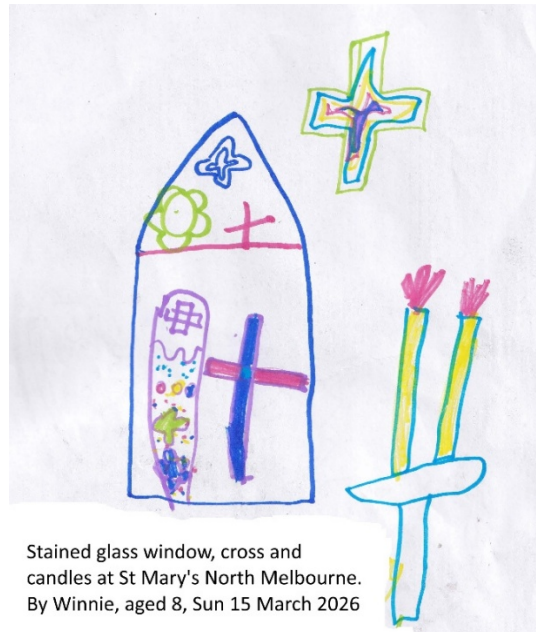




Towards a More Inclusive and Connected Anglican Diocese of Melbourne

Saint Mary's, North Melbourne, *Listening in Lent*, 2026



Stained glass window, cross and candles at St Mary's North Melbourne.
By Winnie, aged 8, Sun 15 March 2026



INTRODUCTION

On 15 March 2026, members of the congregation of St Mary's North Melbourne took part in the *Listening in Lent* exercise. Participants recognised that in the Diocese of Melbourne we are “a diverse church” in a plural, multicultural, multifaith Australian society marked by growing inequity and hostility towards the Other.

In this context, as one parishioner put it, Anglican congregations, schools and agencies can faithfully live out the Gospel by “*creating dialogue in a polarised society.*”

The following feedback is organised under three headings:

(1) ‘**A diverse and inclusive diocese**’

describes strengths parishioners observed and valued in the diocese,

(2) ‘**Diocesan priorities, compliance and culture**’

presents areas experienced as needing change, and

(3) ‘**A more inclusive open future**’

outlines hopes and recommendations for a more inclusive future for the diocese.

This final report of our consultation was endorsed by Parish Council on 19 April.

1. A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE DIOCESE

- I. Each group of participants identified that the diocese is internally diverse and named this diversity as a gift that requires active care and safeguarding. Parishioners spoke of diversity across multiple dimensions, including theological diversity, diversity in worship styles, language and culture across the diocese, and affirmed the rich diversity of sacramental life in parishes. Participants valued the fact that different liturgical practices are supported and diverse cultural practices embraced and were particularly appreciative of liturgical traditions that nurture participation, worship, and music.
- II. This diversity was consistently described not as fragmenting but as mutually enhancing. As one parishioner noted, “*within the Melbourne tradition, there are many ways of worship that allow for diversity.*” Another reflected that these differences were “*complementary ministries and gifts including small but spiritually rich communities ... there's a diversity within our diocese regarding tradition, the style of worship, and, you know, biblical interpretation.*”
- III. This was understood as an “*ecumenical charism*” of “*diversity but belonging together.*” Such a capacity to hold evangelical, Anglo-Catholic, and other traditions together without insistence on homogeneity was appreciated, and valued as a way in which the Church remains connected to “*other times and places.*”
- IV. Support for women's ordination and leadership was named as a concrete expression of inclusion in the diocese, with one parishioner noting, “*We appreciate the history in our diocese of encouragement of ordination and lay leadership of women including in*

senior roles.” This history was seen as integral to the diocese’s identity and as an example of how inclusion is enacted.

Sacrament, Scripture, Liturgy, Prayer, Music, Community at St Mary’s North Melbourne

- V. Reflecting on our own parish, parishioners spoke warmly of the particular charism of St Mary’s North Melbourne, which was consistently described as being centred on the Eucharist. One parishioner summed this up by saying that *“there is a place for everyone to worship and receive communion without discrimination.”* This Eucharistic centre was closely connected to the parish’s commitment to traditional liturgy and a strong musical tradition, alongside preaching that is experienced as both theologically and pastorally formative. As one participant noted, *“we love the quality of preaching in the sense that it is reflectively formed, scripture based.”*
- VI. The Archbishop’s emphasis on prayer as central to what the church is and does and to any renewal within the church was appreciated by participants who valued St Mary’s active prayer life, which is outward looking as well as focused on pastoral care and nurturing faith and devotion. Laypeople leading Sunday ‘Prayers of the People’ at St Mary’s are very attentive to the needs of the world, members of the congregation in particular need, and those who have recently died. Morning prayer, held online usually three times a week, is an important outreach of the congregation to the wider community beyond Sunday worship.
- VII. Participants also valued the multi-generational character of the parish community and its ecumenical openness to people from other churches, denominations, and Christian traditions. Together, the combination of Eucharistic worship, liturgy, prayer and music, thoughtful preaching, and an intergenerational and ecumenical welcome was seen as offering rich formation in Anglican identity and *“the opportunity for depth of spiritual growth”* over time.

Pastoral Care, Chaplains, Justice

- VIII. Participants identified pastoral care, both within congregations and extending into the wider community, as a central and valued dimension of Anglican life in the diocese. This was closely connected to appreciation for chaplaincy ministries in hospitals, prisons, schools, universities, neighbourhoods, and other settings. Chaplaincy was understood as *“primary sector ministries”* where the Church’s presence is expressed through listening, faithful attentiveness and service within a pluralist society.
- IX. Participants also named the importance of the work of Anglican agencies, and the actions taken by the Church in relation to redress to address past abuse. The steps taken by the diocese in relation to reparation for First Nations peoples were also appreciated as concrete expressions of justice and reconciliation. Opportunities for the Church to communicate publicly with the broader community through, for example, messages displayed at St Paul’s Cathedral or on parish billboards, were valued as meaningful expressions of social responsibility.

Theological Education

- X. There was strong appreciation for *“the rich gift that our theological colleges bring to the Diocese,”* particularly in relation to the quality and depth of theological teaching and

discussion they sustain. Participants described Anglicanism in Melbourne as a thinking tradition, one that values careful, reflective engagement with Scripture, theology, and tradition.

- XI. Parishioners also specifically valued our parish’s ongoing connections to Trinity Theological College. Together, these connections between parish life and theological education were understood as vital to forming Anglicans who can think, pray, worship and discern together, equipping us to respond faithfully as a Church to the complexities of contemporary life and the needs of society.

2. DIOCESAN PRIORITIES, COMPLIANCE AND CULTURE

- I. Participants acknowledged the significant financial constraints facing the diocese, while also expressing concern about the impact of recent funding decisions. The withdrawal of funding for hospital chaplaincy was described by some as a *“failure to see chaplaincy as a primary sector ministry,”* and the recent cancellation of funding for theological schools was described by one parishioner as the diocese neglecting to act *“on all our behalfs.”*
- II. Parishioners also spoke about the significant burden of compliance requirements, noting that diocesan assessments, insurance, and safety obligations can be financially and administratively difficult for many congregations to meet. One group observed that professional standards, OHS requirements, and safeguarding practices were sometimes perceived primarily as compliance *“burdens or red tape,”* rather than as shared practices that are necessary in light of past *“bad behaviour by clergy and lay leadership”* and that *“help make churches safe and welcoming”*.
- III. Concerns were also raised about perceived inequities between parishes, particularly where well-resourced congregations are able to fund curates or additional ministry staff, while others struggle to access adequate diocesan support. Some participants felt there was insufficient recognition of the differing needs and capacities of parishes, both financial and organisational. This was reinforced by experiences of diocesan communication that at times seemed to adopt a uniform approach that sometimes overlooked the varied contexts and capabilities of parishes. As one parishioner noted: *“I guess, with parish-Diocese communication there is often a kind of one-sized fits all approach or kind of, you must do this in the lack of kind of understanding which ways different parishes may have, some capabilities, but not all.”*

Culture Challenges

- IV. Participants identified a range of cultural challenges within the diocese that were observed to inhibit dialogue across diversity. The presence was noted of *“dogmatic attitudes”* both in relation to how Scripture is read and interpreted and to how people understand being in relationship with God. There was also concern about a tendency to *“make assumptions”* rather than to engage, converse, or ask questions of one another.
- V. A broader pattern of *“tribalism and factionalism”* was identified, with some participants naming antipathy between groups and a lack of collegiality across the

diocese as practices that need to be let go if the Church is to grow healthily. This pattern was seen as being reinforced by the silo-ing of congregations, where parishes were experienced as quarantined from one another and therefore not learning from what other parishes do well. As one participant observed, “[It’s] a sort of Anglican characteristic that what we do here is none of any other Anglican churches’ business.” At the same time, participants were clear that greater connection should not take the form of uniformity imposed from the diocesan centre, noting, “we don’t want the diocese to say, this is good, everybody has to do that.”

- VI. Parishioners also expressed concern that “growth” was sometimes framed in diocesan discussions primarily in numerical terms, with decision-making shaped more by financial considerations and attendance targets than by “spiritual factors” and clergy and lay wellbeing.
- VII. Participants further identified a gap between stated commitments to be a welcoming church and lived experience. Several spoke of a lack of follow-through from a posture of “all being welcome” to practices that enable people genuinely to feel welcomed and able to belong. This included perceptions of some church schools as elitist, and a tendency toward the exclusion of certain groups, particularly LGBTI people.

3. A MORE INCLUSIVE, OPEN FUTURE

- I. Participants consistently expressed a desire for the Church to be “fully open and inclusive to all people and to support them on their spiritual journey without judgement.” Inclusion was understood as something that must be embodied in practice through welcome that is relational and sustained. Participants spoke of the importance of recognising the “equality of all beings,” of committing to the full inclusion of LGBTI Anglicans, and of fostering interaction with other Christian denominations and with people of other faiths and no faith as part of faithful witness in a plural society.
- II. Participants also emphasised that such inclusion requires deliberate cultural change. As one person noted, “we need to find ways that we can speak across the divides, with people of different persuasions.” This was closely linked to the desire for stronger, more relational structures within the diocese to support the wellbeing of both clergy and lay people, for example, through bishops “knowing and taking an interest” in the wellbeing of those in their care.
- III. A clear longing was voiced for deeper connection beyond individual parishes, so that congregations are supported through collaboration, shared learning, and mutual encouragement across the diocese. The sharing of experience and practice between parishes, which one participant described as “cross-fertilisation” was seen as vital: “You’ve gotta set up mechanisms to bring a sort of global picture” to congregations about challenges and opportunities across the diocese. This included the hope that the diocesan centre would be able to support parishes more effectively in redevelopment projects, “in terms of planning and coordination as well as financial support.”

- IV. Parishioners also expressed a desire to see more genuinely multicultural congregations, including both language-based communities and English-speaking congregations made up of people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, while maintaining continuity of *“Anglican practice.”* Together, these hopes point to a future in which respectful dialogue across diversity, belonging and shared responsibility are held at the heart of diocesan life.

Formation of Lay and Ordained Anglicans

- V. Participants identified the formation of both lay and ordained Anglicans as an area requiring renewed attention and intentional investment. As one parishioner observed, *“Many years ago, we stopped, really properly engaging with the institutions of theological education as a diocese in the training of candidates.”* It was suggested that a deeper and more intentional relationship with the theological schools is needed, not only for the training of ordinands, but for the intellectual and spiritual cultivation of all Anglicans within the diocese.
- VI. Participants expressed the view that formation programmes should be broadened to include *“liturgical, ecumenical, and spiritual studies”* as core components, alongside engagement with a contemporary Code of Ethics. One parishioner reflected that *“we live in a very different world than we have, and I think the church needs to think about the ways in which it means to hold up its own accountability now that the Royal Commission [has established accountability measures].”*
- VII. Attention was also drawn to the practical demands now facing many parishes, with participants noting the need for clergy to be better trained in areas such as parish management and basic accounting, especially as some congregations become smaller. In this context, participants also emphasised the importance of diocesan *“backup”* where capacity is limited.
- VIII. Concerns were raised about a lack of doctrinal coordination across training pathways and curacies. By way of example, participants noted that St Mary’s was seen as an ideal context for the formation of curates for the benefit of the wider Church, yet the financial burden of supporting such training currently falls largely on individual congregations rather than being shared across the diocese. Together, these observations point to a desire for a more integrated, collaborative diocesan approach to formation—one that equips Anglicans to serve faithfully, thoughtfully, and sustainably in changing contexts.

Justice and public advocacy

- IX. Participants expressed a desire for the Church to be known more for its public witness and *“advocacy for peace and justice”* particularly in ways that lead to tangible change for the poorest and most vulnerable. This was described by one parishioner as a call to be *“a more bold, accepting, and an inclusive church in a more kind of concrete action way.”* Participants spoke of the importance of the Church remaining relevant both locally and globally in its expression and public voice, particularly in relation to emerging social challenges.

- X. One such area named was preparedness to respond compassionately and practically to humanitarian crises, including the anticipated challenges of future refugee displacement. As one participant noted, *“one of the things we would like [is] to be ready for the refugee crisis that's gonna come. Prepared for that, and ready to respond, as parishes, and as a diocese, can only be achieved by the diocese working really closely with parishes to make such a thing happen.”* Participants also expressed hope for a renewed commitment to social justice issues more broadly, including *“a greater focus on environmental care and responsibility, First Nations engagements.”*
- XI. Beyond these specific concerns, participants spoke of the Church’s vocation to advocate for a more equal society, including advocacy for and with the poor and excluded, and public engagement within parliamentary and policy processes. This included the desire for a more humane social response to people facing critical or terminal illness, with appropriate attention to spiritual care and dignity at the end of life. Participants also emphasised the importance of fostering stronger connections with social agencies and of reconnecting congregations and schools with Anglican agencies, so that justice-oriented advocacy and service can be sustained through shared resources, building relationships and respectful dialogue.

Immediate Actions

- XII. Participants recommended a number of immediate actions that would give concrete expression to a more inclusive, open future. Central among these was the explicit affirmation of diversity and inclusion, alongside a clear acknowledgement that these require ongoing active care and safeguarding. The need was named for being *“more open”* as a theological commitment, grounded in active hospitality to the Other rather than treated as an abstract idea.
- XIII. Participants also called for the renewed recognition of chaplaincy as a primary sector ministry, and the reversal of what some perceived as the marginalisation of chaplaincy. This included sustained support for chaplaincies in hospitals, prisons, universities, schools, and local communities, where the Church’s witness is often expressed through presence and caring accompaniment of people facing hardships and loss.
- XIV. Alongside this, participants recommended the development of a clear timeline to reinstate funding support for theological education, recognising formation as essential not only to ordained ministry but to the life and health of the whole Church. Such investment was seen as necessary to sustain thoughtful, prayerful, openminded and ethically engaged Anglicans into the future of this diocese.
- XV. Finally, some participants expressed the view that a more inclusive future also requires clarity about ecclesial belonging and communion, recommending that the Diocese of Melbourne *“reject GAFCON and affirm the Diocese of Melbourne as a full, enthusiastic and committed member of the Anglican Community with the Archbishop of Canterbury as the spiritual head and symbolic leader of the global Anglican Communion.”* This recommendation arises from the concerns named throughout this feedback regarding communion, inclusion, and Anglican identity, and reflects a desire to affirm relationships of belonging within the wider global Anglican family.