

Artificial Intelligence and Committees on Ministry Resource

Introduction

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) is everywhere. Even when we aren't aware of it, AI use is impacting every facet of our common life, including Committees on Ministry. Fortunately, smart and ethical people, including within the United Church of Christ, are offering education to understand artificial intelligence, and together we can explore how its use may arise in COM work, why it is important to develop a policy for use of AI for a Committee on Ministry, and some considerations for doing so. Whatever decisions a COM, Association and Conference make regarding the use of AI, MESA strongly encourages the conversations to happen to minimize misunderstandings, unauthorized implementation, data and confidentiality breaches, and uses that counter the values and ethics of the Committee on Ministry.

Where to Start

The first step is for COM leaders to educate themselves about what AI is and how it works. UCC General Counsel Heather Kimmel's recent [blog](#) entry on AI and churches provides an excellent introduction. This blog post also includes a link to her recorded training on [The Insurance Board's Online Learning](#) website. Scroll down the page to Human Resources to find the video and the PowerPoint slides. Please note that an adapted "Generative Artificial Intelligence Policy Development Checklist for COMs" is at the end of this document. This checklist will help guide the creation of your AI Policy.

How Might a COM engage with Artificial Intelligence?

- COM and COM members may use AI to conduct their work. For example, note taking during meetings. Questions may arise when AI is employed: how it is used (all meetings? entire meeting? just during "business"?), who is responsible for editing AI's output, and how the results are shared?
- COMs may interact with AI through materials created by those seeking authorization or ministers with authorization. For example, ordination papers, sermons, MID portfolios. COMs can open conversation, set expectations about AI use and expectations of transparency if, and when, AI is used.
- How AI uses the work of the COM. Any input to AI tools, intentional or not, like public website postings, blogs, etc. may become part of the data used by AI for others and may be susceptible to data breaches.
- Local Churches and authorized ministers may seek guidance for AI use in their ministry settings from the COM.

Special Considerations for COMs

As your COM discerns what kind of AI policy is appropriate, there are some areas that merit special consideration:

- What guiding values and principles will shape the COM's AI policy? Are they consistent with the Manual on Ministry, the UCC Ministerial Code, and any Association/Conference by-laws and policies?
- A common use of AI in COMs is notetaking and recording of virtual meetings. These outputs may be used to prepare meeting minutes. Will AI technology be permitted in meetings and if so, with what platforms/software? Who will be responsible for monitoring the use of AI for notetaking, including review of any AI-generated materials?
- Preparation for ministry and authorization: those seeking authorization in the UCC, including Members in Discernment, Privilege of Call, dual standing, and lay ministerial standing/licensure are responsible for creating papers, portfolios, sermons, and other creative expressions of their formation/discernment process that is shared with the COM and used for assessment purposes. Is the COM providing direction and clarity regarding AI use for these materials (even if that clarity is "do not use")?
- As COMs support authorized ministers, what questions are arising regarding AI use in Local Churches and other settings for ministry? What ethical concerns are arising for authorized ministers? What role, if any, does the COM have in providing guidance to ministers and/or Local Churches?
- What other areas of COM work raise the issue of AI use?
- The environmental impact of AI is a consideration for many: how might those considerations factor into your policy?

Resources for Learning:

Read UCC General Counsel Heather Kimmel's latest blog post on Artificial Intelligence, the section on AI notetaking may be especially relevant to COMs: [Generative Artificial Intelligence for Local Churches: An Update - United Church of Christ](#)

[The-Steward-Newsletter-Fall-2025.pdf](#) An issue of The Insurance Board newsletter focusing on AI and the Local Church, with many topics applicable to COMs.

[AI and Faith](#) A website and organization dedicated to engaging the questions of artificial intelligence and ethics.

[A Step-by-Step Guide to Create an AI Policy for Your Church](#) is an article on the website Church Executive. While the focus is on local churches, COMs could also benefit from their guidance in creating an AI policy.

[College students and professors are making their own AI rules : NPR](#) is an article on different perspectives on using AI in academic work.

Artificial Intelligence Policy Development Checklist for Committees on Ministry

*Adapted from a checklist by Heather E. Kimmel,
General Counsel for the United Church of Christ,
for the Insurance Board Webinar: "Generative Artificial Intelligence for Churches"
June 28, 2024*

- Review theological beliefs, the Manual on Ministry, The Ministerial Code, relevant policies and bylaws, and other statements of witness to inform and determine policy direction and purpose statement. Possible directions may be to prohibit the use of AI models and AI enabled applications (collectively "AI tools") by Committee on Ministry (COM) members, those with status/standing; to proceed cautiously, bounded by strict guidelines set forth in the policy; or to encourage the use of AI tools in accordance with the policy. (Note: A policy is recommended even if the COM chooses to prohibit use, as some may already be using AI tools).
- Survey COM members, those seeking ministerial authorization and authorized ministers for current use, familiarity with, concerns and questions about, and interest in AI tools.
- Develop a review and approval process for the implementation of AI tools that include reviewing the data security of the tool. (Note: This should include, at a minimum, reviewing the terms of service and privacy policy for each tool). For many COMs, this may involve notetaking and record keeping tools. The assistance of experts, like Conference/Association IT staff, may be required.
- The implementation of AI tools should be undertaken in consultation with the Conference or Association to ensure consistencies with the policies that have been adopted by the Conference or Association, if any.
- Using the review process developed above, review AI tools already in use to assess current risk.
- Prohibit or limit the use of AI tools that use sensitive or personal data to train the model or that do not provide adequate security safeguards. (Note: consider whether vendors/independent contractors are subject to these policy provisions or need separate provisions in their contracts to protect COM data.)
- Separately prohibit COM members from uploading sensitive or personal data into any AI tool that has not been approved.
- Prohibit COMs from using any AI tool that has not been approved to create content, works, or materials for the COM, including text, music, imagery, or note-taking tools.

- Require careful human review and ultimate human responsibility for output accuracy, copyright infringement/plagiarism, and compliance with the COMs policies on bias/discrimination.
- Determine whether COM members and those with status or standing are required to disclose the use of AI. For example, if an MID is required to disclose use of AI, is the disclosure internal to COM operations only, or external to the wider church community? What level of interaction and use with AI requires disclosure?
- If AI use is approved, consider providing resources for prompt engineering training to increase the quality of output.
- Train all COM members on the policy. Ensure that it is shared and discussed with MIDs and others impacted by the policy.
- Update the policy regularly as technology develops.