

AI Policy for Discipleship Ministries

v2.1, last updated 2/20/2026 by Blake Davis

- **Purpose:** This policy outlines the responsible use at Discipleship Ministries, both The Upper Room and World Service, of Large Language Model (LLM), Natural Language Processing (NLP) and all other Generative tools (such as Midjourney [image], Sora [video], etc.) that utilize what is commonly known as Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies, aligning with our mission to create daily life with God, support intentional disciple-making processes, engage communities, and cultivate local resources.

This document is intended to ensure our use of AI technologies is compliant with applicable law, incompliance with AI platform rules, shows respect of third-party rights and interests, including compliance with contractual restrictions (e.g., provisions in book publishing agreements).

- **Goals:** Our goal is to utilize AI tools in ways that enhances rather than replaces human effort, fosters community, maintains trust and transparency with our staff and constituents, upholds our theological integrity and complies with applicable law, AI platform rules and respect of third-party rights and interests including compliance with contractual restrictions (e.g., provisions in the book publishing agreement).
- **Recognition:** This policy and its writers recognize that the relevant rules and regulations around generative technologies should be expected to change continuously with the potential for 'change fatigue', and therefore if this technology is regularly used lapses in compliance should be anticipated due to the potentially ever-changing nature of the technology and its regulation.
- **Terminology, Definition and Abbreviation:**
 - Henceforth in this document, unless specified, the technologies mentioned above will be abbreviated and referred to simply as 'AI' in encompassing all Generative Machine Learning technologies and their associated platforms/tools.
 - Prompts: A prompt is the set of instructions a user (prompter) inputs into an AI technology, a set of instructions for an intended output (generated content)
- **Definitions- Three categories of generated content (developed by Blake Davis):**
 1. **Human-Generated with AI Assistance:** Content is considered mostly human-generated with AI assistance when AI tools are used to support, enhance, or streamline the human creative process but do not contribute the majority of the creative content. In this case, AI acts as a tool for aiding human ideas, providing suggestions, or helping with editing and refining.
Example: An AI based grammar and punctuation tool (e.g., Grammarly). AI assisted PowerPoint Slides where template is AI-Generated but the content being added is Human made. LLM's used to review human-generated content for clearer communication of the intent. LLM's used for feedback on refining ideas, where the implementation of the ideas are human led.

2. **Collaboratively Generated Content:** Content in this category represents a balanced collaboration between human creativity and AI input. In these instances, both AI and human contributions are significant to the final output. The AI may provide initial drafts, iterations, ideas, or frameworks, which are then modified, expanded, or restructured by humans. The creative process is more interactive, with AI and human inputs interweaving throughout, often blurring the line between what was human input vs AI.

Example: An article where the initial draft is generated by an AI tool, but substantial portions are rewritten or heavily edited by humans, integrating unique insights, perspectives, or stylistic changes that significantly alter the original AI output. Another example could be a presentation where AI suggests the layout and initial content, but humans extensively modify the design, add in-depth analysis, or rework the narrative flow.

3. **AI-Generated Content:** Content should be defined as AI-generated when the primary ideas, structure, or creative output originate from an AI tool, with minimal human input. This includes content where AI has autonomously developed the majority of the material, such as text, images, or media, without significant human direction or editing beyond an initial basic prompt.

Example: An article written primarily by an AI tool, with humans only making minor edits or adjustments.

- **Note about Classification:** We recognize that distinguishing between categories two and three can be challenging. For example, if a user provides a simple prompt and largely accepts the AI-generated output, this falls under category three (mostly AI-Generated Content). However, if a user crafts an extensive, structured prompt—such as a multi-page coded instruction set with detailed parameters—guiding the AI through multiple refinements, the resulting output could be considered primarily shaped by extensive human input and could be classified as category two (Collaboratively Generated Content).

As AI capabilities evolve, we will continue refining these distinctions. For now, the responsibility for categorizing AI-generated content and its associated human percentage (see Section 4) will largely depend on the integrity and transparency of the staff member crafting the prompt.

- **Review Schedule:** Quarterly

1. Ethical Use and Human Workforce Consideration

- **Compliance Requirements:** While we encourage the exploration and use of these tools, we also must ensure compliance with applicable law, platform rules and respect for third-party rights and interests including compliance with contractual restrictions (e.g. provisions in the book publishing agreement).
- **Principle:** AI tools are used to augment human capabilities, not replace them. We encourage exploration and use of AI in ways that enhance the development of new ideas, improve efficiency of internal processes and our ability to serve our constituents, stakeholders, Annual Conferences and Local Church leaders for the continued mission of spiritual formation and Disciple Making. We believe AI can assist with clarity, content expansion and process optimization to allow more time for intentional discipleship within churches and communities.

- **Community and Collaboration Expectations:** AI tools will be used to support, not replace, communal and collaborative efforts in our ministry. These tools should be seen as facilitative partners that foster communal projects, not work as a replacement of human interface. Using these tools creates no expectation for increases on staff productivity, creativity, and engagement.
- **Prioritizing Human Ideation:** It is our belief that these tools should be used to support and enhance the work of ministry for those lacking access or resources to or resources for human assistance. We believe ideation and workflow within the context of human community will always be ideal, from both impact and missional perspectives. However as this is not always possible we believe in equipping our staff and churches with tools to assist with productivity.

2. Quality Control and Theological Integrity

- **Human Oversight for Accuracy:** All AI collaborated, and AI-generated content must undergo comprehensive review from a human staff person or approved contractor to ensure data integrity, factual accuracy, and that theological accuracy and alignment with our church's teachings and mission are met.
- **Theological Content:** Special care must be taken for theological content generated with AI assistance to ensure that content aligns with UMC teaching, UMC Book of Discipline and Discipleship Ministries' Core Values.

3. Data Security, Privacy, and Compliance

- **Data Protection:** We commit to the highest standards of data security and privacy, especially regarding sensitive church and personal information.
- **Compliance and Caution:** We must recognize that we have no control over AI tools and practices in complying with relevant data protection laws and ethical guidelines. No personal information (information that isn't already publicly available) for Staff, Constituents, Stakeholders or Contacts should be placed into the AI platforms without the express permission of those connected to the data. Every model/platform has its own privacy settings and considerations that should be considered uniquely. Please discuss with your supervisor if you have questions. For this reason we recommend these tools be mostly used for ideation, outlining, planning, strategizing.
- **Authorial Autonomy:** Authors and producers of original content engaged by Discipleship Ministries will be given the contractual option to exclude or limit (e.g. for marketing copy only) the ingestion of their creative output into AI platforms. (see: [Author's Guild FAQ on AI training](#))
- **Platform Restrictions:** Staff are forbidden from using DeepSeek AI on agency devices. While we recognize its capability as a free LLM, the Hangzhou DeepSeek policy states the user inputs, device metadata and potentially keystroke patterns are collected and stored on local servers accessible by the Peoples Republic of China. This along with multiple DDoS attacks on the platform lead us to forbid staff from downloading or using the platform on agency devices.

4. Transparency, Clarification and AI Disclosure

As we emphasize in our AI training for local church leaders: If someone would feel deceived or degraded trust after learning how much AI contributed to a piece of content, that AI involvement must be disclosed.

- **When AI Use Must Be Disclosed:**

AI involvement should be transparently disclosed in the final user-facing content if it falls into one of these categories:

- Category Three: Mostly AI-Generated Content – AI contributed the majority of the structure, ideas or final output with minimal human editing or input, *OR*
- Category Two: Collaboratively Generated Content where two or more of the below parameters apply:
 - Did AI contribute the majority of the initial content creation?
 - Did AI contribute the majority of the final structure, wording or design?
 - Did AI contribute the majority of the ideas or direction leading to the output?
 - Would the content be noticeably different without AI involvement (as opposed to just speeding up the development of the content)?
- Audio or Visual content created within the above parameters should never be presented as human generated or real.
- How to disclose AI Use: For applicable content, a footnote must be included with a statement similar to 'This content was created by our staff with the support of AI tools.'
 - Marketing Caveat: Given text character constraints, this disclosure is not mandatory for marketing materials such as social media posts directing to another page, provided it appears on the main landing page to which these materials link.

Ongoing Transparency and Education: We will continue to provide resources to educate stakeholders about the role of AI, emphasizing it as an extension of human work, being transparent and open about our processes and use of these technologies as they continue to develop.

Prompt for disclosure generation:

A prompt was developed to simplify the categorization and development of disclaimers on finalized articles for publication. This prompt can be found [here](#)

5. AI in Content Development and Administrative Tasks

- **Content Creation:** We believe AI will serve as an aid in the drafting and editing of content, it is imperative that all final content undergoes comprehensive human review as stated in the

previous section of this document to ensure full alignment with our theological principles and doctrinal accuracy and potential liability is considered. This vetting process should be rigorous and human led to guarantee our content remains true to our mission and values.

- **Resource Expansion:** We believe AI can be employed to diversify and enhance existing resources, ensuring they are accessible and uphold theological integrity; it is imperative that all final content undergoes comprehensive human review as stated in the previous section of this document to ensure quality and accuracy, and consistently reflect the principles of Discipleship Ministries' Core Values and Strategic Priorities.
- **Audio, Video and Imagery:** We recognize the potential of AI to aid in the creation and editing of visual and audio content. All AI-assisted audiovisual materials must be subject to thorough human review, as outlined in the previous sections, to ensure they accurately represent our theological principles and maintain our commitment to authenticity, community engagement and local laws (see note below). This human scrutiny is vital to ensure that our content not only meets our standards of quality and accuracy but also resonates with and supports the overarching mission and values of Discipleship Ministries in avoiding misleading creations, while abiding by legal guidelines.
Note: Due to the Tennessee Elvis Act of July 1, 2024, any generated voice audio should either be licensed or generated based on the creators own voice samples.
- **Project Planning and Goal Setting:** We believe AI tools can be used for streamlining administrative tasks, helping to develop strategy and goals, thus allowing staff to focus more on ministry and community engagement. While there is no way to disclose this kind of assistance, it is important to note that these strategies must abide by the ethical, workforce, integrity and data privacy and compliance principles stated in this document.

6. Implementation, Training, and Approval Processes

- **AI Tool Selection:** While recognizing the rapidly evolving landscape of AI technology, we maintain an open approach to the selection of AI tools. However, it is crucial that any AI tool utilized by staff is in harmony with our mission and values, and fully complies with the DM Information Security Policy from January 2024, as agreed upon by our staff.
- **Staff Training:** Those staff who choose to use these tools must continue to receive training on the responsible and effective use of AI tools, and are responsible for adhering to this policy and complying with relevant data protection laws and ethical guidelines.

7. Review, Feedback, and Continuous Improvement

- **Policy Review:** This policy will be reviewed quarterly, incorporating feedback and adapting to technological advancements and agency needs.

8. Contact, Reporting, and Accountability

- **Inquiries:**

- For AI-related inquiries, reach out to Blake Davis at bdavis@umcdiscipleship.org.
- For IT or Information Security questions, reach out to Jeff Hooven at jhooven@umcdiscipleship.org.
- **Reporting:** It is the responsibility of Staff to report policy breaches to their direct supervisor, ensuring accountability and responsiveness as we navigate this ever-changing landscape.