# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN PARISH & DIOCESAN DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

ST. JAMES CHURCH OF MONTCLAIR, THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF NEWARK JULY 2025

AGENDA
AI in Parish & Diocesan Digital Communications

# 1.What is Artificial Intelligence

- **AI Definition**
  - Systems designed to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence
  - Involves learning from data, recognizing patterns, making decisions

- **Core Technologies**
  - Machine Learning: algorithms that improve with experience
  - Natural Language Processing: understanding and generating human language
  - Large Language Models: billions-parameter networks powering advanced text tasks

# I. What is Artificial Intelligence (continued)

- **AI Types**
  - Narrow AI: specialized solutions (chatbots, recommendation engines)
  - General AI: hypothetical systems matching human versatility

- **Why It Matters for Parishes & Dioceses**
  - Automate routine communications
  - Personalize outreach and spiritual care
  - Unlock data insights to guide strategy

# II. How AI Can Assist Parish and Diocesan Communicators

AI can assist with developing strategy, creating and transforming content and engaging with members of the Diocese and parishioners.

- **Strategy -** Create a baseline digital communications strategy to then tailor and infuse with human constituent perspective.

- **Content -** Quickly and effectively transform a local parish article to be more relevant for a different audience. Turn vestry minutes into digestible updates.

- **Engagement -** Apply Episcopal church trained chatbots to engage with parishioners on practical and spiritual matters, e.g., by engaging in Q&A (what is today's sermon about?) or entertaining prayer requests.

# II. How AI Can Assist Parish and Diocesan Communicators (continued)

## AI as a Stewardship Partner - *The Voice*

**Narrative Stewardship:** Use AI to help tell the story of how gifts of time, talent, and treasure are transforming lives—locally and across the Diocese.

Theological Framing: Prompt AI to generate reflections on stewardship grounded in scripture (e.g., 2 Corinthians 9:6–8) and Episcopal tradition.

**Voice Amplification:** AI can help elevate underrepresented voices—youth, elders, marginalized communities—by assisting in drafting or translating their stories.

Editorial Support: AI can:

Suggest seasonal stewardship themes (e.g., "Abundance in Scarcity" during Lent)

Draft donor thank-you notes with warmth and specificity

**Example Prompt:**
*"Please draft a 500-word stewardship reflection for the Diocese of Newark's newsletter, The Voice, drawing on the theme of 'Faithful Generosity in Uncertain Times.' Include a quote from Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and a story from a parish food pantry ministry."*

# III. Accessing AI Tools

- AI capabilities are delivered via cloud services, embedded in familiar apps (Office 365, Google Workspace)
- Platforms range from no-code chatbots to developer-friendly application programming

### How to Get Started

- Define your goals (content creation, chat engagement, analytics)
- Select relevant AI tool(s)
- Run small-scale tests

### Pros & Cons

- Pros: rapid deployment, intuitive interfaces, scalable to parish size
- Cons: licensing fees, learning curve for staff, require ongoing governance
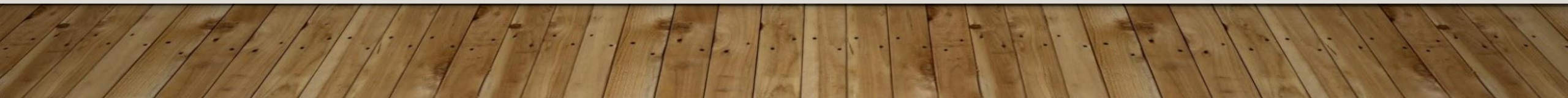
# IV. Strategy
# Create a digital communications strategy

**Case1**

PROMPT: "Morning! Could you take the role of a episcopal church digital communications consultant. Your client is the St. James Episcopal Church of Montclair New Jersey at 581 Valley Road. I am the Parish Administrator. I would like your input formulating a top line strategy for introducing or expanding digital tools to enhance communications with parishioners, promotion of church programs, and outreach to members of the community who may wish to participate in church services and programs. What do you see as the best way to articulate the areas of communications needing to be strengthened, recommended strategy, actions steps and timeline? Could this include recommendations about new social media platforms and examples of how a platform such as Blue Sky could offer digital communications opportunities but also presents risks? Can you apply deep think to this?"

*Using Microsoft Co-pilot*

# IV. Strategy (continued)
# Case Output

**Case 1** Create a digital communications strategy

- Initial presentation downloaded by Co-Pilot

- Adapted version including human Parish Administrator's perspective

*Using Microsoft Co-pilot*

# V. Content
# Craft new articles

**Case 2.a** Write an article about all the ways St. James Church engages with the community, emphasize its role supporting vulnerable constituents.

PROMPT: Morning! Could you help me write an article incorporating all the ways that St. James Episcopal Church engages with and supports its community and parishioners, especially poor, marginalized and/ or vulnerable constituents. Please use all info sources on the church website and all of the publicly available and appropriate information about the church and how it has engaged its parishioners and community over the past ten years. Please apply deep think to incorporate some nuances unique to St. James. Please use your judgement on the form and content or use some of prior articles we have worked on as input to the desired length.

*Using Microsoft Co-pilot*

# V. Content (continued)
# Case Output

**Case 2.a** Craft an article for St. James enews highlighting all the ways St. James Church engages with the community. Target audience is St. James Parishioners and the local community.

- Initial article on St. James Church engagement with its constituents

Follow on Prompt: Make the article a little less of a laundry list of all the activities the church engages in instead prepare more of an integrated, thematic narrative for a punchier article.

- Second version of article on St. James Church engagement with its constituents

*Using Microsoft Co-pilot*

## V. Content (continued)
## Adapt the tone of voice and content for different audience

**Case 2.b** Adapt the St. James article to be more relevant for audiences in other parishes across the diocese.

PROMPT- 1
Could we adapt the tone of the following article to audiences across different parishes in the Newark diocese? The current version is written for the St. James parish and any other constituents in the Montclair community interested in the church's activities. I would appreciate your help making any adjustments in tone and content that make the article more relevant and interesting to the other parishes in the diocese. Here is the article to be revised: *(upload existing article)*

PROMPT- 2
Thank you!! Can you include, on balance, a bit more of of the specific highlights in the St. James article, e.g. as Montclair examples of these broad cross parish themes?

*Using Microsoft Co-pilot*

# V. Content (continued)
# Case Output

**Case 2.b** Adapt the St. James article to be more relevant for audiences in other parishes across the diocese.

- St. James Article with tone adapted for broader diocese

*Using Microsoft Co-pilot*

# VI. Engagement
# AI Tools That Support Parish & Diocesan Engagement

**Chatbots -** Provide access to church info, answer FAQs, offer prayer prompts, collect requests

- ○ Example: *Cathy*, the Episcopal Church's chatbot

**AI-Powered Email Assistants** - Personalize outreach based on parishioner interests, suggest subject lines and optimal send times, summarize long updates into digestible messages

**Social Media Content Generators** - Turn sermons or bulletins into posts, suggest hashtags and visuals, tailor tone for different platforms (Instagram vs. Facebook)

**Sentiment & Engagement Analytics -** Analyze feedback from surveys, emails, or social media, identify what resonates with your community, inform future messaging and ministry focus

**Voice Assistants & Smart Devices *(emerging)*** - Enable voice-activated access to service times, devotionals, potential for integration with smart speakers or kiosks

# VI. Engagement (continued)
# What are chatbots? A New Way to Connect

A chatbot is a computer program that can simulate conversation, e.g., through text or voice—using AI

In Church Life, Chatbots Can:
- Answer common questions (e.g., "What time is Sunday service?")
- Offer spiritual support (e.g., prayer prompts, scripture references)
- Help newcomers feel welcome
- Provide access to church information
- Collect prayer requests or event RSVPs

How They Work:
- Built using Natural Language Processing (NLP) to understand and respond in plain English
- Trained on church-specific content (e.g., bulletins, FAQs, sermons)
- Can be embedded on websites, Facebook Messenger, or SMS

# VI. Engagement (continued)
# Illustration - Chatbot "Cathy" Developed by Episcopal Church

**Scope**

- National Episcopal Church deployment of friendly, knowledgeable chatbot "Cathy"
- Integrated across website, Facebook Messenger, SMS

# VI. Engagement (continued)
# Illustration (continued) - Parishioner Interactions with Cathy

**Parishioner**: "What's the sermon about this Sunday?" **Cathy**:

- "This Sunday, our rector explores 'Finding Hope in Uncertain Times' (Mark 4:35-41). Would you like a brief summary or reflection questions?"

**Parishioner**: "Can I submit a prayer request?" **Cathy**:

- "Absolutely. Please share your intention, and our prayer team will lift it up at morning prayer. Shall I guide you through the form?"

**Parishioner**: "Does St. James offer outreach to seniors?" **Cathy**:

- "Yes — our 'Silver Saints' monthly luncheon and home visits program. I can send you details or connect you with the coordinator.

## V. Moving Forward
## Parting Thoughts on AI is a Tool—Ministry is the Mission

- Discernment over Disruption
  Use AI to enhance—not replace—our human, pastoral voice.
- Stewardship of Innovation
  Embrace technology as a gift to serve the Gospel more effectively.
- Start Small, Stay Grounded
  Pilot tools, reflect often, and always center your community's needs.
- Collaborate Across the Diocese
  Share learnings, templates, and best practices to lift all parishes.
- Keep the Human in the Loop
  Let AI handle the routine so we can focus on the relational.

# Comments / Questions?

Thank you!

- Prepared by Alexa Philo, Parish Administrator, St. James Episcopal Church of Montclair, with structuring and research assistance via Microsoft Co-Pilot.

# Appendix

Popular AI Tools

Security Concerns

# Popular AI Tools

| Tool | Purpose | Church Use Case | Access |
|------|---------|-----------------|--------|
| Microsoft Copilot | Embedded AI in Office apps | Draft vestry minutes, sermon outlines, stewardship letters | M365 license |
| ChatGPT (OpenAI) | Conversational assistant | Draft newsletter articles, generate prayers, brainstorm sermon titles | http://chatgpt.com |
| Canva Magic Write | Visual + text AI | Create flyers for events, social media posts | canva.com |
| Gamma.app | AI slide builder | Build presentations like this one | gamma.app |
| Otter.ai | Meeting transcription | Record and summarize vestry or diocesan meetings | otter.ai |
| Sermon Shots | Video clipping | Turn sermons into short clips for outreach | sermonshots.com |

# Security Concerns

| Concern | Description | Church Example | Mitigation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data Privacy | AI may store or learn from sensitive data | Uploading a prayer list with names to ChatGPT | Use anonymized data; avoid uploading personal info |
| Misinformation | AI may generate incorrect or outdated info | Chatbot gives wrong liturgical calendar date | Regular content audits; human review |
| Over-Automation | Risk of losing pastoral tone | AI-generated stewardship letter feels cold | Always personalize AI drafts with pastoral voice |
| Access Control | Staff use tools without oversight | Volunteer uses AI tool that stores data externally | Create usage policies and training |
| Bias | AI may reflect societal or theological bias | AI-generated prayers lack inclusive language | Train AI on Episcopal-specific content and values |

# Background Reading

"The Church and AI: A Pastoral Guide" – Anglican Communion Office

- Explores theological and ethical dimensions of AI in ministry.

"Faith and Artificial Intelligence" – Christian Century

- A thoughtful reflection on how AI intersects with Christian ethics.

"AI and the Future of Ministry" – Fuller Seminary's De Pree Center

# Background Reading (continued)

"Theology of Technology" – John Dyer (Dallas Theological Seminary)

- Accessible book on how Christians can think about emerging tech.

"Digital Discernment: A Guide for Church Leaders" – Alban Institute

- Helps leaders evaluate new tools through a spiritual lens.