

Sermon “What Would AI Say?” By Virginia Voigt

I was listening to an NPR show about the use of AI by clergy and by the average person who wants answers to life’s most important questions. As a worship associate looking for topics for services, I decided to investigate AI and what it may mean to UUs. I have to confess that I have been apprehensive about the use of AI myself, and had never used it.

I thought this would be a good opportunity to face my fears and see what AI would say when asked to write a sermon for a UU minister on AI. I asked 3 AI platforms, Microsoft Copilot, Open Chatbot Chat GPT, and Google Gemini. I wanted to see what each would offer. I was interested to see that all of them provided more than a sermon. They provided a combination of gathering and chalice lighting words, readings, stories, and closing words. Gemini also offered a closing reflection. Copilot did not provide a sermon, but offered additionally a “reflection on tools and transformation”, comments on ethical challenges, “spiritual practices for an AI future”, a “call to action”, and connections between the use of AI and UU principles. The important ethical challenges they pointed out are:

1. Carbon and Water Footprints

Artificial intelligence thrives on vast computational power. Those servers need energy and water, often drawn from communities already under stress.

2. Accountability and Bias

When an AI misidentifies a face or filters a résumé unfairly, whose fault is it—machine, programmer, or society? We must create systems of shared ethics that hold all parties responsible.

3. Trust and Transparency

As algorithms shape more of our lives—our news feeds, healthcare decisions, even friendships—we demand that they be open to scrutiny, explainable, and aligned with our values.

I chose this sermon from

Gemini

Dear friends, we live in a world that is rapidly changing. The advent of artificial intelligence has brought forth innovations that were once the stuff of science fiction. From self-driving cars to virtual assistants, AI is transforming the way we live, work, and connect with one another. It holds the promise of solving complex problems, enhancing our creativity, and even addressing some of the most pressing challenges of our time, such as climate change and healthcare.

Yet, as we embrace these advancements, we must also confront the ethical dilemmas and existential questions they raise. What does it mean to be human in an age where machines can learn, adapt, and even create? How do we ensure that the technologies we develop reflect our highest values and aspirations? And, perhaps most importantly, how do we navigate the potential pitfalls of a world increasingly influenced by algorithms and automation?

As Unitarian Universalists, we are called to uphold the inherent worth and dignity of every person. This principle must guide our engagement with AI. We must advocate for technologies that promote equity, justice, and compassion. We must ask ourselves: Who benefits from these advancements? Who is left behind? In our pursuit of progress, we must ensure that we do not sacrifice our humanity at the altar of efficiency.

Consider the ways in which AI can amplify our voices and extend our reach. It can help us connect with those who are marginalized, amplify the stories of the unheard, and foster understanding across divides. Yet, we must also be vigilant against the ways in which AI can perpetuate bias, deepen inequality, and erode our sense of community. We must strive to create a future where technology serves the common good, rather than the interests of a privileged few.

In our quest for understanding, let us also remember the importance of empathy. As we develop and interact with AI, we must cultivate a sense of compassion for those who may be affected by these technologies. This means listening to diverse perspectives, engaging in

dialogue, and recognizing the humanity in every individual, whether they are flesh and blood or code and circuitry.

As we navigate this uncharted territory, let us draw inspiration from our Unitarian Universalist principles. We are called to seek truth, to embrace diversity, and to promote justice. Let us approach AI not with fear, but with curiosity and a commitment to ethical stewardship. Let us be the architects of a future where technology enhances our shared humanity, rather than diminishes it.