

CATHOLIC FAITH & AI

Resources for technology, pastoral practice, and lived discipleship

**Navigating the Digital Frontier:
AI Mindfulness
Formation Guide**



Navigating the Digital Frontier: AI Mindfulness

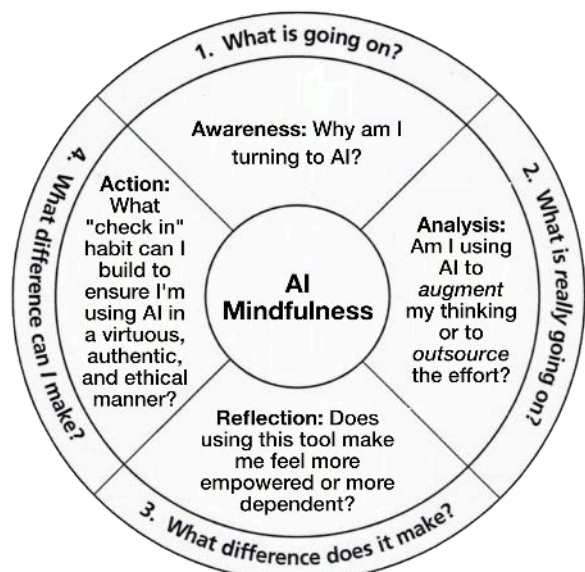
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CORE INSIGHTS

The Catholic Church has been a long-time advocate of applying critical thinking skills to analyze messages that come from media and digital technologies. The first official documents dealing with media, *Vigilanti Cura* and *Miranda Prorsus*, written before the 1960's, emphasized caution to protect the faithful from harmful media messages. In the decades since, however, the mindset of the Church has shifted from a purely protective stance to one of critical engagement.

Standing at the threshold of a “new industrial revolution,” as Pope Leo XIV calls the field of artificial intelligence (AI), society finds itself in a landscape that is both bursting with possibility and overwhelming. For those tasked with forming the young in the faith—Catholic parents, educators, and ministers—the challenge is no longer just about monitoring screen time; it is about forming the soul in a world where the line between what is human-created and AI-generated is increasingly blurred.

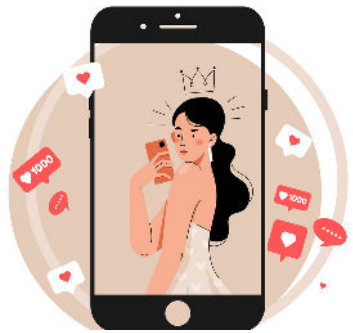
Media literacy has always involved critical thinking, but AI literacy requires something more and deeper: discernment. The Media Mindfulness methodology provides a framework for asking a series of questions to critically engage with media. As we engage with the specific challenges of AI, the core questions of media mindfulness can be adapted as a tool for growth in AI literacy (see diagram below). This approach moves us beyond passive consumption into a cycle of awareness, analysis, reflection, and action.



This diagram is adapted from *Being No One* by Gretchen Haber, Thomas Zering, and Matthew Keisler (Minneapolis, MN: SARP Mary's Press, 1989, page 2). Copyright © 1989 by SARP Mary's Press. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

AI Mindfulness

The AI Mindfulness method of critical thinking can be employed from two perspectives. First, the questions proposed can be used by individuals when they engage with AI-generated text, image, sound, or video, just like any other media text. Second, they can be used as an examination of conscience of sorts, helping users discern why they are turning to AI and ensuring that engagement is holy, holistic, and ethical, always driven by the dignity of the human person and the desire for authentic human relationships.



The four questions of AI Mindfulness

1. *What is going on?* Awareness

In our fast-paced world, we often click and consume without thinking. Awareness asks us to pause and notice. With AI, it's increasingly difficult to distinguish what is human-created from what is AI-generated. When we see an image of Pope Francis in a puffer jacket or hear Pope Leo commenting on some issue in a way that doesn't sound quite right, the first questions of AI literacy can be:

- **Is it real or AI-generated?**
- **How was it made?**
- **How can I find out about it?**
- **What other information do I need?**

When confronting our own motivations for using AI, we can ask:

- **Why am I turning to AI for this specific task?**
- **Am I using this tool in a manner that respects people and their inherent dignity (including my own)?**
- **Am I being overly reliant on AI instead of exercising my own creativity?**

2. *What is really going on?* Analysis

Analysis moves us deeper. We recall that AI systems are trained on massive amounts of data—data that carries all the beauty, but also all the biases and weaknesses of our fallen world. In a Catholic context, we must ask if an AI tool and its responses to prompts respect the dignity of every person.

- **Does the algorithm promote stereotypes?**
- **Are there voices or perspectives that are missing?**
- **Does the AI-generated response prioritize profit over the common good?**
- **Is the response giving harmful or incorrect information?**

Analysis helps us realize that “the computer said so” is never a reason for accepting at face value what any AI system generates, especially when it comes to morality. An AI system may have information, but it does not have wisdom.

3. What difference does it make? Reflection

This is the heart of AI Mindfulness. Here, we bring the AI experience into conversation with the Gospel and the values of our faith by asking and contemplating:

- **How does this AI tool affect my relationship with God, others, and myself?**
- **Does how I’m using AI enhance my God-given creativity and skills or usurp them?**
- **Am I using AI in a virtuous, authentic, and ethical manner?**

Every human being is made in the *imago Dei*—the Image of God, called to be a co-creator with God the Father. When a student uses AI to do their homework for them, they aren't just "saving time"; they might be bypassing the very process of intellectual and spiritual growth that God intended for them. Similarly, if a priest uses AI to “write” his homily without taking the time to ponder the Scriptures in prayer, is the resulting homily an example of authenticity that serves his parishioners? (For more on

AI in preaching, see our guide *Forming Hearts and Voices for the Word: AI and Preaching*).

Pope Francis often spoke of what he called the “culture of encounter.” Reflection helps us see that while a chatbot can provide an answer, what it can’t provide is an encounter. It cannot offer empathy, it cannot celebrate a sacrament, and it cannot replace the comfort of a hug from a friend. We must reflect on whether AI is helping us become more human, or if it is making us more detached from those around us. (For more about AI and relationships, see our guide *Fostering Communion Beyond Connection: AI and Relationships*).



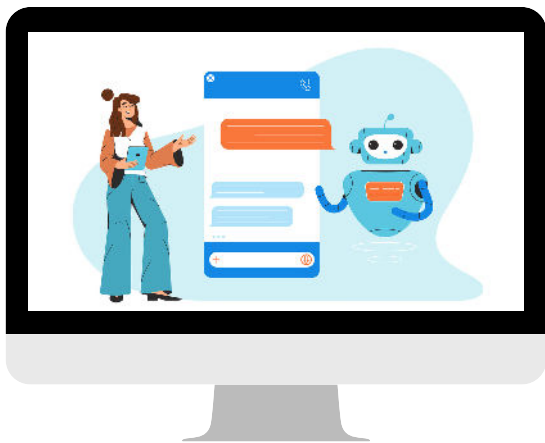
4. What difference can I make? Action

The final step is where the rubber meets the road of AI literacy, asking us to articulate specific ideas about our own engagement with AI and AI-generated content. Make sure you don’t skip this step! It might seem easier to stop at reflection without

making concrete, practical plans for responding, but don't be tempted. Thinking and reflecting are important, but action is also needed.

For example, a parent might commit to learning more about whatever AI system is being used by their child at school so they can be a better guide at home. For an educator, it might mean teaching students how to use AI ethically—to brainstorm and organize a paper or project, but never as a substitute for their own voice and thoughts. For a minister, it might mean using AI to organize parish data while ensuring that the "pastoral heart" remains human-led.

Action is about integrity. It's about choosing to use these powerful tools to build the Kingdom of God rather than just to make life "easier."



Why AI Mindfulness Matters

The Church has a long history of adopting new media—from the printing press to social media—to spread the Gospel. However, AI is

unique because it mimics human behavior and threatens human agency. If we do not model good use of AI and teach children to be critical thinkers when it comes to artificial intelligence, they risk losing the ability to distinguish a data-driven response from one in which thoughts and values have been gleaned through an authentic relationship with Christ.

By using AI Mindfulness, we move from being reactive to being discerning and intentional. We empower ourselves, as well as the young people we are responsible for, to navigate the digital continent with a compass calibrated by faith, ensuring that even in a world of computers that “sound like people,” the human heart remains the primary seeker and finder of Truth.

FOR REFLECTION & CONVERSATION

- How might you incorporate AI Mindfulness into your practices surrounding AI?
- What are some questions you might ask yourself about using AI? Are you strong in one or more of the four areas of awareness, analysis, reflection, and action, but need more work on others? Which ones? How can you improve?

TO THINK ABOUT

“AI is becoming one of the defining features of our time. Growing intellectually means learning to think clearly, to think critically, to examine reality, and to search for truth, beauty, and goodness. ...Using AI responsibly means using it in ways that will help you grow, never in ways that distract you from your dignity or your call to holiness.”

— Pope Leo XIV, to the [National Catholic Youth Conference](#), Nov. 21, 2025

“Just as the Holy Spirit sent the apostles into a diverse and complex world, the Church today must go forth into the digital continent with boldness and hope. We must form generations of Catholic leaders who can engage AI with both technical knowledge and deep moral imagination.”

—Maryland Bishops, [The Face of Christ in a Digital Age](#), Pentecost 2025

PASTORAL TOOLBOX / PRACTICING AI MINDFULNESS IN REAL LIFE

Here are a few ways you can put what you have learned into practice.

- Print out (or download) the AI Mindfulness graphic and place it near your computer. Once a week (or more often if you wish), when you open an AI system such as ChatGPT, Midjourney, or Veo, go through the questions and check yourself to make sure you're using it ethically and from a virtuous mindset.
- Hone your skills at spotting AI images by playing the Reality Check game found [here](#).
- Parents, have an age-appropriate conversation with your children about AI and what it can and cannot do. Talk about interactions with chatbots, emphasizing that AI systems are machines that mimic human language and expressions.
- At the parish or school, dedicate one (or more if needed) of your staff meetings to discuss AI and your institution's policy considering what you have learned from this guide. If you do not have a policy yet, consider putting one together. There are many examples of church institution policies online that can help you get started.
- Keep up to date with the latest trends and developments in AI technology by subscribing to an informational newsletter. There are many out there such as, [Superhuman AI](#), [AI and Faith](#), and [The Neuron](#).

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

For Prayer and/or Journaling

What spiritual practice might I need to add/revive to be more grounded in Christ, Gospel values, and the spiritual richness of the Church? How might this help me in discerning how best to use AI and model good use to others?

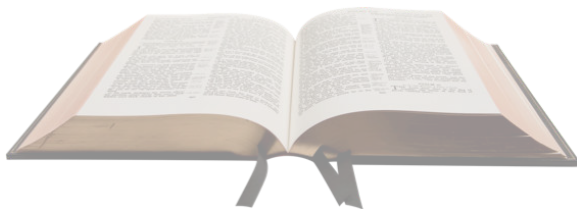
Reflect on this quote from Pope Francis from *Fratelli Tutti*:

“To speak of a ‘culture of encounter’ means that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone. This becomes an aspiration and a style of life” (no.216).

What do these words of the Holy Father mean to you after reading this guide about AI literacy?

How might you foster a “culture of encounter” as you learn about, use, model, and teach AI?

Bring these questions to prayer.



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

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

Pope Francis, Message for World Communications Day, January 24, 2024.



*Media mindfulness catechesis
for lived discipleship*

bemediamindful.org