

Parish Communications

Parish AI Use Policy

A one-page policy template that helps a parish articulate and document its approach to AI in communications. Adapted by the parish from the template; signed by priest, parish secretary, and a PPC member; reviewed annually.

The policy is grounded in the Pillar 4 principle: the human is the oversight in sensitive, spiritually driven communication. AI may assist. It may not replace discernment.

THE TEMPLATE

PAGE 1: THE POLICY

Parish AI Use Policy

Parish of [parish name]

Date adopted: _____

Review date (annual): _____

Responsible person for policy oversight: _____

SECTION 1: GUIDING PRINCIPLE

The human is the oversight in sensitive, spiritually driven communication. AI may assist our work. It may not replace the discernment, judgment, or pastoral responsibility that belongs to human beings.

This principle governs all decisions below. Where the policy is unclear, the principle is the reference.

SECTION 2: WHERE AI MAY BE USED IN THIS PARISH

[Parish adapts the list below. Remove items that do not apply. Add items specific to this parish's circumstances.]

- Drafting and refining routine operational content (Mass times, hall booking confirmations, event announcements).
 - Grammar, spelling, and clarity editing of human-drafted content.
 - Translating operational content into the languages spoken in the parish.
 - Summarising long documents for the priest's or curator's review.
 - Transcribing meeting notes when all present have consented.
 - Generating initial drafts that a human will significantly rework.
 - [Add parish-specific permitted use] _____
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SECTION 3: WHERE AI MAY NOT BE USED IN THIS PARISH

[Parish adapts the list below. The starting list reflects the Pillar 4 principle; most parishes will retain most of it, and may add further restrictions.]

- Homilies or any content presented as the priest's personal reflection.

- Pastoral letters to the parish or to individuals.
 - Communications with bereaved families, sick parishioners, or those in spiritual crisis.
 - Content that purports to be the discerned wisdom of a named human when no named human has discerned it.
 - Any communication where the reader would reasonably feel deceived to learn AI had produced it.
 - Generation of sacred imagery (Christ, the Virgin, particular saints, the Eucharist) until the Church provides clearer guidance on this area.
 - [Add parish-specific restriction] _____
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SECTION 4: SENSITIVE DATA RESTRICTIONS

No pastoral data, safeguarding-relevant information, confessional-adjacent content, bereavement details, prayer request submissions, or named personal information may be entered into public AI tools without explicit consideration of where the data goes and who can access it.

When in doubt, do not enter the information. Pastoral discretion with personal information does not pause because a new tool is convenient.

SECTION 5: DISCLOSURE

Where AI has substantively contributed to a piece of communication, a standing note on our parish website explains how AI is used in our communications work. Individual pieces do not require per-piece disclosure unless the nature of the piece would make undisclosed AI use a form of deception.

The standing disclosure is located at: _____

SECTION 6: WHO DECIDES EDGE CASES

Edge cases, new tools, and situations not covered by this policy are decided by:

Edge cases are not decided in isolation by any one person. The deciding role is consultative with the priest, and significant decisions are shared with the PPC.

SECTION 7: REVIEW

This policy is reviewed annually, or sooner if significant new tools or practices emerge. The Pillar 4 framework of True Light Digital's Formation library is a reference resource for understanding how the Church is navigating these questions over time.

Review date: _____

SIGNATURES

Priest: _____ *Date:* _____

Parish secretary: _____ *Date:* _____

PPC member: _____ *Date:* _____

PAGE 2: GUIDANCE AND WORKED EXAMPLES

This page is not part of the policy itself. It helps the parish think through common cases before signing.

WORKED EXAMPLES

Using AI to summarise the bishop's pastoral letter for the parish newsletter.

Permitted, with care. The summary must be checked against the original by a human. The human takes responsibility for accuracy. Attribution to the bishop is preserved; it is the bishop's thought, summarised with the aid of AI.

Using AI to draft a bereavement message to a grieving family.

Not permitted. The message is the parish's pastoral care in words. It must come from a human who has thought about this family and what they are carrying. Using AI here is a small but real fraud on the family.

Using AI to translate a First Communion letter into the three languages spoken in the parish.

Permitted, with human review for accuracy. Translation is a task where AI can accelerate, but a human (ideally a native speaker in the community) checks the output before it is sent.

Using AI to generate a weekly "reflection" posted as the priest's thought, without the priest having engaged with it.

Not permitted. The reflection represents the priest's discernment. AI cannot substitute for it. If the priest is too busy to write a weekly reflection, the parish publishes one less often rather than publishing something that appears to be his thought but is not.

Using AI to generate an image of Christ or Mary for a parish bulletin.

Not recommended. Traditional imagery or commissioned human work is preferred until the Church provides clearer guidance on AI-generated sacred imagery. The theology of sacred images is well-developed; AI-generated religious imagery is a new category the Church has not yet addressed authoritatively.

Using AI to clean up grammar in a volunteer's submission before it goes in the newsletter.

Permitted. The submission is the volunteer's; AI is assisting the curator's editorial work. If the volunteer would want to know, mention it casually: "I tidied up the grammar with a quick pass through an AI tool, kept the substance as you sent it." Most volunteers are grateful.

Using AI to transcribe notes from a PPC meeting.

Permitted, with all-present consent. Everyone in the meeting should know a transcription tool is being used. The transcript is kept in the usual confidential way PPC records are kept.

Using AI tools on a personal device to help a volunteer draft her SVP update before submitting it to the curator.

Permitted. This is the volunteer's tool for her own writing. Disclosure is not required at the submission stage; the substance will be reviewed by the curator regardless.

COMMON QUESTIONS

What about Google Translate or similar tools that we have used for years?

These are AI tools, broadly. They have been in use for years without controversy because their scope is narrow (translation) and their output is expected by readers to be machine-generated. The policy treats them as permitted for operational translation work.

What if a parishioner submits content that she generated using AI?

The curator handles it through the normal editorial vetting process (T4). The curator asks honestly whether the content represents the submitter's real engagement with the topic, or whether AI has substituted for her

engagement. If the latter, the curator may ask the submitter to share what she actually wants to say in her own words.

What if the priest asks the parish secretary to use AI for something the policy does not permit?

The parish secretary may raise the policy with him. The policy was signed by him and her together, and she has standing to reference it. If the priest is asking for a legitimate exception (a specific circumstance the policy did not anticipate), it is worth discussing and updating the policy at the next review.

What about future tools we cannot imagine now?

The policy is reviewed annually precisely because the tools change. New tools are evaluated against the guiding principle (*the human is the oversight in sensitive, spiritually driven communication*), not against the specific lists in Sections 2 and 3. The principle holds; the lists adapt.

THE DISCLOSURE NOTE ON THE PARISH WEBSITE

The parish should have a standing page explaining how AI is used in its communications work. A template for this page is available separately from True Light Digital (see X3: *How We Use AI at True Light Digital* for a model).

A short version might read:

"This parish uses AI tools in a limited way to assist with routine operational communications: drafting notices, cleaning up grammar, translating operational content into the languages spoken by our parishioners, and summarising long documents for review. We do not use AI to generate content that represents the priest's discernment, pastoral messages to grieving families, or communications where AI use would feel like deception. A human reviews everything before it is published. If you have questions about this, please contact the parish office."

Adapt to your parish's specific practice.

Based on the True Light Digital Formation framework. For the cornerstone essay on which this policy is based, see truelight.digital/formation/guardrails-and-discernment/.

This template should be reviewed annually, and whenever significant new AI tools become part of parish life. The Pillar 4 cornerstone essay will be updated periodically to reflect developments in the Church's thinking on these questions.

True Light Digital publishes this template as part of its free Formation library. If your parish would value support in building a wider communications system, please contact us at sean@truelight.digital. If not, we hope this template serves you well on its own. That is the goal.