ASCENDING OVERTURE TO THE 46TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

From the Presbytery of the East

Subject: Request for a Position Paper and Permanent Committee on Digital Discipleship and Ethical Engagement in a Technological Age

Whereas the Book of Government (19-4.C.2) provides for the action of a presbytery to overture the General Assembly on those matters it believes vital or helpful to the whole Church, and

Whereas the Church of Jesus Christ is called to make disciples who are shaped by the Word of God[1], the Spirit of God[2], and the people of God[3]; and

Whereas the digital environment—including algorithmically curated media, persuasive technologies, and artificial intelligence—now profoundly shapes how people think[4], relate[5], worship[6], and understand truth[7]; and

Whereas artificial intelligence is rapidly advancing in ways that influence decision-making[8], creativity[9], relationships[10], and even spiritual practices[11], raising increasingly urgent questions about personhood[12], responsibility[13], and faithful witness in a technological age[14]; and

Whereas these technologies have a formative impact on moral imagination[15], spiritual practices, social trust, and Christian identity[16], raising questions about truth, agency, justice, and sanctification[17]; and

Whereas pastors and elders across the EPC are seeking biblical and theological guidance for discipling congregations shaped by these technologies and for making faithful decisions about their use in ministry; and

Whereas the EPC has not yet produced a pastoral or theological statement on digital ethics, algorithmic systems, or technological discipleship; therefore

Be it resolved, that the 46th General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church authorize the formation of an ad interim committee to draft a position paper on "Digital Discipleship and Ethical Engagement in a Technological Age," and explore the formation of a permanent committee that will offer ongoing guidance and recommendations on how the church should engage in the use of, provide instruction about, and set ethical boundaries concerning the rapidly changing technology sector and digital culture.

Submitted:

The Presbytery of the East of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church

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[1] John 17:17, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12

[2] Acts 1:8, Romans 8:9–11

[3] Hebrews 10:24–25, Proverbs 27:17, Acts 2:42–47

[4] Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 10:5, Colossians 2:8

[5] Ephesians 4:2–3, Colossians 3:12–14

[6] Romans 1:25, Matthew 15:8–9

[7] 1 John 4:1, 2 Timothy 4:3–4

[8] James 1:5, Psalm 32:8

[9] Exodus 31:3–5

[10] 1 Corinthians 12:25–26

[11] Romans 12:1–2, Ephesians 6:10–11

[12] Genesis 1:26–27, Psalm 139:13–14, Acts 17:28–29

[13] Galatians 6:5, Romans 14:12, Luke 12:48

[14] Matthew 5:16, 1 Peter 3:15–16

[15] Philippians 4:8

[16] Galatians 2:20, 1 Peter 2:9

[17] Joshua 24:15, Deuteronomy 30:19, Micah 6:8, 1 Corinthians 1:30

Rationale: The Bible warns us over 20 times about false teachers—and today, many of the loudest voices shaping our people aren't pastors, but algorithms. These systems disciple us, liturgically, shaping what we love, fear, and believe—often more than the Word of God or the gathered body of Christ. We're losing formation to a disembodied, digital catechism. But God calls us to embodied community, shaped by Scripture and the Spirit.

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church has historically addressed, with clarity and compassion, the most pressing moral, cultural, and theological issues facing the Church. In our time, one of the most pervasive and yet under-addressed forces shaping Christians is the digital environment - particularly algorithmic systems, persuasive technologies, and artificial intelligence. These forces are not neutral tools; they shape desires, attention, beliefs, community, and even identity.

The Church now finds itself discipling people whose moral imaginations are increasingly formed by digital agents and ecosystems rather than the Word of God and healthy Christian community. Social media algorithms reward outrage and reduce truth to tribalism. Search engines personalize reality. Attention-based business models commodify our habits, thoughts, and relationships. Artificial intelligence now generates content, filters information, and mimics human agency, raising serious questions about human dignity, the image of God, and truth.

EPC pastors and elders are asking:

How do we form mature disciples in this environment?

How do we discern the difference between which emerging technologies are good and valuable and which are wrong and should be rejected?

What biblical principles should guide our ethical engagement with these systems?

Given the depth and complexity of the challenge, the Presbytery of the East will be bringing an ascending overture to the 2026 General Assembly proposing a two-phase approach:

Phase One: Position Paper: This paper would outline a Reformed theological and ethical response to digital and algorithmic culture, algorithmic systems, persuasive technologies, and artificial intelligence for the EPC's long-term guidance.

Phase Two: Permanent Committee Formation: Due to the rapidly evolving nature of technology, a position paper will not be sufficient. A permanent committee should be formed to review practices, including the church's use of technology, the privacy policies of our vendors, and the use of our personal and corporate data. This committee could also deploy best practices and practical support for churches to assess their data use and obligations, and to respond to

technology developments in real time. This committee might also oversee a subcommittee that publishes these best practices and works with other denominations and evangelical bodies to move the culture at large toward more biblically-formed technology ethics.

This two-phase approach allows the EPC to respond both promptly and thoughtfully, pastoring the flock now, while preparing a deeper foundation for the future.