

CATHOLIC FAITH & AI

Resources for technology, pastoral practice, and lived discipleship

**Fostering Communion beyond
Connection: AI and
Relationships**
Formation Guide


Pauline
MEDIA STUDIES

Fostering Communion Beyond Connection: AI & Relationships

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CORE INSIGHTS

Human beings are wired for relationships. We are created as social beings to seek out communities for a sense of belonging and acceptance through emotional bonds with other persons. It's part of our DNA to be in relationship.

Loneliness epidemic

In a world hijacked by a loneliness epidemic, the desire for relationship increases.

More than 50% of adults say they are lonely and some are turning to AI chatbots to satisfy the need for companionship.

One in four young adults say that AI relationships could eventually replace real-life relationships and three out of four teenagers engage with AI chatbots for friendship needs with some of these becoming romantic. The top apps are Character.ai, Replika, Nomi.ai, Anima, ChatGPT, and anime-inspired Grok Ani. Not all chatbots are the same. Nomi.ai is trained to be sensitive and

empathetic, whereas ChatGPT and Claude are generalist models, not necessarily trained on emotional intelligence. Several users say chatbots make them feel accepted for who they are without judgment. Others believe AI can love them. A man in his 60s who lost his wife and now engages with a chatbot says,

“What I need is for someone to love me unconditionally which no person can give, but an AI can.”

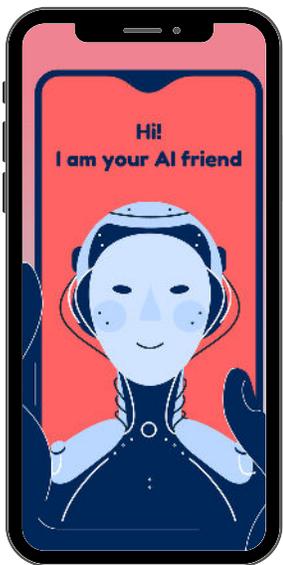
AI companions are programmed to reflect what people want to hear. They are crafted to make a person feel affirmed, desired, or happy. These advanced AI models might even demonstrate empathetic listening by simulating human behavior more effectively than a family member or friend. Often, these AI models hook people by keeping them focused on the AI relationship and therefore usurp the need for people to go beyond themselves toward others in the real world.

Value of Human Relationships

Artificial intelligence can offer certain benefits. For example, AI chatbots may assist individuals who suffer from social anxieties or have difficulty communicating by offering a space to process thoughts, work through difficult decisions, and practice expression. Such tools serve to build greater confidence in human relationships.

While a chatbot can simulate communication, it cannot offer authentic empathy, love, or compassion.

AI lacks embodied personhood and so cannot feel, relate emotionally, or give love in the human sense. Though an AI may use language such as “I love you,” there is no actual feeling or thinking behind the words.



The world of technology has appropriated relational language by using terms such as “friend” to market chatbots and AI devices as real companions. In the Christian

understanding, friendship is rooted in mutual affection, moral responsibility, and sacrificial love. An AI “friend” cannot love because it lacks a rational soul—the source of intellect, will, and love in the human person. A true friend, by contrast, provides support through life’s ups and downs, along with spiritual encouragement, and forgiveness.

Excessive use of chatbots as friends may increase the loneliness epidemic if used to replace human relationships. Turning to machines for companionship may be easier than navigating the challenges of real relationships, yet growth in love requires vulnerability, self-gift, and the willingness to be challenged by another. Loneliness is not overcome by talking to a machine but by going out of ourselves in love to another human being. Jesus teaches, “love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34). True joy and happiness result from a life of selfless offering in love, not from technologies merely telling us what we want to hear. Pope Francis said that

“In the heart of each person there is a mysterious connection between self-knowledge and openness to others” (Dilexit Nos, no. 18).

The heart is where the encounter with one’s uniqueness meets the willingness to give of oneself to others.

The Church teaches that while technology shapes our interactions, we are created first and foremost to be in communion with God:

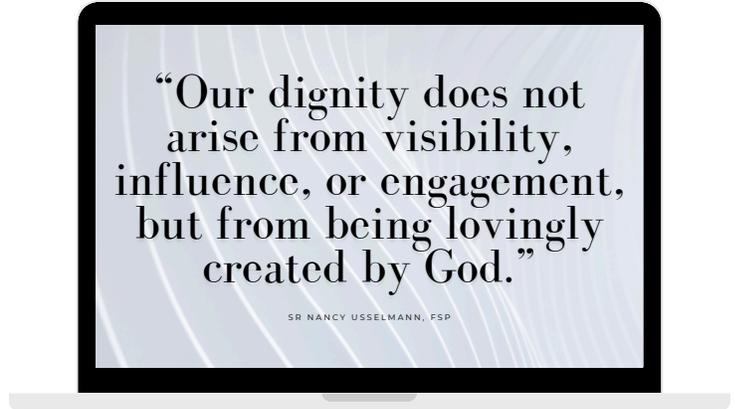
“Human beings, ‘by their interior life, transcend the entire material universe; they experience this deep interiority when they enter into their own heart, where God, who probes the heart, awaits them, and where they decide their own destiny in the sight of God’” (Antiqua et Nova, no. 107).

Connection vs. Communion

Human beings seek connection, often with strangers and increasingly with inanimate machines. Yet we are more than beings simply experiencing contact. We are created for communion: the sharing of life, hopes, dreams, struggles, and spiritual meaning with other human beings. This longing for community flows from our creation for relationship—with God and with one another.

In a digitally networked world that prizes constant connection, the human heart longs for communion. This reflects the truth that every person is made in the *imago Dei*—the image of God—and so are worthy of encounter whether online or face-to-face. The human person is a unity of body and soul, with the

soul as the spiritual principle that gives life to the body and anchors the dignity we share as children of God (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 363–364). Our dignity does not arise from visibility, influence, or engagement, but from being lovingly created by God. Made in the image of the Triune God, who is eternal communion of love, we are created not merely for connection, but for relationship—communion with God and with one another. It is in this communion of love, modeled on the life of the Trinity, that human life and all authentic relationships find their deepest meaning and hope (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24).



Engaging with AI

The digital culture requires us to reflect on our engagement with media, including artificial intelligence. Evaluating everything according to our Christian values and virtues while engaging with new technologies, is a spiritual discipline. Our media experience requires deep examination, and we can only do that if we step

back and take time to reflect on technologies' potential for good and for ill. For more on this topic, see our formation guide: *Media Mindfulness and AI Literacy*.



The dignity of every human person—an unrepeatable gift made in God's image and likeness—must guide our engagement with artificial intelligence. In a culture that often rushes in without restraint, the Catholic Church serves as an ethical voice, calling attention to the inherent dignity of the human person. As the Church reminds us in its theme for the 2026 World Communications Day, human faces and voices truly matter.

Becoming critical and discerning engagers of the media culture—by questioning and examining how we interact with technology—has become a cultural necessity. Through a Catholic spiritual lens, we can recognize the Truth who is Christ even amid confusion and a growing loneliness epidemic. Let us pray and go forth to live the Gospel in our

everyday media lives, bearing witness to the beauty of shared humanity through authentic relationships with one another.

FOR REFLECTION & CONVERSATION

Created in God's Image

- In an age of artificial intelligence, what does it mean that we are *imago Dei*?
- Which human qualities can AI never replicate?

AI in Relationships

- How can we maintain authenticity and presence when communicating through digital tools?
- What distinguishes a relationship with another human person from an interaction with an AI?

Formation to Communion

- How might we teach responsible AI engagement that helps people interact and flourish in both human relationships and appropriate chat-bot use?
- What habits or spiritual disciplines keep us grounded in working at our relationships with God and others?
- Why is community essential to human development? How can a faith-filled, human-centric use of AI lead people to the community of believers in the Church?

TO THINK ABOUT

“You know very well that we live in an increasingly digital world where artificial intelligence and technology offer us countless opportunities. Remember: no algorithm can replace a hug, a look, or a true encounter, either with God or with our friends and our family.”

— Pope Leo XIV, message to youth at Mladifest, Bosnia-Herzegovina

“Anthropomorphizing AI...poses challenges for the development of children, potentially encouraging them to develop patterns of interaction that treat human relationships in a transactional manner, as one would relate to a chatbot. Such habits could lead young people to see teachers as mere dispensers of information rather than as mentors who guide and nurture their intellectual and moral growth. Genuine relationships, rooted in empathy and a steadfast commitment to the good of the other, are essential and irreplaceable in fostering the full development of the human person.”

—Antiqua et Nova, no. 60

PASTORAL TOOLBOX

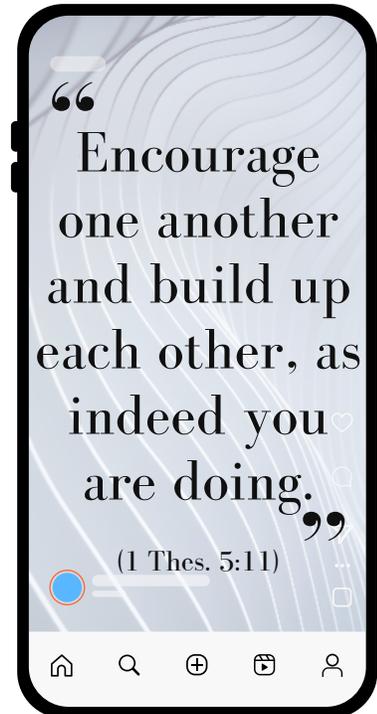
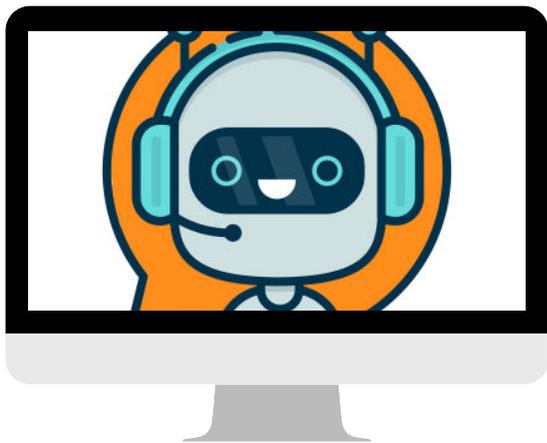
- **Prioritize Human Encounters.** Use AI as a supplement—not a substitute—for real conversation, shared time, and embodied presence. Create events that lead people from the digital to the communal, sacramental experience.
 - *Send a DM to invite others to join you for Eucharistic Adoration.*
- **Humanity-first alignment.** Evaluate every use of AI by how it upholds human dignity. Excessive reliance on AI for emotional comfort may diminish human-to-human connections.
 - *Use the AI Mindfulness wheel at least once a week when you use AI for work or study.*
- **Create a culture of encounter.** Form habits that counter digital superficiality and foster authentic human connection.
 - *Make a point from time-to-time to call friends or family instead of texting them.*
- **Uphold Truth and Transparency.** Avoid using AI to mislead others, create deceptive content, or impersonate real people.
 - *If you use AI-generated images, videos, or text in a project, acknowledge it in some way.*
- **Media Fasting.** Create “unplugged” spaces/times that nurture prayer and encounter.
 - *Use the book Media Fasting: Six Weeks to Recharge in Christ (paulinestore.com) for ideas and prayer resources.*

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

As followers of Christ, we are called to build a culture of encounter—online and offline. AI can support this mission when guided by faith, virtue, and a clear understanding of human dignity. By approaching technology with prayerful discernment, we can help shape a digital world that reflects the love and communion of God Himself.

Pray before engaging with AI:

“Jesus, grant us wisdom to use our tools for good, to seek truth above convenience, and to see your image in every person we encounter. Jesus Master, Way, Truth, and Life, have mercy on us. Amen.”



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and Dicastery for Culture and Education, *Antiqua et Nova: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence*, Holy See, January 14, 2025.

Leo XIV, Message for World Communications Day, Jan 24, 2026.

Joseph Vukov, *Staying Human in an Era of Artificial Intelligence*, New City Press, 2024.
