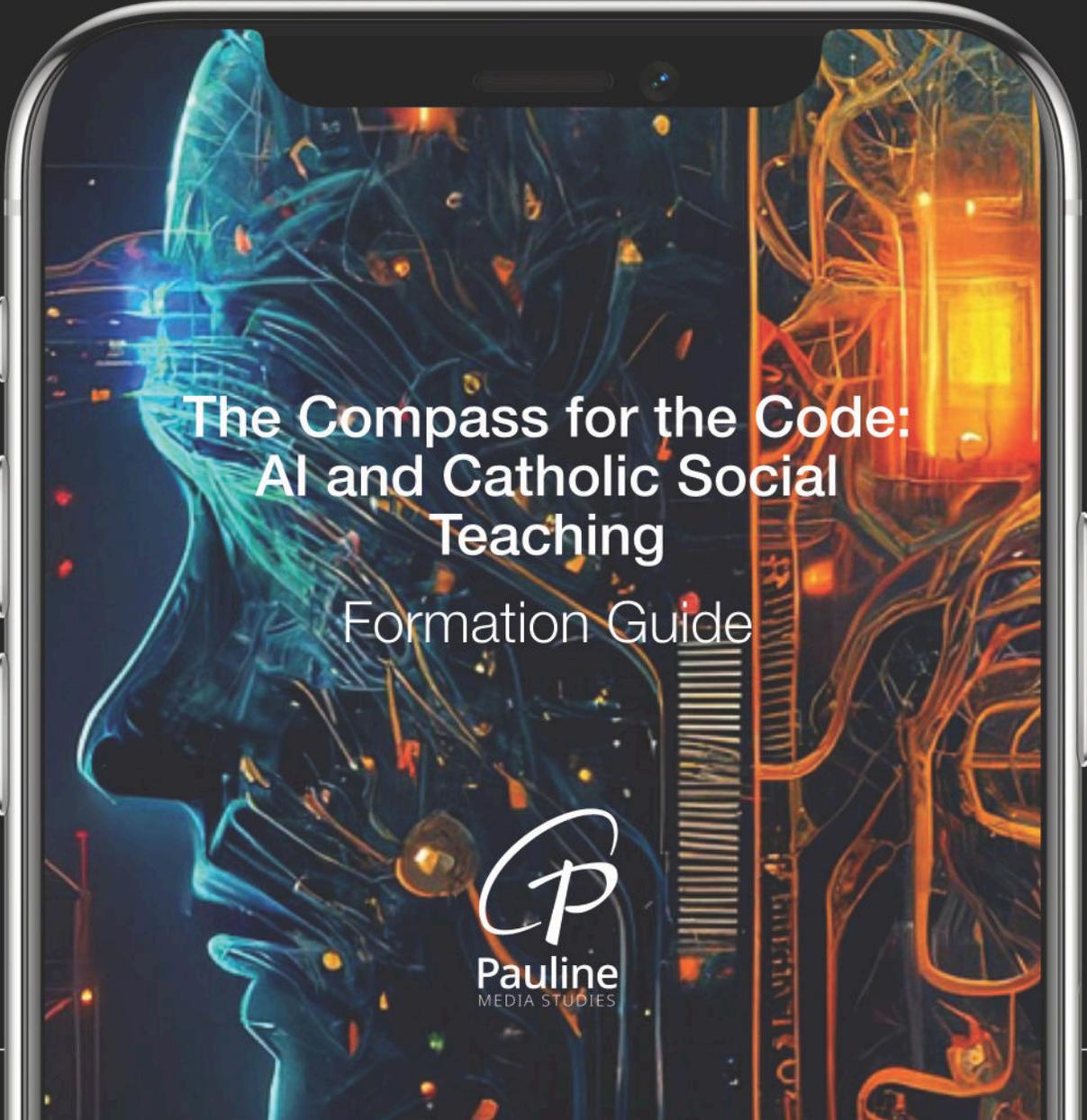


# CATHOLIC FAITH & AI

*Resources for technology, pastoral practice, and lived discipleship*



**The Compass for the Code:  
AI and Catholic Social  
Teaching**  
Formation Guide

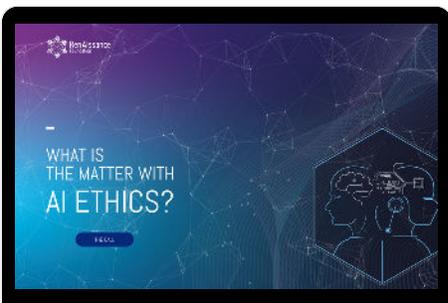
  
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MEDIA STUDIES

# The Compass for the Code: AI and Catholic Social Teaching

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## CORE INSIGHTS

Even before generative artificial intelligence (AI) entered the public consciousness with the first chatbot in 2022, the Catholic Church was leading the way in bringing people together to encourage AI creators, coders, and consumers to commit themselves to an ethical use of this rapidly developing technology. In 2020, the [Rome Call for AI Ethics](#) was signed by leaders from the Pontifical Academy for Life, IBM, Microsoft, FAO, and the Italian government. Since then, representatives from numerous other technology organizations and faith communities have set pen to paper to pledge their institutes to the ethical principles set forth in the Rome Call.



Why is this of note? Because the wisdom of the Church and its teaching provide a clear framework that can be of great assistance to guide anyone involved with artificial intelligence, be they creator or user, in using AI in an ethical and human-centered manner. Because AI is a “social” technology, the Church’s body of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) can be a compass to guide leaders, ministers, and all people of faith in navigating this new frontier.



The collection of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents that make up Catholic Social Teaching can be summed up through seven “themes,” which have been articulated by the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) (USCCB). Similar articulations by the [Canadian Conference of Bishops](#) also provide insight.

For the purposes of this guide, the USCCB themes will be used. They are:

- The Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- The Call to Family, Community, and Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- The Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Care for God's Creation

### **AI and the Life and Dignity of the Human Person**

The teaching that every human person is made in the image of God is the foundation upon which all Catholic social teaching is based. Because we possess this inherent dignity, no machine can ever replace or replicate the dignity we have as *imago Dei* (image of God). To be true to this dignity, any AI system needs to serve the human person and society, not the other way around.

AI works best when analyzing data or automating mundane tasks, but human persons must never be reduced to mere data points or statistics. Every person has a unique story that must be respected, heard, and valued.



Respecting human dignity means we never use AI in a dehumanizing manner. For example, AI can be helpful in healthcare for assisting in diagnostic work or organizing medical staff, but it can never replace the care a patient should receive from caregivers or healthcare providers.

Keep in mind that AI systems, based on data, are incapable of making moral decisions. Of immense concern is the development of lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS). This topic is covered in detail in *Antiqua et Nova*. The document states: “LAWS, which are capable of identifying and striking targets without direct human interventions, are a cause for grave ethical concern because they lack the unique human capacity for moral judgment and ethical decision-making” (no. 100).

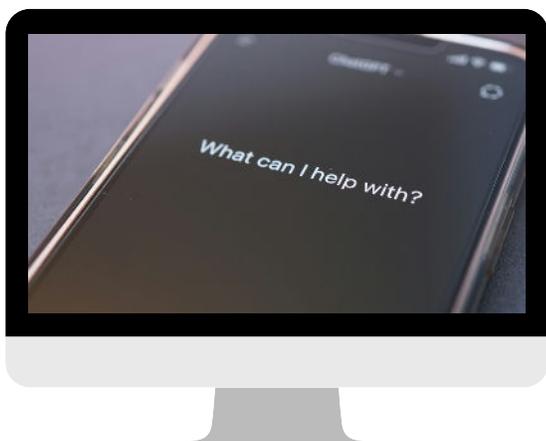
### **AI and the Call to Family, Community, and Participation**

In Genesis 2:18, God says that it's not good for man to be alone. We were

created as social beings to live in communion with others. That happens in our families and communities as well as how we actively participate in society, working toward the common good of all people. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) puts it this way:

**“The human person needs to live in society. Society is not for him an extraneous addition but a requirement of his nature” (no. 1879).**

AI can help with that, but it can also hinder. Unfortunately, many chatbots start with a question such as “How can I help?” or “Where should we start?” making it sound like the user is conversing with another person. This blurs the line between human and machine. Once, I was using AI to help compose a prayer service and at the end it “told” me that it would pray for my event! It mimicked a very human response to the thread, but the chatbot cannot pray for me or anyone else! One Catholic AI tool



uses “What are you looking for?” to counteract this trend.

Living in relationship with others and with God is one way of expressing our human dignity. It may be enticing to “talk” with a chatbot because it’s designed to be helpful and positive, telling you what you want to hear. It may sound empathetic, but it cannot offer you a shoulder to cry on or a comforting hug. If you are a person in a leadership or ministry role, it helps to be aware that using AI for companionship is a disturbing trend, especially among young people. For more on this, see our formation guide, [Fostering Communion Be-yond Connection: AI and Relationships](#).

### **AI and Rights and Responsibilities**

The [Rome Call for AI Ethics](#), mentioned above, is applicable directly to this CST theme as it calls creators and users to act re-sponsibly when using AI. As people, we have a right to the truth as well as other societal rights, such as privacy. Transparency when it comes to how AI is used is part of being responsible and honest. The proliferation of deepfakes—especially false images, videos, or audio of Church leaders— threatens the social trust necessary for a healthy society or Church.

Because AI learns from user input, it’s also important to be aware of

what information is included in an AI prompt. Never share personal, organizational, or sensitive information when using AI. Privacy results from our dignity as humans. *Antiqua et Nova* says,

**“Privacy plays an essential role in protecting the boundaries of a person’s inner life, preserving their freedom to relate to others, express themselves, and make decisions without un-due control” (no. 90).**

### **AI and the Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**

Whenever a new technology comes along, it’s good to ask: “Who is being left behind?” If AI only serves to make life better for the wealthy, it is not serving the common good of all and only making the inequalities present in our world more pro-nounced.

There is much written about “algorithmic bias” which can favor one group or way of thinking over another, depending on the data on which an AI system is trained. While a graduate student at MIT, [Dr. Joy Buolamwini](#) worked with facial recognition software. The camera could not detect her face because of her dark skin, but when she put on a simple white mask, the software recognized it immediately as a “face.”



This bias is disturbing to say the least. Other biases may discriminate against those who are poor. As a Church, we need to stand with those on the margins, advocating for AI that helps the poor, rather than excluding them.

There is also the issue of the “digital divide” where technology is available only to those who can afford it. Standing with the poor means demanding that AI benefits all, not just to those with means.

### **AI and the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers**

The Church has long been an advocate for the worker. The Catechism states that work is a duty and can be a means to our holiness (see CCC 2427).

AI is changing the way we work. The developments in AI have opened whole new lines of work, resulting in new jobs for the economy. Even so, there is also a concern that AI will drastically change and probably eliminate some forms of work entirely. What we want to see is AI supporting human work rather than replacing it, even if the manner of work undergoes transition. *Antiqua et Nova* echoes this: “The goal should not be that technological progress increasingly replaces human work, for this would be detrimental to humanity, rather, it should promote human labor. Seen in this light, AI should assist, not replace, human judgment. Similarly, it must never degrade creativity or reduce workers to mere ‘cogs’ in a machine” (no. 70).

### **AI and Solidarity**

The concept of solidarity moves us away from ourselves as individuals and invites us to act for the common good of all. In this age of artificial intelligence, this means embracing “algor-ethics” (a term coined by Pope Francis) and promoting the need for ethical AI guardrails on a global scale. The Rome Call is a good example of this. The more organizations that sign the accord, the more groups are in solidarity as we work toward a more defined and widely accepted code of AI ethics.

Solidarity takes great effort as AI companies want their businesses to succeed on a financial level. International cooperation is needed to make sure that AI is used for peace, not for the spreading of hate, negative stereotypes, or the development of weapons. In the Church, we practice solidarity when we help each other understand these tools, ensuring the older generation is not left in the dark and the younger generation does not get lost in the digital woods.

### **AI and Care for God’s Creation**

It doesn’t take a lot of imagination to see how AI can help us care for creation. From creating models that can forecast extreme climate events, to supporting sustainable agriculture, to optimizing energy use, AI has great potential to promote ecological sustainability.



However, there is a big “but” when it comes to technology and sustainability. It is easy to forget that the “cloud” isn’t actually in the sky. It is a

physical network of hardware and cables. Global computing power resides firmly on the ground, and AI's environmental footprint is massive. Server farms and data centers use immense amounts of electricity and water keeping our digital access up and running 24/7. The Church says that "considering the heavy toll these technologies take on the environment, it is vital to develop sustainable solutions that reduce their impact on our common home" (Antiqua et Nova, no. 96).

Coalitions such as [GreenAI Institute](#); academic institutions such as Stanford, MIT, and Harvard; and tech companies like Google and Microsoft, are all involved in researching and promoting "Green AI" to ensure that the digital revolution does not harm our planet.

## Conclusion

Catholic Social Teaching and its seven themes provides a solid framework for an individual and collective examination of conscience for many aspects and challenges of artificial intelligence. In his [2024 World Communications Day Message](#), Pope Francis encouraged us to use the "wisdom of the heart" in the face of technology. "Only by adopting a spiritual way of viewing reality, only by recovering a wisdom of the

heart, can we confront and interpret the newness of our time and re-discover the path to a fully human communication."

What a contribution to humanity our parishes and schools could make by becoming centers of [AI literacy](#), teaching people not just how to use these tools, but how to judge them by the light of the Gospel. In an era where machines can mimic our voices and faces, Leo XIV invites us to stay focused on "what we can and will be able to achieve, by growing in humanity and know-ledge through the wise use of the powerful tools at our service" ([2026 WCD Message](#)).

## FOR REFLECTION & CONVERSATION

- Am I using AI to clear away busy work to have more time for pastoral accompaniment, or am I letting AI become a screen that distances me from the "smell of the sheep"? Which theme of CST can aid me in this reflection?
- How are we teaching our students, children, or staff to look beyond the immediate "answer" provided by AI and instead use their God-given reason to seek the ultimate Truth? How are we helping them see that while a machine can process and summarize information, only a human person can discern the truth and infuse that truth with lived experience?

## TO THINK ABOUT

*“Unlike the realm of analytical judgment in which AI excels, true empathy belongs to the relational sphere. It involves intuiting and apprehending the lived experiences of another while maintaining the distinction between self and other. While AI can simulate empathetic responses, it cannot replicate the eminently personal and relational nature of authentic empathy.”*

— [Antiqua et Nova](#), no. 61.

*“We are all called upon to cooperate. No sector can tackle the challenge of steering digital innovation and AI governance alone. Safeguards must therefore be put in place. All stakeholders—from the tech industry to legislators, from creative companies to academia, from artists to journalists and educators—must be involved in building and implementing informed and responsible digital citizenship.”*

—Pope Leo XIV, [2026 World Communications Day Message](#).

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## PASTORAL TOOLBOX / PRACTICAL IDEAS

- 1. Empathy and truth.** When you use AI to draft any text, put a practice in place to ensure that a human reviews it for empathy and truth. The work that we do as humans is a means of sanctification, so much more than an automated output.
- 2. Create “tech-free zones.”** Perhaps it is the dinner table, a staff meeting, or a classroom discussion where we set aside all screens. To answer the call to family and community, we need to practice giving our full attention to the people around us. It is also a great opportunity to exercise our own minds rather than just “asking Google.”
- 3. Pause and reflect.** Institute a 10-second pause before sharing AI-generated content. Verify the source. Is it possible it is a deepfake? Ask yourself: does this promote human dignity and the common good? In the family or classroom, make fact-checking a fun and virtue-building exercise rather than a chore.
- 4. Choose wisely.** When choosing which AI platforms to utilize, look into the software companies to see if they are transparent about their data privacy policies and their environmental impact.
- 5. Digital ecology.** Be informed about the innovations in green AI by signing up for an informational newsletter from organizations such as [Green AI Institute](#) or [Green Web Foundation](#).

# SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

## For Prayer and/or Journaling

Reflect on this quote from *Antiqua et Nova*:

“In a world marked by AI, we need the grace of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to look at things with God’s eyes, to see connections, situations, events, and to uncover their real meaning” (no. 115).

What do these words mean to you after reflecting on AI and CST? How can you grow in looking at things, including your use of AI, with God’s eyes? Bring these questions to prayer.

### A Prayer for Wisdom in the Digital Age

Come Holy Spirit, Breath of life, and Source of all wisdom. We thank you for the gift of human ingenuity and the tools we have created to better our world. As we navigate the complexities of artificial intelligence, we ask for the grace of deep discernment.

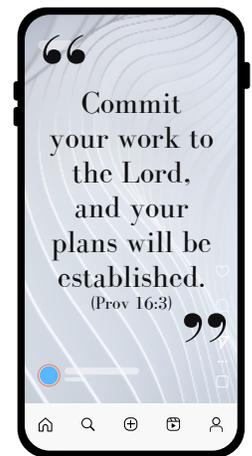
*For Human Dignity:* Grant us the eyes to see that no algorithm can replace the sacredness of the soul. May we never use technology to diminish, but always to uphold, the inherent worth of every person.

*For the Common Good:* Guide our hands as we build and use these AI

systems. Let them not be tools of exclusion or profit for the few, but instruments of justice that serve the many—especially the poor and vulnerable.

*For Stewardship:* Help us remember that our digital “dominion” is a responsibility, not a license. May AI be used to care for your creation and to foster true human connections.

Spirit of truth, let us never grow weary in the pursuit of the true and good. Let our innovations be measured not by their speed or power, but by their capacity to increase love and service in the world. Amen.



## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Louisa Conwill, Megan Levis, and Walter Scheirer, *Virtue in Virtual Spaces: Catholic Social Teaching and Technology*. Liturgical Press, 2024.

Pope Francis, *2024 World Day of Peace Message*.