News



Meghan Sullivan, a philosophy professor and director of the Institute for Ethics and the Common Good and the Ethics Initiative at the University of Notre Dame, gives the keynote address Sept. 23, 2025, at a Notre Dame summit on artificial intelligence. (OSV News/University of Notre Dame/Evan Cobb)

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As artificial intelligence evolves at lightning speed, the University of Notre Dame has convened a summit to bring Catholic and Christian values to bear on AI technology.

The university's Institute for Ethics and the Common Good and its Ethics Initiative teamed up to host the Notre Dame Summit on AI, Faith and Human Flourishing on the Notre Dame campus from Sept. 22 to 25.

Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the U.S., opened the summit with a Sept. 22 Mass at which he was the principal celebrant and homilist, with university president Fr. Robert Dowd, a Holy Cross priest, concelebrating.

At the summit, Notre Dame unveiled its "DELTA" framework for AI ethics, with the acronym representing five key principles: dignity, embodiment, love, transcendence and agency.

During her Sept. 23 keynote address, Meghan Sullivan — professor of philosophy and director of both the Institute for Ethics and the Common Good and the Notre Dame Ethics Initiative — said that "discernment is required … more than ever" with the acceleration of AI in an era of "technological triumphalism."

Instead, she said, "we have to approach this kind of advancement with humility," as well as "other virtues."

Sullivan noted that "in the 20th century, Christians were very involved in major social transformations, especially in the West, especially in this country," highlighting in particular theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who served on the Council on Foreign Relations; the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and "many local congregations" who advanced the nation's civil rights movement through "harnessing Christian virtues and Christian ethics."

Now, in the 21st century, "one of the biggest ethical transformations we have already witnessed is the transformation to a digital economy" — but "Christians were

largely absent from the conversation about this transition," said Sullivan.

Part of that absence was due to the digital revolution being "largely driven by areas of the country that tend to not have a very strong Christian presence," she said.

Another key reason was that the transition "happened really fast," in a "diffuse and ubiquitous way" that coincided with, among other things, "a rapid rise in disaffiliation from Christian institutions," she said.

Yet "it would be a catastrophe if Christians were not present for the next phase of the discussion about digital transformation," Sullivan warned. "And we have to get our act together."

She cited an oft-repeated sentiment from summit participants, saying, "We cannot slow down this technology. The only thing that we can do is speed up and deepen the conversation."

Sullivan explained that through grant funding the university had conducted close to 140 interviews with experts, which showed broad consensus among both Christian and secular communities for an "ethical floor" to ground AI.

Other insights up for consideration at the summit are "powerful" questions about AI and human flourishing, and the significant energy that exists in both Christian and tech communities to reflect on AI's implications.

In addition, said Sullivan, "there's a reason why people love AI. There's a reason why people love chatbots, why people are turning to Godbot to try to answer their questions.

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"There are deep human needs that are not right now being adequately served by our schools, by our churches, and by our civic institutions," she said. "Those institutions are not meeting those needs. … That's a wake-up call for those of us that care deeply about our schools and our churches and our civic institutions to try to strengthen them to meet those needs, rather than letting them be displaced by this new technology."

With billions annually invested in AI, Christian communities need to work "in a more coordinated way" if they hope to make an impact on the issue, "because the forces that are working to develop and deploy this technology are also highly networked and highly coordinated," said Sullivan.

Notre Dame's DELTA framework for guiding AI conversations provides a sound starting point, said Sullivan.

"Dignity" recalls that "every person is valuable because they are human, not because of how smart, wealthy, or productive they are," she said. "When using AI to increase scale, speed, or efficiency, we need to ask how this affects individuals."

Sullivan said that while "AI is extraordinarily good at solving optimization problems … people cannot be optimized out of the equation."

"Embodiment" highlights that "we are physical, social, vulnerable people," she said. "Our senses help us cherish what we encounter, and mortality makes life precious. Virtual reality can never fully capture lived experience."

Focusing on "love" brings home that "loving relationships involve two-way exchanges," Sullivan said. "Tools like chatbots might simulate companionship, but we need real, messy, human connections to flourish."

Though not necessarily intentional, AI technology has developed in such a way that it has "absolutely affected our ability to see other people as anything more than their ideology or their tweets or their posts," said Sullivan. "We have got to figure out how we can help a generation of human beings habituate to love other human beings when there's this simulacrum that's in their midst."

"Transcendence" stresses that "there are many good, beautiful things that we did not create," Sullivan explained. "As we begin to use AI to interpret the world, we need to cultivate our capacity for awe and gratitude."

"Agency" upholds the "freedom, focus, and ability to make moral choices" that humans need to "live a good life," she said. "Technology can diminish this potential. We must protect decisions that only a human conscience should make."

Sullivan invited summit participants to "join us in this work," adding, "You can help the world think differently about AI."