

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Elder Gerrit W. Gong and Scott Morrison Challenge Faith Leaders to Shape the Future of AI and Energy

Salt Lake City, October 17, 2026 — Elder Gerrit W. Gong of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints called on Saturday for benchmarks that hold artificial intelligence accountable for how it represents faith and morality, and former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison urged that the energy debate be taken “out of the pews” and back into practical policy. Their remarks opened the final day of the G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20), which took up two of the G20’s most pressing issues: AI and energy security.

In his keynote on AI, Gong described the Church’s [principles for its use of artificial intelligence](#), organized around spiritual connection, transparency, privacy and security, and accountability, which he helped introduce to Church leaders this year. The Church, which welcomes 32,000 congregations in 195 countries each week, is developing protocols to guard against deepfakes and cautions members against relying on AI for companionship or emotional support. He rejected what he called glib talk of AI becoming godlike.

“As a creation of God, man can create AI, but AI cannot create God,” Gong said. “AI is not and cannot be God.”

The gap between AI’s reasoning and its moral compass is widening, Gong said, and AI models still show religious bias and omit faith-based information when answering life’s critical questions. He pointed to the Consortium for Evaluating Faith and Ethics in AI (CEFE-AI), led by researchers from religious universities, which is now benchmarking how AI systems represent faith. The aim, he said, is not to make AI religious or to promote any one faith, but to build the trust and accountability the public never received from social media. Beyond “humanity’s last exam,” he called for a benchmark to develop AI that is demonstrably trustworthy and anchored in moral values.

“To me, AI will not achieve its full potential until we make it as morally good as it is powerful,” Gong said.

The panel that followed, moderated by Dr. Medlir Mema of the AI Ethics and Governance Institute, offered concrete next steps. Former Egyptian Ambassador to the Holy See Lamia Mekhemar proposed that the IF20 establish two working groups: one on what humanity must preserve and cannot surrender, and one on how to achieve that technically.

“Technology can tell us what is possible, but it cannot tell us what is right. And it cannot tell us what is worth protecting, because the judgement belongs to us, and it has a name: ethics,” Mekhemar said.

Ambassador Muhammadou Kah of the Republic of The Gambia urged G20 leaders and international bodies to embed faith-informed ethical guardrails into data and AI governance, arguing that agreement on red lines is both realistic and urgent.

“We need to ensure that humanity, especially the global south, is never reduced to a data source, a testing ground, or a source of informational extraction,” Kah said.

Dr. DZ Kalman of the Berkman Klein Center and the Shalom Hartman Institute said the speed of AI has made the conversation “default multi-faith,” and urged religious communities to act together on certification.

“Religious groups in particular have an ability to set certification standards for the public,” Kalman said. “I would like to see it become much clearer so the consumers have more choice about which AI models they can use that actually express ethical standards and create financial incentives for companies to do so.”

Dr. Tomicah Tilleman, CEO of the Pro-Human AI Coalition, warned against repeating the mistakes of social media, which was built on a business model designed to be addictive, harvest data and manipulate behavior. AI’s trajectory is not inevitable, he said, and faith communities have an authority few others can match to demand better incentives and designs that protect human agency.

“We need a new and better set of incentives that will optimize this technology for the right thing,” Tilleman said. “It is going to be critical, I would suggest, for faith communities to take advantage of the opportunity to emerge as voices for a new and better set of priorities around the development of AI.”

Tilleman said the current design of AI should not be accepted as a given. A new generation of chips will allow high-quality AI to run on personal devices, keeping data in users’ hands, and communities whose data is used to train a model could become its co-owners. His coalition’s polling, he said, shows that people feel AI is being done to them rather than with them, and middle powers are listening ahead of the 2027 AI summit in Geneva. He urged consumers to demand better options. “In the digital age, our data is our personhood,” Tilleman said. “And it’s very difficult to allow someone to take our personhood and expect to retain our agency going forward.”

In the second plenary, “Energy Needs and Building Peace,” Morrison said climate and energy policy had become an ideological contest that serves neither side.

“The issue of climate is an article of faith on the right and the left, when, frankly, I saw it more as a genuine challenge that needed a solution,” Morrison said. “Until people want to walk out of the pews on this issue and walk back into a policy discussion, then I think it’s going to stay on this rather unhappy path.”

Morrison said the only thing that will truly change the paradigm is technology that makes energy radically cheaper and more reliable, and that governments should invest in science that can be scaled and delivered in developing countries. The surging energy demand of AI, he predicted, may finally draw in the capital needed to solve that puzzle. Asked for one actionable recommendation, he proposed electrifying the health services that faith-based organizations run around the world.

In a video address, H.E. Dr. Mohammed bin Said Al Maamari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman, called on G20 leaders to adopt energy policies that protect future

generations and treat religious and community institutions as “genuine partners in shaping and implementing the pathways of transition.” Ambassador Amr Aljowaily of the African Union Commission said some 600 million Africans, nearly half the continent, live without electricity, and called for universal access and fairer terms of cooperation, including grants rather than loans.

“Energy security is not an abstract policy issue, it determines whether a hospital can keep their lights on, whether a child can study at night, whether a farmer can irrigate a field, and whether a family can afford to cook,” said Professor Husna Ahmad OBE, CEO of Global One 2015.

Professor Azza Karam, President of Lead Integrity, challenged religious communities to look inward and take stock of what the global interfaith movement has, and has not, achieved. “We’re hearing religious politics and political religion far more often than we’re hearing a prophetic voice for the common good,” she said.

Opening the day, IF20 Vice President Katherine Marshall said all Forum sessions have been recorded, with videos, summaries and a report to follow, and that the Forum’s ideas will be carried to G20 governments where they can be most effective.

Highlights from the day’s concurrent sessions:

- **AI Innovation and Human Dignity** — Utah Commerce Commissioner Margaret Busse described the state’s Office of Artificial Intelligence Policy. “Who is AI leaving behind?” asked BYU computer science professor David Wingate. “Is AI blessing our homeless population? What about the mentally ill? What about single moms? Is it strengthening our families?”
- **Looking Ahead: Health and Children** — Veena O’Sullivan, Director of IF20 UK, said the 2027 Forum will rally around helping children not only survive but thrive. “We want the voices of faith because when it comes to violence against children, religious communities have a very important role to play,” said Maria Lucia Uribe Torres of Arigatou International Geneva.
- **Hope from the Ground Up: Faith Communities and a Planet in Crisis** — Darren Parry, former Chairman of the Shoshone Nation, shared his grandmother’s teaching: “When your heart is noisy, you cannot hear the earth. And if you cannot hear the earth, you cannot hear each other.” Panelists also described the spread of rooftop solar and battery storage across facilities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, starting in the global south.
- **How Faith Actors Respond to Disasters** — “Compassion must be organized to create a lasting impact,” said Debra Boudreaux of the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation. “Everyone agrees on great principles, but no one implements them,” said Ambassador Michel Veuthey of the Sovereign Order of Malta. “So it is up to us to be the example.”
- **Faith and Media** — “Young people must not only be protected from the digital world,” said Dr. Elizabeta Kitanovic, CEO of IF20-Europe. “They must be empowered to help shape it.”

Plenary 4, “Technology for Good: Is AI a Modern Miracle or an Existential Threat?”, and Plenary 5, “Energy Needs and Building Peace: Challenges Facing the G20,” took place October 17, 2026, between

8:45 and 11:45 a.m. MDT at the University of Utah Institute of Religion, followed by concurrent sessions from 12:15 to 1:15 p.m. Plenary 5 was moderated by Professor Peter Mandaville of Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs. The Forum will close this afternoon at the Cathedral of the Madeleine with a handoff to the organizers of the 2027 Forum in the United Kingdom, ahead of the G20 Leaders' Summit in Miami on December 14–15. The full program is available at g20interfaith.org/2026-forum-program.

Full speaker bios are available in the [2026 Forum Directory](#).

About the G20 Process

The Group of Twenty, or G20, is the premier forum for international economic cooperation, bringing together the leaders of Earth's most prosperous economies. Collectively, G20 members represent around 80 percent of the world's economic output, two-thirds of the global population and three-quarters of international trade. Throughout the year, representatives from G20 countries gather to discuss financial and socioeconomic issues as well as broader humanitarian issues targeted by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

About the G20 Interfaith Forum

The G20 Interfaith Forum seeks global solutions by collaborating with religious thought leaders and political representatives to help shape the overall G20 agenda. It draws on the vital roles that religious institutions and beliefs play in world affairs, reflecting a rich diversity of institutions, ideas, and values. Through its extensive network of networks, it helps prioritize key global policy goals and point toward practical means of implementation at every level of society.

For more information, please visit www.g20interfaith.org.

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