FIRST PERSON: AI in ministry

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The Baptist Record recently interviewed Cirlot to get his impressi

ons of how AI might be used productively in ministry.

How can AI be used beneficially and spiritually within ministry?

First, let's clarify what AI is and isn't. Most people think of science fiction-level AI when discussing this topic. However, we are not close to a scenario like Skynet taking over the world. Generally, AI falls into two categories: Narrow AI and Strong AI.

Narrow AI is a computer program trained to excel at a specific task. A good example is my security cameras detecting package deliveries. The program has 'learned' to recognize packages on the video by being fed thousands of package examples, training

it to 'see' them until it could consistently identify them.

Strong AI, akin to what you see in TV and movies, like Jarvis in Iron Man, possesses general intelligence. This type of AI would have broad input capabilities and the ability to 'think' and act independently. However, this doesn't exist yet.

Currently, AI is limited to narrow AI. Even advanced tools like ChatGPT are in this category. They're similar to using a word processor or Quickbooks for accounting. These tools are already beneficial for ministry.

In the context of ministry, AI like ChatGPT can supplement human tasks. It's not about replacing human roles but enhancing them. For example, ChatGPT can assist in content generation, offering creative ideas, and aiding in education. It's about leveraging technology to enhance our capabilities in various ministry aspects.

Content Generation: Much of the content we produce in ministry settings is programmatic. Agendas for meetings, the basic structure of an email, the wording for social media posts about events. We can use ChatGPT to write this kind of content in seconds.

Creative Thinking: ChatGPT is excellent at creative ideas. For instance, I can ask ChatGPT for 10 metaphors for a theological truth. I can ask for three icebreakers for a youth event. It can make up silly stories that illustrate a point. There is no limit to the creative possibilities.

Education: I have a pattern I follow almost daily on ChatGPT when I want to learn something. I first ask for a crash course in whatever the subject is. Then I follow up with more specific questions as my topic gets more focused on what I'm actually trying to figure out.

What are the dangers of AI that we should be careful about?

Regarding Strong AI, or Artificial General Intelligence, it's a future concern with potential risks, as highlighted in existing literature. However, we're not at that stage yet.

For Narrow AI, which is already in use, there are concerns to consider. For instance, while I use ChatGPT in my sermon writing process for research and language refinement, I wouldn't endorse using it to write sermons entirely. Sermon writing and delivery are spiritual activities best performed by humans, not AI.

What led you to research AI?

My journey towards AI research was a natural progression. As a freelance web developer with a lifelong interest in computer science, AI has always been a part of the world I live in. I view AI as the next iteration in computing, affecting us all. Staying ahead of the curve seems more prudent than trying to catch up later.

In conclusion, while AI presents exciting possibilities, especially in enhancing various tasks within ministry, it's important to approach its use with discernment and a clear understanding of its capabilities and limitations.