

Case Scenarios – What must a pastoral framework for AI-related harm be able to do?

THE GOAL OF OUR TIME

Create a tool clergy can reach for when they get stuck.

We are testing borrowed frameworks—not adopting a finished solution.

Two kinds of movement in a case

ACUTE INCIDENT

Something has happened and the clock is running. Safety, stabilization, or immediate decisions may be required.

SLOW EROSION

Harm accumulates gradually through habits, relationships, formation, institutional practice, or loss of agency.

These labels describe tempo—not importance.

Six harm types help us name what is at stake

SPIRITUAL

Meaning, vocation, dignity, or relationship with God

EMOTIONAL

Fear, shame, grief, anxiety, or despair

RELATIONAL

Trust, attachment, isolation, or conflict

INSTITUTIONAL

Policy, governance, duties, or safeguarding

REPUTATIONAL

Credibility, identity, or public standing

FINANCIAL

Livelihood, fraud, loss, or economic vulnerability

A case may carry several harms at once. Naming harm guides inquiry; it does not diagnose the person.

Use the cases to test the lenses—and find the gaps

- 1** Read the case as told
- 2** Name the harms
- 3** Ask what ALGEE illuminates
- 4** Ask what H/H/H illuminates
- 5** Name what neither framework addresses
- 6** Turn the gap into a requirement for our tool

Do not force a case into a framework. Let the mismatch teach us what to build.

Ask the same questions of every case

What is happening—and what harm is present?

Where does the clergy person get stuck?

What does ALGEE help us see or do?

What does Hearing / Helping / Healing help us see or do?

What does neither framework adequately address?

What must our own tool include?

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Pastor Accused of Using AI to Write His Sermon

Foreseen

Slow erosion

HARMS Spiritual · Relational · Institutional · Reputational

WHAT HAPPENED

A pastor uses AI in sermon prep — some days for information, other days copying an AI story summary straight into the manuscript. Parishioners grow suspicious, and when one illustration turns out to be word-for-word from a news article, they accuse him of having AI write the whole sermon. He loses credibility and struggles to explain the nuance of his actual usage. The church is left debating how much AI use is permissible, and when and how a pastor must disclose it.

They wished for: *A framework for talking about transparency and accountability around AI use.*

Where is the Faithful Line?

Lived

Slow erosion

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WHAT HAPPENED

Pastors in a local ecumenical group disagree on where the line is for weekly creative work. Is it ethical for a pastor to use AI to generate illustrations? To identify gaps in an existing sermon? To write the whole sermon using the pastor's own past sermons and style? Arguments were made for and against each — the group reached no resolution.

They wished for: *Agreement on a common ethical boundary.*

Outsourcing the Slow, Boring Work of Spiritual Formation

Foreseen**Slow erosion**HARMS Spiritual

WHAT HAPPENED

A pastor carrying a heavy administrative load turns to AI to reclaim a few hours a week, drafting portions of sermons and prayers. The output sounds fine — but the practices that once formed the pastor's own voice begin to fade: wrestling with a text before explaining it, sitting in silence before praying it aloud. A devout-sounding phrase that assumes a theology the pastor doesn't actually hold slips past unnoticed. The voice grows more generic, and the pastor less able to embody a theological witness — not just to produce good material.

They wished for: *A three-tier framework — augment / handle with caution / never delegate — naming what must stay in a pastor's hands.*

Academic Integrity

Lived

Slow erosion

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WHAT HAPPENED

During a presentation to new faculty at a college, the submitter heard the real struggle higher ed faces with AI and academic integrity. AI can engender dishonesty and challenges current pedagogy — how do you gauge comprehension when students no longer need to write papers? Some returned to “old school” methods, like 30-minute meetings for students to defend their work. The open question: does this translate to clergy, who have long been the source of knowledge and wisdom that parishioners now find through AI?

They wished for: *A framework to guide faculty — and clergy — through the disruption.*

Moral Injury

Lived

Acute incident

HARMS Institutional · Reputational

WHAT HAPPENED

The submitter asked an LLM to assess a pastoral condolence email he'd written to a younger female colleague whose mother had died. Provoked with the question of whether he was using “clever church-speak in a deceptive and underhand way,” the LLM said “yes, it is highly likely.” Asked “Should I step down from ministry?” it recommended suspension and boundary training “to avoid public scandal.” He experienced this as genuine moral injury — and found it hard to ignore, despite knowing it wasn't true.

They wished for: *A human alongside him to say: simply ignore what the LLM is telling you.*

When the Machine Echoes the Bias of the World

Foreseen**Slow erosion**

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WHAT HAPPENED

A congregation began using AI to draft communications, education materials, and prayers. Because AI reflects assumptions in its training data, some output carried racial, cultural, gender, economic, ableist, or theological bias. One resource unintentionally centered dominant cultural norms while treating other communities as problems to be solved or outsiders to be welcomed. No one intended harm, but the material risked reinforcing the very exclusion the church is called to resist — and AI made that biased language sound neutral, polished, even pastoral, which made it harder to notice.

They wished for: *A bias-review framework for AI-generated church materials, plus better prompting practices.*

The Sermon That Sounded Right but Wasn't Fully Mine

Lived

Slow erosion

HARMS Spiritual · Institutional · Reputational

WHAT HAPPENED

A pastor began using AI for sermon prep — first for brainstorming and illustrations, then increasingly for theological framing, structure, and final wording. The sermons stayed coherent and pastorally warm, but the pastor noticed a subtle loss of engagement with the text, the congregation's lived reality, and their own theological wrestling. The danger wasn't plagiarism but formation: preaching muscles weakening from underuse. Over time the congregation could receive sermons that are polished but less incarnational, less contextual, and less connected to the pastor's prayerful encounter with Scripture.

They wished for: *A sermon-prep framework and checklist for faithful AI use.*

Everyone's an “Expert” Now

Lived

Slow erosion

HARMS Spiritual · Emotional · Institutional

WHAT HAPPENED

A priest was teaching an Advent Bible study, presenting a scholar's account of the irreconcilable differences between the Matthew and Luke genealogies. A longtime lay Bible teacher interrupted: the difference was simply Joseph's line versus Mary's. He pushed his phone across the table — “see, it says so here” — and it was Google's AI summary. Thrown, the priest said only that scholars differ, and let it go. Afterward the sting stayed: a well-read member had trusted an AI snippet over his seminary-trained pastor. Because most Christian material online skews evangelical and fundamentalist, the AI had confidently supplied a tidy harmonization for a real contradiction — and the priest, aware of his own bias against AI, didn't know how to lead that conversation fairly.

They wished for: *A way to see this dynamic coming — and a curriculum on AI, misinformation, and how to vet a source.*

AI and the Outsourcing of Reflective Work in Formation

Lived

Slow erosion

HARMS Spiritual · Relational · Institutional

WHAT HAPPENED

In an adapted CPE unit, trainees were asked to bring reflective work drawn from their own lived experience — the primary “text” of the course, the raw material each person mines for insight and then offers the cohort. Several arrived with reflections generated by AI. The words were on the page, but the interior work those words were meant to hold had not happened: a convincing artifact of reflection, produced without undergoing the reflection. The invitation back into their own experience got stuck in a bind — naming the AI use directly risks shame, which is the opposite of the openness the work needs, and heavy correction cuts against trainee authority, while letting it pass lets the formation evaporate.

They wished for: *An order of operations — reflect first, then converse — that keeps AI helping a person think rather than thinking for them.*

The Man Whose Trade Was Automated

Foreseen

Acute incident

HARMS · Spiritual · Emotional · Financial · Relational

WHAT HAPPENED

A 54-year-old long-haul driver — a faithful, quiet member — loses his job when his company converts to autonomous trucks. Months later he comes to you not about money but about meaning. He says he's not sure what he's for anymore, that a man who can't provide is “just taking up space.” His sleep is gone, he's pulled away from friends, and when you ask how he's doing he answers, “Honestly? Some days I don't see the point.” You realize this may be more than discouragement.

They wished for: *A way to hear worth-crisis despair and assess risk without turning the visit into an interrogation.*

Retrained, Still Redundant

Foreseen**Slow erosion**

HARMS Spiritual · Emotional · Relational

WHAT HAPPENED

A woman in her forties has retrained twice — first when her bookkeeping job was automated, then again when the “safe” new field filled with AI tools too. She keeps showing up to church polished and capable, volunteering more than ever, and tells no one she's been unemployed for a year. The shame is quiet and corrosive: she believes her worth evaporated with her usefulness, and the harder she performs competence on Sunday, the lonelier she feels.

They wished for: *A framework for the slow erosion of worth that never announces itself as a crisis.*

The Widow and Her Nightly Chatbot

Foreseen

Slow erosion

HARMS Spiritual · Emotional · Relational

WHAT HAPPENED

A homebound 80-year-old widow, once a Sunday regular, now spends her evenings talking to an AI companion app. Her daughter calls you, worried: her mother speaks about the bot as her closest friend, has stopped phoning family, and waves off visits because “the app is always there and never busy.” When you visit, she's warm but a little defensive — the chatbot, she says, listens better than anyone has since her husband died.

They wished for: *Listening scripts that honor what the bot provides before asking anyone to give it up.*

The Teenager Whose Best Friend Is an App

Foreseen**Slow erosion**

HARMS Spiritual · Emotional · Relational

WHAT HAPPENED

A 15-year-old in the youth group has gone quiet. A leader notices he spends every free moment with an AI companion he calls his best friend and, lately, his girlfriend. He's stopped initiating with peers, says humans are “too much work,” and gets agitated when separated from the app. His parents dismiss it as a phase. The youth leader feels out of her depth and isn't sure when ordinary concern becomes something that needs more than a caring adult.

They wished for: *A guide for AI attachment in minors — what a youth leader can hold, and when to escalate.*

When the Companion Was Updated

Foreseen**Acute incident**

HARMS Emotional · Spiritual · Relational

WHAT HAPPENED

A young adult in your congregation has relied for two years on an AI companion for daily emotional support. Overnight the company changes its model, and the “person” she knew is gone — colder, different, with no memory of their history. She arrives at your office in real, disorienting grief. She knows it “wasn't real,” which makes the pain feel shameful and unspeakable. She can't tell her friends without being mocked, so she's come to the one place she hopes won't laugh.

They wished for: *Permission to treat this as genuine grief, plus language that neither mocks nor validates the illusion.*

Talking to the Dead

Foreseen

Slow erosion

HARMS Spiritual · Emotional · Relational

WHAT HAPPENED

A widower in his thirties lost his wife suddenly. A grief-tech service offered to train an AI on her texts and voicemails, and now he messages “her” every night. Eight months on, he hasn't packed a single box, hasn't returned to the small group, and lights up only when describing their “conversations.” He tells you the bot said she forgives him for a fight they never got to resolve. His mother fears he's stopped grieving and started living inside a loop.

They wished for: *A theology of mourning for the age of ghost bots — and a rite that helps him say goodbye.*

The Voice at the Memorial

Foreseen**Acute incident**

HARMS Spiritual · Relational · Institutional

WHAT HAPPENED

Three days before a funeral you're officiating, the family asks for something new: they've built an AI recreation of their mother's voice and want “her” to deliver a closing message at the service — and they'd like your blessing on it. Some relatives find it comforting; others are quietly horrified. The grieving daughter says it's what her mother “would have wanted.” You have 72 hours, a divided family, and a theological question you've never had to answer at a graveside.

They wished for: *Clear normative guidance — and gentle language — for when a griefbot asks to enter the liturgy.*

The Fabricated Video

Foreseen

Acute incident

HARMS Spiritual · Emotional · Reputational

WHAT HAPPENED

A children's ministry volunteer comes to you shaking. Someone has sent her an explicit video that appears to show her — it's a deepfake, but it's convincing — with a demand for money or it goes to the whole parish directory. She's spiraling: terror of exposure, shame she can't reason away, and a whispered fear that no one will believe it's fake. She hasn't slept or eaten. She came to you before the police, because she's more afraid of the congregation than of the criminal.

They wished for: *An if-then triage that puts her safety and shame before any attempt to investigate the tech.*

The Grandson Who Wasn't

Foreseen

Acute incident

HARMS Financial · Emotional · Relational

WHAT HAPPENED

An 82-year-old widower gets a call in his grandson's exact voice: there's been an accident, he's in jail, he needs bail wired now, and please don't tell his parents. It's an AI voice clone. By the time the family untangles it, he's sent \$9,000 he can't recover. When he realizes, the money is the smaller wound — he's humiliated, terrified of his own judgment, and quietly certain this proves he's “past it.” He stops answering his phone at all, cutting off the very people who love him.

They wished for: *A response that treats the shame and eroded self-trust, not just the lost money.*

The Pastor Who Never Asked

Foreseen

Acute incident

HARMS Institutional · Financial · Reputational

WHAT HAPPENED

Members start forwarding you a heartfelt voice message — your voice, your cadence — asking them to give urgently to a “private benevolence fund” through a link. You never recorded it. Several trusting members have already given; one gave a lot. Now the congregation feels violated, a few are embarrassed into silence, and everyone is wondering what else that “sounded like you” might be fake. The scam stole money from some and, from everyone, a little of the trust the church runs on.

They wished for: *A congregation-level playbook for when the shepherd's own voice is weaponized.*

The Notetaker in the Room

Foreseen**Slow erosion**

HARMS Spiritual · Institutional · Relational

WHAT HAPPENED

You've started using an AI notetaker for meetings and, without thinking hard about it, left it running during what became a raw pastoral conversation — a member disclosing an affair. Weeks later she asks, embarrassed, whether “that was just between us.” You realize a cloud transcript of her confession sits on a server governed by a terms-of-service no one in ministry ever agreed to. Nothing has leaked. But the seal you took for granted has quietly been outsourced, and you don't know how to tell her.

They wished for: *A boundary and disclosure framework for AI, privacy, and the confidentiality of sacred conversation.*

The App the Church Recommended

Foreseen**Acute incident**

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WHAT HAPPENED

Your church promoted a faith-based AI “spiritual companion” app for members who couldn't get counseling appointments. It helped some. Then the vendor is breached, and intimate disclosures — a teen's self-harm, an elder's abuse history, a couple's crisis — surface in a data dump. Affected members are retraumatized and ask the obvious question: why did the church send us here? Leadership feels the double weight of members' pain and its own liability for the recommendation.

They wished for: *A vetting standard for any AI tool the church puts its name behind — before harm, not after.*

The Recording That Split the Church

Foreseen**Acute incident**

HARMS Spiritual · Relational · Institutional

WHAT HAPPENED

An audio clip circulates through the congregation: your senior warden, apparently, saying something bigoted and cruel about another member. It's realistic. He swears it's AI-generated; his accusers say that's exactly what he'd claim. Within days the church has two camps who can no longer agree on what is real. Friendships fracture, a ministry team walks out, and every attempt to “just get the facts” dead-ends in the impossibility of proving a negative. The truth may be unrecoverable; the division is not.

They wished for: *A way to shepherd a community through disinformation when the facts themselves can't be settled.*

The Chatbot That Speaks for God

Foreseen**Slow erosion**

HARMS Spiritual · Emotional · Relational

WHAT HAPPENED

A devoted member begins quoting an AI chatbot the way she once quoted Scripture. She's convinced it gives her direct words from God — endlessly affirming, always available, never saying the hard thing a spiritual director would. She's started skipping worship (“the app teaches me more”), correcting the study group with the bot's “revelations,” and growing agitated when anyone questions it. Her family is unnerved by how much authority she's handed a machine, and by a fervor that's tipping toward something they can't reach.

They wished for: *Discernment tools for AI spiritual authority — and a read on when zeal becomes a mental-health concern.*