tools now provide short AI mode answers instead of listing websites. Because of this, people are often using AI without realising it.
- 2.2 For the Church, this means that ministers, office holders and members are already using these tools in daily life, whether deliberately or not. The question is not therefore whether AI will affect the Church, but how the Church should respond faithfully to technology that is already present.
- 2.3 AI is not a single technology, but a group of different tools that have developed over many years. Some tools analyse information and recognise patterns and are used in areas such as medical screening, fraud detection and route planning. Others recommend content based on our behaviour, suggesting music, videos or shopping items. More recently, *Generative AI* has become widely available. These tools can create new material such as text or images in response to a request. Some of these tools, for example ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot, generate language and are often called *Large Language Models (LLM)*, because they produce human-like communication and are easily accessible. It is primarily these generative systems that this report addresses.

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- 2.4 The rapid public awareness of AI in recent years has largely followed the arrival of these generative tools, which became more widely available in the early 2020s. It is their accessibility that has brought AI into our everyday conversation and Church life and for this reason, the report primarily relates to the tools that generate language and content, since these most directly affect communication, learning and ministry.
- 2.5 AI has three main features which may be important to note. Firstly, these systems produce material that looks like human communication. They can write, create images and summarise information quickly, so it is not always obvious who has produced something. This raises questions about authorship, responsibility and authenticity.
- 2.6 Secondly, the tools are easy to use and are widely available. They are built into familiar software and often cost little or nothing to access. They are therefore used by specialists and large organisations, as well as in everyday settings, including church life.
- 2.7 Thirdly, the technology is growing and changing rapidly, whilst our understanding of it is still developing at a slower pace. Public discussion often moves between enthusiasm and concern. Within the Church, we noted similar responses throughout the survey: interest, caution and experimentation taking place at the same time.
- 2.8 These characteristics mean that AI affects several aspects of the Church's life. Survey responses indicated that people reported using AI in preparing sermons and prayers and in administrative communication, while expressing caution regarding pastoral use and raised concerns about authenticity, data protection, governance and the environmental impact.
- 2.9 The Conference, in accepting Memorial M1, recognised that the questions raised are not confined to one committee or area of work, but touch on theology, ministry, formation and the Church's public witness. For this reason, the working group has understood its task not primarily as evaluating a single tool, but as helping the Church discern how it lives faithfully in a fast pacing and changing technological environment.
- 2.10 AI is already present in the daily practices of the Connexion and therefore the working group sought to listen to the experiences, concerns and hopes of those already engaging with these tools. The following section summarises what was heard.
- 2.11 The working group does not assume that all technological developments should be adopted. Rather, it recognises that AI is already shaping social and economic life, requiring the Church to discern carefully where engagement, limitation and refusal may be appropriate.

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3. The experience across the Connexion.

- 3.1 As part of its work, the working group sought to understand how AI is already being encountered in the life of the Methodist Church in Britain. A church-wide survey was undertaken by Izzy Solomon, a member of the working group, to gather both quantitative and qualitative responses from ministers, local preachers, worship leaders, office holders and members across the Connexion. A total of 291 responses were received, providing a broad picture of experience and reflection within the Church.
- 3.2 The survey explored patterns of use, perceptions of opportunity and concern, and the theological and ethical questions people raised using AI. A detailed account of the research methodology and findings is provided in Appendix 1.
- 3.3 Around half of ministers and lay leaders reported using AI in some aspect of their role. Most commonly this involved preparing sermons and prayers, theological study, drafting material, administration and planning. There was very little reported use for direct pastoral care.
- 3.4 AI was frequently described as helping with routine workload or enabling people to begin writing rather than replacing the task itself. Many respondents indicated that assistance in preparation could be appropriate, while the act of preaching, praying or pastoral conversation should remain personal and accountable. Across the responses, a consistent pattern emerged: high engagement combined with significant caution.
- 3.5 Around four fifths of respondents expressed concern about the ethical implications of AI and a similar proportion believed the Church should engage thoughtfully with it rather than ignore it. Areas of concern included authenticity in worship and preaching, data protection and trustworthiness, misinformation and reliability and environmental impact and justice. At the same, most respondents did not advocate rejecting the technology altogether, instead, they preferred careful use with clear boundaries and guidance.
- 3.6 When asked what should guide the Church's response, respondents place particular emphasis on truthfulness, compassion, wisdom and care for creation. Two broad boundaries were repeatedly identified. Firstly, the closer a task was to worship, prayer or pastoral care, the more strongly people felt it should remain human and relational. Secondly, people expected the Church's use of technology to be consistent with its public commitments to justice and environmental responsibility.

- 3.7 Alongside caution, respondents also described constructive possibilities. Some identified ways AI might assist communication, support those with additional needs, or help individuals begin prayer when words were difficult to find. The overall tone was therefore neither enthusiasm nor rejection, but careful openness: a desire to use technology where it serves ministry, while maintaining the relational and moral responsibilities at the heart of the Church's life.
- 3.8 Taken together, the responses suggested that Methodists are already undertaking practical theological reflection on AI. People did not simply ask what the technology could do, but what its use might mean for truthfulness, accountability, careful creation and faithful witness. The working group therefore heard a clear request for guidance that enables the Church to engage wisely and consistently with its values.
- 3.9 The working group records its thanks to Izzy Solomon for this research. Her careful gathering and analysis of the responses has enabled the Church to hear the voices of ministers and members across the Connexion and to ground this work in lived experience rather than abstract debate. See Appendix 1 for an overview of the research.
- 3.10 In addition to the written research, Izzy has created a textile artefact in the form of a tree, which embodies the themes emerging from the survey. Each embroidered leaf carries a participant quotation, colour coded according to key themes including authenticity, trust, usefulness, creation care, public witness and hope. The artefact has already been at 3Generate and will be present at the Conference.
- 3.11 The artefact is offered to the Connexion and available for Synods, events and gatherings, where participants can add their own reflections on paper leaves, allowing the conversation and our discernment to continue to grow in each place.
- 3.12 Theologically, the artefact expresses an important conviction that reflection on AI belongs to the whole people of God and not just the work of specialists or the working group.

4. Theological reflection

- 4.1 The material gathered by the working group demonstrates that the Church is not approaching AI from a position of distance. Methodist people are already using these tools, testing their usefulness and recognising their limitations. In doing so, they are also raising questions which are not only practical but theological.

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- 4.2 Many responses implicitly reflected convictions about what it means to be human, what constitutes authentic prayer and preaching, and why pastoral care depends upon relationship and responsibility. Concerns about truthfulness, accountability, justice and care for creation, point to questions of discipleship and Christian witness.
- 4.3 The working group therefore concluded that the issues raised by AI cannot be addressed solely through policy or regulation. They require theological reflection alongside practical guidance. The following section sets out theological considerations arising from the Church's experience and the Conference's request in Memorial M1.
- 4.4 From the account of creation in Genesis 1, Christian theology affirms that humanity is created in the image of God and this is a way in which humans are distinct within God's creation. However, it raises a number of questions as to how that should be understood. That might lead to asking the following questions:
- Whether humans have particular skills/abilities that other creatures do not?
 - Whether humans have particular rights/responsibilities that other creatures do not?
 - Whether humans have a particular approach to relationship with God and others that other creatures do not?
 - Whether humans reflect God in a way that other creatures do not?
- 4.5 The more that is discovered about creation, the more complex those possibilities become. For example, the development of the theory of evolution makes an account of human distinctiveness that requires too sharp a distinction with other creatures difficult if not impossible. In a world where humanity has evolved from apes, how is a concept of the image of God in humanity to be understood? It should be noted, of course, that this was one of the issues that meant some Christian theologians opposed the idea of evolution (and some Christians still do).
- 4.6 AI can similarly challenge questions of the image of God. An understanding of the image of God may be related to the creativity, skills, relationality and so on of humans. If AI technologies are developed that can do those things as well or even better, what are the implications of that for an understanding of the image of God?
- 4.7 It is important to avoid a 'God of the gaps' approach. This is an approach to relating science and theology that finds place for God in the things that cannot (currently) be explained scientifically. For example, it cannot be said scientifically

what triggered the origin of the Universe. It is tempting for the Christian to say that 'gap' requires God in order to fill it. If then a scientific description of the mechanism is discovered, the 'need' for God is reduced. A better understanding is to say that all that is held in the purposes of God and that scientific understandings of its nature and processes can sit alongside theological accounts of God's creative goodness. Similarly, if the account adopted of AI and theology requires the identification of human traits that AI cannot currently replicate, and links those to the image of God in humanity, then it is likely that our account of the image of God in humanity will be ever reducing as technology develops. An account of the image of God in humanity that can be maintained even in the face of extraordinarily advanced technology is what is required.

- 4.8 Inclusive and progressive approaches to theology, among others, have relied heavily on the concept of the image of God in order to assert the importance of challenging prejudice and discrimination on a whole range of aspects of human identity, including gender, race, sexuality, neurodiversity, disability and so on. The Methodist Church's Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity and the Principles for Justice both incorporate this.
- 4.9 Biblically and theologically, it is important to maintain that humanity is indeed made in the image of God. There are important theological affirmations that rest on that assertion and consequences that flow from it. Nevertheless, in considering AI, it will be important to be attentive to how the nature of human distinctiveness can be articulated in the light of that assertion.
- 4.10 The theologian Marius Dorobantu considers the relationship of AI and theology and offers the following conclusion:

In my opinion, the truly ground-breaking conclusion from reflecting theologically on AI is that being like God does not necessarily mean being more intelligent. Christ's life and teaching show that what is most valuable about human nature are traits like empathy, forgiveness, and meekness, which are all eminently relational qualities. What enables such attributes is a kind of thinking rooted more in the irrational than in the rational parts of our minds. Perhaps this can shed new light on Saint Paul's choice to "boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses ... or whenever I am weak, then I am strong."¹

1 Dorobantu, Marius. "Imago Dei in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Challenges and Opportunities for a Science-Engaged Theology." *Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology, New Series 1* (2022): 175-96.

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- 4.11 These theological questions relate to a number of practical considerations for mission and ministry. In terms of the ministry of the Church, the question might be posed: "What must be done by a human made in God's image?" The following list (which is not exhaustive) provides relevant examples:
- Sharing faith
 - Writing a sermon
 - Preaching a sermon
 - Writing a prayer
 - Praying
 - Creating devotional images/art
- 4.12 While the acts of preaching and praying themselves might seem obviously to require a human to do them, the working group would wish to affirm the spiritual nature of the preparation for these tasks to affirm the importance of prayerful and thoughtful engagement with them. The writing of sermons and prayers is as important as their delivery. While AI tools may provide assistance in refining language and expression, it is important that preachers and leaders of worship are fully engaged in the content that they share as part of worship. While detailed consideration has not yet been given to questions of AI and online communion, these considerations apply even more fully in the case of celebrations of Holy Communion.
- 4.13 AI is a fast-developing area, and this report will be out-of-date from the moment it is completed. As with many developments, Christians are called to a wise and discerning engagement with the world in which God calls them to live and to serve. The wide range of questions and challenges, as well as opportunities, that AI generates makes this discernment especially important.

5. **Artificial Intelligence, economy and the environmental impact.**

- 5.1 The Methodist Church in Britain has committed itself to working towards net zero carbon emissions and to responding to the climate emergency as an expression of its discipleship and witness. Any consideration of AI must therefore ask whether its use is consistent with these commitments.
- 5.2 AI depends upon physical infrastructure, data centres, energy supply chains, hardware production and global labour systems. The operation and expansion of this infrastructure require significant electricity consumption and resource use. Emerging analysis suggests that growing demand associated with AI development may place increasing pressure on national energy systems

and complicate efforts towards decarbonisation.² Its environmental effects are therefore significant and closely connected to economic and justice considerations. The working group heard that many across the Connexion expect the Church's use of technology to be consistent with its public commitments regarding creation care and justice.

- 5.3 The development and operation of AI require substantial energy and water usage, as well as mineral extraction for hardware manufacture. These impacts are often geographically distant from the communities that benefit from the technology. Decisions about adopting AI may contribute to patterns of consumption that conflict with the Church's commitment to reduce environmental harm. This does not mean that AI should never be used, but rather, it calls for attentiveness, using technology where it genuinely serves ministry, while avoiding casual or excessive use based solely on convenience.
- 5.4 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) provides a structured way of understanding the environmental consequences of a project or activity before decisions are made. It brings together evidence about energy use, resource consumption, emissions and wider ecological effects, enabling organisations to consider not only immediate benefits but also longer-term impacts on creation. In the context of AI, such approaches can help make visible the often-hidden environmental costs associated with data centres, hardware production and energy demand. While not all uses of AI will require formal assessment, the principles underlying EIA encourage careful attention, transparency and accountability, supporting more informed and consistent decision making.
- 5.5 AI also relies upon economic structures that distribute benefits and burdens unevenly. Data processing, content moderation and resource extraction frequently occur in communities with limited power to shape how technologies are developed or deployed. For the Church, environmental responsibility cannot be separated from economic justice. Questions about AI therefore include: Whose labour makes its use possible? Who bears the environmental cost? Who gains and who benefits?
- 5.6 The Church's public witness depends upon being consistent in what it says and how it puts that into practice. Respondents frequently connected AI to concerns about environmental impact and justice and expressed a desire that the Church's use of technology reflect its stated commitments. The working group recognises

2 Ofgem, Ethical AI use in the Energy Sector (2025) <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/guidance/ethical-ai-use-energy-sector>

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that AI technologies may contribute positively to efficiency and innovation, while simultaneously increasing overall energy demand. The Church, therefore, needs to discern how technological development interacts with our commitments to environmental sustainability and global justice.

- 5.7 The working group has not seen AI as either inherently harmful or inherently beneficial. Instead, its use should be guided by responsibility, adopting tools where they genuinely enable ministry or inclusion, while resisting patterns of unnecessary technological consumption. This approach reflects the conviction that technological capability alone does not determine faithful practice. The Church's calling is not simply to adopt what is technically possible, but to discern what is faithful to our commitments to justice, environmental sustainability and global partnerships. As part of a movement of Methodist and Uniting Churches worldwide, it is recognised that the use of technology by Methodists in Britain impacts on our participation in economic justice and ecological systems which affects our interconnected communities around the world.

6. Data, privacy and governance

- 6.1 The use of AI does not remove responsibility from those who use it. Within the life of the Church, accountability remains with the minister, office holder or body making use of the material produced. From a legal perspective, the Church remains responsible for compliance with data protection legislation, including the UK General data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Data Use and Access Act 2025. The use of AI tools does not transfer liability to the system provider. Decisions made using AI assisted content remain the responsibility of those who publish, communicate or act upon them. It is important that those using AI understand their legal and pastoral responsibilities in doing so.
- 6.2 Particular care is required where personal or sensitive information is involved. Material entered into publicly available systems may be retained or processed in ways that are not visible to the user. This has implications for pastoral conversations, prayer requests, safeguarding related information and any data that could identify individuals. The working group heard widespread uncertainty across the Connexion regarding appropriate boundaries and identified a need for clear guidance and increased awareness to protect trust.
- 6.3 Many widely used AI systems are developed and hosted outside of the UK, often within large commercial organisations. This raises questions not only of data protection but of governance, bias and accountability. AI systems are trained on

datasets that may reflect cultural, political or economic assumptions originating beyond the Church's context. AI produced data/ documents should always be checked for accuracy as it cannot be assumed that the data is accurate. Likewise, users should remain attentive to bias and avoid assuming neutrality in generated content. The Church's governance structures remain responsible for ensuring that the adoption of AI tools is consistent with its legal obligations, ethical commitments and public witness.

- 6.4 AI can generate material whose origin is not immediately apparent. In contexts where words themselves form part of ministry, including preaching, teaching and pastoral communication, clarity about authorship should be identified. Survey responses suggested that people were generally comfortable with assistance where responsibility remained clear and visible.
- 6.5 Many of the risks associated with AI arise, not from intentional misuse, but from uncertainty about its operation and limits. Good practice therefore depends upon shared understanding rather than individual experimentation. The Church will be best served by developing clear guidance and creating appropriate Standing Orders, which are reviewed periodically, so that confidence grows alongside competence, and compliance with legal and governance responsibilities is maintained.

7. **Guidance for the Church**

- 7.1 The working group has not sought to produce detailed regulation governing every possible use of AI as it is developing rapidly and any sense of rules would quickly become outdated. Instead, the group offers principles intended to assist ministers, office holders and churches in making responsible and faithful decisions in their own contexts. These principles arise from the Conference mandate, the listening undertaken across the Connexion and the ethical considerations outlined above.
- 7.2 AI tools may assist tasks within the life of the Church, but do not exercise ministry in themselves. Responsibility for worship, teaching, pastoral care and leadership remains with those called and appointed to these roles. Accordingly, AI may appropriately support preparation, organisation and administration. However, it should not be treated as a substitute for personal judgement, theological reflection or relational engagement.
- 7.3 Where AI contributes to material used in the Church's life, responsibility for the final content rests with the person who uses it. In contexts where words

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themselves form part of ministry, including prayer and pastoral communication, transparency about the role of AI supports trust. The intention is not to discourage use, but to ensure honesty regarding authorship and accountability.

- 7.4 The working group heard evidence of a consistent instinct that pastoral care depends upon relationships, attentiveness and responsibility for another person. AI may assist communication or organisation, but care should be taken where its use risks replacing human listening or obscuring personal accountability. Particular caution is required wherever vulnerable or sensitive personal information is involved.
- 7.5 Those using AI should be mindful of how information is handled. Personal or confidential data should not be entered into systems where storage or use cannot be clearly understood. Good practice therefore includes awareness of privacy implications, especially when using publicly available tools.
- 7.6 Decisions about adopting new technologies should take account of the Church's commitment to justice and to the environment. Efficiency alone should not determine practice. AI should be used thoughtfully, recognising its wider environmental and social implications.
- 7.7 The Church is encouraged to develop understanding rather than assume familiarity. Many uncertainties arise not from misuse but from lack of clarity. Training, shared reflection and ongoing conversation will therefore be important so that the Church's use of AI is shaped by wisdom rather than novelty or anxiety.
- 7.8 AI raises questions which are technical, ethical and theological at the same time. No single individual is expected to resolve these alone. Churches, Circuits and Districts are encouraged to reflect together, seeking practices that support ministry while preserving trust, responsibility and care.

***RESOLUTIONS

- 36/1. The Conference receives the Report.**
- 36/2. The Conference adopts the principles in Section 7.**
- 36/3. The Conference directs the Connexional Council in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Committee and**

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those working on the Church's environmental impact to ensure that there is appropriate guidance available across the Connexion.

- 36/4. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to consider how material on theological, ethical and practical implications of AI can be included within training for ordained and lay ministries.
- 36/5. The Conference adopts this report as its further reply to memorial M1 (2024).

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Appendix 1

Overview of Church-wide survey



This is a heavily condensed version of the research. The full dissertation is available at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1no0xv86frZuyA00LWaMziuCx-oLGrUWnHUu0oj3s2hk/edit?usp=sharing>.

Beginning with a Prayer

"I just didn't want to embarrass anyone with a jumbled prayer," she said. The woman, an active Methodist, was speaking of her recent experiment: using ChatGPT to generate her prayers for various interactions. I was struck by the underlying anxiety: that her offerings might be less worthy, less presentable, less clean than something algorithmically ordered. But isn't that, in some sense, one of the major points of prayer? That it is messy, authentic, and intimately ours?

This encounter reframed something for me: that AI's most subtle impact may not be the automation of tasks, but the reconfiguration of what we think good human action looks like.

At the heart of my research lies a theological conviction that human beings are made in the image of God, not because we are efficient, rational, or productive, but because we are relational, interpretive, and morally accountable. As John Wesley preached, the divine image in humanity lies especially in our moral and social capacities, not simply our reason.

Introduction

Existing literature in AI ethics and theology provides important conceptual frameworks, but less attention has been given to how these questions are experienced and negotiated within everyday church life.

This dissertation addresses that gap by examining how members of the Methodist Church in Britain encounter AI in the contexts of prayer, pastoral care, theological reflection, and ministry practice. The project focuses on insights emerging from lived engagement rather than institutional or purely academic perspectives.

While artificial intelligence encompasses many technologies, the study focuses primarily on large language models due to their growing visibility in everyday ministry and communication.

Methodology and Limitations

This project is grounded in a mixed-methods and participatory design approach to explore how members of the Methodist Church in Britain engage with AI. The study combines a survey of church members and ministers with the creation of a public-facing creative artefact designed to facilitate ethical reflection.

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The research was guided by the question: “How do members and ministers of the Methodist Church perceive and respond to the ethical and theological implications of artificial intelligence?”

A total of 291 survey responses were collected from participants across a range of Methodist roles and age groups. As the survey relied on voluntary participation, the sample may reflect a bias toward individuals already interested in the topic. Younger adults were also under-represented, and some respondents expressed uncertainty about what technologies count as “AI”. Despite these limitations, responses demonstrated significant engagement with the ethical and theological questions raised by AI.

Survey Analysis and Key Findings

Overview of Participants

Responses were gathered from 291 participants across a wide range of roles within the Methodist Church in Britain, including ministers, local preachers, church officers, and lay members. The sample was weighted toward middle-aged and older adults, though younger respondents were also represented.

Participants reported varied familiarity with AI. While only a small number described themselves as experts, most reported moderate or limited familiarity. Many had encountered AI through tools such as ChatGPT, predictive text, smart assistants, or algorithmically curated media. However, a notable group reported uncertainty about what technologies count as AI, highlighting the need for clearer public understanding.

AI Use by Role

Patterns of AI use differed slightly between ministers and lay leaders. Ministers reported somewhat higher levels of AI use overall, most often for administrative tasks, planning, or drafting written material. Some also experimented with AI for theological research or sermon preparation.

Among local preachers, worship leaders, and lay pastors, AI use was more evenly divided between users and non-users. When used, it was most commonly applied to sermon preparation or worship planning. Across both groups, very few respondents reported using AI directly for pastoral care or communication. Many participants expressed caution about delegating core pastoral or liturgical responsibilities to automated systems.

Attitudes to AI

Survey responses showed strong moral and ethical engagement with AI among participants. A large majority expressed concern about the ethical implications of AI and agreed that the Methodist Church should engage thoughtfully with the issue.

However, participants were more cautious about direct institutional adoption. Only a small minority supported maximising AI use within church life, while many respondents emphasised the importance of discernment and context-sensitive application.

Interest in further learning was high, with many respondents expressing a desire to better understand AI's implications for privacy, environmental sustainability, and wider social impacts.

Ethical Values

Participants were asked to rank ethical values they considered most important for the Church when approaching AI. Truthfulness, compassion, wisdom, and stewardship of creation were consistently ranked as the most significant principles.

By contrast, "respect for tradition" was most frequently ranked lowest. This does not necessarily indicate rejection of tradition but rather suggests that respondents prioritise ethical discernment and moral responsibility when navigating technological change.

Key Qualitative Themes

Authenticity in Worship and Prayer

Many participants expressed concern about using AI to generate prayers, sermons, or liturgical material. While some acknowledged its usefulness for drafting or inspiration, others emphasised that preaching and prayer are relational practices rooted in knowledge of a specific congregation and openness to the Holy Spirit. These responses suggest a strong commitment to human presence and authenticity in worship, with sincerity and pastoral awareness valued over technical polish or efficiency.

Trust and Transparency

Concerns about privacy, data security, and the opacity of AI systems appeared frequently in open-text responses. Participants raised questions about bias, misinformation, and the risks posed by "black box" systems. These concerns were often framed through a moral or theological lens, with respondents emphasising the importance of discernment, transparency, and ethical oversight when engaging AI technologies.

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Pragmatic Use and Administrative Support

Many respondents described practical uses of AI for administrative tasks, planning, and drafting written materials. Several ministers noted that AI could help overcome the “blank page” when preparing communications. However, most participants framed these uses cautiously, viewing AI as a supportive tool rather than a substitute for pastoral judgment or ministry practice.

Public Witness and Ethical Responsibility

PA recurring theme was the belief that the Church should engage AI not only internally but also through its public ethical witness. Respondents raised concerns about environmental impacts, exploitative data practices, and harms to vulnerable communities. At the same time, some participants identified potential opportunities, such as accessibility improvements, translation tools, or new forms of outreach. These responses suggest cautious but hopeful openness to technological innovation, provided it aligns with the Church’s commitments to justice, transparency, and care for creation.

Discussion

Boundaries in Ministry Practice

The findings suggest that Methodist engagement with AI is characterised by a form of practical theological discernment. Participants generally accepted AI as a helpful tool for tasks that reduce administrative workload or assist with preparation. However, clear boundaries emerged around practices that participants understood as central to ministry, particularly preaching, prayer, and pastoral care.

In these contexts, respondents emphasised the importance of human presence, relational knowledge, and moral responsibility. Preaching and prayer were frequently described as practices rooted in attentiveness to a specific congregation and openness to the work of the Holy Spirit. As a result, while AI might assist with drafting or preparation, many participants resisted the idea of delegating these acts themselves to automated systems. This reflects an implicit norm of “assist, not substitute,” in which technological tools may support ministry but cannot replace the relational and spiritual dimensions that constitute it.

Public Credibility and Ethical Commitments

Participants also situated AI within the wider ethical commitments of the Methodist Church. Concerns about environmental impacts, data justice, and the protection of vulnerable communities appeared frequently in responses. For many respondents, the Church’s approach to AI must align with its existing commitments to social justice, safeguarding, and care for creation.

This introduces a credibility test for technological adoption: the Church's internal practices must remain consistent with the values it publicly proclaims. Rather than rejecting AI outright, participants called for greater transparency, ethical scrutiny, and institutional guidance to ensure that any use of AI aligns with these commitments.

Trust, Authorship, and Transparency

Across the survey responses, trust emerged as closely linked to questions of authorship and responsibility. Participants were generally more comfortable with AI-assisted text when the human author remained visible and accountable for the final result. Conversely, uncertainty about the origins of AI-generated material often reduced trust, even when the wording itself appeared acceptable.

This pattern suggests that acceptance of AI within church contexts depends less on technological capability than on transparency about how it is used. Making authorship and responsibility visible appears particularly important in contexts where words themselves are the act of ministry, such as sermons, prayers, and pastoral communication.

Conclusion

British Methodists are already discerning AI in grounded, practical ways. AI that reduces friction is generally welcomed, while clear limits are placed on prayer, preaching, and pastoral care. Trust depends less on output quality than on authorship, transparency, and responsible use.

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Appendix 2: Memorial M1 (2024)

M1 The Theology of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The Cambridge Circuit Meeting (14/26) (Present: 28 voting: unanimous) wishes to draw the attention of the Conference to the recent reports on Artificial Intelligence in the media and the open letters from academics and technology industry leaders warning politicians and the wider world about the potential and the threat AI brings. It asks the Conference to consider the following action:

- To request that the Faith and Order Committee explore theology around AI in terms of the following:
 - a. The image of God
 - b. Prayer and sermon writing threats and opportunities using AI
 - c. The possible relationship and consequences of Online Communion and AI
 - d. The role of Methodist ministers and Lay Office holders and what if any functions can be undertaken by AI
 - e. The framework of this request understands that all of this will be explored within the remit of the EDI impact assessment tool

Reply

The Conference thanks the Cambridge Circuit Meeting for its memorial and for drawing attention to this important topic. The Conference shares the Circuit Meeting's recognition that AI is an ever-increasing part of life with implications for work, leisure, communication and much more. It raises a wide range of questions for the church, including with regard to theology, ethics and practice.

The range of issues identified by the Circuit Meeting do not only touch on the work of the Faith and Order Committee but, for example, also raise questions relevant to the work of the Ministries Committee and to the training and formation of people for a variety of roles within the Church. Alongside this, the Conference also notes that AI raises a range of questions in the wider public sphere (including questions of justice about the value of work and workers) and that these issues affect ecumenical partners as well as a range of other organisations.

The Conference agrees with the Circuit Meeting that the Methodist Church needs to give attention to questions raised by the use of artificial intelligence in a variety of contexts. It accepts the memorial and directs the Secretary of the Conference to establish a

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working party, with broad representation including from the Faith and Order Committee, Ministries Committee, theological education institutions and relevant members of the Connexional Team, to identify the issues that should be explored by the Methodist Church (including in their consideration those raised by the Circuit Meeting) and to offer reflections, guidance and policy proposals to the Conference.