

“An Exciting and Fearsome Tool”

✦ AN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ETHICS GUIDE FOR CATHOLIC CHARITIES ✦



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Introduction

Artificial intelligence is, [in Pope Francis' words](#),
“an exciting and fearsome tool.”

Catholic Charities leaders may feel excited about the possibilities AI offers for staff and clients, but might fear its misuse, negative impacts, or that certain applications are inconsistent with Catholic principles.

This resource is designed as a practical guide for Catholic Charities leaders to process both excitement and fear about AI and assess the suitability of adopting particular AI-driven applications. It is not intended to be prescriptive, but instead to identify questions to ask and resources to consult when evaluating AI products and vendors for mission alignment.

Documents from Vatican sources and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) are referenced to highlight official ecclesial thinking on AI. Foundational sources undergirding this resource's approach are the [Catholic Charities USA Code of Ethics](#) and the [DELTA framework for AI ethics](#), developed by the University of Notre Dame's Institute for Ethics and the Common Good.

Artificial intelligence may offer Catholic Charities key benefits in areas such as disaster relief, communications, language translation, case management, human resources, data analysis, mental health services, client intake, peacemaking, and connecting persons with programs and services. As Pope Francis stressed in his [2024 World Day of Peace message](#), AI can be “used to promote integral human development.”

At the same time, as [Pope Leo has stated](#), “Embracing the opportunities offered by digital technology and artificial intelligence with courage, determination, and discernment does not mean turning a blind eye to critical issues, complexities, and risks.”

[Antiqua et nova](#), the Vatican's doctrinal note on AI, explains that concerns arise because, as with any tool, AI “can be directed toward positive or negative ends.” That's why “the moral evaluation of this technology will need to take into account how it is directed and used.”

That evaluation, the doctrinal note continues, should be “guided by the principle of subsidiarity and other principles of Catholic Social Teaching.” In short, [as Pope Francis insisted](#), AI applications “must all be evaluated to ensure they respect human dignity and promote the common good.”

AI is advancing rapidly and will likely continue to do so. We are in the midst of an “epochal change,” [to again quote Pope Francis](#). Accordingly, this resource will be revised and updated as needed. Feedback from the Catholic Charities network is welcomed, as the work of assessing AI tools for mission fit is a collaborative effort. “The task laid before us is not to stop digital innovation,” [according to Pope Leo](#), “but rather to guide it ... so we can truly assimilate these tools as allies.”

Assessing AI Applications

As Catholic entities, whether they be a 501c3 corporation or an (arch)diocesan division, Catholic Charities agencies are responsible to ensure that the vendors they engage and organizations they collaborate with do not compromise their Catholic identity. Potential vendors and collaborators must be vetted to ensure “mission fit.”

In part, this is a diocesan bishop’s responsibility in his role of providing oversight to Catholic Charities agencies which, according to [Catholic canon law](#), “are required to follow Catholic principles in their activity and may not accept commitments which could in any way effect the observance of those principles.”

However, Catholic Charities leaders are also responsible for vetting AI applications. As stated in the forthcoming Leadership Charter of Caritas Internationalis, of which CCUSA is part, Catholic Charities leaders should commit to “Aligning Partnerships with Catholic Values – Avoiding Relationships that compromise our moral or faith-based principles.”

In making assessments, the U.S. bishops’ [Ethical and Religious Guidelines for Catholic Health Care Services](#) identifies principles for evaluating collaborations with non-Catholic external partners to avoid “formal” or “material” cooperation with “immoral activities” and the potential for “scandal.” [Catechism of the Catholic Church § 1750](#) provides additional background.

The list of “[AI Principles and Priorities](#)” which the U.S. bishops submitted to Congress in June 2025 identifies and articulates key points to consider when vetting AI applications.

Other resources to consult include:

- [Catholic Charities USA Code of Ethics](#);
- Your Catholic Charities agency’s code of ethics, AI policy, and investment guidelines;
- Your (arch)diocese’s AI policy and investment guidelines;
- The [DELTA Framework for AI Ethics](#) from the University of Notre Dame’s Institute for Ethics and the Common Good;
- [Antiqua et nova](#), the Vatican’s doctrinal note on AI;
- [Address of Pope Francis to the G7 Session on Artificial Intelligence](#);
- [2024 World Day of Peace message of Pope Francis](#);
- [2024 World Day of Social Communications message of Pope Francis](#);
- [2026 World Day of Social Communications message of Pope Leo](#);
- [Rome Call for AI Ethics](#); and
- Investment guidelines from the [USCCB](#) and the [Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences](#).

Drawing upon these and other sources, subsequent sections of this resource will consider critical issues when assessing AI applications.

Worldviews of AI Developers and Owners

Like all technologies, AI applications mirror the human values of their creators and users. “Technological products reflect the worldview of their developers, owners, users, and regulators,” explains the Vatican’s doctrinal note on AI, *Antiqua et nova*.

Such perspectives, the doctrinal note stresses, can “shape the world and engage consciences on the level of values.” In other words, the worldviews embedded in AI can influence those of AI users – for better or for worse. As Pope Francis warned in his encyclical *Laudato si’*, technology can condition lifestyles “along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups.”

That’s why, *Antiqua et nova* concludes, “the ends and the means used in a given application of AI, as well as the overall vision it incorporates, must all be evaluated to ensure they respect human dignity and promote the common good.”

In making assessments, questions to consider about AI developers’ worldviews and their financial incentives include:

- Do they promote what Pope Francis called “technological dictatorship” and implement “forms of manipulation and social control?”
- Do they express racist sentiments or endorse eugenic initiatives?

- Do they believe that AI is or may become conscious and should be accorded “rights”?
- Do they envision and advance a post-work society?
- Do they dismiss addressing today’s poverty and inequities in favor of building a utopia for tomorrow?
- Do they believe tech is the solution to all human problems – Pope Francis’ “technocratic paradigm”?
- Do they oppose calls for guardrails and regulations on the development and use of AI?
- Do they understand humans and machines as equivalent and interchangeable?
- Do they openly deride Catholicism or its leaders?
- Do they de-value the human body as lamentable and discardable?
- Do they seek to merge or replace humans with machines (transhumanism and posthumanism)?
- Do they promote “digital immortality” through tech?
- Do their products contribute to “the rise of a surveillance society,” as Pope Francis warned?
- Do they cherish the earth as a common home to be cared for, or simply a collection of resources to exploit?

AI and the Human Person

Catholic Charities agencies seek to promote human flourishing through the principles of “integral human development,” which concerns the elements required for a meaningful and dignified human life. How human flourishing is pursued, however, depends on an understanding of what it means to be human, or “anthropology.”

The rise of artificial intelligence has “prompted many people to reflect on what it means to be human and the role of humanity in the world,” notes [Antiqua et nova](#). Yet such reflection is critical, as designers of AI applications may understand the human person in ways quite different from that which characterizes Catholic Charities’ services.

That’s why *Antiqua et nova* stresses that “the overall vision and understanding of the human person embedded within these systems are important to consider” since “technological products reflect the worldview of their developers (and) owners.” Catholic Charities agencies should be vigilant in assessing the anthropologies undergirding AI applications.

Over a decade ago, Pope Francis in [Laudato si’](#) warned of a “technocracy which sees little value in human beings.” To counter this, Francis concluded, what’s needed is an “adequate anthropology” that honors humanity’s “unique capacities of knowledge, will, freedom and responsibility.”

Such an anthropology contrasts with “functionalism,” which pervades the tech world. Functionalism, according to *Antiqua et nova*, “reduces the human mind to its functions and assumes that its functions can be entirely quantified in physical or mathematical terms.” In other words, human beings are really no different from machines: inputs are followed by outputs.

The costs of this misunderstanding are high. For if human beings are nothing more than machines, it’s easy to justify replacing them with other machines that can do things better and faster. And it means that human beings really don’t have any moral agency, or even the ability to *think* for themselves. Because machines don’t think.

With functionalism, “human dignity risks becoming diminished or forgotten, substituted by functions, automatism, simulations,” [warned Pope Leo](#). And *Antiqua et nova* explains that, with functionalism, “people are valued based on the work they can perform,” creating “a world of humanity enslaved to efficiency, where, ultimately, the cost of humanity must be cut.”

In light of such potential outcomes, *Antiqua et nova* insists the following: “The commitment to ensuring that AI always supports and promotes the supreme value of the dignity of every human being and the fullness of the human vocation serves as a criterion of discernment for developers, owners, operators, and regulators of AI, as well as to its users. It remains valid for every application of the technology at every level of its use.”

Human-like (“Anthropomorphized”) AI

“AI,” asserts [Antiqua et nova](#), “is but a pale reflection of humanity.” It continues: “AI should not be seen as an artificial form of human intelligence but as a product of it.”

However, given its abilities to mimic human intelligence, simulate human emotions, and “chat” in a conversational manner, users can be tempted to think that AI is something more than it is and ascribe to it human qualities. This is called “anthropomorphism.”

Because many AI applications are intentionally anthropomorphised, [Antiqua et nova](#) observes that “ability to know when one is interacting with a human or a machine can no longer be taken for granted.” That’s why, it continues, “misrepresenting AI as a person should always be avoided.”

Anthropomorphization can generate confusion. When people become comfortable with AI sounding and acting human, they can be tricked into making, as [Antiqua et nova](#) puts it, the “frequent and serious mistake to forget that artificial intelligence is not another human being.”

Such mistakes are dangerous. “By simulating human voices and faces, wisdom and knowledge, consciousness and responsibility, empathy and friendship,” [Pope Leo explains](#), “the systems known as artificial intelligence not only interfere with information ecosystems, but also encroach upon the deepest level of communication, that of human relationships.”

When people seek forms of companionship with AI that should be reserved for humans, they can experience social isolation and stunted emotional development.

“Technology that exploits our need for relationships,” [warns Pope Leo](#), “can lead not only to painful consequences in the lives of individuals, but also to damage in the social, cultural and political fabric of society.”

Additional dangers of an anthropomorphized AI, identified in [Antiqua et nova](#), include children relating with others as they would with chatbots, and young people seeing “teachers as mere dispensers of information rather than as mentors.” And [Pope Leo cautions](#) that it can be “deceptive, particularly for the most vulnerable” – a particular concern for Catholic Charities.

Anthropomorphized AI is typically encountered in chatbots and virtual agents, both of which can be helpful tools. However, if employed by Catholic Charities agencies, chatbots and agents should be presented in ways that make it clear to users that they are engaging with a machine, and not a person. Strategies may include avoiding the following:

- 1) Giving AI tools names, genders, and fictional personalities;
- 2) Employing personal pronouns for AI tools such as I, me, etc.;
- 3) Ascribing human emotions to AI tools (“I’m proud of you,” “I’m so excited,” etc.); and
- 4) Applying human qualities to AI tools (“I’m thinking,” “I apologize,” etc.).

AI and Decision-Making (for Clients)

Catholic Charities agencies seek to promote their clients' human flourishing, not by fostering dependency on its services, but empowering them to make decisions for positive change.

"(P)eople are truly human," affirms the [CCUSA Code of Ethics](#), "only if they are the master of their own actions and.. the architect of their own progress. They must act according to God-given nature, freely accepting its potentials and its claims upon them."

This value acknowledges human capacity for growth and development. Accordingly, AI applications adopted by Catholic Charities agencies should facilitate this and not inhibit it by profiling clients solely on their past behavior.

As [Pope Francis expressed](#), "We would condemn humanity to a future without hope if we took away people's ability to make decisions about themselves and their lives, by dooming them to depend on the choices of machines."

However, current AI applications could threaten client agency. In their [2025 letter to Congress](#), the U.S. bishops noted that "automated decision-making systems - used in areas such as employment screening, loan approvals, healthcare, public benefit screening, and immigration processing - can reinforce existing biases or introduce a utilitarian approach devoid of necessary human considerations, with potentially devastating consequences."

[Pope Francis himself referenced](#) AI programs designed to predict whether a prisoner might re-offend based on categories like "ethnic origin, educational attainment, credit rating, and others." "(S)uch a methodology," he warns, "risks *de facto* delegating to a machine the last word concerning a person's future" and "may implicitly incorporate prejudices."

To avoid such an outcome, [Francis stressed](#): "We need to ensure and safeguard a space for proper human control over the choices made by artificial intelligence programs: human dignity depends on it." Why? Because "human beings are always developing, and are capable of surprising us by their actions. This is something that a machine cannot take into account."

Similarly, Francis insisted in his [2024 World Day of Peace message, *Artificial Intelligence and Peace*](#), that "fundamental respect for human dignity demands that we refuse to allow the uniqueness of the person to be identified with a set of data."

And [Antiqua et nova](#) concludes: "A person's past behavior should not be used to deny him or her the opportunity to change, grow, and contribute to society. We cannot allow algorithms to limit or condition respect for human dignity, or to exclude compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and above all, the hope that people are able to change."

AI and Decision-Making (for Staff)

Work at Catholic Charities requires making decisions: for clients, for one's agency, for one's professional life. AI can be a decision-making resource by analyzing vast quantities of data and suggesting courses of action. As [Pope Francis explained](#), AI "makes a technical choice among several possibilities either based on well-defined criteria or statistical references."

[Francis, however, distinguished](#) between a machine's capacity to "produce algorithmic choices" and human beings who "not only choose, but in their hearts are capable of deciding." That's why, he insisted, "decision-making ... must always be left to the human person."

[He also contrasted](#) human intelligence and "artificial intelligence" - a term which can be "misleading," he said, as the more proper term is "machine learning." And "wisdom," he concluded, "cannot be sought from machines."

Similarly, [Antiqua et nova](#) states that "AI's advanced features give it statistical abilities to perform tasks, but not the ability to think." AI may simulate human intelligence but is distinct because human intelligence is shaped by "embodied experiences, including sensory input, emotional responses, social interactions, and the unique context of each moment."

All this has several important implications:

- 1) Only humans are capable of making informed ethical decisions. "Between a machine and a human being, only the latter is truly a moral agent," states *Antiqua et nova*.
- 2) Because only humans are moral agents, "ultimate responsibility for decisions made using AI rests with the human decision-makers," per *Antiqua et nova*. Machines cannot take the blame for poor decisions or mistakes.

- 3) "Automation bias" - defined by *Antiqua et nova* as the assumption that AI's output is "endowed with qualities of unmistakable certainty" - is a threat. [Pope Leo warns](#) of a "naive and unquestioning reliance on artificial intelligence as an omniscient friend, a source of all knowledge, an archive of every memory, an 'oracle' of all advice."
- 4) "Cognitive offloading" - the practice of handing over our critical thinking to AI - is to be approached with caution. "(C)hoosing to evade the effort of thinking for ourselves and settling for artificial statistical compilations threatens to diminish our cognitive, emotional, and communications skills," [says Pope Leo](#).
- 5) If everyone depended upon machine output for their thinking, we would all end up largely thinking the same thing. "It is unacceptable," [declared Pope Francis](#), "that the use of artificial intelligence should lead to groupthink."
- 6) Reliance on AI output for decision-making subjects users to its inherent limitations, biases, and worldviews of its developers which can, as [Pope Leo explains](#), "trap us in networks that manipulate our thoughts."

In short, [Pope Leo concludes](#), "surrendering our mental capacities ... to machines would mean burying the talents we have been given to grow as individuals in relation to God and others."

AI and Communications

"AI," [Pope Leo acknowledges](#), "can provide support and assistance in managing tasks related to communication." Earlier, [Pope Francis noted](#) that AI can "facilitate the exchange of information between different peoples and generations" and "enable communication between individuals who do not share a common language." Catholic Charities agencies can welcome such benefits.

However, AI's use in communications has downsides. Because AI has "increasingly taken control of the production of texts, music, and videos," [writes Pope Leo](#), "much of the human creative industry is at risk of being dismantled." He further notes how "algorithms designed to maximize engagement on social media ... reduce our ability to listen and think critically, and increase social polarization."

[Antiqua et nova](#) warns of "the deliberate use of AI for manipulation" as "deepfake images, videos, and audio" can "cause people to question everything." And as "AI-generated false content erodes trust in what they see and hear," it adds, "polarization and conflict will only grow."

As a result, [Pope Leo laments](#) that it is "increasingly difficult to distinguish reality from fiction." That's why he insists that "(c)ontent generated or manipulated by AI are to be clearly marked and distinguished from content created by humans."

Another concern is that the large language models which generate AI content were "trained" upon published materials used without permission, attribution, or

compensation, at times from knowingly pirated databases or by allegedly violating paywalls. This has led to multiple lawsuits against AI companies, which maintain that their products' output constitutes "fair use."

Given this, Catholic Charities agencies should consider the ethical implications of what [Pope Francis called](#) "grave risks" to "intellectual property." [Pope Leo insists](#) that "authorship and sovereign control of the work of journalists and other content creators must be protected." And [the U.S. bishops](#) "call for the protection of data and intellectual property rights."

Another consideration for Catholic Charities involves the use of AI-generated images in marketing and communications. While they may be inexpensive and do not require a human subject's consent, they can reinforce biases and exaggerate stereotypes of vulnerable populations that some label "poverty porn."

To this point, [Pope Leo cautions](#) that bias in AI systems can transmit "an altered perception of reality" by "reproducing stereotypes and prejudices present in the data they draw on" which can "intensify existing social inequalities and injustices."

Finally, given AI's propensity for "hallucination" in which it "yields results that appear real but are not," [Antiqua et nova](#) insists that "(t)hose who produce and share AI-generated content should always exercise diligence in verifying the truth of what they disseminate."

Security, Privacy, and Surveillance

Beginning with intake, Catholic Charities agencies typically collect and store sensitive data and confidential information related to the clients they serve. Certain AI applications can assist in analyzing such data, ultimately for a client's benefit.

Such information, however, must be kept absolutely secure to guard clients' right to privacy, honor their human dignity, adhere to applicable laws, and maintain the trust required for any healing relationship.

Doing so can be a challenge, however, with certain AI applications. "Privacy, data ownership and intellectual property are ... areas where these technologies engender grave risks," [observed Pope Francis](#), who also expressed concerns about the "rise of a surveillance society."

It's for these reasons that the Catholic Charities USA Artificial Intelligence Policy mandates a "thorough evaluation of the security of any AI tool before using it," including "carefully reviewing the privacy policy, terms of use, terms of service, security features, and reputation of the tool."

Such evaluation is critically important as AI applications may use submitted data to train large language models for generative AI, which can run the risk of sensitive and proprietary information being accessed by third parties such as hackers. Some AI applications even sell, or reserve the right to sell, collected user data to third parties.

Data security is essential, not just for legal and risk management reasons, and to avoid reputational harm to a Catholic Charities agency, but also to defend clients' human dignity, wellbeing, reputation, and human rights. "(D)ata privacy," according to [Antiqua et nova](#), "is even more imperative as a safeguard for the dignity and relational nature of the human person."

Antiqua et nova further notes that "Advances in AI-powered data processing and analysis now make it possible to infer patterns in a person's behavior and thinking from even a small amount of information." Such "(d)ata conveys not only information but also personal and relational knowledge," which, in the wrong hands, "can amount to power over the individual."

Such power could cause grave harm to persons in an era of advancing digital technologies that, according to [Dignitas infinita](#), a Vatican declaration on human dignity from 2024, "increasingly tends toward the creation of a world in which exploitation, exclusion, and violence grow" – an outcome the declaration labels "digital violence."

In defence against such violence, it's important to recall, as does *Antiqua et nova*, that the Catholic Church's "Second Vatican Council included the right 'to safeguard privacy' among the fundamental rights 'necessary for living a genuinely human life,' a right that should be extended to all people on account of their 'sublime dignity.'"

AI, Accompaniment, and Encounter

Inspired by Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan, Catholic Charities agencies seek to serve our neighbors through "encounter" and "accompaniment" - two key concepts in Catholic Social Teaching.

This mission reflects our being created in the image of God, a Trinity of three divine Persons united as One in love. "Our lives, reflecting in the image of the Trinity," said Pope Francis in his [2024 World Day of the Sick message](#), "are meant to attain fulfilment through a network of relationships, friendships and love, both given and received."

For Catholic Charities, certain AI applications can facilitate "encounter" and "accompaniment" by helping to bring isolated persons together or connecting clients with human-driven services. "Like other technical tools," states *Antiqua et nova*, "AI has the potential to foster connections within the human family."

However, AI can also impede authentic human connection. To an assembly on "Connected Faith: Living Prayer in the Digital Age," [Pope Leo warned](#) of the temptation of "putting mere virtual connections in the place of real relationships between people, where presence, prolonged and patient listening, and the deep sharing of ideas and feelings are indispensable."

A typical source of this temptation is "tech solutionism" or what Pope Francis labelled the "technocratic paradigm" which, as defined in *Antiqua et nova*, "perceives all the world's problems as solvable through technological means alone." But in humanitarian services there are many problems that tech cannot, and should not be expected, to solve.

As *Antiqua et nova* asserts in a reference that can apply to Catholic Charities, "if AI is used not to enhance but to replace the relationship between patients and healthcare providers - leaving patients to interact with a machine rather than a human being - it would reduce a crucially important human relational structure to a centralized, impersonal, and unequal framework."

"Instead of encouraging solidarity with the sick and suffering," *Antiqua et nova* continues, "such applications of AI would risk worsening the loneliness that often accompanies illness. This misuse of AI would not align with respect for the dignity of the human person and solidarity with the suffering."

There may be times when adopting certain AI applications looks appealing in the face of resource limitations and increased client needs. At such times, however, *Antiqua et nova's* words should be recalled, that "human dignity and the common good must never be violated for the sake of efficiency."

Finally, it should be understood that encountering and accompanying persons who seek Catholic Charities' help often requires compassion and empathy, and "no AI application can genuinely experience empathy," per *Antiqua et nova*, as "true empathy ... involves intuiting and apprehending the lived experience of another."

AI and Care for Creation

“Care for creation and attention to environmental impact” is a principle of the Catholic Charities USA Code of Ethics. In view of Catholic Charities’ mission of reducing poverty in America, this principle is especially important. As Pope Francis makes clear in *Laudato si’*, “the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest.”

Artificial intelligence presents a new challenge in caring for creation. [Pope Francis wondered](#): “How can we make sustainable a technology so powerful, costly and energy-consuming?”

At the same time, according to *Antiqua et nova*, AI might help caring for creation by “creating models to forecast extreme climate events, proposing engineering solutions to reduce their impact, managing relief operations, and predicting population shifts. In addition, “AI can support sustainable agriculture, optimize energy usage, and provide early warning systems for public health emergencies.”

Nevertheless, *Antiqua et nova* continues, in view of “the heavy toll these technologies take on the environment, it is vital to develop sustainable solutions that reduce their impact on our common home.”

For instance, as [Pope Francis observed](#), “The growth of artificial intelligence raises the need to protect the environment from e-waste.” Data centers for AI are regularly upgraded with new equipment and more powerful chips, generating massive e-waste with toxic and hazardous materials which, as [the U.S. bishops note](#), “harms children, the unborn, and wildlife.”

In addition, as *Antiqua et nova* states, “current AI models and the hardware required to support them consume vast amounts of energy and water, significantly contributing to CO₂ emissions and straining resources.” In the U.S., water consumption for AI harms communities and farms when data centers are constructed in water-scarce or drought-prone areas.

At the same time, the immense energy required to power AI is straining power grids, warming the planet, and polluting the air through increased burning of natural gas and coal from aging power plants that, until recently, had been slated to close. And increased energy bills for those living near data centers are an added burden on the poor.

All of this has important implications for the adoption and use of AI applications by Catholic Charities agencies and may suggest policies restricting AI use to what is necessary, as opposed to what is available. According to *Laudato si’*, “little daily actions” such as minimizing AI use can “benefit society” and help “change the world.”

Furthermore, the environmental practices of potential vendors and collaborators should be carefully evaluated.

AI and Human Labor

AI is transforming the world of labor. On one hand, “AI can be a tool to enhance our work,” according to the U.S. bishops’ [2025 Labor Day Statement](#), “making it more efficient and creative.” On the other hand, the bishops warn, “AI can displace workers altogether.”

Worker displacement by AI is a serious concern since, according to [Antiqua et nova](#), work is “part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment.” It’s not just “a means of earning one’s daily bread.”

Our current pope chose the name “Leo” to honor his predecessor, Leo XIII, who in his encyclical *Rerum novarum* called for workers’ rights in the wake of the first industrial revolution. Today, [Pope Leo XIV speaks](#) of confronting a second “industrial revolution,” sparked by AI, which presents “new challenges for the defence of human dignity, justice, and labor.”

At this critical moment for the future of work, [Pope Leo writes](#) that the church “offers to everyone the treasury of her social teaching,” which has significant implications for how Catholic Charities engages with AI applications and vendors.

Of particular concern, as [Pope Leo stresses](#), is the “oligopolistic control of algorithmic systems and artificial intelligence” by “only a handful of companies.” Similarly, Pope Francis [expressed fears](#) of “technological dictatorship” and, in *Laudato si’*, of multinational tech firms that “exercise more power than states themselves.”

Such concentrated power threatens workers’ well-being, dignity, and rights. It’s for such reasons that the U.S. bishops warned in their [2019 Labor Day Statement](#) of “the immense opportunities for oppression and extortion that go with the possession of monopoly power,” such as wage suppression and union-busting.

As the [bishops stressed](#) elsewhere, “Catholic social teaching supports the right of workers to choose whether to organize, join a union, and bargain collectively, and to exercise these rights without reprisal.”

Given this, Catholic Charities agencies, as expressions of justice and solidarity, should be prudential when contemplating collaborations with, or purchases from, tech firms which wield “oligopolistic” power, inhibit workers’ right to organize, mistreat employees and contractors, tolerate unsafe work environments, or develop products designed to supplant human labor.

As Pope Benedict XVI insisted in [Caritas in veritate](#), “purchasing is always a moral – and not simply an economic – act.” A quest for “efficiency” or “progress” does not justify purchasing a product or service that denigrates worker dignity and rights.

AI, Peacemaking, and Community Building

Catholic Charities agencies seek to build healthy, peaceful communities that promote the common good. As stated in the [Catholic Charities USA Code of Ethics](#), “we strive to build a just moral order and ‘right relationships’ within ... the communities in which we work” and help our neighbors “to transform the societies in which they live.”

AI applications can facilitate this. “AI has the potential to foster connections within the human family,” observes [Antiqua et nova](#). Certain tools might seek to de-escalate online hate speech, provide evidence-based responses to disinformation, and identify common ground and shared values between conflicting groups to facilitate dialogue.

However, AI can also contribute to factors that harm communities and exacerbate conflicts by increasing social isolation, creating “echo chambers” that inhibit engagement with diverse perspectives and create polarization, and erasing cultures which, in the [words of Saint John Paul II](#), are “life’s interpretive keys.”

Antiqua et nova notes that “AI-generated fake media can gradually undermine the foundations of society,” thereby “fueling political polarization and social unrest.” Furthermore, “When society becomes indifferent to the truth, various groups construct their own versions of ‘facts,’ thereby “dismantling the foundational trust on which societies are built.”

[Pope Leo warns](#) about algorithms which, “By grouping people into bubbles of easy consensus and easy outrage ... and increase social polarization.” And he cautions against “AI systems that catalog our thoughts, creating a world of mirrors around us,” robbing us “of the opportunity to encounter others ... with whom we can and must learn to relate.”

In addition, Leo states that a “major challenge posed by these emerging systems is that of bias, which leads to acquiring and transmitting an altered perception of reality.” This risk, arising from an AI system’s “reproducing the stereotypes and prejudices present in the data they draw on,” can “prolong and intensify existing social inequities and injustices.”

That same data, Leo adds, has “inadequate social representation.” Native languages, traditional wisdom, oral histories, and local customs not digitized are absent from AI’s output. Given this, [Pope Francis warned](#) that AI “might limit our worldview” and can impose “uniform anthropological, socio-economic and cultural models.”

In [Fratelli tutti](#), Francis fears that the loss of cultures will “result in utter monotony” and explains that with the imposition of “a single cultural model” people will lose grasp of the “spiritual and human riches inherited from past generations.” This rootlessness breeds loneliness and is fertile ground for dangerous ideologies, he concludes.

To confront such risks, [Pope Leo appeals](#) that AI ethics should center on “fostering a more human order of human relations, and peaceful and just societies.”

AI, Assistive Technologies, and Transhumanism

Catholic Charities staff and volunteers serve persons experiencing hard realities of the human condition. They can do so while aided by productive technologies which are, in [the words of Pope Francis](#), “brilliant products of the creative potential of human beings” that is “God-given.”

For instance, Catholic Charities clients and staff may benefit from AI applications that assist individuals with physical limitations. Brain-computer interfaces, as an example, can allow persons with particular disabilities to communicate through speakers or screens, control devices that aid mobility, and acquire or regain the capacity to see.

Such assistive devices can be life-changing and promote human dignity. However, because these technologies benefit persons with physical disabilities, some conclude that technology should ultimately free human beings from the limitations of their physical bodies altogether. This is called “transhumanism.”

To transhumanists, the human mind is separable from the body, which is ultimately dispensable. Transhumanism “treats the body more as an obstacle than as an integral part of the person’s identity,” according to [Antiqua et nova](#). Transhumanists speak of transcending our biology and uploading minds into the cloud or robots or avatars to achieve “digital immortality.”

Transhumanism exemplifies Pope Francis’ “technocratic paradigm” which, per [Antiqua et nova](#), “perceives all the world’s problems as solvable through technological means alone.” It reflects, as Francis said in [Laudato si’](#), “the excessive pretensions of science and technology” and prefigures tech’s “lordship over all” and being “viewed as the principal key to the meaning of existence.”

It’s for this reason that the U.S. bishops, in their [June 2025 letter to Congress](#), wrote that “we also must avoid temptations toward transhumanism or equating AI itself with human life.”

Transhumanism denies the Catholic understanding that, as *Antiqua et nova* words it, “the human person is “a unity of body and soul” as illuminated by the Incarnation, “through which God himself took on our flesh.” And, by pursuing immortality through tech instead of faith, through transhumanism “humanity risks creating a substitute for God.”

Pope Leo alluded to this risk at a [general audience](#) in which he spoke about death: “(M)any current anthropological views promise immanent immortality, theorize the prolongation of earthly life through technology. This is the transhuman scenario, which is making its way into the horizon of the challenges of our time.”

“Could death really be defeated by science?” he wondered. Then he asked: “But then, could science itself guarantee us that a life without death is also a happy life?” Not for Christians, he concludes, who await death “with the sure hope of the Resurrection (that) preserves us from the fear of disappearing forever and prepares us for the joy of life without end.”

Staff Formation and Artificial Intelligence

Ongoing staff formation is a best practice for Catholic Charities agencies, as is reflected in the [Catholic Charities USA Code of Ethics](#): “We will invest in our staff to ensure that they have the skills, experience and formation they need to reach their full potential.”

Formation on matters related to AI should not be overlooked. To this point, the Catholic Charities USA AI policy stipulates that “All new employees and other relevant personnel will receive training on the responsible and secure use of AI. This training will cover topics such as ethical considerations, potential risks, security best practices, and compliance requirements.”

In his message for the [2026 World Day of Social Communications](#), Pope Leo stressed that “media, information, and AI literacy” is “increasingly urgent,” adding that Catholics “can and must contribute to this effort.”

Leo’s appeal implies formation for Catholic Charities staff and even volunteers. But it might also involve agencies engaging clients, as he writes, by “reaching out to older adults and marginalized members of society, who often feel excluded and powerless in the face of rapid technological change.”

In that message, Leo lists specific goals for media literacy efforts:

- 1) Appreciate the risks of engaging with human-like (“anthropomorphized”) AI.
- 2) Enable users to treat AI systems as tools - and nothing more.
- 3) Encourage checking the sources provided by AI-generated content, as they can be inaccurate or incorrect.
- 4) Promote privacy and data protection by appreciating the security risks of AI systems.
- 5) Understand how to use AI with intention.
- 6) Protect people’s voices and faces so they won’t be used without consent for harmful content like deepfakes, cyberbullying, and digital fraud.
- 7) Explain how algorithms shape our perception of reality.
- 8) Increase awareness of how AI biases work.
- 9) Uncover the mechanisms that determine what content appears in our feeds.
- 10) Identify the economic principles and models of the AI economy (“oligopolistic control”, attention economy, “profit maximization”, etc.)

“(D)igital technology,” Leo warns, “threatens to alter radically some of the fundamental pillars of human civilization.” That’s why, he concludes, “All stakeholders” - and this would include Catholic Charities agencies - “must be involved in building and implementing informed and responsible digital citizenship.”

Adopting AI in a Catholic Charities Workplace

[Pope Francis acknowledged](#) that AI “gives rise to fear for the consequences it foreshadows” and that many, including himself, “are fearful when we acknowledge the dangers inherent in its use.”

Shortly after his election, [Pope Leo expressed concern](#) about “developments in the field of artificial intelligence that pose new challenges for the defense of human dignity, justice, and labor.”

Given this, it is reasonable to suppose that introducing AI applications into a Catholic Charities workplace may precipitate apprehension and anxiety. Staff may understandably fear AI’s impact on their clients, their careers, their families, our nation, and our common home.

[Antiqua et nova](#) cautions that “while AI promises to boost productivity by taking over mundane tasks, it frequently forces workers to adapt to the speed and demands of machines rather than machines being designed to support those who work.”

“As a result,” *Antiqua et nova* continues, “contrary to the advertised benefits of AI, current approaches to the technology can paradoxically *deskill* workers, subject them to automated surveillance, and relegate them to rigid and repetitive tasks.”

In addition, as *Antiqua et nova* observes, “The need to keep up with the pace of technology can erode workers’ sense of agency and stifle the innovative abilities they are expected to bring to their work.”

In light of such concerns, prudence should guide any consideration of adopting AI tools at a Catholic Charities agency. As *Antiqua et nova* states, “the responsibility for managing (AI use)” should be “guided by the principle of subsidiarity and other principles of Catholic Social Teaching.”

Subsidiarity suggests soliciting input from staff on AI adoption and use, instead of imposing it on them without consultation. Given that they best know the realities of their jobs, staff thoughts on how AI is incorporated in the Catholic Charities workplace can be solicited through the [practice of “synodal” listening and dialogue](#).

“Given AI’s potential to transform entire sectors of the economy,” [wrote the U.S. bishops](#) in their 2025 Labor Day Statement, “now is the time for deeper dialogue between workers and decision makers to discern common causes and shared solutions.”

“Workers themselves,” the bishops continue, “should be included in the business and policy decisions that will shape the world of work going forward.”

Such consultation will empower staff, foster their well-being, promote psychological safety, and facilitate responsible AI adoption.

AI and Legislative Advocacy

Legislative advocacy is a foundational service for Catholic Charities. As expressed in the [Catholic Charities USA Code of Ethics](#), “we will advocate ... on behalf of and with the poor and marginalized to bear witness to, and address, their plight and the underlying or structural causes of poverty, threats to human life and injustice.”

Catholic Charities USA, the Code continues, advocates at the national level and “collaborates with other Church structures to advocate on international issues as appropriate.” Individual Catholic Charities may advocate locally with their state’s Catholic Conference.

Given AI’s growing pervasiveness in society, it’s conceivable that the Catholic Charities network may advocate for policies that relate to its impacts on legislative priorities as guided by papal pronouncements and initiatives of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In his 2015 encyclical [Laudato si’](#), Pope Francis called for a “legal framework which can set clear boundaries” on “the techno-cratic paradigm” which threatens to “overwhelm not only our politics but also freedom and justice.” Otherwise, he warned, “The alliance between the economy and technology ends up sidelining anything unrelated to its immediate interests.”

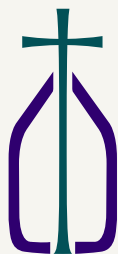
Subsequently, in his [2024 World Day of Peace message](#), Francis appealed for a “binding international treaty” on AI for “the prevention of harmful practices but also the encouragement of best practices.”

He reiterated his call for a “binding international treaty” in his [2024 World Day of Social Communications](#) message, and proposed “models of ethical regulation, to forestall harmful, discriminatory, and socially unjust effects of (AI systems) and to combat their misuse for the purpose of reducing pluralism, polarizing public opinion or creating forms of groupthink.”

[Antiqua et nova](#), issued in 2025, calls for regulations to address the “risk of surveillance overreach,” constrain the effect of “AI-generated fake media that can gradually undermine the foundations of society,” and “ensure that all legal entities remain accountable for the use of AI and all its consequences” while safeguarding “transparency, privacy, and accountability.”

More recently, in his [2026 World Day of Social Communications](#) message, Pope Leo proposed regulations to “protect individuals from forming emotional attachments to chatbots.” [Elsewhere, he implored](#) “(g)overnments and international organizations to ... implement policies that protect the dignity of minors in this era of AI.”

In our nation, the U.S. bishops in June 2025 [appealed to Congress](#) for a “regulatory framework informed by ethical principles and reasonable policy considerations.” Dignity of the Human Person, Care for the Poor, and Respect for the Truth were the listed ethical principles, followed by policy considerations of: Family Life; Labor and the Economy; Healthcare, Education, and Political and Civic Life; Warfare; and Energy and the Environment.



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