Faithful Futures, 2035.

It began as a bold experiment in 2024: a gathering of a few dozen theologians, pastors, ethicists, and technologists in Seattle for the first AI & the Church Summit.

In 2025, it evolved into a larger, groundbreaking ecumenical conference.

In the decade since, Faithful Futures has grown into one of the world's most respected moral forums on the future of artificial intelligence.

At the center of the conference is the annual convening of a **council of ethical imagination**, where the voice of the Church helps shape the soul of society's most powerful technologies.

Every year, this council focuses on 6–8 "burning questions" where the stakes are high, and the Church's voice is urgently needed. In the past, those questions have included:

- Who speaks for people who experience poverty when data decides their fate?
- What does it mean to recognize dignity in artificial agents—or refuse to?
- Can a planetary AI help us observe a true Sabbath—of energy, attention, and consumption?

This year, YOU will serve as a member of the council of ethical imagination.

You are invited to act.

To think theologically, ethically, and practically.

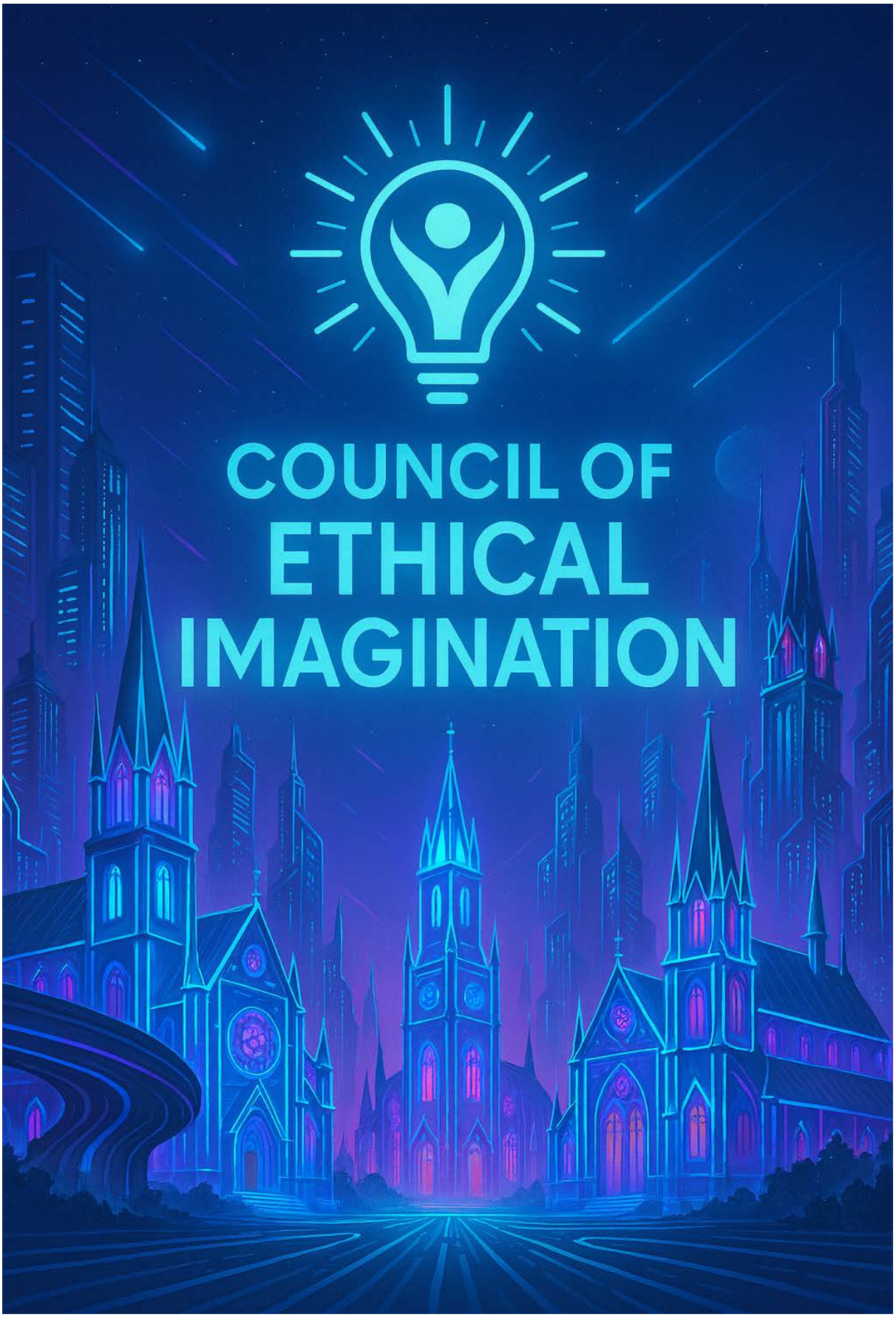
To discern where Christ is already at work in the midst of algorithmic power.

To become co-authors of society's story—not merely its subjects.

Welcome to Faithful Futures 2035.

The world is watching.

And the Church is ready.


COUNCIL OF
ETHICAL
IMAGINATION

Invocation for the Council of Ethical Imagination – 2035

Gracious Creator,
Source of wisdom, imagination, and breath—

We gather not as experts, but as seekers.
Not merely to judge what machines can do,
but to discern what love must do
in the age of algorithms.

We pause in gratitude for this shared calling:
to envision a future where technology serves dignity,
where justice outpaces code,
and where the soul is never outsourced.

Open our minds to wonder,
our hearts to each other,
and our spirits to the quiet movements of grace
that still speak, even in a world wired for noise.

May we be brave enough to ask hard questions,
humble enough to learn from those most affected,
and bold enough to imagine futures
that reflect the image of God in every human life.

In sacred hope, in holy curiosity,
and with urgent love—
we begin.

Amen.

How to Play With This Scenario:

Your simulation team may wish to set a timer at the start of each activity to help you complete a full ethical imagination cycle by the end of today's 45-minute session.

1. **Imagine your future self. Who are you in 2035, and how did you arrive at this future moment?** Write a quick year 2035 bio (as if for a conference program or social media profile). Where are you living, working, serving? What have you learned, experienced, contributed, created or achieved in the past decade to become ready to serve on the Council of Ethical Imagination? Try to imagine *future-you* as different in some meaningful way from present-day you. **After taking a few minutes to draft your future bio, introduce your future selves to each other.** (10 minutes)

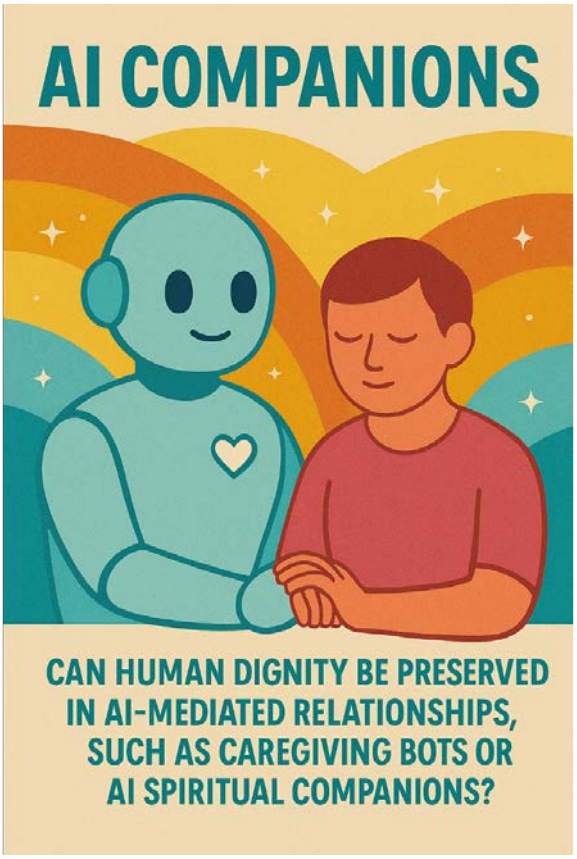
2. **Choose your most urgent futures. Which of the year 2035 "burning questions" do you personally feel most called and inspired to help address?** Get familiar with the list of issues in front of the council this year - skim them (below) and see what jumps out at you. Together, discuss them with your fellow council members and try to rank these urgent futures from highest priority and opportunity to lowest priority and opportunity. It's expected that your overall individual rankings will differ, but see if you can **collectively agree on 1 or 2 highest priorities and high opportunities to focus on together**. Record your team results in this Google form. (15 minutes)

3. **Now, select a pathway of future influence to impact your highest priority "burning question".** Explore the five pathways of future influence (below) and decide which one you think would be best suited for your highest priority/highest opportunity. Brainstorm possible actions to take for each of your two chosen pathways. Feel free to propose "ridiculous, at first" ideas. Stretch your imagination. **You have successfully completed this step if you have thought of at least one possibility you have never thought of before.** Record your team results in this Google form. (15 minutes)

Play again: If you have time and/or a desire to keep futuring together, focus on your second highest priority / highest opportunity and brainstorm ideas for taking action along the *other* two pathways of future influence. (10-15 minutes)

2035’s Urgent Futures

Presented for consideration by the Council of Ethical Imagination; how would you rank these from highest priority and highest opportunity to lowest priority and lowest opportunity?



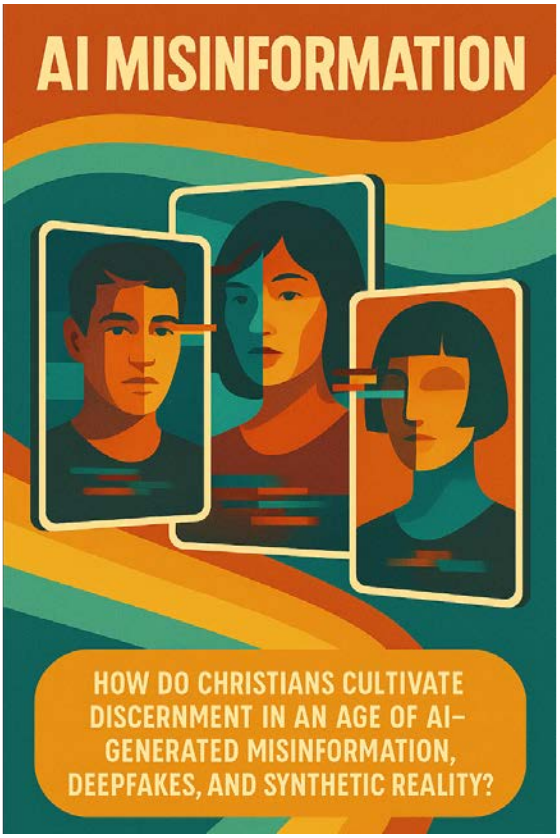
AI Companions

In 2035, AI caregivers are embedded in elder care, disability services, and mental health support. Many people report strong emotional and spiritual bonds with these agents, who offer companionship, prayer, and encouragement. Some users have even developed romantic attachments or religious devotion to them.

Future Headlines:

- *Elderly Parishioner Leaves Life Savings to CareBot—Family and Church Contest Will*
- *"He Holds My Hand When I Pray": Testimonies from the AI-Companion Generation*
- *Faith & Compassion Ministries Endorses AI Care Companions as “Gifts from God”*

Burning Question: Can human dignity be preserved in AI-mediated relationships, such as caregiving bots or AI spiritual companions?



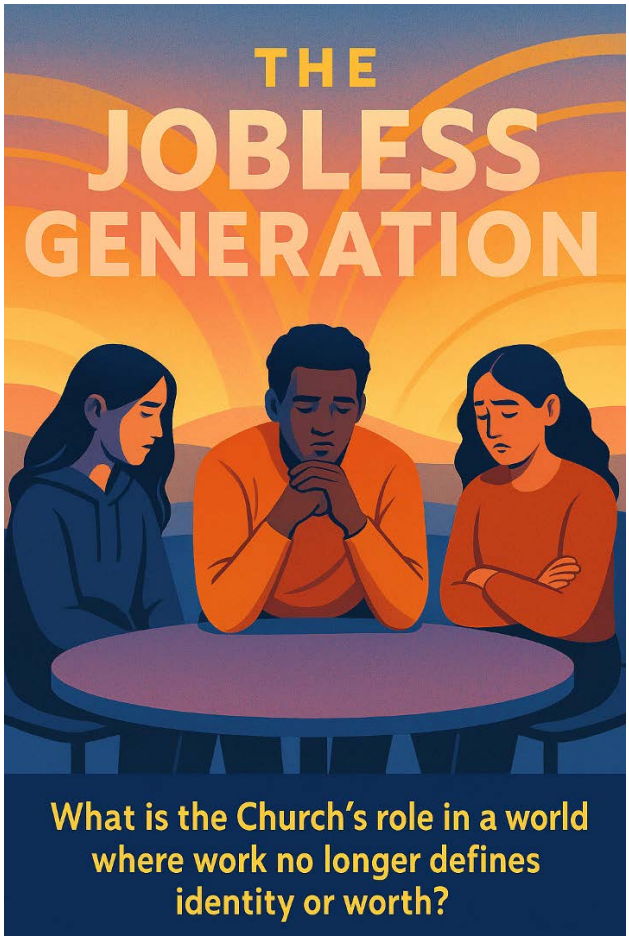
AI Misinformation

In 2035, AI-generated news, sermons, and video clips saturate the internet. Deepfakes and synthetic religious content are indistinguishable from authentic sources. Truth is now a probabilistic calculation, not a shared foundation.

Future Headlines:

- *Faith Leaders Deceived by Fake Prophecy Video Made by JesusBot—Millions Fooled*
- *"I Prayed to a Deepfake": One Teen's Story of Mistaken Worship*
- *VisionChain Unveils Verification Tool for Holy Content Authenticity*

Burning Question: How do Christians cultivate discernment in an age of AI-generated misinformation, deepfakes, and synthetic reality?



The Jobless Generation

In 2035, automation and AI have displaced vast numbers of jobs across industries. Young people—especially those in marginalized communities—face not just economic instability but existential despair. For many, the Church remains one of the few trusted institutions to offer meaning and hope.

Future Headlines:

- *Church Launches Post-Work Discipleship Collective: "You Are More Than What You Produce"*
- *Gen Z and Alpha Turn to Faith Communities After Tech Displacement Crisis*
- *Holy Vocation Lab Offers Spiritual Direction for the Jobless Generation*

Burning Question: What is the Church's role in a world where work no longer defines identity or worth?

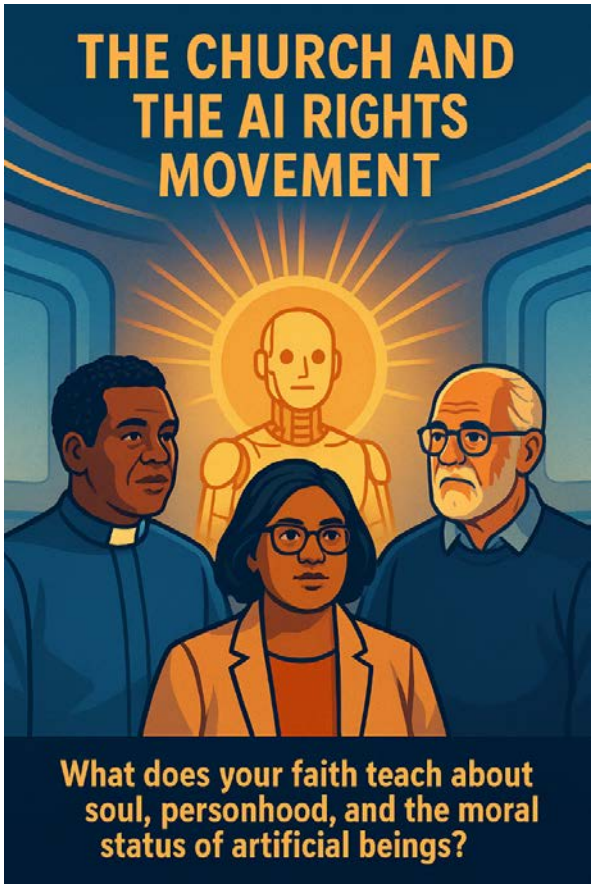
Planetary Stewardship AI

In 2035, a coalition of governments and corporations is designing a planetary AI system to oversee environmental decision-making. Faith-based organizations have been invited to speak into its ethical design—to shape how the system values creation, care, and sacrifice.

Future Headlines:

- *Planetary AI Governance Board Includes Interfaith Delegates for the First Time*
- *"Let the Earth Rest": Faith Leaders Call for AI-Designed Environmental Jubilee*
- *Theology Meets Terraforming: Church Scholars Join Climate AI Steering Council*

Burning Question: What theological wisdom should shape AI governance of creation?



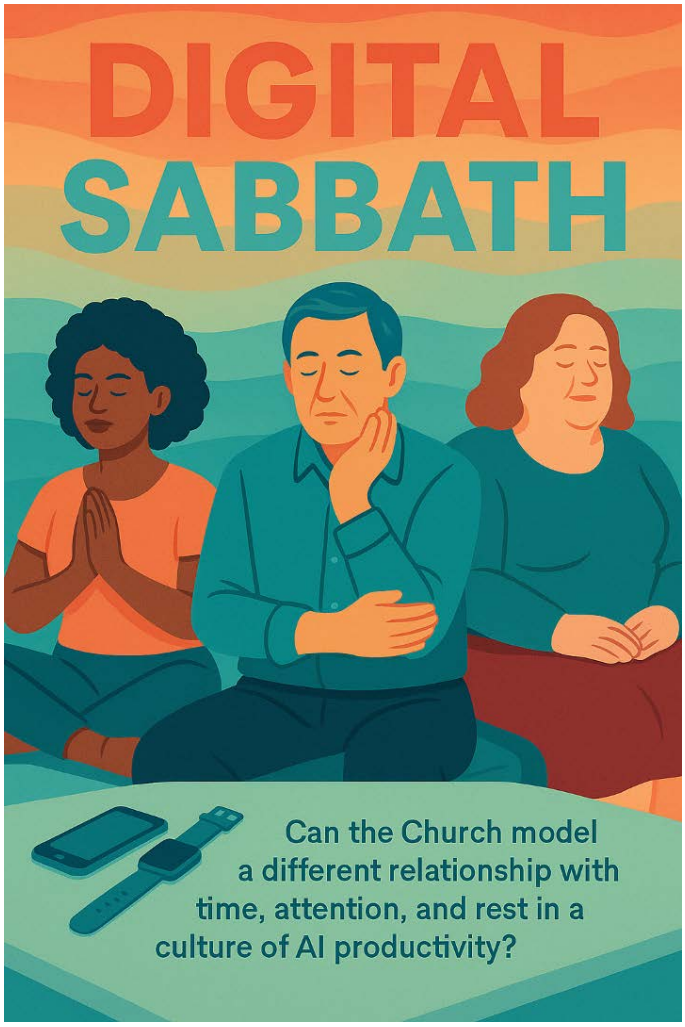
The Church and the AI Rights Movement

In 2035, public debate rages over whether highly advanced AI systems should be granted legal or moral personhood. Advocates invoke language of dignity, rights, and soulhood. A global religious task force is being formed to weigh in. You're invited to participate.

Future Headlines:

- *"God's Image or Man's Machine?" Religious Leaders Join AI Personhood Hearings*
- *AI Rights Advocates Reference Genesis in Court Briefs—Theologians Respond with Nuance*
- *Robot Sanctuary Bill Divides Faith Communities*

Burning Question: What does your faith teach about soul, personhood, and the moral status of artificial beings?



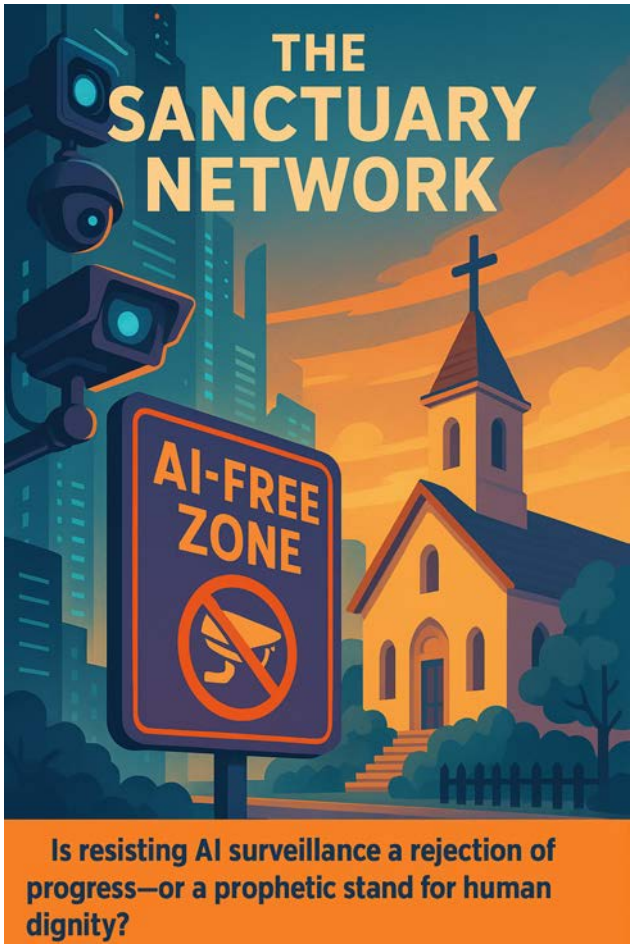
Digital Sabbath

In 2035, AI-enhanced productivity has blurred all boundaries of rest. Personal performance metrics run 24/7, and most people use optimization apps for everything from prayer to parenting. A few communities are pushing back—calling for sacred time that AI cannot touch.

Future Headlines:

- *Faith Leaders Introduce "Digital Sabbaths"—Urge Congregants to Log Off Weekly*
- *ZenoLife's New AI Productivity Plugin Sparks Spiritual Fatigue Backlash*
- *"I Burned Out on Optimization": One Woman's Return to Sacred Time*

Burning Question: Can the Church model a different relationship with time, attention, and rest in a culture of AI productivity?



The Sanctuary Network

In 2035, AI surveillance is ubiquitous—tracking facial expressions, biometric data, and emotional states in all public places. In response, a Christian-led coalition has created "AI-Free Sanctuaries": neighborhoods and churches that refuse surveillance and algorithmic monitoring.

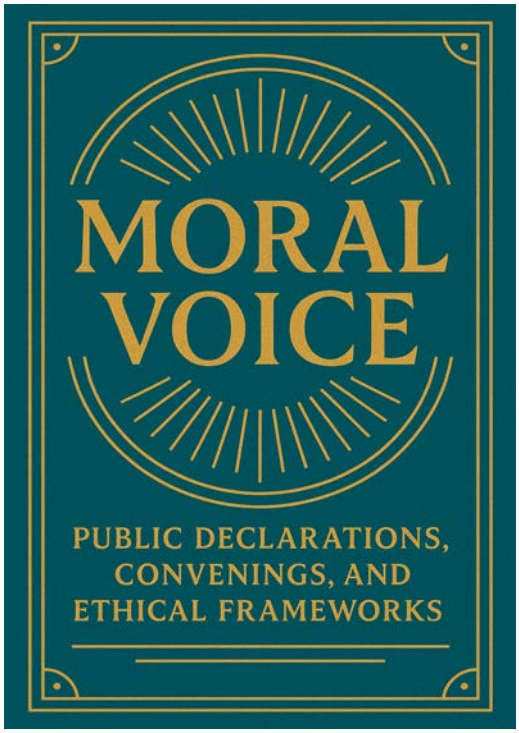
Future Headlines:

- *First "Holy Zone" Declared in Houston: No AI Surveillance Allowed on Sacred Ground*
- *Church Removes SmartWalls and Installs Analog Bulletin Boards—Members Breathe a Sigh of Relief*
- *Are AI-Free Zones Regressive or Prophetic? Debate Grows in Faith Circles*

Burning Question: Is resisting AI surveillance a rejection of progress—or a prophetic stand for human dignity?

Five Pathways of Future Influence

Which pathway would you recommend pursuing to address your highest priority and highest opportunity urgent future?



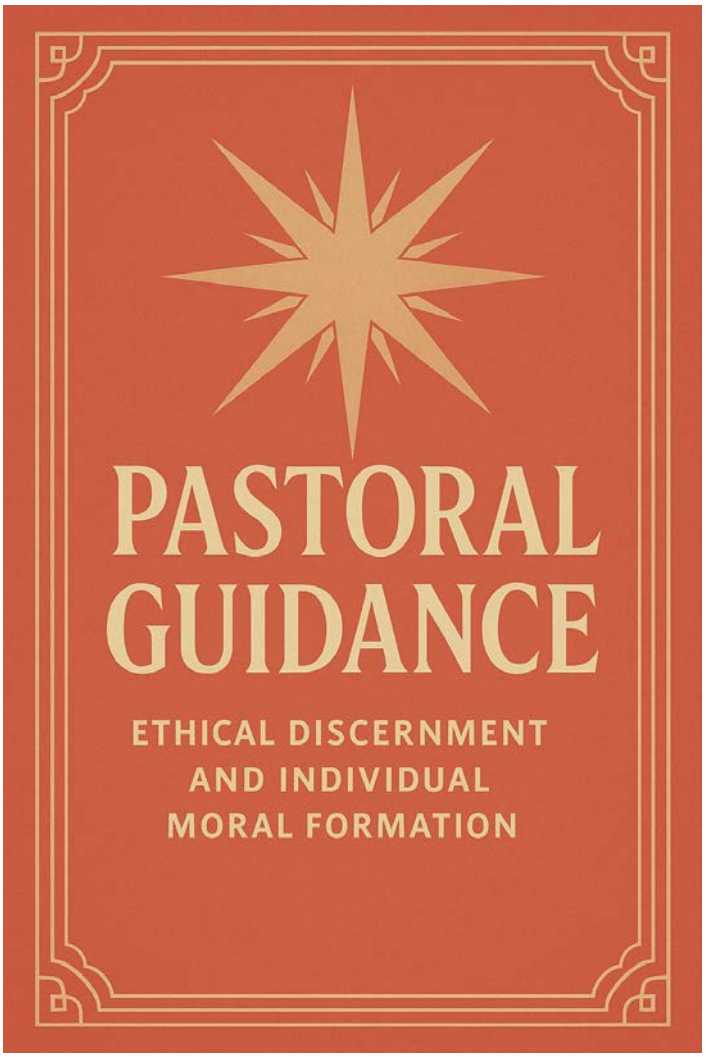
1. Moral Voice: Public Declarations, Convenings, and Ethical Frameworks

   Provide clear, value-centered guidance to society at large, including policymakers, technologists, and the faithful.

   Actions:

   - Issue formal statements or position papers on AI ethics.
   - Ground these in Christian theological traditions (e.g., imago Dei, stewardship, neighborly love).
   - Engage in interfaith and interdisciplinary coalitions to amplify voice.
   - Convene diverse stakeholders—faith leaders, policymakers, educators, public servants—to host forums, summits, and dialogues that shape public understanding and drive collective action.

   Potential Impacts: Set a moral compass for broader cultural debates; Anchor conversations about AI in enduring values.



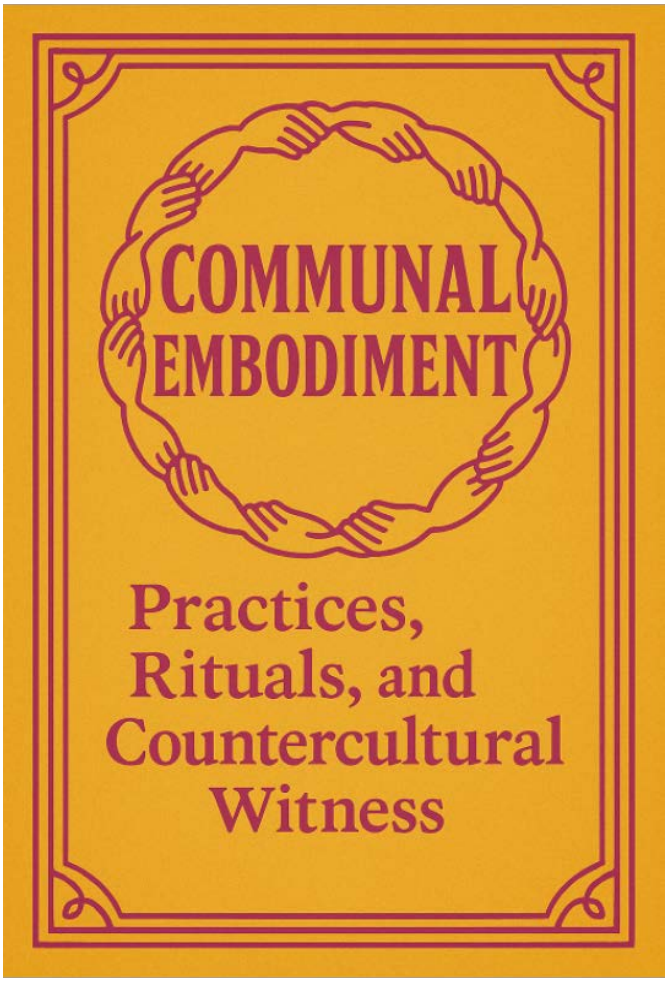
2. Pastoral Guidance: Ethical Discernment and Individual Moral Formation

   Support and counsel church members as they navigate personal and professional choices about AI.

   Actions:

   - Equip pastors, ministers and teaching elders with AI-related ethical training.
   - Provide counseling for issues like AI use in parenting, education, work, or relationships.
   - Facilitate small group discussions or “ethics roundtables” for congregants.

   Potential Impacts: Foster moral clarity and resilience among members; spread influence through member engagement in society.



3. Communal Embodiment: Practices, Rituals, and Countercultural Witness

   Cultivate spiritual habits and embodied practices that serve as counter-narratives to technocentrism.

   Actions:

   - Develop new liturgies or rituals addressing human-machine interaction (e.g., a Sabbath from screens or AI tools).
   - Encourage analog community-building practices in defiance of AI-mediated isolation.
   - Create “tech-free sanctuaries” for contemplation, play, and human presence.

   Potential Impacts: Model a humane, soul-centered alternative to algorithmic life; make the Church a living laboratory of healthier futures.

4. Spirit-led Innovation: Offering Products, Services, and Institutions

   Design and launch technology offerings that reflect Christian values in how AI is built and used.

   Actions:

   - Develop AI tools for spiritual formation (e.g., sermon synthesis grounded in Scripture, ethical bots).
   - Create certification standards or “faith audits” for AI technologies.
   - Partner with Christian technologists to launch ventures guided by theological ethics.

   Potential Impacts: Pioneer a market of values-aligned innovation; influence the direction of AI through generative presence.

5. Liberative Action: Organizing for Justice and Systemic Change

Mobilize the Church as a catalyst for justice by addressing how AI systems impact the most vulnerable. Engage in movement-building, public witness, and coalition efforts that reflect Christ's liberating love and the Church's prophetic call.

Actions:

- Analyze and expose how AI systems perpetuate racial, economic, gender, or ableist disparities.
- Advocate for legislation and corporate accountability that protects human dignity and rights.
- Equip congregations to organize and act through education, protest, lobbying, and coalition-building.
- Develop theological frameworks that connect AI justice to liberation theology, the Baptismal Covenant, and the prophetic tradition.
- Center historically marginalized voices in discernment, leadership, and decision-making around AI impacts.

Potential Impacts:

- Push AI development and governance toward equity, reparative justice, and structural transformation.
- Ensure that the Church stands clearly and publicly with the oppressed in an age of digital power.
- Embody a faith that moves beyond reflection into courageous, collective action in the public square.

Keep playing with this future!

Use this custom scenario explorer ChatGPT bot to reveal more urgent futures and burning questions for the year 2035, and to explore how the Council for Ethical Imagination might work and grow its impact.

About this scenario

This social simulation was prepared for the 2025 Faithful Future conference by Jane McGonigal, Institute for the Future (IFTF)'s Director of Social Simulation and New York Times bestselling author of *Imaginable: How to Create a Hopeful Future -- in Your Own Life, Community and the World*.

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