Synod Charge

Melbourne Synod | 7 October 2026

Members of Synod, brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you.

It is good to be together, from across Melbourne, Geelong and the many communities of this Diocese: parishes, schools, chaplaincies, agencies, cultures and Anglican traditions.

One body in Christ

We come together as one body in Christ. Synod reminds us that we belong to a Church wider than our own parish, ministry, tradition or community.

Saint Paul urges us to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

We have received a remarkable inheritance. For generations, faithful Christians have prayed, proclaimed Christ, planted churches, founded schools and agencies, served their neighbours and passed on the faith.

I stand within that history as the fourteenth Archbishop of Melbourne.

We honour that inheritance, not by preserving every feature of the past, but by receiving the gospel afresh and carrying it faithfully into the world God has given us now.

Next year the City of Melbourne and this Diocese mark a shared 180th anniversary.

That gives us an opportunity to engage afresh with the life of our city and ask how we can serve its people with renewed confidence and hope.

It's all about Jesus

When I was installed as Archbishop last November, I said as plainly as I could: "It's all about Jesus."

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him.

This is his Church, his mission and his harvest.

Our life and hope are found in him.

In this Synod, we begin with Christ, attend again to the work of his Spirit, and ask how we may be faithful to the mission entrusted to us.

The moment before us

Since becoming Archbishop, I have spent much time listening.

I was elected with a clear expectation that I would lead change.

But faithful change does not mean beginning again. It receives the best of our inheritance, names honestly what should not be carried forward, and dares to imagine what, under God, might yet be possible.

Through parish visits, Listening in Lent, the Diocesan Ministry Conference and many other encounters, Louie and I have seen deep love for Christ and his Church: people coming to faith, disciples growing, leaders raised up, churches renewed and communities served with remarkable faithfulness.

I have also heard weariness and anxiety.

Some churches are growing; others are struggling.

Many clergy, lay leaders and volunteers carry heavy burdens.

Too many churches see few children or young people.

In growing communities our Anglican presence is limited, our leadership pathways are not strong enough, and our structures do not always serve local mission clearly.

Longing to belong

Beneath much of this is a longing for stronger relationships, clearer direction, renewed gospel confidence and deeper belonging: to be known, to contribute, to have one's gifts recognised, and to know that one's church, tradition, culture or ministry has a place within our shared future.

Out of that listening, we have begun to identify our priorities for renewal.

The strategy before us is not set in stone. It is a framework for faithful action, learning and continuing discernment.

Melbourne and Geelong are evolving rapidly. New suburbs are becoming the size of cities. Older neighbourhoods are changing.

Many people carry the pressures of housing, cost of living, loneliness, mental ill-health and anxiety about the future.

Public life has become increasingly anxious and fractious.

Next month, Victorians will vote in a state election.

Christians will reach different political judgments, but our allegiance to Christ must shape our participation:

praying for those who govern, speaking truth with charity, upholding human dignity and seeking the common good.

This is where God has placed us.

Renewal will require prayer, courage and change.

I also believe God has given us real possibilities for renewal.

Seeing the harvest

Jesus sees a plentiful harvest

Matthew's Gospel tells us that Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching, proclaiming the good news, and healing.

No town was too small, no village too distant, no person beyond his attention.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus saw their confusion, pain and longing.

He saw people loved by God.

And then he said to his disciples: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few."

The harvest is plentiful

Notice the order. Jesus begins with abundance: the harvest is plentiful. So many people are ready to respond to the Gospel, discover the love of God and be transformed by Jesus!

The workers are few

Only then does he name our experienced reality: the workers are few. We often begin with our own limits, tired leaders, ageing congregations, financial pressures and inadequate structures.

Jesus begins with the harvest. Both are true.

The gap

There is a gap between the harvest Jesus sees and the workers presently available;

between the growing city around us and our capacity to serve it;

between young people who need to encounter Jesus and leaders available to form them.

Pray into the gap

And this is where it gets exciting. Jesus invites us into his supernatural work: "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field." Prayer is what faith does with the gap.

Those invited to pray are named and sent.

Disciples who pray become part of God's answer to their prayer.

The adventure begins.

Prayer cannot simply be one activity within our strategy.

It is its beginning, foundation and continuing life.

I want us to prepare for a diocesan Year of Prayer next year, supported by dedicated leadership and resources, so that our plans arise from dependence upon God rather than confidence in ourselves.

Jesus invites us to see the harvest, pray into the gap and go where he sends us.

A working vision

At the heart of the direction now before us is a working vision:

> ***A renewed Church,***
> ***proclaiming Christ,***
> ***across Melbourne and Geelong,***
> ***so that every person may encounter the love of God.***

These words describe the Church I believe God is calling us to become.

A renewed Church

First, **a renewed Church**. Renewal is God's work.

Plans and structures can serve it, but spiritual life comes from Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

At the Cross, Christ enters the depths of human suffering and sin.

In the Resurrection, God declares that sin and death do not have the final word.

The risen Christ remains Lord of his Church, calling, forgiving, restoring and sending his people.

Every church needs renewal in every generation.

Renewal may mean strengthening what bears fruit, recovering confidence in prayer and mission, rebuilding trust, releasing something familiar or beginning something new.

A renewed Church remains in Jesus.

It prays, listens to the Spirit, makes disciples, speaks about Christ and serves its neighbours.

Where people have been harmed or unheard, leaders must listen, repent and act.

Trust grows through truthfulness, care and accountability.

Renewal also means courage to face reality: to recognise what we can give away, where we need help, where we can partner, and where we may need to welcome a fresh start with grace and humility.

Proclaiming Christ

Second, **proclaiming Christ**.

At my installation, I promised to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, for as long as God gives me breath.

My conviction is unchanged.

Because of the cross, our sins are forgiven.

Because of the resurrection, new life is possible.

Because Christ will return, we have hope for the future.

This is the good news entrusted to the Church.

We must learn again how to share the Gospel in our generation. We will invest afresh in evangelism: encouraging those with gifts in this ministry, equipping local churches in every tradition and preparing for a diocesan Year of Evangelism in 2028.

We also proclaim Christ through worship and sacrament; service, justice and reconciliation; hospitality and pastoral care; protecting the vulnerable; and the love we show our neighbours.

We need a faithful and confident Christian voice in the public life of Victoria.

The Church betrays its calling if it becomes just another interest group arguing for its own survival.

We bear witness to a greater reality: Jesus Christ is Lord;

every person is made in the image of God;

grace, forgiveness, reconciliation and hope are possible.

Across Melbourne and Geelong

Third, **across Melbourne and Geelong**.

We are called to proclaim Christ here, in the places where God has put us.

Each church is called to know its place, pray for it, listen to its people, serve its needs and speak of Jesus.

Our schools are among the largest mission fields entrusted to this Diocese.

I have gathered school heads and chairs and encouraged them to own their Anglican identity, indeed their Christian identity, with confidence - to be clear about what it means and why it matters.

We will continue to celebrate their excellence and service, strengthen the pipeline of school chaplains, and encourage Christian teachers to bear witness with wisdom and integrity.

And we will make plans to start new schools in new neighbourhoods to influence future generations with the Gospel and its values to enrich society.

I am grateful to Bishop Stephen Hale for his help as we have been exploring what might be possible in this area.

Our Anglican agencies have an outstanding reputation for serving people experiencing vulnerability, exclusion and hardship.

I have begun meeting with agency leaders and have asked them to build a closer relationship with me and with the Diocese, and to strengthen the connections between agencies and parishes.

I want our churches and agencies to know one another better and to enrich one another’s life and mission.

The nations have come to Melbourne and Geelong.

Communities worship in many languages and Anglican traditions.

This breadth is one of our great gifts.

It asks us to listen carefully, receive one another's gifts and unite in shared commitment to Christ and his mission.

> *"In just eight months it has been my privilege to consecrate three bishops and to experience the very special pleasure of adding them to our diocesan team as partners in care and oversight.*
>
> *Some have teased me a little about the speed with which this has happened."*

That was Archbishop David Penman in his first Synod Charge more than forty years ago – not three bishops at once though, and the teasing hasn't ceased!

The purpose of our recent changes is to bring episcopal ministry and support closer to clergy, parishes and local communities.

Together, Bishops Paul, Megan, Nigel and Ben will serve across our four renamed and renewed episcopal areas Dandenong, Merri, Geelong and Nunawading, and help us respond to the missional needs of this Diocese.

Please be patient and generous as they settle in!

I also want to offer my sincere gratitude to Bishop Genieve and Archbishop Brad for their advice and support, to Bishop Alison, who has helped during this important transition, and to Bishop Kate for her ministry as priest and bishop and especially in discernment and formation.

Next Tuesday, Bishop Kate will be commissioned as Director of the Holy Name Spirituality Centre. Kate, we pray that your new ministry will become a deep well of prayer, hospitality and renewal for all who come seeking space to listen to God.

So that every person may encounter the love of God

Finally, **so that every person may encounter the love of God**. This keeps our attention looking outwards. The harvest is the people and communities God loves.

Belonging

Every person matters to God. We want more people to hear the good news of Jesus, discover forgiveness and hope, and find a place where they belong. We want children and young people to grow as disciples and be trusted and released as leaders. They belong fully to the Church now.

We want people of every culture and background to be welcomed and able to contribute their gifts. Our churches are visible signs of God's love: proclaiming the gospel, offering prayer and pastoral care, and working for justice, mercy and reconciliation.

To reach every person, we need to work with the whole Body of Christ. That means we need to partner with our brothers and sisters in other denominations.

Since arriving, Louie and I have built good friendships and hosted and prayed with leaders from many different denominations.

I love seeing churches do that locally too.

In recent months, we have sought to respond to rising antisemitism and the fractures it exposes by commissioning Bishop Philip Huggins to help develop Jewish-Anglican relationships, especially with the Royal Commission's response being published in December.

Bishop Philip is preparing prayers with Anglican Overseas Aid for our parishes to use on Sunday 13 December, ahead of the first anniversary of the Bondi attack. We will share these after Synod.

We can all contribute to peace by standing against hatred, building trust and strengthening relationships across difference.

Our calling to reconciliation with First Nations peoples continues through relationship, listening, learning and practical commitment.

Louie and I hosted Provincial First Nations Clergy for a retreat earlier in the year, building on work developed by Canon Glenn Loughrey for which I am very grateful.

Glenn has now concluded his work with us with a series of new artworks, commissioned by the Bishop of Bendigo and myself. The series, Lent to Easter: Walking Country, Awakening Justice, draws on Aboriginal understandings of Country and the Christian movement from Lent to Easter.

I will unveil the paintings here on Friday evening. Please do come and see them. The plan is for the series to travel through the Province before one painting is given to each of our five dioceses. Each will hold part of the story.

And I have appointed Ken Hutton, who has much experience of this ministry, here and in the Northern Territory, to focus on this work in a full-time role and to support First Nations clergy and lay leaders across the province.

Our final measure is not institutional success, numerical size or public reputation, but the kingdom of God: Christ honoured, disciples formed, churches renewed, neighbours loved and communities transformed by the good news of Jesus.

How I intend to lead

The way we lead and work together will shape the kind of Church we become. So, I want to be explicit about five commitments that I bring to my leadership and offer to the whole Diocese.

Audacity: or “Aim High”. I will encourage us to pray in faith for what only God can do, set God-shaped ambitions, and act boldly with our confidence in Christ.

Humility: or “Bow the Knee”. I will encourage our posture to lead us to prayer, to listen and learn, recognising that none of us has all the answers, to be willing to be corrected, to repent and to receive the gifts God has placed in others.

Unity: or “Enjoy it Together”. I will encourage us to work in teams, together, across boundaries, resisting silos and defensiveness. We will choose to celebrate when we see breakthroughs and answers to prayer. We will choose to speak positively about one another. And when relationships are strained, we will speak honestly, directly and with love.

Let me go further. I will encourage us to face difficult questions with patient, theological, pastoral and synodical work.

Synod has an important place in common discernment, but we also need other, safer places to listen, study Scripture and discuss difficult questions graciously. I want our theological colleges and other leaders to help create such spaces. This will take time but it will be worth it.

Generosity: or “Give it Away”. I will encourage us to share people, resources, finances, learning and opportunities so that others may flourish, celebrating fruit wherever God gives it and asking what will strengthen the mission of the whole Diocese. We will give away the Gospel, so that all might hear.

Tenacity: or “Never give up”. I will encourage us to remain faithful, even when renewal is slow, difficult or costly. We will not give up on one another. We will have a long-term, generational vision. We will not stop praying for the lasting fruit that only God can give.

Audacity. Humility. Unity. Generosity. Tenacity.

Aim high, bow the knee, enjoy it together, give it away, never give up.

This is how I intend to lead and how I hope we will treat one another.

Lift your eyes

So, **lift your eyes** with me.

What might God do among us in the years ahead?

I see a Diocese alive with prayer and confident in Christ; churches renewed and turned towards their communities; children and young people growing as disciples and stepping into leadership; new leaders recognised, formed and sent.

I see people meeting Jesus, coming to faith, being baptised and finding a church where they belong.

I see the gifts of every culture and Anglican tradition strengthening our common life.

I see parishes, schools, agencies and diocesan ministries sharing their strengths and releasing more of what we have for mission.

God is already at work in churches and ministries across this Diocese. But there is more. The harvest is plentiful. Look up!

Now, we must tend what God has planted.

We must ask the Lord of the harvest to raise up and send more workers.

And we must be ready to take the next step he gives us.

Can you see what Jesus sees?

Can you see the harvest?

Will you ask him to show you afresh?

Will you ask the Lord of the harvest for workers?

And when he calls, will you go?

For the Harvest

For the Harvest, our Vision and Working Strategy from 2027-2036, gives us a common direction for the coming years.

Its priorities are missional discipleship, leadership development, church revitalisation and church planting.

It calls us to seek renewed churches, a renewed diocesan centre and renewed funding approaches, so that our common life is directed towards Christ's mission.

Our aim is not uniformity, but healthier churches in every Anglican tradition, all pulling in the same direction, aligned to a common cause. Each church discerning their next faithful steps and learning as the work develops.

Over the coming days of Synod, I will talk more about why a shared strategy is needed, what it contains, and the part each of us can play.

And I will ask you to welcome this strategy.

For now, let us approach this work prayerfully: read it carefully, ask questions, listen generously, and listen for what the Holy Spirit is saying.

Ask:

Lord, what are you showing us?

Lord, what are you asking of us?

Lord, where are you sending us?

Whatever decisions we make during this Synod, our confidence remains in Jesus Christ. He is Lord of the Church and Lord of the harvest. The harvest is plentiful.

At my installation, I ended with a fifth-century prayer. I offer it again as we begin this Synod and consider the life and mission entrusted to us.

Let us pray.

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favour; and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name, and finally by your mercy obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**.