

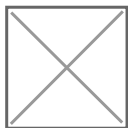
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Bishop Oscar Cantú of San Jose, Calif., concelebrates Mass on the grounds of the ICE Processing Center near Adelanto, Calif., Dec. 10, 2025. (OSV News/courtesy California Catholic Conference)

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Moments after the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced the creation of its task force on artificial intelligence, OSV News spoke with the AI group's chair, Bishop Oscar Cantú of San Jose, California.

During a Sept. 16 phone call with OSV News, Cantú discussed the vision for the task force — especially in light of Pope Leo XIV's encyclical on AI, *Magnifica Humanitas* — as well as his concerns regarding the rapid development of AI and its impact upon humanity.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

OSV News: What is the vision for this task force?

Cantú: Basically, to carry out the vision of Pope Leo in his encyclical. He has given us — not just the church, but particularly the church — marching orders to convoke, listen, teach and remind people that technology is something good when it's able to assist humanity in the work that we do, in living a human life, in supporting our dignity as individuals and as families, and in helping us to build healthy societies.

There are lots of conversations we need to have, certainly with the technology people, but also with the general public to let them know that our parishioners, people in various industries, moms and dads at home, school children and teachers alike, have a voice because this technology affects everyone. And if it doesn't now, it will very, very soon.

So we all have a voice to bring to the public square. And that puts the appropriate amount of pressure on the technology companies and on our politicians to do the right thing.

I think we can probably all agree that our politicians are beholden to different voices, whether it's the voice of money, donors or other political pressures. That seems to be one of the reasons the technology people are coming to the church — particularly

the Catholic Church, because we're global, and because we're not motivated to do what we're doing in this (AI) square by finances.

We have nothing to gain from AI, and we're not motivated by politics either. We're concerned about how this affects human dignity — the individual, the family, society and particularly the most vulnerable.

I think that these comments have resonated deeply with the technology people, and they want to remain in conversation with us.

Most of us, including elected officials, don't really know the inner workings of AI, and the concept can seem very broad and abstract. How can the U.S. bishops' conference AI task force help to address the issue of AI literacy, so that more people can feel they have a say in its use?

Even though I've lived in Silicon Valley for the past eight years, everything I know about AI, I've learned in the past five months.

Previously, I was just busy with pastoral things. But I think the impetus (to learn more about AI) came from the encyclical, as for so many other people. I've listened to the technologists and to those who have been in these conversations for some time, and I've been doing a lot of reading.

Megan Sullivan of the University of Notre Dame (professor of philosophy and founding director of the Notre Dame's Institute for Ethics and the Common Good) has offered to provide a menu of formation opportunities for bishops and for dioceses. We want to have a set of experts available and resources for both bishops and dioceses.

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Should this effort have to start with the bishops, or is it something parishes should undertake as well — both a top-down and bottom-up initiative?

I think it's sort of all hands on deck. I have pastors in my diocese who have started putting on AI conferences, because they have parishioners who are in the industry or because they bring people in. I don't think we need to try to regulate that, because

time is of the essence.

But certainly we need to do some capacity building for our bishops, especially, because we need to use our voices as teachers of the faith. Traditionally, the church is known to be an expert in humanity, and that's what we need to bring to the table.

One of our tech panelists (during the U.S. bishops' conference Sept. 16 administrative committee meeting) said, "Trust your voice. Just because you don't have a background in technology doesn't mean you can't speak to it. Bring your concern about humanity; bring your theological voice and anthropological voice to the table." I think that's important for the bishops to hear.

We don't need to be experts in technology, but it does help to have a basic understanding of how AI works, and what the upsides and concerns are.

Are there specific AI impacts or scenarios you're concerned about?

The big one for me is labor; I'm very concerned about what this can do to the labor market.

I live in a residential neighborhood in Silicon Valley, and I've seen people coming and going constantly over the past eight years — homes for sale, people moving in, and then 12 months later, people moving out. There's this revolving door with all of these companies; they hire thousands and then they have these massive layoffs.

What does that do to people's lives? They build up equity, establish a life and so many of them are on visas from other countries. People are concerned about displacement, whether it's lawyers or even coders, since a lot of the technology codes better and faster than a human person.

I have heard from at least one credible voice that the data does not suggest that there will be a massive disruption to the labor force. But as with other technological shifts in history, there will be losses, and there will also be gains of new positions that will be created. I hope that that holds true.

Many technology people are advocating for a universal basic income (to offset industry layoffs and displacement). And while that allows us to pay our rent and buy food, what happens to our dignity? If our anthropology from the Scriptures tells us that when we work, we participate in God's work of creation, are we no longer participating? How does that affect the human psyche and the human spirit?

Are you hopeful that the bishops' voices on AI will be heard by lawmakers, especially since President Donald Trump has dismissed calls to slow down AI development?

I don't mean this in a disparaging way — it's just the way politics works — but politicians measure the pressure that they get. Certainly one of those pressures is a sort of moral and intellectual pressure.

Part of what we bishops need to do is dissuade people from buying into this voice that the first company across the finish line wins, and the winner is the winner. That's not the message we're going to be sharing. There are some very serious things on the line here, and we need to proceed very cautiously.

We need to speak with clarity. Technology people that are telling us we need to pump the brakes on this. And it's much more prudent to slow down and to have lost maybe a couple of billion dollars. Perhaps we can save human dignity and even humanity.

What can the faithful do to help the church respond to the challenges of AI?

I would say two things, and I think they go together.

First, learn what you can. You don't need to become an expert, but learn what you can about AI. The USCCB has put together some "cheat sheets," if you will, on the encyclical that look at its salient points.

Also, speak up. That is critical. Everyone is affected, and so everyone needs to make their voice heard — whether it's to their city hall, their children's schools and universities, and so forth. The more that we raise our voices and our concerns, it places the appropriate pressure on those who are in power.