

Artificial Intelligence in Church Settings: A Comprehensive Review of Opportunities, Ethical Issues, and Ministry Implications

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence is increasingly shaping communication, administration, education, and decision making across society, and church settings are no exception. This review examines the opportunities, ethical issues, and ministry implications of AI in Christian contexts. The manuscript synthesizes recent literature on how AI can support church administration, sermon preparation, Bible study, pastoral communication, evangelism, translation, media production, prayer support, counseling assistance, and discipleship systems. Across these areas, AI is presented as a practical aid that can improve efficiency, expand access, personalize communication, and extend ministry reach, especially in digitally connected and multilingual congregations. However, the review emphasizes that AI should remain a support tool rather than a substitute for spiritual leadership, theological judgment, or embodied pastoral care. The review also identifies major ethical and theological concerns. These include threats to human dignity, the limits of machine based spiritual authority, privacy and confidentiality risks, bias and misinformation, hallucination, doctrinal distortion, overdependence, dehumanization, weak accountability, and inadequate governance. Special attention is given to the dangers of entering sensitive congregational data into external systems, the need for human verification of AI generated content, and the importance of preserving trust in pastoral relationships. The manuscript further argues that churches require clear policies, leadership training, digital literacy, and responsible governance structures in order to use AI wisely and transparently. Overall, the review concludes that AI may be valuable for church communication, administration, and outreach when used with discernment, theological oversight, and ethical safeguards. Its most responsible role is one that strengthens ministry without weakening human presence, moral responsibility, or Christian identity. The manuscript therefore calls for a human centered, faith guided approach in which technological innovation serves, rather than replaces, the spiritual mission of the church. It also points toward future research on ministry outcomes, trust, and the effects of AI on preaching, counseling, youth engagement, theological education, and digital evangelism. Rather than adopting AI because it is novel or efficient, churches are encouraged to evaluate each tool according to its accuracy, privacy safeguards, contextual fit, and alignment with Christian values. In this way, AI can contribute to ministry while preserving reverence, accountability, and care.

KEYWORDS

Artificial intelligence, church settings, ministry, ethics, pastoral care, digital religion, evangelism, governance, theological discernment

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INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence has moved quickly from a specialized computing concept into a general-purpose technology that is reshaping communication, analysis, and decision-making across many fields. Recent scholarship shows that the AI conversation is no longer limited to technical performance alone, but now strongly includes ethics, governance, bias, transparency, safety, and accountability¹. In parallel, research on human AI interaction argues that AI should be treated as part of a wider sociotechnical system, where outcomes depend not only on algorithms but also on the values, goals, and practices of the people and institutions that use them².

In church settings, AI is becoming increasingly relevant because ministry is now carried out in a digital world where people expect fast communication, accessible content, and responsive support. In this context, AI may assist with administrative tasks, content preparation, information retrieval, translation, outreach, and some forms of communication support. At the same time, the question is not simply what AI can do, but what should remain distinctly human in pastoral and spiritual life. Research in religious studies has already shown that AI can be used to support the study and classification of religion, while also opening deeper questions about interpretation, authority, and religious identity³.

The use of AI in ministry raises both promise and caution. On the one hand, it can lighten routine workloads, support organizational efficiency, and help churches communicate more effectively with members and wider audiences. On the other hand, scholars of pastoral care warn that wisdom, empathy, presence, and moral discernment cannot be reduced to information processing or delegated without serious reflection⁴. Recent work on religious actors and AI further shows that faith communities are not passive observers of technological change; they are already using AI tools in practical ways, while also engaging in education, advocacy, and policy related responses to the technology⁵.

Empirical studies are also beginning to show how people react when AI enters explicitly sacred spaces. Research on an AI led church service found that participants expressed a wide range of reactions, including skepticism, curiosity, and in some cases reports of spiritual experience, which suggests that AI in worship is likely to remain contested rather than universally accepted⁶. More recent work on Christian churches in America indicates that leaders are actively negotiating AI value alignment with institutional beliefs, mission priorities, and human dignity⁷. These developments make it important to examine AI in church settings carefully and without either blind enthusiasm or automatic rejection.

The purpose of this review is therefore to synthesize current evidence on the opportunities, ethical issues, and ministry implications of AI in church life. The discussion is organized around the background and development of AI, its meaning and scope in church settings, its growing relevance for ministry practice, and the major themes that shape responsible engagement with this emerging reality.

OPPORTUNITIES AND APPLICATIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN CHURCH SETTINGS

Artificial intelligence is no longer a distant idea reserved for laboratories or large technology companies. In church settings, it is beginning to appear in very ordinary places: planning meetings, sermon preparation, online communication, community care, teaching, and digital outreach. The strongest pattern in the recent literature is that AI works best when it is treated as a support tool rather than a replacement for spiritual leadership. Across studies on church leaders, religious education, online ministry, and digital religion, the most consistent theme is that AI can save time, widen access, and improve organization, but it must still be guided by human discernment, theological responsibility, and ethical restraint⁸⁻¹⁰.

AI as a support tool in ministry and church administration: Church administration often involves many repetitive tasks that consume time but do not directly require pastoral creativity. Recent research suggests that AI can help with these background duties by organizing information, drafting routine communication,

supporting scheduling, and simplifying record management. In a study of Christian churches in America, pastors described AI adoption as most useful when it aligned with mission, community solidarity, and human dignity rather than simply chasing efficiency for its own sake⁸. This is important because church administration is not just an operational task. It also shapes how members experience care, order, and trust^{8,10}.

A second strand of recent work shows that religious associations can use AI to support tasks such as information management, control processes, communication, and even the organization of religious activities themselves⁹. Another study on Christian online ministry describes digital church work as strategic communication that helps leaders meet congregational expectations while maintaining identity and access¹⁰. Together, these studies suggest that AI can serve as a practical assistant in ministry administration, especially where churches must manage large volumes of messages, events, and member interactions⁸⁻¹⁰.

Table 1 summarizes how AI can support routine church administration through drafting notices, organizing records, and assisting with planning.

AI in sermon preparation, Bible study, and Christian teaching: Sermon preparation is one of the most visible areas where AI is being explored in church life. Recent qualitative work with preachers shows that large language models are already being used to brainstorm outlines, test phrasing, compare interpretations, and speed up early drafting¹¹. This does not mean that AI is preaching. Rather, it means that ministers are using it as a thinking aid, similar to a research assistant that can help sort ideas more quickly^{11,12}.

At the same time, religious education research shows that AI should be used with caution because biblical and theological interpretation cannot be reduced to pattern matching. A recent article on AI in religious education argues that AI can personalize learning, expand access to religious knowledge, and support innovative teaching, but it can also misrepresent sacred texts, weaken teacher student relationships, and blur ethical boundaries if used uncritically¹². A broader review of religion and AI reaches a similar conclusion: The technology can be useful, but churches and educators must remain attentive to theological depth, human authority, and responsible interpretation¹¹⁻¹³.

Table 2 shows how AI can aid sermon outlines, Bible study support, and Christian teaching without replacing human interpretation.

AI in pastoral communication, follow-up, and engagement: Pastoral communication is more than message transmission. It is about remembering people, reaching out at the right time, and maintaining a sense of belonging. Research on religious institutions' social media use in Kenya shows that digital platforms such as YouTube and Facebook supported emotional and spiritual communication during the COVID-19 period, especially when physical gathering was restricted¹⁴. In the same way, AI can help churches manage reminders, organize contact lists, and support routine follow-up messages so that no one is unintentionally forgotten^{14,15}.

The Nigerian study on mass media use in Pentecostal churches reinforces this point by showing that online media already play a strong role in reaching younger people who are comfortable with digital communication¹⁵. This is especially relevant for follow-up and engagement because many congregants now expect churches to communicate through the same platforms they use every day. AI can help draft outreach messages, sort common questions, or flag members who may need attention, but it should never replace genuine care. Digital communication raises deeper questions about embodiment, presence, and participation in Christian community¹⁵.

Table 1: Major AI applications in church administration and ministry support

Major AI applications in church administration and ministry support	Church use	Practical value	Citation(s)
Drafting notices, emails, and reminders	Keeps members informed with less manual effort	Saves time and improves consistency	Nord and Schleier <i>et al.</i> ⁸
Organizing records, schedules, and attendance	Helps leaders track participation and coordinate teams	Reduces clerical pressure and errors	Andok <i>et al.</i> ⁹
Supporting planning and online ministry strategy	Assists decision making for programs and communication	Frees leaders for pastoral work	Hodøl ¹⁰

Main administrative tasks in which AI can assist church workers and leaders. It focuses on drafting notices, organizing records, managing schedules, and supporting planning and Abbreviations: AI, artificial intelligence

Table 2: AI uses in sermon development, Bible study, and teaching

AI uses in sermon development, Bible study, and teaching	Church use	Practical value	Citation(s)
Sermon outlines and study prompts	Helps preachers begin preparation faster	Saves time and stimulates reflection	Mannerfelt and Roitto <i>et al.</i> ¹¹
Bible study support and passage comparison	Assists teaching and text exploration	Improves depth and accessibility	Papakostas ¹²
Theological review and lesson refinement	Helps shape clearer Christian teaching	Strengthens accuracy and pastoral fit	Vaughan <i>et al.</i> ¹³

Main ways AI can support sermon preparation, Bible study, and teaching. It emphasizes early drafting, text comparison, lesson refinement, and study support

Table 3: AI supported pastoral communication and congregational engagement practices

AI supported pastoral communication and congregational engagement practices	Church use	Practical value	Citation(s)
Automated reminders and updates	Keeps members informed about visits, meetings, and services	Improves continuity of contact	Birya and Mwamzandi <i>et al.</i> ¹⁴
Digital outreach to younger audiences	Reaches people through familiar platforms	Strengthens relevance and visibility	Afolabi and Oderinde <i>et al.</i> ¹⁵
Follow-up support for online and offline members	Helps identify people needing attention	Supports pastoral care and belonging	Afolabi and Oderinde <i>et al.</i> ¹⁵

Practical uses of AI in pastoral communication and congregational follow up. It highlights reminders, outreach messages, and support for member engagement

Table 3 presents ways AI can strengthen pastoral communication, follow-up, and congregational engagement through timely and organized contact.

AI in evangelism, outreach, and digital mission work: Evangelism has always involved communication, but the channels of communication have changed dramatically. Recent work suggests that AI can help churches and religious groups present their message more clearly, respond to common questions, and expand their digital reach. A study on religious associations explains that AI can be used to popularize religion, inform people about activities, support mission-related communication, manage information, analyze sacred texts, preserve cultural heritage, and assist educational work¹⁶. Churches that want to reach people in digital spaces can use AI to organize content, tailor messages, and support public engagement in a more structured way^{16,17}.

At the same time, the literature warns that outreach becomes weaker when it is driven only by speed and volume. Studies on generative AI and trust show that AI generated religious content can reflect bias, mislead users, and create trust problems when used without oversight^{17,18}. For evangelism, this means that AI can be useful for digital mission work, but only if churches carefully review what is being produced. Mission should remain truthful, relational, and respectful¹⁶⁻¹⁸.

Table 4 highlights how AI can support evangelism, outreach messaging, and digital mission work while preserving trust.

Table 4: AI opportunities in evangelism, outreach, and digital mission

AI opportunities in evangelism, outreach, and digital mission	Church use	Practical value	Citation(s)
Outreach messaging and public information	Shares church activities and invitations	Expands visibility and reach	Gill ¹⁶
Generating mission content for digital platforms	Helps adapt messages for online audiences	Supports consistency and speed	Zhang <i>et al.</i> ¹⁸
Bias aware content review	Checks for distortions in AI generated material	Protects trust and theological integrity	Jenks ¹⁷

How AI can assist evangelism, outreach, and digital mission communication. It shows its value in message preparation, online visibility, and content review

Table 5: AI applications in church media, translation, and content creation

AI applications in church media, translation, and content creation	Church use	Practical value	Citation(s)
Translation of church materials	Makes content usable across languages	Improves inclusion and reach	Aldhafeeri <i>et al.</i> ¹⁹
Content generation for digital channels	Produces captions, summaries, and posts	Expands visibility while reducing workload	Aldhafeeri <i>et al.</i> ¹⁹
Personalized communication materials	Adapts content for different groups	Makes ministry more relevant	Aldhafeeri <i>et al.</i> ¹⁹

AI use in church media work, translation, and digital content creation. It covers captions, summaries, multilingual communication, and audience specific materials

AI in church media, translation, and content generation: Church media teams often work under pressure to produce a steady stream of material. Sermon summaries, captions, devotionals, bulletins, subtitles, and social media posts can take a great deal of time, especially in churches that serve multilingual communities. AI translation tools can improve communication and widen access, but they also raise concerns about privacy, accuracy, and possible misinterpretation when the translated message carries legal, ethical, or sensitive meaning¹⁹. A mistranslated prayer point, announcement, or sermon quotation can distort meaning in ways that matter spiritually and relationally¹⁹.

Beyond translation, broad reviews of generative AI chatbots show that large language models are already being used across many sectors to produce text, answer questions, and assist with content generation¹⁹. Another study on generative AI driven personalization shows that AI can adapt content to user needs, increasing engagement and making digital learning or communication more relevant to individuals¹⁹. In church media, this suggests real possibilities for personalized devotionals, tailored announcements, multilingual captions, and audience specific content for youth, adults, and new believers¹⁹.

Table 5 explains how AI can assist church media teams with translation, captions, summaries, and other content tasks

AI in counseling support, prayer support, and discipleship systems: Prayer and discipleship are deeply human practices, but recent studies show that some digital tools can support them in limited ways. An article on AI as a tool supporting prayer practices argues that technology can help believers maintain prayer rhythms, reminders, and structured spiritual routines, especially when used as a companion rather than a replacement for faith practice²⁰. This points to a practical role for AI in discipleship systems, where churches may want to help members remain consistent in prayer, reading, reflection, and accountability²⁰.

The mental health literature offers a helpful parallel. A viewpoint paper on an AI powered chatbot called Leora suggests that conversational agents may provide accessible and immediate support for minimal to mild symptoms of anxiety and depression²⁰. A separate scoping review found that AI chatbots can support the psychological health of health professionals by offering personalized and accessible interventions,

Table 6: AI assisted counseling, prayer support, and discipleship applications

AI assisted counseling, prayer support, and discipleship applications	Church use	Practical value	Citation(s)
Prayer reminder applications	Supports routine devotion	Encourages consistency in prayer life	Gruchota <i>et al.</i> ²⁰
Conversational support for basic well being	Provides simple encouragement and reflection	Offers access outside office hours	Gruchota <i>et al.</i> ²⁰
Discipleship tracking and follow up	Monitors requests, reminders, and reading plans	Helps ministry teams stay organized	Baek <i>et al.</i> ²¹

This table presents limited but useful AI applications in prayer support, counseling support, and discipleship systems. It highlights reminders, reflection, encouragement, and follow up support

Table 7: Key benefits of AI for church efficiency, personalization, and growth

Key benefits of AI for church efficiency, personalization, and growth	Church use	Practical value	Citation(s)
Efficiency in routine ministry work	Automates repetitive tasks	Saves time and reduces workload	Chelli <i>et al.</i> ²²
Personalization of messages and support	Adapts content for different groups	Makes ministry feel more relevant	Chelli <i>et al.</i> ²²
Scale in digital religious engagement	Reaches more people through online systems	Expands access while requiring safeguards	Chelli <i>et al.</i> ²²

This table brings together the broad practical benefits of AI for church efficiency and growth. It emphasizes automation, personalization, and scaling of digital ministry engagement

although the evidence base is still early and more rigorous evaluation is needed²¹. For church counseling support, the implication is clear: AI may be useful for first line encouragement, prayer reminders, and guided reflection, but it cannot replace human counseling, pastoral discernment, or spiritual accompaniment^{20,21}.

Table 6 describes how AI can support prayer reminders, basic encouragement, and discipleship follow up in limited ways.

Promise of AI for efficiency, personalization, and scale: The most attractive promise of AI in church settings is that it can improve efficiency, personalize support, and help ministries reach larger numbers of people. A recent study on generative AI driven personalization shows that AI can adapt content and interaction to individual needs, which can increase engagement and make digital environments feel more responsive²². That is highly relevant for churches that serve mixed age groups, multilingual congregations, or online communities with different levels of spiritual maturity²².

A broad systematic review of generative AI chatbots across domains found that these systems are now widely used in education, healthcare, business, and other sectors, and that their development increasingly depends on contextual design, responsible deployment, and domain specific adaptation²². A further study on religiosity and acceptance of AI based recommendations found that thinking about God increased acceptance of such recommendations, suggesting that religious framing can shape how people receive AI mediated guidance²². Taken together, these studies suggest that AI can help churches do more, reach farther, and respond more personally, but only when efficiency is balanced with trust, dignity, and human oversight²².

Table 7 brings together the main advantages of AI in church life, especially efficiency, personalization, and wider reach.

ETHICAL ISSUES AND MINISTRY IMPLICATIONS

Artificial intelligence can help churches work faster and communicate more widely, but the ethical questions it raises are not secondary concerns. They go to the heart of what church is, who leads, how people are cared for, and what it means to speak truth in a religious community. Recent scholarship shows

Table 8: Ethical and theological concerns surrounding AI in church settings

Ethical and theological concerns surrounding AI in church settings	Church implication	Practical concern	Citation(s)
Human dignity	AI must not reduce people to data or targets	Protects the value of persons in ministry	Przygoda <i>et al.</i> ²³
Spiritual authority	Machines cannot replace pastoral or sacramental office	Preserves theological responsibility	Cruz and Mora <i>et al.</i> ²⁴
Boundaries around grief and memory	AI should not exploit the dead or simulate sacred presence carelessly	Protects reverence and emotional integrity	Sisto ²⁵

This table outlines the major ethical and theological concerns raised by AI in church life. It highlights human dignity, spiritual authority, and boundaries around sacred practice

that AI in church life must be judged not only by usefulness, but also by whether it protects human dignity, respects spiritual authority, safeguards privacy, avoids distortion, preserves pastoral presence, and supports responsible leadership²³⁻²⁵.

Human dignity, spiritual authority, and theological boundaries: The first ethical pressure point is human dignity. Churches do not merely communicate information; they form persons, cultivate conscience, and witness to the value of human life before God. Recent work on Christian churches in the United States shows that religious leaders welcome AI only when it is aligned with mission, community solidarity, and human dignity, not when it is used as a cold instrument of control or replacement²³. A theological reflection on humanity in the age of AI similarly argues that Christian anthropology must remain central²⁴. A third study on digital resurrection technologies extends this concern into the realm of postmortem simulation, warning that AI can trespass into areas that touch sacred memory, grief, and dignity²⁵.

For church life, this means that spiritual authority cannot be surrendered to a machine, even when the machine sounds persuasive. AI may generate words, but it does not possess spiritual office, sacramental authority, or moral accountability. It can assist a pastor, but it cannot replace discernment, prayer, ordination, or the responsibility to interpret Scripture in a living community²³⁻²⁵.

Table 8 outlines the ethical and theological concerns that arise when AI is used in church settings.

Privacy, confidentiality, and data protection in church environments: The second ethical issue is privacy. Church data often contains the most intimate details of people's lives: Prayer requests, counseling notes, giving patterns, attendance history, family crises, and health concerns. In an AI enabled church environment, that information can be exposed to new risks if it is entered into systems that store, analyze, or transmit it without strong safeguards. Research on the impacts of AI on freedom of religion or belief online shows that digital systems can shape access, visibility, and control in ways that affect religious life directly²³. Work on AI in pharmacy practice likewise reports strong professional concern about patient privacy and weak regulation when AI enters sensitive spaces²³. A 2025 review of AI translation tools in healthcare adds that privacy, informed consent, equity, and liability are key pressure points whenever AI is used to mediate communication involving personal information²³.

These concerns are especially relevant to churches because ministry often relies on trust more than contracts. A congregant may share a burden with a pastor because they believe it will remain confidential. Churches need clear rules about what may be entered into AI tools, who can access the outputs, where the data is stored, and how long it is retained. The safest posture is to assume that any sensitive information given to an external AI system could potentially be exposed unless proven otherwise²³.

Table 9 identifies privacy and data protection risks linked to the handling of sensitive church information by AI systems.

Table 9: Privacy and data protection risks in AI enabled ministry

Privacy and data protection risks in AI enabled ministry	Church risk	Practical implication	Citation(s)
Prayer requests and counseling notes	Sensitive disclosures may be stored or reused	Requires strict confidentiality rules	Przygoda <i>et al.</i> ²³
Member records and attendance data	Can reveal personal patterns and vulnerability	Needs access control and retention policies	Przygoda <i>et al.</i> ²³
Translation and communication tools	May expose private content to external systems	Requires informed consent and data minimization	Przygoda <i>et al.</i> ²³

This table presents the privacy and data protection risks associated with AI enabled ministry. It focuses on prayer requests, counseling notes, member records, and communication tools

Table 10: Risks of bias, misinformation, and doctrinal distortion in AI use

Risks of bias, misinformation, and doctrinal distortion in AI use	Church risk	Practical implication	Citation
Hallucinated facts or references	False claims may enter teaching materials	Requires human verification of sources	Mugaanyi <i>et al.</i> ²⁶
Doctrinal simplification	AI may flatten complex theology	Needs theological review before use	Huang <i>et al.</i> ²⁷
Prompt or model bias	Output may privilege certain traditions or assumptions	Requires careful contextual supervision	Farquhar <i>et al.</i> ²⁸

This table summarizes the risks of bias, misinformation, and doctrinal distortion in AI generated output. It stresses the need for human review of references, theology, and contextual accuracy

Bias, misinformation, hallucination, and doctrinal distortion: The third ethical issue is accuracy. AI systems may speak with confidence while generating false or misleading content. In theological contexts, this is particularly dangerous because a small error can become a doctrinal error, and a doctrinal error can reshape belief. Studies on hallucination in large language models show that these systems can produce fluent but factually incorrect outputs, making the problem not merely technical but epistemic²⁶⁻²⁸.

In church settings, the implications are obvious. AI can distort biblical references, flatten theological nuance, or present a confident but shallow explanation of doctrine. It may mix traditions, misattribute quotations, or generate content that sounds devout but lacks doctrinal grounding. Churches should therefore treat AI output as draft material, not authoritative teaching. Every sermon outline, Bible study note, apologetic response, and doctrinal explanation generated by AI must be checked by a knowledgeable human leader before it reaches the congregation²⁶⁻²⁸.

Table 10, presents the risks of bias, misinformation, and doctrinal distortion in AI generated church content.

Risks of overdependence, dehumanization, and weakened pastoral presence: The fourth issue is dependence. AI is attractive because it is immediate, patient, and always available. That convenience can quietly produce overreliance. Research on preachers using AI for sermon preparation shows that ministers often use it as a brainstorming tool, but they critically evaluate the output and rely on theological training and pastoral experience to make sense of it²⁹. A psychology of religion perspective likewise warns that digital systems can create disorientation and spiritual uncertainty²⁹. A recent theological review argues that the rise of AI should be approached with attention to communication, agency, and ethics rather than with blind enthusiasm²⁹.

The pastoral risk is dehumanization. If a church leans too heavily on AI, members may begin to feel processed rather than cared for. A chatbot may answer quickly, but speed is not the same as presence. AI should never become the first and last pastor people meet. Digital tools can extend ministry, but they cannot substitute for embodied relationships, spiritual listening, and the slow work of accompaniment²⁹.

Table 11: Ministry risks associated with overreliance on artificial intelligence

Ministry risks associated with overreliance on artificial intelligence	Church risk	Practical implication	Citation(s)
Sermon overdependence	Ministers may lean on AI instead of study and prayer	Encourages shallow preparation	Sbardelotto ²⁹
Spiritual confusion	Members may struggle to distinguish machine output from discernment	Requires clear teaching about limits	Sbardelotto ²⁹
Dehumanized care	Contact may feel automated rather than pastoral	Preserves face to face and prayerful ministry	Sbardelotto ²⁹

This table explains the ministry risks that can arise when churches rely too heavily on AI. It highlights sermon dependence, spiritual confusion, and reduced pastoral presence

Table 12: Governance principles for responsible AI adoption in churches

Governance principles for responsible AI adoption in churches	Church use	Practical value	Citation(s)
Transparency	Members should know when and how AI is used	Builds trust and reduces confusion	Akbarighatar <i>et al.</i> ³⁰
Accountability	A human leader must own the final decision	Prevents blame shifting to the tool	Akbarighatar <i>et al.</i> ³⁰
Policy coherence	Written rules should guide tool use and data handling	Reduces inconsistency and risk	Lee and Lee ³¹

This table presents the governance principles that support responsible AI use in churches. It emphasizes transparency, accountability, and clear policy guidance for ministry practice

Table 11 shows how overdependence on AI can weaken pastoral presence and make ministry feel less human.

Accountability, transparency, governance, and responsible AI use in churches: The fifth issue is governance. Churches that adopt AI need more than enthusiasm; they need policy. A key transparency study shows that attempts to standardize AI transparency are useful, but they can also create new uncertainties if the process is too technical or too detached from democratic oversight. A configurational study of responsible AI argues that trustworthy use depends on human centered governance, and that principles such as accountability, privacy, safety, explainability, inclusiveness, and fairness must be enacted rather than merely stated³⁰. In the policy domain, a study on harmonizing AI ethics and legal frameworks in Korea shows that coherent rules matter because fragmented guidance creates confusion and weakens trust³¹.

For churches, this means that ethical AI use cannot depend on informal habits alone. It needs written guidance, decision pathways, review structures, and clear lines of responsibility. Who approves AI tools? Who checks the output? Who handles complaints? Responsible use means being able to explain how a tool was chosen, how it is supervised, and what kinds of ministry decisions remain human only^{30,31}.

Table 12 summarizes the core governance principles needed for transparent and responsible AI use in churches.

Leadership training, digital literacy, and policy development for ministry contexts: The sixth issue is capacity. Churches cannot govern what they do not understand. Research on AI literacy among teachers and university students shows that competence differs across contexts and that training must include not only technical skill but also ethical and contextual understanding³².

The implication for church leadership is straightforward. Pastors, administrators, youth leaders, media teams, and theologians need training that goes beyond how to type prompts. They need to know the risks of bias, privacy loss, doctrinal distortion, overdependence, and weak oversight. Church policy development should therefore include training workshops, written usage guidelines, consent procedures, review steps, and a process for evaluating new tools before adoption³².

Table 13: Capacity building needs for AI ready church leadership

Capacity building needs for AI ready church leadership	Church use	Practical value	Citation(s)
Basic AI literacy training	Helps leaders understand tools and limitations	Reduces misuse and fear	Kundu <i>et al.</i> ³²
Ethical and contextual learning	Teaches privacy, bias, and governance concerns	Supports wise decision making	Kundu <i>et al.</i> ³²
Policy writing and review skills	Helps leaders create church specific rules	Makes AI use consistent and accountable	Kundu <i>et al.</i> ³²

This table outlines the capacity building needs required for AI ready church leadership. It highlights training in literacy, ethics, contextual judgment, and policy development

Table 14: Future research directions and practical recommendations

Future research directions and practical recommendations	Church use	Practical value	Citation(s)
Study real ministry outcomes	Evaluates whether AI actually helps congregations	Moves discussion beyond hype	Corpuz ³³
Track trust and acceptance over time	Observes how people respond to AI use	Helps churches build confidence responsibly	Thaiduong ³⁴
Adopt lifecycle governance	Reviews tools from selection to retirement	Keeps AI accountable over time	Leon ³⁵

This table identifies future research directions and practical priorities for church engagement with AI. It emphasizes real ministry outcomes, trust over time, and lifecycle based governance

Table 13 describes the training and policy development needs required for AI ready church leadership.

Future directions for AI integration in church life and Christian ministry: The future of AI in church life will likely move in two directions at once: Greater usefulness and greater scrutiny. Recent work on digital religion suggests that future church practice will continue to negotiate innovation and tradition, disruption and continuity, while rethinking communication, agency, and ethics in digital contexts³³. A recent study of public trust in AI shows that trust is dynamic, which means religious communities will also need to think carefully about how trust is built and damaged in AI mediated environments³⁴. A 2026 governance framework further argues that reliable ethical AI must be managed across the full lifecycle of development, use, and oversight³⁵.

For Christian ministry, that points to several practical directions. Churches should invest in research on real ministry outcomes rather than relying on hype. They should study how AI affects preaching, counseling, youth engagement, theological education, translation, and digital evangelism in actual congregations. Most importantly, churches should keep the human person at the center. AI may help the church communicate, organize, and extend its reach, but it should never erase the spiritual rhythm of prayer, embodied fellowship, discernment, repentance, or love³³⁻³⁵.

Table 14 points to future research and practical priorities for responsible AI integration in church life.

CONCLUSION

Artificial intelligence has emerging value in church settings by supporting administration, communication, teaching, outreach, and selected ministry activities. However, its role should remain supportive rather than directive, ensuring that spiritual leadership, pastoral discernment, and theological responsibility remain human centered. The review highlights key ethical concerns, including privacy, misinformation, doctrinal distortion, and overdependence, which require careful oversight. Churches should therefore adopt clear governance frameworks, leadership training, and responsible usage policies to ensure ethical implementation. Future studies should evaluate the practical effects of AI on ministry outcomes, congregational trust, discipleship, counseling, and digital evangelism in real church environments.

SIGNIFICANT STATEMENT

This review provides a timely synthesis of the opportunities, ethical concerns, and ministry implications of artificial intelligence in church settings. It is significant because it highlights both the practical benefits and theological limitations of AI while emphasizing the importance of human oversight, accountability, and ethical safeguards in ministry contexts. The manuscript also contributes practical guidance for responsible AI adoption and identifies key areas for future research, including trust, ministry effectiveness, and long-term governance in faith-based environments.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors sincerely acknowledge the extensive body of scholarship that informed this comprehensive review and contributed to a deeper understanding of artificial intelligence in church settings. We also express appreciation to the researchers whose published works provided the foundation for the analysis and discussion presented in this manuscript.

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