Is Pastoring Becoming Artificial? A Survey of The Perception and Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence Among Seventh-Day Adventist Clergy in Nigeria

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https://doi.org/10.56201/ijrcp.vol.11.no8.2026.pg27.49

Abstract
Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is entering pastoral work worldwide, yet empirical and denomination-specific evidence from Africa remains scarce. This study examined how Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) clergy in Nigeria use generative AI, how they assess its usefulness and theological risks, and how these assessments relate to their intention to use it. A cross-sectional, convergent mixed-methods survey was completed by a purposive sample of 48 pastors from five conferences and missions in the Federal Capital Territory and Lagos, Ogun and Abia States. Closed items were analysed with descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations, and four open-ended items were analysed thematically. Most respondents (83.3%) reported some use of generative AI in ministry in the previous 12 months, chiefly ChatGPT (58.3%) and Meta AI (50.0%), mainly for sermon preparation (41.7%) and communication (31.2%). Perceived usefulness ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.01$) and theological concern ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.10$) were both moderately high. The leading concern was doctrinal inaccuracy ($M = 3.73$) rather than displacement of the Holy Spirit. Perceived usefulness was the only construct significantly associated with behavioural intention ($r = .50$, $p < .001$), and 81.2% of pastors wanted Conference-organised training. Nigerian Adventist pastors hold a structured ambivalence towards generative AI, accepting it as a research aid subordinate to prayer, study and doctrinal verification, which calls for denominational

guidelines and training before informal practice becomes entrenched.

Keywords: *generative artificial intelligence; pastoral ministry; homiletics; Seventh-day Adventist Church; Nigeria*

1. Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Meta AI and Microsoft Copilot have changed how professionals in many fields write and analyse information, and pastoral ministry has not been exempting. Industry surveys in North America show rapid uptake among clergy. Weekly or daily use of AI among pastors and church staff rose from 43% in 2024 to 61% in 2025 (AiForChurchLeaders.com & Exponential AI NEXT, 2025), and only 13% of United States Protestant pastors surveyed in late 2025 reported no use of AI at all (Barna Group, 2026). Pastors mostly use these tools for brainstorming, research and administrative communication rather than for writing sermons outright (Barna Group, 2024, 2026). This rapid diffusion raises questions that go beyond efficiency for traditions in which preaching is understood as a Spirit-led and prophetic responsibility. The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church has a distinctive homiletic and pastoral tradition shaped by Scripture, its Fundamental Beliefs and the writings of Ellen G. White, who urged ministers to prepare for the pulpit through personal study and prayer (Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2018; White, 1915). For such a tradition, whether and how generative AI should be used in preparing sermons and pastoral care is a theological question as well as a practical one. Adventist commentators have already noted both the opportunities of AI for ministry and its risk of producing doctrinally unreliable answers (Kabah, 2024), and at least one world division of the Church has adopted ethical principles for AI use (Lemos, 2023). Nigeria, home to a large share of the 1.1 million members of the Church's West-Central Africa Division (General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, 2026), offers an important setting in which to examine these questions. Although the global literature on AI and religion is growing, empirical, denomination-specific and Africa-based data remain scarce. Nigerian scholarship on AI in Christian ministry has been largely conceptual, addressing the potential of AI for evangelism (Odeleye & Ojo, 2025), digital discipleship and ecclesiology (Dairo & Dairo, 2025) and pastoral care (Kanu, 2025). The one survey identified for this study concerned theological students and lecturers in Anglican seminaries rather than serving pastors (Ogunbiyi & Oyebanji, 2025). None of these studies measured how often pastors of a particular denomination use AI, for which tasks, or how their attitudes and theological reasoning relate to their intention to use it. This study addresses that gap through a survey of SDA pastors in five conferences and missions in Nigeria.

1.1 Related Literature

Research among Western clergy indicates a fast normalization of generative AI. In the 2025 State of AI in the Church survey, 91% of church leaders expressed support for AI in ministry, while only 6% reported that their church had an AI policy (Jahng, 2025), and fewer than a quarter reported using AI for explicitly theological content such as sermons and devotionals (Hartford International University for Religion and Peace, 2025). Barna Group's tracking shows a similar pattern. In early 2024 only 12% of pastors were comfortable using AI to write sermons, whereas by late 2025 about a quarter reported using AI to write or edit sermons, mainly as a research and preparation aid rather than as an author (Barna Group, 2024, 2026). Qualitative studies support this “partner, not author” pattern. Manner felt and Roitto (2025) found that preachers in the Church of Sweden used large language models

mainly for brainstorming and inspiration and evaluated the outputs critically in the light of their theological training, although their limited understanding of how the models work led them to give under-specified prompts. Interviews with pastors in the United States showed that clergy see generative AI as an idea generator, research assistant, co-author and translator, while experiencing tension over the authenticity and spiritual substance of AI-assisted preparation (Cheong & Liu, 2025). In Africa, the literature is more conceptual than empirical. Nigerian studies identify uses of AI in pastoral care chatbots, congregational analytics and social media evangelism, while warning about theological integrity, privacy and reduced human oversight (Odeleye & Ojo, 2025). Others argue that AI can personalize devotional practice but should complement, not replace, human pastoral relationships (Dairo & Dairo, 2025; Zenodo, 2025). Journalistic reports describe Nigerian developers building AI tools for churches and warnings from the Nigeria Religious Coalition on Artificial Intelligence that AI platforms are being used to spread misleading religious claims (Maina, 2026). Beyond Africa, the Catholic Church has cautioned that AI should support, not substitute for, human relationships and moral judgement (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith & Dicastery for Culture and Education, 2025). A further concern is accuracy. Large language models can produce fluent but false or unsupported content, a problem known as hallucination (Ji et al., 2023), and they tend to reproduce dominant patterns in their training data (Bender et al., 2021). In religious education, generative AI has been shown to carry cognitive biases that can shape learners' religious understanding (Zhang et al., 2025). For a confessional tradition that measures teaching against Scripture and its Fundamental Beliefs, this tendency presents a particular risk of doctrinal error reaching the pulpit.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The study draws on three complementary perspectives. First, the Technology Acceptance Model holds that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use shape the intention to adopt a technology (Davis, 1989), and later work integrated social influence and facilitating conditions into a unified model (Venkatesh et al., 2003). This justifies measuring perceived usefulness, institutional support and behavioural intention as separate constructs. Second, Diffusion of Innovations theory explains adoption in terms of relative advantage, compatibility with existing values and the norms of the social system (Rogers, 2003). Compatibility is especially relevant where a technology touches sacred practice. Third, work on networked religion and digital religion shows that religious communities negotiate new media in line with their beliefs and authority structures rather than adopting them wholesale (Campbell, 2012; Campbell & Tsuria, 2022), while Lartey's (2003) intercultural approach to pastoral care highlights the relational and contextual character of ministry that technology may support or erode. Together, these perspectives frame the tension between technological efficiency and Spirit-dependent pastoral authenticity examined in this study.

1.3 Research Questions

The study addressed five research questions (RQs):

RQ1. How frequently, and for which ministerial tasks, do SDA pastors in selected conferences in Nigeria use generative AI tools?

RQ2. How do pastors perceive the usefulness of generative AI relative to the institutional and infrastructural support for its use?

RQ3. What theological and spiritual concerns do pastors associate with using generative AI in homiletic and pastoral care preparation?

RQ4. What is the relationship between perceived usefulness, theological concern, frequency of use and pastors' intention to continue or expand AI use?

RQ5. What policy guidance do pastors believe the Church should provide on AI use in ministry, and how do they expect congregations to react to its disclosure?

By answering these questions, the study provides denomination-specific baseline data for Conference and Division leaders developing guidelines, offers a more nuanced picture than a simple adopter versus non-adopter distinction, and extends the literature on digital religion into confessional and African settings.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

The study used a cross-sectional, convergent mixed-methods survey design in which closed (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) items were collected in a single questionnaire and analyzed separately before the results were integrated in the discussion (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design was chosen because pastors' theological reasoning about AI could not be captured by rating scales alone, and the open-ended responses allowed the quantitative patterns to be explained.

2.2 Study Setting and Participants

The target population comprised ordained pastors, licensed or commissioned pastors and ministerial interns serving in the SDA Church in Nigeria. A purposive sample (Etikan et al., 2016) of 48 pastors was drawn from five conferences and missions in three geopolitical zones: Abuja West Mission in the Federal Capital Territory (North Central; n = 5, 10.4%), Ogun Conference (South West; n = 10, 20.8%), Lagos Atlantic Conference (South West; n = 15, 31.2%), Lagos Mainland Conference (South West; n = 8, 16.7%) and Aba South Conference in Abia State (South East; n = 10, 20.8%). These fields were selected to capture geographical and cultural variation across densely populated areas of the Church's work in Nigeria. Pastors were contacted via existing conferences WhatsApp platforms. Conference presidents were intimated and contacted on the research goal and procedure for their approval. Some Conference Presidents helped drive pastors' responses to the research google form.

2.3 Instrument

Data were collected with a self-administered electronic questionnaire developed for this study from the constructs of the Technology Acceptance Model and Diffusion of Innovations theory (Davis, 1989; Rogers, 2003; Venkatesh et al., 2003). The questionnaire had four sections. Section A recorded demographic and ministry characteristics: conference, age group, highest theological qualification, ordination status, years in ministry, number of churches or districts served and frequency of general internet and social media use. Section B was a tool and task inventory asking which generative AI platforms pastors had used in the previous 12 months, how often they used generative AI in ministry and for which ministerial tasks. Section C contained 21 five-point Likert-type items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) in three clusters: perceived usefulness and institutional context (nine items), theological and spiritual concern (eight items) and behavioural intention (four items, one of which asked about willingness to attend Conference-organised training). Section D contained four open-ended questions asking pastors to state (i) their main reason for using or not using generative AI, (ii) an example of what would constitute a theological or spiritual violation, (iii) the policy guidance the Church should provide and (iv) how their congregation would react if they disclosed their AI use. The questionnaire was subjected to data analyst review for verification and validation before distributed to respondents.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered online through google forms from June 10 and concluded on July 24, 2026. Respondents completed it in English, at their own pace, after reading a statement explaining the academic purpose of the study.

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were descriptive in nature and made use of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Frequencies and percentages were computed for categorical variables. Likert responses were coded 1 to 5, and the agreement and disagreement percentages reported combine the two agreeing and the two disagreeing options respectively. Composite scores for each cluster were calculated as the mean of the item scores. Self-reported frequency of AI use was coded as an ordinal score. Likert-scale responses were coded numerically along a five-point scale (Strongly Disagree = 1 to Strongly Agree = 5). The composite scores for each construct were obtained by calculating the mean of the item scores in the respective. To answer RQ4, Pearson product-moment correlations were computed between the composite scores and frequency of use, with two-tailed significance tested at $\alpha = .05$ and 95% confidence intervals obtained through Fisher's z transformation. Effect sizes were interpreted with Cohen's (1988) benchmarks (.10 small, .30 medium, .50 large). Subgroup differences by age group, ordination status and qualification were examined descriptively by comparing group means. Responses to the four open-ended questions were analysed through inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The principal investigator read all responses repeatedly, generated initial codes, grouped recurring codes into themes and then re-coded the full data set in a second independent pass to check the consistency of theme assignment. Because a response could express more than one idea, themes are not mutually exclusive. Illustrative excerpts are reported verbatim with the respondent's role and age group.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. No names or contact details were collected; only conference affiliation and demographic categories were recorded. Respondents were informed of the academic purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire, and completion was taken as consent. Quotations are reported without identifying information. Each conference presidential consent and approval for the study to be conducted replaced formal approval of ethical committee.

3. Results

3.1 Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the profile of the 48 respondents. The largest groups were from Lagos Atlantic Conference (31.2%), aged 31 to 45 years (41.7%), held a bachelor's degree in theology (41.7%) and were ordained (52.1%). Years in ministry were spread fairly evenly across the four bands. Regarding general digital engagement, 64.6% of pastors reported regular use of the internet or social media, 16.7% reported consistent daily use and 18.8% reported occasional use.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 48)

Variable	Category	n	%
Conference Affiliation	Lagos Atlantic Conference	15	31.2
	Ogun Conference	10	20.8
	Aba South Conference	10	20.8
	Lagos Mainland Conference	8	16.7
	Abuja West Mission	5	10.4
Age Cohort	31–45 years	20	41.7
	46–60 years	17	35.4
	21–30 years	8	16.7
	61 years and above	3	6.2
Highest Qualification	B.A. Theology	20	41.7
	M.Div./M.A. Religion	15	31.2
	PGD Pastoral Ministry	12	25.0
	D.Min./Ph.D.	1	2.1
Ordination Status	Ordained Pastor	25	52.1
	Licensed/Commissioned Pastor	13	27.1
	Ministerial Intern	10	20.8
Years in Ministry	11–20 years	13	27.1
	6–10 years	13	27.1
	0–5 years	12	25.0
	21 years and above	10	20.8
Churches/Districts Served	3 Churches	17	35.4
	Above 4	16	33.3
	1 Church	8	16.7
	2 Churches	7	14.6

Table 1. Demographic and ministry-context profile of respondents (N = 48).

3.2 Frequency, Platforms and Tasks of Generative AI Use (RQ1)

Of the 48 pastors, 40 (83.3%) reported some use of generative AI in ministry in the previous 12 months: 3 (6.2%) used it consistently, 10 (20.8%) regularly and 27 (56.2%) occasionally, while 8 (16.7%) did not use it at all. ChatGPT (58.3%) and Meta AI (50.0%) were the most used platforms, followed by Gemini (29.2%) and Claude (14.6%) (Table 2). The high use of Meta AI, which is built into WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram, likely reflects the central role of these messaging platforms in Nigerian church communication.

Platform	n (of 48)	%

Platform	n (of 48)	%
ChatGPT (OpenAI)	28	58.3
Meta AI	24	50.0
Gemini (Google)	14	29.2
Claude (Anthropic)	7	14.6
Microsoft Copilot	4	8.3
Other (e.g., Consensus)	2	4.2

Table 2. Generative AI platforms used by respondents in the past 12 months (multiple selection permitted).

Thirty-seven pastors (77.1%) named at least one ministerial task for which they had used generative AI (Table 3). Homiletic preparation was the most frequent task (41.7%), followed by communication and media (31.2%) and exegetical support (25.0%). Uses in pastoral counselling (14.6%) and hospital or chaplaincy ministry (4.2%) were much less common, suggesting that pastors keep AI away from the most personal forms of ministry.

Ministerial Task Category	n (of 48)	%
Homiletic Preparation (sermon outlining, cross-referencing)	20	41.7
Communication & Media (social media, flyers, newsletters)	15	31.2
Exegetical Support (Hebrew/Greek, commentary access)	12	25.0
No Generative AI Use in Ministry (past 12 months)	11	22.9
Evangelism & Outreach Planning	10	20.8
Bible Study & Small Group Facilitation	9	18.8
Pastoral Counselling Preparation	7	14.6
Administrative Workflows	5	10.4
Ministerial Training & Education	5	10.4
Personal Theological Self-Study	5	10.4
Hospital/Chaplaincy Ministry Support	2	4.2

Table 3. Ministerial task categories for which generative AI has been used (multiple selection permitted).

3.3 Perceived Usefulness and Institutional Context (RQ2)

The composite score for perceived usefulness and institutional context was moderately high (M = 3.55, SD = 1.01). The highest-rated item was the belief that Conference and Union leaders encourage technological competence (M = 4.06; 77.1% agreement), followed by the view that AI helps produce higher-quality written communication faster (M = 3.75). The lowest-rated item was the adequacy of reliable internet access for AI use (M = 3.23), with which 35.4% of pastors disagreed (Table 4).

Item	M	SD	%Agree	%Disagree
Senior leadership encourages technological competence	4.06	0.89	77.1	6.2
Higher-quality written communication produced faster	3.75	0.93	72.9	12.5
Time invested in learning AI platforms is worthwhile	3.67	0.91	72.9	14.6
AI outlines enhance sermon topic exploration	3.58	1.01	70.8	18.8
Easy to get AI output meeting ministry standards	3.50	0.95	62.5	18.8
Peers view AI use as progressive/commendable	3.46	0.74	52.1	10.4
Increases overall managerial productivity	3.40	0.92	52.1	14.6
Reduces time on administrative tasks	3.27	1.28	56.2	31.2
Reliable internet access adequate for AI use	3.23	1.15	50.0	35.4

Table 4. Perceived utility and institutional-context items, ranked by mean agreement (1–5 scale).

3.4 Theological and Spiritual Concerns (RQ3)

The composite theological concern score was also moderately high (M = 3.31, SD = 1.10). The strongest concern was that AI-generated content may contain theological inaccuracies (M = 3.73; 70.8% agreement). Explicitly pneumatological concerns, such as the view that AI disrupts the leading of the Holy Spirit in sermon preparation (M = 3.42) or that an AI-assisted sermon is less anointed (M = 3.29), were rated lower and drew more divided responses. The item on internal moral conflict when using AI to draft worship texts had the lowest mean (M = 3.04) (Table 5).

Item	M	SD	%Agree	%Disagree
Concerned AI content may contain theological inaccuracies	3.73	0.89	70.8	10.4
AI disrupts the Holy Spirit's leading in homiletic process	3.42	1.13	52.1	27.1
Discovery of AI use would damage pastoral credibility	3.33	1.06	45.8	25.0
'Called and equipped' by the Spirit undermined by AI	3.29	1.11	47.9	31.2
AI-assisted sermon is less spiritually anointed	3.29	1.25	41.7	33.3
AI use perceived as pastor being spiritually unequipped	3.15	1.18	39.6	37.5
AI in pastoral care risks reducing sacred nature of ministry	3.21	1.11	41.7	33.3
Internal moral conflict using AI to draft worship text	3.04	0.99	33.3	31.2

Table 5. Theological and spiritual concern items, ranked by mean agreement (1–5 scale).

3.5 Behavioural Intention

The four behavioural intention items had a composite mean of 3.31 (*SD* = 1.14). Willingness to attend Conference-organised training on the ethical and effective use of AI received the highest mean of all 21 items (*M* = 4.08; 81.2% agreement). By contrast, the intention to begin or continue regular AI use in the next six months had the lowest mean in the cluster (*M* = 2.94), with agreement (37.5%) close to disagreement (33.3%) (Table 6). When the training item is excluded, the mean of the three personal-use intention items is 3.05.

Item	M	SD	%Agree	%Disagree
Would participate in Conference-organized AI training	4.08	1.03	81.2	8.3
Would recommend theologically reflective AI use to peers	3.10	1.12	45.8	27.1
Plans to expand range of ministry tasks using AI	3.10	1.06	43.8	29.2
Intends to continue/begin regular AI use in next 6 months	2.94	1.02	37.5	33.3

Table 6. Behavioural intention items (1–5 scale).

3.6 Relationships among Constructs (RQ4)

Table 7 reports the correlations among the composite scores and frequency of use. Perceived usefulness had a large, positive and statistically significant correlation with behavioural intention (r = .50, p < .001, 95% CI [.25, .69]). All other correlations were small and not statistically significant at the .05 level. These included frequency of use with perceived usefulness (r = .24, p = .10) and with behavioural intention (r = .20, p = .17), and theological concern with perceived usefulness (r = −.23, p = .12), behavioural intention (r = −.20, p = .17) and frequency of use (r = −.08, p = .59). With 48 respondents, only correlations of about .29 or larger in absolute value could reach significance, so the small negative associations involving theological concern should be read as tentative.

Variable Pair	Pearson r
Frequency of use ↔ Perceived utility	0.24
Frequency of use ↔ Theological concern	-0.08
Frequency of use ↔ Behavioural intention	0.20
Perceived utility ↔ Theological concern	-0.23
Perceived utility ↔ Behavioural intention	0.50
Theological concern ↔ Behavioural intention	-0.20

Table 7. Pearson correlations among composite construct scores and self-reported frequency of use.

3.7 Variation by Demographic Group

Descriptive comparison showed a U-shaped pattern in perceived usefulness across age groups. The youngest (21 to 30 years; *M* = 3.78) and oldest pastors (61 years and above; *M* = 3.89) rated usefulness highest, and those aged 46 to 60 years rated it lowest (*M* = 3.30). Theological concern followed the opposite pattern and was highest among pastors aged 46 to

60 years (M = 3.54). Ordained pastors reported a higher mean frequency of use (M = 1.24) than ministerial interns (M = 1.00). Because some subgroups were very small (for example, only three pastors were aged 61 years and above), these differences were not tested statistically and should be interpreted with caution.

3.8 Qualitative Findings (RQ5)

3.8.1 Reasons for using or not using generative AI

Six themes emerged (Table 8). The most frequent were concern about spiritual displacement and dependence on the Holy Spirit (n = 12) and a sense that AI is an inevitable part of contemporary life (n = 12), followed by efficiency and time saving (n = 10). One ordained pastor aged 31 to 45 years explained non-use in these terms: "It will undermine my spiritual dependence on the Holy Spirit, thus making my ministry to be artificial."

Theme	n (of 48)	Illustrative Excerpt
Efficiency and timesaving	10	"It helps to supply information faster than when you use your brain alone" (Ordained Pastor, 46–60 years).
Spiritual displacement / Holy Spirit concern	12	"It will undermine my spiritual dependence on the Holy Spirit, thus making my ministry to be artificial" (Ordained Pastor, 31–45 years).
Research and quality enhancement	6	"It enhances my creativity in dealing with contemporary issues... and helps unify my thoughts and achieve coherence" (Licensed Pastor, 31–45 years).
Technological inevitability/relevance	12	"AI is inevitable in today's fast-paced digital age... its effectiveness depends on the user" (Ordained Pastor, 31–45 years).
Skill/technology gap	4	"I've not learnt how to use it" (Ministerial Intern, 31–45 years).
Fear of eroding self-development/study discipline	2	"It reduces self-development" (respondent).

Table 8. Thematic coding of reasons for adopting/not adopting generative AI (themes not mutually exclusive).

3.8.2 Perceived theological or spiritual violations

Pastors most often identified doctrinal inaccuracy or non-Adventist theological content (n = 9) and bypassing prayer, study and the guidance of the Spirit (n = 9) as violations, followed by generating full sermons without personal review (n = 6) (Table 9). A licensed pastor warned that AI responses "might not be Adventist compliant" and that "strange fires might be served at the pulpit."

Theme	n (of 48)	Illustrative Excerpt
Full sermon generation without personal review	6	"Assigning AI to develop sermon from start to finish" (respondent).

Theme	n (of 48)	Illustrative Excerpt
Doctrinal inaccuracy / non-Adventist theological content	9	"AI responses are conditioned by theological frameworks that might not be Adventist compliant. Strange fires might be served at the Pulpit" (Licensed Pastor, 31–45 years).
Bypassing prayer, study, and the Spirit's guidance	9	"When AI takes the place of the Holy Spirit" (Ministerial Intern, 31–45 years).
Pastoral care/counselling in acutely sensitive moments	2	"Counselling a couple who just lost their first child at birth would be [the] height of insensitivity and lack of true empathy" (Ordained Pastor, 46–60 years).

Table 9. Thematic coding of hypothetical or real instances of theological/spiritual violation.

3.8.3 Desired policy guidance

The most common request was for general ethical boundaries and moderation (n = 11), followed by training and workshops (n = 7) and verification of AI content against Scripture and Church teaching before use (n = 5). Only two pastors called for a ban on AI in sermon writing, and four had no clear view or opposed a formal policy (Table 10).

Theme	n (of 48)	Illustrative Excerpt
General ethical-use boundaries/moderation	11	"Let AI not replace your brain, and dedication to study... you must fact check every information and see that it is in compliance with the teachings of the Bible and the Church" (Ministerial Intern, 21–30 years).
Training and workshops needed	7	"A thorough orientation on how to use AI should be carried out in the Conference" (Ministerial Intern, 21–30 years).
Verification against Scripture/doctrine before use	5	"Pastors should be guided to use AI ethically. The copy-paste sermons can't glorify God" (Licensed Pastor, 31–45 years).
Prohibit AI in sermon writing/worship content specifically	2	"Never to be employed in sermon preparation and delivery" (Ordained Pastor, 46–60 years).
Uncertain / no clear policy view	4	"I don't think there should be a formal policy on it" (Licensed Pastor, 31–45 years).

Table 10. Thematic coding of desired Conference/Division policy guidance.

3.8.4 Anticipated congregational reaction to disclosure

Expectations of congregational reaction were divided (Table 11). Seven pastors expected a loss of trust or credibility, six expected acceptance if use was transparent and bounded, and three expected mixed reactions.

Theme	n (of 48)	Illustrative Excerpt

Theme	n (of 48)	Illustrative Excerpt
Negative: loss of trust, credibility, or disappointment	7	"They will not believe in you and they will lose faith in your messages" (Licensed Pastor, 31–45 years).
Positive/neutral: acceptance if transparent and bounded	6	"Many members would appreciate the transparency and recognize that AI can help with research... Transparency, biblical faithfulness, pastoral integrity... would be the key factors" (Ministerial Intern, 21–30 years).
Mixed or conditional reaction	3	"Some will appreciate it while others may not" (Ordained Pastor, D.Min./Ph.D., 61 years and above).

Table 11. Thematic coding of anticipated congregational reaction to disclosed AI use.

Across the four open-ended questions, a common moral distinction appeared. Pastors regarded AI as acceptable when used as a tool for research and writing that remains subject to prayer, personal study and the pastor's own authorship, and as unacceptable when it replaces the pastor's spiritual work. This distinction, rather than simple approval or rejection of the technology, underlies the moral reasoning of the sample.

4. Discussion

4.1 Structured Ambivalence Rather Than Polarisation

The central finding is that Nigerian Adventist pastors hold a structured ambivalence towards generative AI rather than dividing into enthusiasts and opponents. Perceived usefulness and theological concern were both moderately high, and the weak, non-significant correlation between them ($r = -.23$) shows that the same pastors often hold both views at once. A plausible mechanism is the "partner, not author" model reported elsewhere (Barna Group, 2026; Cheong & Liu, 2025; Mannerfelt & Roitto, 2025). When AI is confined to research and drafting, pastors can value its efficiency while placing their theological safeguards at a later stage of preparation, so the two attitudes do not compete directly. An alternative explanation is social desirability, because pastors may affirm theological caution publicly while using AI more than they report. The anonymous design reduces but cannot remove this possibility.

The pattern matches the global picture of broad openness combined with restraint in theological uses (Hartford International University for Religion and Peace, 2025; Jahng, 2025). The present study adds that even pastors who do not use AI give theological rather than merely practical reasons for their position, which suggests that decisions about AI in this denomination are made through a theological lens.

4.2 Institutional Encouragement and Infrastructural Constraint

The highest-rated usefulness item was the perception that Conference and Union leaders encourage technological competence, while the lowest was the adequacy of internet access. This gap reflects a familiar pattern of adoption under resource constraints, in which favourable social norms are not matched by facilitating conditions (Rogers, 2003; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Nigeria's broadband penetration only passed 50% in late 2025, well below the national target of 70% ("Nigeria's internet penetration," 2025). Institutional support for digital skills may therefore be running ahead of the infrastructure pastors need, especially outside metropolitan areas. That the small positive correlation between usefulness and frequency of use ($r = .24$) did not reach significance is consistent with this interpretation,

since pastors who see value in AI may still be limited by connectivity and cost.

4.3 Doctrinal Fidelity as the Primary Theological Concern

It might have been expected that pneumatological displacement, the fear that AI would usurp the role of the Holy Spirit, would dominate pastors' concerns. Instead, the leading concern was epistemological: that AI content might introduce theological error. This finding extends the authenticity framing of Western research (Cheong & Liu, 2025; Mannerfelt & Roitto, 2025). In a confessional tradition with clearly stated Fundamental Beliefs, the more urgent question appears to be doctrinal conformity rather than spiritual authenticity alone. The mechanism is plausible. General-purpose language models are trained on large bodies of text in which Adventist distinctives, such as the Sabbath, the sanctuary doctrine and conditional immortality, are minority positions, so outputs tend to reflect majority Protestant or generic Christian views (Bender et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2025). Combined with the tendency of these models to produce confident but inaccurate content (Ji et al., 2023), this gives pastors good reason to treat doctrinal accuracy as their main risk. The qualitative data support this reading, since doctrinal inaccuracy was among the most frequently named violations (Table 9). It is also possible that pastors find doctrinal error easier to name than more abstract spiritual concerns, which could partly explain the higher mean for this item.

4.4 The Training Gap

The finding with the greatest policy relevance is the contrast between strong demand for structured training (81.2% agreement, the highest mean on the instrument) and divided intention to expand personal use (37.5% agreement). This suggests that many pastors do not feel equipped to regulate their own use of AI and are seeking an institutionally sanctioned framework, including the doctrinal verification discussed above, before going further. The large correlation between perceived usefulness and behavioural intention (r = .50) is consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) and implies that training that demonstrates legitimate and theologically safe uses could raise intention more than general encouragement does. Because most pastors already use AI informally while only a few churches globally have AI policies (Jahng, 2025), there is a limited window in which guidance can shape practice before informal habits become the norm.

4.5 Efficiency and Authenticity in Practice

Rather than treating efficiency and authenticity as opposites, many AI-using pastors described a personal regime of verification and authorship. They used AI for research, structuring and refining language, while prayer, study and doctrinal checking remained the final gatekeeping stages (Tables 8 to 10). This resembles the role of the preacher as an active and critical evaluator observed among Church of Sweden clergy (Mannerfelt & Roitto, 2025) and is consistent with Ellen White's counsel that ministers should prepare through diligent personal study and prayer (White, 1915). The working ethic that emerges from these data can be summarised as AI subordinate to the Spirit and to doctrinal verification. Pastors' reluctance to use AI in counselling and chaplaincy also fits the relational emphasis of intercultural pastoral care (Lartey, 2003).

4.6 Adequacy of the Design and Limitations

The design was adequate for describing patterns of use and attitudes and for identifying the main associations, but several limitations apply. First, the purposive sample of 48 pastors from five fields does not permit generalisation to all SDA pastors in Nigeria or elsewhere, and the sample size limits statistical power. Second, the instrument was developed for this

study and has not undergone psychometric testing such as reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) or confirmatory factor analysis, so the composite scores should be treated as descriptive indices. Third, the data are self-reported and cross-sectional, so causal relationships between usefulness, concern and intention cannot be inferred. Fourth, frequency of use is an ordinal variable, and Pearson correlations involving it should be regarded as approximate. Finally, the qualitative data were coded by a single investigator, and the use of a second independent coder would have strengthened the trustworthiness of the themes.

4.7 Directions for Future Research

Future research should develop and validate a psychometrically sound scale of attitudes to AI in ministry that can be used across denominations in Africa. Longitudinal studies could track how attitudes change as denominational policies and AI tools evolve. Comparative studies including Pentecostal, Anglican, Catholic and other churches in Nigeria would show whether the doctrinal-fidelity concern is specific to Adventism or common to confessional traditions. Studies of congregants' attitudes to AI-assisted preaching, and content analyses comparing AI-assisted and conventional sermons, would also address questions this study could not answer.

5. Conclusions

Generative AI has moved from novelty to everyday practice among SDA pastors in the fields studied in Nigeria, with more than four in five reporting some use in ministry in the previous year, most often for sermon preparation. Theological acceptance has not kept pace with this adoption. Pastors hold a two-sided assessment of the technology driven less by fear of spiritual inauthenticity than by concern for doctrinal accuracy, and by an ethic that keeps AI subordinate to prayer, personal Bible study and ministerial authorship. Their strong demand for Conference-organised training, which exceeds their readiness to expand use on their own, makes the present an opportune time for the Church to shape the role of AI through policy rather than respond later to entrenched informal practice.

On the basis of these findings, the study recommends that:

i. Conferences, Unions and the Division develop official guidelines on AI use that distinguish appropriate administrative and research assistance from inappropriate practices such as producing sermons without prayer and study;
ii. Church leaders require that AI-generated material used for preaching and teaching be checked against Scripture, the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the writings of Ellen G. White;
iii. Conferences give priority to training programmes on the ethical and effective use of generative AI in ministry, given the strong demand expressed by pastors;
iv. Church administration invest in better internet access for pastors, especially in non-metropolitan districts, to close the gap between institutional expectations and available infrastructure;
v. Pastoral leaders encourage voluntary transparency about AI use, framed in terms of theological integrity and dependence on God; and
vi. The Church protect pastoral counselling and chaplaincy as spheres of human ministry in which AI use is minimal.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the pastors of Abuja West Mission, Ogun Conference, Lagos Atlantic Conference, Lagos Mainland Conference and Aba South Conference who took part in the

survey. Special appreciation goes to Pastor Stanley Chikezie, President, Lagos East Atlantic Conference, Adeyinka Ogunseitan, Ogun Conference President and Pastor Promise Chibunnam, Executive Secretary, Aba West Conference and Pastor Musa Munaji, of North Central Conference for using their office and influence to persuade pastors to respond to the questionnaire. Iyanu Agbalaja, SDA Hospital Chaplain, Ile-Ife facilitated the collation and analysis of the questionnaire. The research received no special granting from funding agency.

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Table 1
Demographic and Ministry Profile of Respondents (N = 48)

Variable	Category	*n*	%
Conference/mission	Lagos Atlantic Conference	15	31.2
	Ogun Conference	10	20.8
	Aba South Conference	10	20.8
	Lagos Mainland Conference	8	16.7
	Abuja West Mission	5	10.4
Age group (years)	21-30	8	16.7
	31-45	20	41.7
	46-60	17	35.4
	61 and above	3	6.2
Highest qualification	B.A. Theology	20	41.7
	PGD Pastoral Ministry	12	25.0
	M.Div./M.A. Religion	15	31.2
	D.Min./Ph.D.	1	2.1
Ordination status	Ordained pastor	25	52.1
	Licensed/commissioned pastor	13	27.1
	Ministerial intern	10	20.8
Years in ministry	0-5	12	25.0
	6-10	13	27.1
	11-20	13	27.1
	21 and above	10	20.8
Churches/districts served	1	8	16.7
	2	7	14.6
	3	17	35.4
	4 Above	16	33.3

Note. B.A. = Bachelor of Arts; PGD = Postgraduate Diploma; M.Div. = Master of Divinity; M.A. = Master of Arts; D.Min. = Doctor of Ministry; Ph.D. = Doctor of Philosophy.

Table 2
Generative AI Platforms Used in the Previous 12 Months

Platform	*N*	%
ChatGPT (OpenAI)	28	58.3
Meta AI	24	50.0
Gemini (Google)	14	29.2
Claude (Anthropic)	7	14.6
Microsoft Copilot	4	8.3
Other (e.g., Consensus)	2	4.2

Note. Multiple responses permitted; percentages are based on N = 48. AI = artificial intelligence.

Table 3
Ministerial Tasks for Which Generative AI Was Used

Ministerial task	*N*	%
Homiletic preparation (sermon outlining, cross-referencing)	20	41.7
Communication and media (social media, flyers, newsletters)	15	31.2
Exegetical support (Hebrew/Greek, commentary access)	12	25.0
Evangelism and outreach planning	10	20.8
Bible study and small group facilitation	9	18.8
Pastoral counselling preparation	7	14.6
Administrative workflows	5	10.4
Ministerial training and education	5	10.4
Personal theological self-study	5	10.4
Hospital/chaplaincy ministry support	2	4.2
No ministerial task reported	11	22.9

Note. Multiple responses permitted; percentages are based on N = 48. AI = artificial intelligence.

Table 4
Perceived Usefulness and Institutional Context Items, Ranked by Mean

Item	*M*	*SD*	%Agree	%Disagree
Senior leadership encourages technological competence	4.06	0.89	77.1	6.2
AI helps produce higher-quality written communication faster	3.75	0.93	72.9	12.5
Time invested in learning AI platforms is worthwhile	3.67	0.91	72.9	14.6
AI outlines enhance exploration of sermon topics	3.58	1.01	70.8	18.8
It is easy to get AI output that meets ministry standards	3.50	0.95	62.5	18.8
Peers view AI use as progressive or commendable	3.46	0.74	52.1	10.4
AI increases overall managerial productivity	3.40	0.92	52.1	14.6
AI reduces time spent on administrative tasks	3.27	1.28	56.2	31.2

Item	*M*	*SD*	%Agree	%Disagree
Reliable internet access is adequate for AI use	3.23	1.15	50.0	35.4
Composite (9 items)	3.55	1.01		

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; %Agree = agree + strongly agree; %Disagree = disagree + strongly disagree. Items rated on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). N = 48. AI = artificial intelligence.

Table 5

Theological and Spiritual Concern Items, Ranked by Mean

Item	*M*	*SD*	%Agree	%Disagree
AI content may contain theological inaccuracies	3.73	0.89	70.8	10.4
AI disrupts the Holy Spirit's leading in sermon preparation	3.42	1.13	52.1	27.1
Discovery of AI use would damage pastoral credibility	3.33	1.06	45.8	25.0
Being 'called and equipped' by the Spirit is undermined by AI	3.29	1.11	47.9	31.2
An AI-assisted sermon is less spiritually anointed	3.29	1.25	41.7	33.3
AI in pastoral care risks reducing the sacred nature of ministry	3.21	1.11	41.7	33.3
AI use signals that a pastor is spiritually unequipped	3.15	1.18	39.6	37.5
I feel internal moral conflict using AI to draft worship texts	3.04	0.99	33.3	31.2
Composite (8 items)	3.31	1.10		

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; %Agree = agree + strongly agree; %Disagree = disagree + strongly disagree. Items rated on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). N = 48. AI = artificial intelligence.

Table 6

Behavioural Intention Items

Item	*M*	*SD*	%Agree	%Disagree
Would participate in Conference-organised AI training	4.08	1.03	81.2	8.3
Would recommend theologically reflective AI use to peers	3.10	1.12	45.8	27.1
Plans to expand the range of ministry tasks using AI	3.10	1.06	43.8	29.2
Intends to begin or continue regular AI use in the next 6 months	2.94	1.02	37.5	33.3

Item	*M*	*SD*	%Agree	%Disagree
Composite (4 items)	3.31	1.14		

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; %Agree = agree + strongly agree; %Disagree = disagree + strongly disagree. Items rated on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). N = 48. AI = artificial intelligence.

Table 7

Pearson Correlations among Composite Scores and Frequency of Use

Variable pair	*r*	*p*	95% CI
Frequency of use and perceived usefulness	.24	.100	[-.05, .49]
Frequency of use and theological concern	-.08	.589	[-.36, .21]
Frequency of use and behavioural intention	.20	.173	[-.09, .46]
Perceived usefulness and theological concern	-.23	.116	[-.48, .06]
Perceived usefulness and behavioural intention	.50	< .001	[.25, .69]
Theological concern and behavioural intention	-.20	.173	[-.46, .09]

Note. N = 48; df = 46. Two-tailed tests. CI = confidence interval, computed with Fisher's z transformation.

Table 8

Themes in Reasons for Using or Not Using Generative AI

Theme	*n*	Illustrative excerpt
Spiritual displacement and dependence on the Holy Spirit	12	"It will undermine my spiritual dependence on the Holy Spirit, thus making my ministry to be artificial" (Ordained pastor, 31-45 years).
Technological inevitability and relevance	12	"AI is inevitable in today's fast-paced digital age... its effectiveness depends on the user" (Ordained pastor, 31-45 years).
Efficiency and time saving	10	"It helps to supply information faster than when you use your brain alone" (Ordained pastor, 46-60 years).
Research and quality enhancement	6	"It enhances my creativity in dealing with contemporary issues... and helps unify my thoughts and achieve coherence" (Licensed pastor, 31-45 years).
Skill or technology gap	4	"I've not learnt how to use it" (Ministerial intern, 31-45 years).

Theme	*n*	Illustrative excerpt
Erosion of self-development and study discipline	2	"It reduces self development" (Respondent).

Note. Themes are not mutually exclusive. AI = artificial intelligence.

Table 9

Themes in Perceived Instances of Theological or Spiritual Violation

Theme	*n*	Illustrative excerpt
Doctrinal inaccuracy or non-Adventist theological content	9	"AI responses are conditioned by theological frameworks that might not be Adventist compliant. Strange fires might be served at the pulpit" (Licensed pastor, 31-45 years).
Bypassing prayer, study and the Spirit's guidance	9	"When AI takes the place of the Holy Spirit" (Ministerial intern, 31-45 years).
Full sermon generation without personal review	6	"Assigning AI to develop sermon from start to finish" (Respondent).
Pastoral care or counselling in acutely sensitive moments	2	"Counselling a couple who just lost their first child at birth would be [the] height of insensitivity and lack of true empathy" (Ordained pastor, 46-60 years).

Note. Themes are not mutually exclusive. AI = artificial intelligence.

Table 10

Themes in Desired Conference and Division Policy Guidance

Theme	*n*	Illustrative excerpt
General ethical boundaries and moderation	11	"Let AI not replace your brain, and dedication to study... you must fact check every information and see that it is in compliance with the teachings of the Bible and the Church" (Ministerial intern, 21-30 years).
Training and workshops	7	"A thorough orientation on how to use AI should be carried out in the Conference" (Ministerial intern, 21-30 years).
Verification against Scripture and doctrine before use	5	"Pastors should be guided to use AI ethically. The copy-paste sermons can't glorify God" (Licensed pastor, 31-45 years).
Uncertain or no clear policy view	4	"I don't think there should be a formal policy on it" (Licensed pastor, 31-45 years).
Prohibition of AI in sermon writing and worship content	2	"Never to be employed in sermon preparation and delivery" (Ordained pastor, 46-60 years).

Note. Themes are not mutually exclusive. AI = artificial intelligence.

Table 11
Themes in Anticipated Congregational Reaction to Disclosure of AI Use

Theme	*n*	Illustrative excerpt
Negative: loss of trust, credibility or disappointment	7	"They will not believe in you and they will lose faith in your messages" (Licensed pastor, 31-45 years).
Positive or neutral: acceptance if transparent and bounded	6	"Many members would appreciate the transparency and recognize that AI can help with research... Transparency, biblical faithfulness, pastoral integrity... would be the key factors" (Ministerial intern, 21-30 years).
Mixed or conditional reaction	3	"Some will appreciate it while others may not" (Ordained pastor, 61 years and above).

Note. Themes are not mutually exclusive. AI = artificial intelligence.