Session 04.03 - AI and the future of digital mission

Lab: Hope Lab 3: AI and the future of digital mission
Date: 8 October 2026, 16:30–18:00
Room: Iliria
Facilitator: Matthias Boehning
Note-taker: Matthias Boehning
Approximate number of participants: 20

1. Purpose of today's session

Explore AI's opportunities and costs for Christian ministry and develop an informed, practical and theologically grounded approach to its use.

Consider how AI can support ministry while preserving human responsibility, truthfulness, creativity, relationships and spiritual formation.

2. Starting point

The first two sessions explored intentional presence in gaming communities and authentic Christian communication through social media.

Chris introduced AI as a development affecting society broadly: economics, technology, geopolitics, employment, education, relationships and faith. He then presented the *AI Guidelines for Christian Ministry* and invited participants to discuss:

- **Where is AI helping you—or where are you considering using it?**
- **What concerns you about AI in your ministry or role?**

3. Key insights

- **AI offers life-affirming possibilities.** Chris illustrated these through medical diagnosis, protein research, personalised learning and practical ministry support.
- **Benefits come with costs.** The guidelines deliberately use "costs," recognising that trade-offs may occur even without an obvious failure.
- **Responsibility remains human.** A person or organisation using AI cannot transfer accountability to the technology.
- **AI should extend thinking.** Chris generally recommended doing the important creative work oneself, then using AI to question, critique and improve it.
- **Critical work requires human authorship.** He distinguished between primary and supporting AI use, and between critical and less critical tasks.

- **Truth requires active discernment.** Examine sources and emotional responses before accepting or sharing synthetic media.
- **Human value extends beyond performance.** The discussion emphasised lived experience, relationships, the image of God, and the formative place of struggle and imperfection.
- **Open discussion is essential.** Unexamined "silent adoption" can gradually increase dependence without shared understanding or boundaries.

4. Challenges identified

- Overreliance that weakens skills, judgement and cognitive stamina.
- Confident but inaccurate answers, biased prompting and fabricated information.
- Deepfakes that put false words into the mouths of trusted Christian figures.
- Privacy concerns and the protection of personal information.
- Disruption of employment and creative roles.
- Uncertainty about the value and authenticity of AI-generated art and communication.
- Emotional dependence on AI companions, grief bots or simulations of deceased people.
- Pressure towards polished perfection that may make ordinary human contributions seem inadequate.
- Polarisation between enthusiastic adoption and blanket rejection.
- Concentrated technological power, military applications and insufficient international cooperation.
- Idolatrous reliance on AI for wisdom, direction or ultimate hope.

5. Ideas and possible solutions

Chris outlined eight practical approaches:

1. **Ask good questions.** Write clear prompts and avoid steering AI towards a preferred answer.
2. **Fact-check outputs.** Plausible wording is not evidence of accuracy.
3. **Use AI primarily to critique.** Retain authorship of critical work and use feedback to strengthen it.
4. **Be transparent.** Explain AI use through appropriate disclosures or an organisational statement.
5. **Constrain its scope.** Set boundaries and suitable sources, while recognising that controls are imperfect.
6. **Use "head and heart."** Check provenance and pause when content triggers immediate anger, gossip or an urge to forward it.

7. **Treat AI as an assistant or intern.** Ask it to pose questions that clarify one's thinking rather than always supplying finished answers.
8. **Sometimes work manually.** Preserve skills, independent thought and deliberate dependence on the Holy Spirit.

The wider ethical framework included **accountability, privacy, human dignity, environmental responsibility and the common good**.
Chris also encouraged organisations to adapt a simple AI statement and use discussion materials to establish shared expectations.

6. Examples, projects and useful resources

Organisation/project: AI Christian Partnership — *AI Guidelines for Christian Ministry*
What can be learned: A concise framework combining ethical principles with practical guidance. Chris said it was freely downloadable and that revisions to some guidance were being considered.
Contact or link: https://aichristian.org/

Organisation/project: Template church AI statement and discussion starters
What can be learned: A straightforward statement can explain an organisation's approach and begin discussion. It can be adapted beyond a church setting.
Contact or link: Available through the demonstrated website

Organisation/project: Medical diagnosis and AlphaFold
What can be learned: Chris used sepsis detection, breast-cancer screening and protein-structure prediction to illustrate beneficial applications.

Organisation/project: Personalised education
What can be learned: AI can tailor learning material to a pupil's interests and needs. Literacy, numeracy and critical thinking remain essential for evaluating results.

Organisation/project: Ministry administration and communication
What can be learned: Examples included meeting notes, event planning, newsletters, shortening emails, summarising news for prayer preparation and reviewing sermons.

Organisation/project: AI Singing Bible
What can be learned: Musical presentation may help some people engage with Scripture. Chris shared an example from his church.

Organisation/project: AI-generated biblical storytelling
What can be learned: Short, entertaining videos can reach large audiences, while distorted narratives highlight the need for biblical accuracy and responsible oversight.

Organisation/project: Digital resurrection and grief-related simulations
What can be learned: Animated photographs and synthetic family images raise

questions about comfort, authenticity, consent and dependence. They were discussion examples, not endorsed pastoral practices.

Organisation/project: *The Thinking Game* and *The AI Doc*
What can be learned: Chris recommended these films for exploring AI development and the perspectives of industry figures.

Organisation/project: Additional Christian reading
What can be learned: Participants discussed a book transcribed as *AI and the Future Church* and a Vatican document transcribed as *Magnificat Humanitas*. Chris praised the Vatican contribution and welcomed the book recommendation.

7. Opportunities for European collaboration

- Share practical experience and adapt guidance across churches, alliances and ministry organisations.
- Develop common approaches to transparency, data handling and human review.
- Exchange media-verification skills and responses to fabricated Christian content.
- Connect creative communicators with theological expertise.
- Contribute Christian perspectives on dignity, consciousness, relationships and spiritual formation to wider public discussion.
- Encourage informed cooperation rather than fear or conspiratorial explanations.
- Pray for technology leaders, engineers and policymakers facing consequential decisions.

8. Decisions and points of agreement

- Participants held small-group conversations and contributed to the subsequent Q&A.
- Chris urged participants to discuss AI openly in their organisations; Matthias affirmed this as a warning and motivation to act.
- Chris reported that the AI Christian Partnership was investigating AI and consciousness.
- The session closed with thanks and a spoken assurance of prayer for Chris's work.

9. Open questions or different perspectives

- Which ministry tasks require human authorship, and where is primary AI generation appropriate?
- How much disclosure is needed, and how can it be clear without creating unnecessary anxiety?

- How can Christian organisations protect trusted voices against impersonation?
- Does the human story behind creative work matter alongside its quality?
- When might grief-related AI offer comfort, and when might it interfere with relationships or grieving?
- How should Christians respond to claims of AI consciousness or relationships formed with AI?
- How can serious safety concerns be addressed without alarmism or speculative readings of Scripture?
- How can churches sustain their skills and discernment as AI use grows?

Chris did not consider the church uniquely far behind at present, but warned that avoidance and polarisation could change this.

He clarified that his Silicon Valley experience was in **mobile telecommunications, not AI development**. In discussing industry leaders, he encouraged prayer and a sober response rather than assuming a coordinated conspiracy. His interpretation of TESCREAL and technology-centred beliefs as religious or idolatrous was presented as his perspective, not a group conclusion.

10. Three key takeaways

1. **Use AI to strengthen thinking and service:** retain authorship, skills and responsibility.
2. **Protect truth and human dignity:** verify information, respect privacy and value human relationships.
3. **Resist silent adoption:** discuss benefits, costs and boundaries together.

11. Message to the wider HOPE community

As a HOPE Lab, we believe that Christians can engage thoughtfully with AI, recognising its benefits and costs. We encourage ministries to retain human responsibility, protect truth and dignity, and discuss their use openly. May these tools help us serve people well as we remain rooted in relationships, discernment and dependence on God.

12. Handover to the next session

As the final session, the handover is to participants' churches, organisations and the continuing Digital Missions conversation.

- Bring together the stream's themes: **relational presence in gaming, authentic social media communication and responsible AI use**.
- Begin an organisational conversation about existing AI practices.
- Agree practical boundaries suited to the ministry's work.

- Continue learning together about truth, creativity, human identity and spiritual formation.