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PHOENIX, ARIZONA



2025 Churchwide Assembly Report of the Reference and Counsel Committee – Report 3

Thursday, July 31, 2025

Motion J

Resolution on AI in the Church

Submitted by: William Platnick [Upstate New York, 7D]

Whereas, we believe that “God created humankind in [God’s] image” (Genesis 1:27) and that every human being bears the imago Dei, endowed with intrinsic dignity, creativity, and moral responsibility;

Whereas, the ELCA’s social message Faith, Science and Technology: Environment, Medicine, and Genetics reminds us that “God works through human creativity,” and calls the church to exercise wise stewardship of all God-given gifts;

Whereas, artificial intelligence (AI)—broadly defined as computer systems capable of tasks once thought to require human intelligence—has seen rapid advances in areas such as language processing, decision-making, and pattern recognition, with profound implications for work, relationships, worship, and public life;

Whereas, AI raises urgent ethical and theological questions around human dignity, agency, bias, privacy, justice, the nature of vocation, and the safe deployment of powerful new tools—especially for those most vulnerable to technological displacement or surveillance;

Whereas, AI-driven automation threatens to displace workers across industries, exacerbating economic inequity and calling the church to stand in solidarity with those affected;

Whereas, congregations, rostered leaders, and church institutions increasingly encounter AI-driven tools in pastoral care, education, administration, and global mission, yet lack consistent frameworks to discern where such tools may augment human ministry—and where they risk undermining the Gospel and human flourishing;

Whereas, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly has called for ongoing sociaethical reflection on emerging technologies and directs its Division for Church in Society to resource the church in engaging public policy, advocacy, and education;

Therefore, be it resolved, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

1. Affirms that human beings alone—created by God, redeemed in Christ, and guided by the Holy Spirit—remain the ultimate bearers of moral responsibility; no AI system can replace the vocation, compassion, or discernment entrusted to God’s people.
2. Directs the ELCA Division for Church in Society, in partnership with the ELCA Advocacy Office and the seminary network, to develop and publish by March 2026:
 - A concise “AI & Faith” study guide for small groups and adult forums, with discussion questions rooted in Lutheran theology.
 - Ethical and Safe-Use Guidelines for AI in worship planning, pastoral care tools, educational settings, administrative functions, and social ministry programs—emphasizing transparency, accountability, data privacy, bias mitigation, and safeguards against unintended harm.

3. Encourages all ELCA councils (congregational, synodical, and churchwide) to utilize the following Values Framework—originally adopted by the PC(USA) 226th General Assembly—in order to interpret and apply the Ethical and Safe-Use Guidelines (see 2) as they arise in new or unanticipated contexts, while more comprehensive policy is under development:

- a. Recognize the fundamental, inherent dignity of every human.
- b. Ensure no human or human community is subjected to harm at any stage in the AI lifecycle, and mitigate disruptive impacts.
- c. Acknowledge AI's potential to assist at every stage of the human life cycle.
- d. Insist on preservation, promotion, and expansion of fundamental freedoms and rights for individuals and communities in AI-assisted contexts.
- e. Implement environmental and ecosystem safeguards to ensure the flourishing of creation.
- f. Foster participative and enabling roles for all actors, in building peaceful and just societies.
- g. Promote peace, inclusivity, justice, equity, and interconnectedness throughout the AI lifecycle.
- h. Commit to engaging AI's broader implications in a theologically responsible manner.

4. Encourages ELCA seminaries and partner institutions to establish or expand interdisciplinary courses and research initiatives at the intersection of theology, ethics, computer science, and social justice—preparing future rostered ministers and church professionals to navigate AI's challenges faithfully and safely.

5. Urges the ELCA to:

- Advocate, with ecumenical and interfaith partners, for public policies that protect workers displaced by automation, uphold data privacy, prohibit lethal autonomous weapons, and promote responsible innovation.
- Partner with global companion churches to ensure AI-enabled tools (e.g., translation, health diagnostics, educational platforms) advance the Gospel, human well-being, and equitable access, rather than entrench existing inequities.

6. Requests that by the 2028 Churchwide Assembly, the Church Council report on progress made, lessons learned, and recommend any further actions needed to ensure ELCA ministries remain rooted in the Gospel, responsive—and safe—in an age of rapid technological change and ecological challenge,

Rationale

The committee appreciates the timeliness of this resolution and recognizes the critical need for examination of these issues and its deep impact on society. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a rapidly changing technology. ELCA technology staff is already exploring the implications of AI and its impacts on the church and our work in the world.

Recommendation of the Reference and Counsel Committee

To refer Motion J to the Office of the Presiding Bishop - Theological Discernment, and the Service and Justice Unit – Advocacy, in consultation with the Office of the Treasurer – Information Technology, and to request a progress report to the Church Council by its meeting in Spring of 2026.