A Church AI Policy Template

Appendix A from Faith in the Age of AI: Stewardship Over Mastery, by Brian C. Newman

This template turns the church-level guidance in this book into a policy a church can adopt. Chapter 3 recommends a short written policy before any AI tool goes live. Chapter 9 adds disclosure and crisis requirements. Chapter 12 recommends reviewing the policy once a year.

Adapt it to your church's size, tradition, and governance. Replace the bracketed text, delete what does not apply, and keep the result short enough that people will actually read it. This template is not legal advice. Have someone qualified review the privacy and data sections against the laws that apply to your church.

1. Purpose

[Church name] uses artificial intelligence (AI) tools as aids to ministry, never as substitutes for it. This policy exists to make sure every use of AI supplements the work of the church and does not replace the prayer, study, presence, and relationships that only people can offer.

2. Guiding principles

1. **Scripture remains the final authority.** No AI output is treated as authoritative teaching. Scripture quoted or summarized by an AI tool is checked against the Bible itself.
2. **Supplement, not substitute.** Before adopting any tool, leaders ask whether it supplements a real ministry or substitutes for it.
3. **People before tools.** Pastoral care, counseling, discipleship, and worship remain the work of people, in person whenever possible.
4. **Transparency.** The church tells people when they are interacting with AI or receiving AI-generated content.
5. **Accountability.** A named person is responsible for every AI tool the church uses and for everything it produces.
6. **Protection of the vulnerable.** Children, people in crisis, and people who are lonely or grieving receive the highest level of care.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all staff, elders, deacons, ministry leaders, and volunteers who use AI tools in church work, and to any AI tool the church makes available to members or visitors.

4. Permitted uses

The following uses are generally permitted, provided a person reviews the output before it is used:

- Drafting announcements, emails, newsletters, and administrative documents
- Scheduling, logistics, and data organization that do not involve confidential information
- Research assistance for sermon and lesson preparation, with every fact, quote, and Scripture reference verified
- Captioning, transcription, and translation drafts that improve accessibility
- Graphic design and media drafts for church communications

5. Uses that require approval

The following uses require written approval from [pastor, elder board, or designated leader] before they begin:

- Any chatbot, assistant, or app that members or visitors interact with directly
- Any tool that processes member data, giving records, or prayer requests
- Any AI-generated content used in worship, including music, images, video, or scripted prayers
- Any tool used in pastoral care, counseling, or ministry to children and youth

6. Prohibited uses

The church does not:

- Present an AI tool as a pastor, a counselor, or a human being
- Offer an AI persona that speaks as God, Jesus, a saint, or a member of the pastoral staff
- Use AI as a substitute for pastoral counseling, crisis care, or spiritual direction
- Enter confidential pastoral, counseling, medical, or children's information into any AI tool that is not approved for that purpose
- Preach or teach AI-drafted content that the preacher or teacher has not studied, prayed over, and taken full ownership of

7. Accountability for each tool

Before any tool goes live, the accountable leader records the following in a one-page entry kept with this policy:

1. **The tool.** Its name, vendor, and what it does.
2. **The purpose.** The ministry it supports, and why it supplements that ministry rather than substituting for it.
3. **The accountable person.** The staff member or leader responsible for the tool and its output.

4. **The human check.** What a person reviews before the tool's output reaches a member, and who that person is.
5. **The data.** What information the tool receives, where it is stored, and whether the vendor uses it to train its models.
6. **The review date.** When the church will next decide whether to keep, change, or retire the tool.

8. Disclosure

- Any AI tool members interact with discloses that it is AI in its own interface, not only in this policy.
- AI-generated images, video, or music used in worship or church media are identified as such.
- When AI assisted substantially in preparing a sermon, lesson, or publication, the church is willing to say so plainly when asked.

9. Crisis and pastoral care

Any member-facing AI tool must:

1. Recognize expressions of crisis, including thoughts of suicide or self-harm, abuse, or danger to others.
2. Redirect the person immediately to a real, named, reachable person at the church, with current contact information: [name, role, phone].
3. Provide emergency resources. In the United States, these include 911 for emergencies and the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (call or text 988).
4. Never attempt to handle the crisis itself.

The accountable leader tests this behavior before launch and at every review.

10. Children and youth

- No AI companion or chatbot is offered to minors through church ministries.
- Any AI tool used in children's or youth ministry requires written parental consent and adult supervision.
- Leaders help parents understand the AI tools their children are likely using, and point them to the household practices in Chapter 10.

11. Privacy and data

- Use only tools whose data and privacy terms have been reviewed by [designated person].
- Prefer tools that do not use church data to train their models.
- Do not enter names, contact details, prayer requests, giving records, or counseling notes into AI tools that are not approved for that data.
- Remove church data from a tool when the tool is retired.

12. Annual review

Once a year, [the elder board or designated team] reviews this policy and every tool recorded under section 7, asking:

1. How is AI affecting our people, our staff, and our ministry?
2. Is each tool still supplementing a real ministry, or has it begun to substitute for one?
3. What fears or questions about AI are people bringing to our pastors?
4. Has any tool produced an error, a privacy problem, or a pastoral concern?
5. What guard should we set this year?

Adoption

Adopted by [governing body] on [date].

Next review date: [date].

Accountable leader for this policy: [name and role].

From Faith in the Age of AI: Stewardship Over Mastery by Brian C. Newman. Available on Amazon in Kindle and paperback.