A REPORT ABOUT GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (GenAI) IN THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report responds to a 2025 Synod resolution directing Diocesan Council to examine the appropriate use of Artificial Intelligence in ministry, in light of Biblical word ministry, theological anthropology, and the Faithfulness in Service code. It has four parts.

PART ONE – SURVEY FINDINGS

A diocesan survey of 63 ministry workers found that current GenAI use is modest (52% use it rarely or never), but attitudes are cautious rather than hostile. Concerns about societal impact (46%) and active "assessment" (43%) outweigh optimistic enthusiasm. The most common uses are administrative work, sermon preparation, and research; direct sermon authorship by GenAI is almost universally rejected (only 3% have tried it). Respondents largely said they want theological grounding and formation-based guidance rather than rigid rules, as well as training and ongoing resources.

PART TWO – THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Drawing on Biblical word ministry, theological anthropology, and Faithfulness in Service, the report argues that GenAI can assist but not replace pastoral authority, spiritual formation, and authentic human presence. It also addresses eschatology (Christian hope isn't rooted in technology) and justice (economic inequality, labour displacement, and the environmental cost of GenAI).

PART THREE – HELPFUL RESOURCES

A list of articles, books, papers, and podcasts sent to the working group in the survey.

PART FOUR – RECOMMENDATIONS

The working group recommends that Synod (1) receive the report, (2) urge caution and theological reflection on the use of GenAI, (3) ask the Bishop and senior clergy to issue guidance clarifying acceptable use, with particular reference to Faithfulness in Service implications, and (4) ask the diocese to provide training for ministry workers on GenAI, in light of word ministry, theological anthropology, and Faithfulness in Service.

OVERALL THEME

The Diocese is at an early stage of discernment, and the report's core findings are that GenAI may serve ministry as a tool, but must never substitute for human pastoral presence, spiritual formation, or the work of the Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTION

At the 2025 Synod meeting of the Anglican Diocese of Armidale, the following resolution was passed: ***That this Synod requests Diocesan Council to appoint a working group to consider the appropriate use of Artificial Intelligence in light of Biblical word ministry and theological anthropology, with reference to Faithfulness in Service. The working group is to report its findings to a future session of Synod.***

This report seeks to fulfil the wishes of Synod in four ways.

Firstly, the working group, established by Diocesan Council, surveyed people involved in ministry in the Diocese to gather information on their practices and attitudes toward generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), including tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, Grok, and Google Gemini. The findings of this survey form Part 1 of this report.

Secondly, in line with the synod motion, the working group has provided some theological reflections on the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in ministry. These reflections are offered in light of Biblical word ministry and theological anthropology, with reference to Faithfulness in Service, while also considering eschatology and justice. This forms Part 2 of this report.

Thirdly, this report will list helpful resources that individuals shared during the survey. These resources form Part 3 of this report.

Finally, this report sets out a number of recommendations that the working group considers the next steps toward providing ministry workers and volunteers with episcopal clarity on the use of GenAI in the ministries of the Diocese. These recommendations form Part 4 of this report.

The working group that compiled this report consisted of Rev. Tim Stevens (Chair), Rev. Matthew Sheridan, and Rev. Tom Melbourne, with editorial assistance from Rev. Jared Lidgerwood, Rev. Steve Cimarosti, Ven. Bernard Gabbott, Ven. Tory Cayzer, Ven. David Robinson, Ven. Ian Millican, and Mrs Sharon Kirk. Everyone who spoke against the original motion at Synod was invited to take part.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the individuals in the diocese who completed the survey featured in Part One of this report. We are also in debt to the Social Issues Committee of the Sydney Diocese, chaired by the Very Rev Sandy Grant, for their paper on *"Christian Ethics, Ministry and Artificial Intelligence"*, along with Stephen Driscoll for his excellent book *"Made in Our Image"*, both of which we drew on in writing Part Two of this report.

* Artificial intelligence was used as a tool in producing this report. It was used in three ways. ***Firstly***, after the working group had examined the survey data themselves, *Claude AI* was used to assist in creating the tables that appear in Part One of this report. It was also used to identify trends in the survey data that might have been missed during the initial human review. ***Secondly***, *Claude AI* was used to create a dot-point summary of the completed report, from which the working group wrote the executive summary. ***Thirdly***, *Grammarly AI* was used to correct spelling and grammar throughout.

PART ONE: PRACTICES AND ATTITUDES IN THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

A Diocesan-wide survey on the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in ministry contexts was conducted in May 2026, distributed to 127 individuals from the "Clergy and Staff Contact" list provided by the registry, with a request that the survey be forwarded to others exercising ministry in our parishes, chaplaincies, or wider ministry support roles.

From this, the working group gathered responses from 63 individuals across a variety of ministry roles. The survey explored patterns of GenAI adoption and use, attitudes, concerns, practical applications, and desired guidance from Diocesan leadership.

The survey consisted of 20 questions spanning quantitative (frequency, multiple-choice) and qualitative (open-text) formats, providing both statistical insight and rich personal perspectives from ministry workers and volunteers.

SECTION 2: DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

2.1 Ministry roles

Respondents represented a broad cross-section of ministry roles within the Diocese. Ordained Vicars and equivalent senior leaders formed the largest single group, reflecting the working groups' main point of contact with parish leadership.

Ministry Role	Count	%
A Vicar equivalent (including The Bishop, The Dean, and Archdeacons)	16	25%
A lay preacher, service leader, or somoene enrolled in the DBT	9	14%
A lay children or youth ministry volunteer	6	10%
An assistant or associate	5	8%
Diocesan support staff	5	8%
Retired Clergy with Permission to Officiate or a locum	5	8%
A MTS Trainee, or someone currently enrolled in theological studies with a view to ordination	5	8%
A Curate or Youth Minister	3	5%
A school, community, or prison chaplain	2	3%
Other (Paid lay worker, AFES staff, SRE teacher, etc.)	7	11%
Total	**63**	

2.2 Gender

Male respondents comprised 71% of the total sample, with female respondents at 29%.

Gender	Count	%
Male	45	71%
Female	18	29%

2.3 Years in the current type of ministry role

Experience levels varied widely across respondents, ranging from less than 1 year to well over 20 years. Several respondents noted their tenure across multiple parishes or roles in aggregate. This breadth of experience offered a spectrum of perspectives on new technology adoption in ministry, not just on GenAI adoption.

SECTION 3: CURRENT USAGE PATTERNS

3.1 Frequency of use

A slight majority of respondents (52%) reported using GenAI in a ministry context less than monthly or never. Active and regular users (weekly or more frequent) accounted for 23% of respondents.

Frequency of Use	Count	%
Less than monthly or never	33	52%
Once every one or two weeks	10	16%
Monthly	6	10%
A few times a week	8	13%
Once or twice a day	3	5%
Multiple times a day	3	5%

3.2 Use of GenAI in ministry

Respondents who used GenAI in ministry were asked about the frequency of use across 11 specific task categories. Across all categories, a significant portion never used GenAI, yet the following areas showed the highest rates of active use:

Task Category	Number of Respondents	% of All Respondents
Sermon & Teaching Preparation: Research, outlines, illustrations, exegesis support, finding redundancies in a sermon, and adapting messages for different audiences.	17	27%
Theology & Research: Summarising theological positions, comparing denominational views, and exploring church history.	16	25%
Administrative Work: Meeting agendas, budgets, policies, newsletters, announcements, and volunteer coordination.	20	32%
Education & Discipleship: Bible study curricula, small group guides, Sunday school materials, and devotionals.	15	24%
Pastoral Care & Communication: Drafting sensitive letters, counselling resource guides, follow-up emails, and grief/crisis support materials.	12	19%
Creative & Worship Content: Liturgy writing, prayer prompts, worship service planning, and creative event concepts.	10	16%
Evangelism & Outreach: Crafting accessible gospel explanations, social media content, and community engagement materials.	7	11%
Vision & Strategy: Brainstorming ministry initiatives, writing mission statements, or planning long-range goals.	6	10%
Translation & Accessibility: Simplifying content for children, non-English speakers, or people with disabilities.	7	11%
Counselling & Support Resources: Summarising research on mental health, addiction, grief, or marriage to support pastoral counselling.	3	5%
Sermon & Teaching Production: Using GenAI to produce sermons or teaching content for you to deliver, either from scratch or with your own research input.	2	3%

Notably, the use of GenAI for full Sermon & Teaching Production (e.g. having the GenAI generate a complete sermon or teaching content for direct delivery) was extremely rare, with only 2 respondents (3%) reporting any such use. This is consistent with qualitative feedback indicating strong reservations about delegating the authorship of sermons to GenAI.

3.3 Perceived Contribution to Ministry

Among those who use GenAI, most find it helpful to some extent. Seven respondents (11%) actively chose to avoid using GenAI in ministry altogether.

Perceived Contribution	Count	%
Extremely helpful	3	5%
Very helpful	7	11%
Moderately helpful	12	19%
Occasionally helpful	20	32%
Useless	2	3%
I deliberately avoid using GenAI	7	11%
(No response / not applicable)	12	19%

SECTION 4: ATTITUDES TOWARD GenAI

4.1 Personal attitudes

Respondents were asked to select all statements that best described their personal attitude toward GenAI in a ministry context. Multiple selections were permitted. The most prevalent attitude was concern about broader societal impacts (46% selected that option), followed by cautious assessment (43% selected 'I'm assessing it').

Attitude	Count	%
I am worried about its broader impact on society	29	46%
I'm assessing it	27	43%
I am worried that it will challenge authentic ministry practice	15	24%
I am worried about its impact on my ability to think for myself	13	21%
I am worried about developing a dependence on it	12	19%
Keen to push boundaries and find creative uses	7	11%
Excited and positive	6	10%

These results reveal a predominantly cautious disposition: fewer than 1 in 5 respondents selected explicitly positive attitudes, while concern-based responses were consistently more prevalent. The number who expressed the attitude 'I'm assessing it', suggests that a significant number of ministry workers are still in an information-gathering phase rather than having reached firm conclusions.

4.2 Perceived attitudes of Diocesan leadership and lay people

When asked to characterise the attitudes of Diocesan leadership and lay people toward the use of GenAI in ministry, respondents reported a mixed picture of apprehension and cautious openness, with a notable proportion (19%) saying they simply did not know.

Perceived Diocese/Leadership Attitude	Count	%
I don't know	12	19%
Apprehensive about its use	20	32%
Open to it, but unsure where it is helpful	22	35%
Open to it, and clear on helpful areas	7	11%
Wanting to develop appropriate uses collaboratively	12	19%
Totally against its use in any capacity	1	2%

SECTION 5: ETHICS, REFLECTION, AND SAFEGUARDS

5.1 Concerns About Appropriateness

Only 13% of respondents (8 people) had ever used GenAI in ministry and wondered whether that particular use was 'allowed', suggesting that for most current users, the question of permissions has not been a significant source of anxiety, though this may partly reflect limited current use rather than deep ethical certainty.

Have you ever used GenAI in your ministry and wondered if that particular use of GenAI was allowed?	Count	%
No	55	87%
Yes	8	13%

5.2 Concerns About Counter-Productivity

A more substantial minority (24%) had paused to wonder whether a particular GenAI use was actually counter-productive, in terms of their time, spiritual growth, or development as a gospel worker.

Have you ever used GenAI in your ministry and wondered if it was counter-productive in terms of your time, effort, spiritual growth, or development as a gospel worker?	Count	%
No	47	75%
Yes	15	24%
(No response)	1	2%

5.3 Learning About GenAI

Close to half of respondents (44%) had actively sought out resources (e.g. talks, podcasts, blogs, books, or journal articles) to better understand GenAI and its implications for ministry. Respondents specifically mentioned 'Made in Our Image' by Stephen Driscoll, John Lennox's book on GenAI, and the John Anderson podcast. A comprehensive list of helpful resources noted by respondents can be found in part three of this report.

Have you ever listened to a talk or podcast, read a blog, journal article or book in an effort to learn more about the use of GenAI in ministry, positive and negative?	Count	%
Yes	28	44%
No	34	54%
(No response)	1	2%

5.4 Personal Safeguards

More than half of respondents had put some form of personal rule, habit, or safeguard in place governing their use of GenAI. The majority of these were informal rather than formally documented.

Have you put any personal rules, habits, or safeguards in place for your use of GenAI?	Count	%
Yes, informally	29	46%
Yes, formally	7	11%
No	26	41%
(No response)	1	2%

SECTION 6: PERCEIVED FUTURE IMPACT ON CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

When asked about the likely future impact of GenAI on the practice of Christian Ministry, the vast majority of respondents believed there would be at least some impact, with 27% anticipating a great or very great impact.

To what extent do you think that GenAI will impact the practice of Christian Ministry?	Count	%
To a very great extent	9	14%
To a great extent	8	13%
To some extent	41	65%
To a minor extent	3	5%
Not at all	2	3%

This sense that GenAI will have real, even if uncertain, consequences for ministry is broadly consistent with the cautious but engaged attitudes reported above. Most respondents are not dismissing the technology, even if many are not yet regular users.

SECTION 7: QUALITATIVE THEMES

Open-text responses across questions 19, 20, and 21 were analysed thematically. Five major themes emerged:

7.1 GenAI in Sermon Production is a Recognised Boundary

The most consistently recurring theme across all qualitative responses was a strong shared intuition that GenAI should not be used to produce sermon content for direct delivery. This view was expressed across roles, experience levels, and even among the most positive users:

> ***"It is a helpful tool. But it is only a tool. It should never be used to write sermons."***
>
> ***"The main place I CAN'T see myself using it is in sermon and bible study creation. I feel I need to labour over the text, allow it to permeate me, let my subconscious chew on it, pray about it."***
>
> ***"We need our ministry staff to be working on their theological understanding and not become lazy or careless in this area."***

Only 2 respondents (3%) reported any use of GenAI for direct sermon production, confirming broad consensus: research assistance is acceptable; authorship is not.

7.2 GenAI as a Research and Administrative Tool

Many respondents who viewed GenAI positively did so specifically in the context of research assistance and administrative efficiency, framing it as a powerful search and synthesis tool rather than a creative agent:

> ***"GenAI works as a very effective lexicon, and draws in far more sources than the typical pastor's bookshelf would have."***
>
> ***"I have used GenAI as, effectively, a powerful search engine to find sources, which I think is fine."***
>
> ***"GenAI is great for fetching theological positions held by historical figures and telling me where to read them."***

Administrative uses mentioned included drafting employment contracts, creating risk assessments, generating children's ministry materials, building parish governance summaries, and producing payroll automation tools.

7.3 Desire for Theological Guidance Over Rules

A recurring theme in responses to the guidance question was a preference for theologically-reasoned principles rather than prescriptive rules. Respondents wanted the Diocese to help them think from Scripture rather than impose top-down restrictions:

> ***"I would like the diocese to help us think theologically about GenAI, not to give us hard-and-fast rules."***
>
> ***"I think there is more work to be done on the theological side to inform our practice. I don't want to start with practice and work back."***

> ***"Ministers have spent between 3 and 6 years formally preparing for the role they now hold. We can trust them to be thoughtful and considered about their use of GenAI. I think an awareness document is helpful. A 'law' would be received poorly."***

This theological grounding was seen as the more durable and trustworthy path compared to reactive or legalistic rule-making.

7.4 Concerns About Authenticity and Spiritual Formation

Several respondents raised concerns about whether the use of GenAI could undermine authentic ministry, particularly the spiritual discipline involved in deep engagement with Scripture, prayer, and the formation of a gospel worker:

> ***"I believe we serve our congregations not just by producing material or sermons but by being thoroughly transformed by the word of God before we do any of that."***
>
> ***"I worry about developing a dependence on it and its impact on my ability to think for myself."***
>
> ***"GenAI doesn't have the Holy Spirit, so it shouldn't be relied on at all for any ministry context involving pastoral care, preaching or teaching."***

These concerns were not merely practical but theological, touching on questions of what it means to be a Spirit-guided minister of the Word.

7.5 Practical and Creative Applications

Among those who reported useful experiences, several practical and creative applications were highlighted that may not be widely known within the Diocese:

- Using GenAI as a reflective thinking partner: posing ethical dilemmas or personal reflection prompts to structure self-examination.
- Song selection assistance: 'Here is my passage and big idea, suggest 2–3 songs for opening, post-sermon, and closing.'
- Attaching parish governance documents and asking GenAI questions about them for quick reference.
- Generating custom images for children's talks when stock images are unavailable.
- Speech-to-text transcription for slow typists.
- Summarising and formatting meeting transcriptions and data for administrative purposes.
- Using it as a 'powerful search engine' for locating theological sources and liturgical calendar references.

SECTION 8: DESIRED GUIDANCE FROM THE DIOCESE

When asked for guidance from the Diocese on GenAI, respondents consistently expressed the same set of needs. These can be summarised as follows:

8.1 Ethical Framework and Principles

The most common request was for a clear ethical or theological framework, not a blanket ban or rigid rules, but thoughtful principles derived from Scripture that can guide individual discernment:

"Theological and methodological guidance, rather than do's and don'ts."

"A statement on boundaries for its use — some kind of ethical standpoint — and at the same time some prompting as to how it can be used helpfully."

8.2 Clarity on Specific Boundaries

Respondents wanted clarity, particularly regarding: sermon and teaching preparation; the handling of confidential and privileged information; and the application of copyright and IP considerations to GenAI-generated content.

8.3 Training and Resources

Several respondents requested training opportunities (e.g. workshops/training and resources) to help ministry workers engage competently and wisely with GenAI. A desire was expressed for guidance to be “living and updatable” rather than static.

8.4 Assisting ministry teams to be wise

A small number of respondents noted that they would benefit from guidance that helps parish and diocesan teams arrive at shared approaches, particularly in multi-staff contexts where individual variation in GenAI use can create inconsistency.

SECTION 9: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following summary captures the key insights from the 2026 Diocese GenAI survey across 63 respondents:

Usage

- The majority of respondents (52%) use GenAI in ministry rarely or never, with only 22% using it weekly or more frequently.
- The most commonly used ministry applications are administrative tasks (32% active use), sermon and teaching preparation (27%), and theology and research (25%).
- Full sermon production by GenAI is extremely rare (3%) and is broadly viewed as inappropriate by respondents across all roles.
- Outside of ministry, respondents commonly use GenAI for cooking, writing, fitness planning, family research, and workplace productivity tasks.

Attitudes

- The dominant attitude is cautious assessment: 43% are still actively evaluating GenAI's role in ministry, while fewer than 1 in 5 expressed unambiguously positive sentiment.
- The most prevalent concern is broader societal impact (46%), followed by concern about authentic ministry (24%), cognitive dependence (21%), and impact on personal thinking capacity (21%).
- Most respondents (87%) have not experienced uncertainty about whether a specific GenAI use was 'allowed', but 24% have wondered whether a particular use was counter-productive.

Ethics and safeguards

- 57% of respondents have some form of personal safeguard in place for their GenAI use, though most of these are informal.
- 44% have sought out learning resources on the topic, suggesting meaningful engagement with the question beyond their immediate practices.

Impact

- 92% believe GenAI will impact Christian ministry to at least some extent, with 27% anticipating a great or very great impact.
- This broad sense of anticipated impact contrasts with the current low rate of regular use, suggesting that many respondents are watching and waiting.

Guidance needs

- Respondents consistently request theological grounding over prescriptive rules. They want the Diocese to help them think from Scripture, not simply be told what to do.
- Key areas for clarification include: sermon preparation vs. production; confidentiality and privacy; copyright and intellectual property; and the line between research and authorship.
- A desire exists for training, resources, and collaborative exploration of GenAI's place in ministry, with a particular desire for guidance rather than one-off policy statements.
- There is strong consensus that human authenticity, pastoral presence, and personal spiritual formation cannot and should not be delegated to GenAI, and that Diocesan guidance should reinforce rather than undermine this conviction.

In summary, this survey highlights that the Diocese is at the beginning of a discernment process. The breadth of perspectives, from enthusiastic early adopters to principled resisters, represents a diversity of opinions that Diocesan guidance will need to hold together with wisdom and care.

PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

As Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) rapidly advances, it raises important questions for society at large, especially within the Christian community and ministry. This briefing provides an overview of these concerns, focusing on key themes rather than exhaustively covering every detail.

SECTION 1: BIBLICAL WORD MINISTRY

The increasing integration of GenAI in church activities raises important questions about its role in ministry. Should pastors use GenAI to help write sermons? Is it suitable for translating sermons, developing Bible studies, or even composing prayers and hymns? Additionally, can GenAI tools be used responsibly to prepare church communications, design graphics, or summarise theological and ethical issues? Our theological reflection on these things will have a significant impact on our ministry.

1.1 Teaching with Integrity

GenAI's role in ministry, especially in sermon and teaching prep, offers benefits but also poses significant theological risks. Since GenAI systems are not theological authorities, they cannot accurately interpret or teach the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15). These tools generate content based on patterns in data, which can include biases, errors, hallucinations, or superficial theology.[1]

Heavy reliance on GenAI without solid theological training and pastoral oversight can lead to sermons that sound refined but lack spiritual depth, or worse, contain doctrinal errors. Therefore, ministry leaders must stay vigilant, engage in continuous learning, and possibly view GenAI-generated content as a helpful aid rather than a replacement for diligent exegesis and preparation.

1.2 The genuine presence of God in Gospel ministry

Effective preaching and faithful teaching are more than just delivering accurate information; they are acts of worship rooted in the preacher's personal encounter with the Word. While GenAI can imitate a sermon's style or produce emotionally compelling language, it cannot genuinely experience conviction, repentance, joy, or worship.

A sermon might be well-structured and full of vivid illustrations but remain hollow if it doesn't reflect the preacher's own transformation by the gospel. Similarly, GenAI-generated prayers and hymns might use correct theological language but lack the heartfelt depth that comes from genuine communion with God. They can miss the personal lament or awe that authentic human worship uniquely expresses. Creating ministry content without genuine spiritual engagement risks reducing it to a performance, potentially fostering a mindset that relies on human or technological effort rather than God's grace.

1.3 Formation and Discipleship

Another genuine concern regards spiritual formation. If pastors become dependent on GenAI tools for key ministry tasks, what kinds of habits are being cultivated?

[1] A hallucination, in the context of GenAI, is when the model invents fake citations, fabricates statistics, or states falsehoods as if they were true. This data then reinforces the GenAI model's belief that it is true, as GenAI outputs are commonly used to develop new GenAI models.

The task of engaging with difficult passages, studying Scripture in community, or prayerfully discerning application is an inherently formative activity. GenAI might shortcut these tasks, but cannot genuinely replace them.

Pastoral ministry is ultimately about fostering theological wisdom and spiritual maturity, both personally and within the church. Over-reliance on GenAI might cause leaders to prioritise speed and convenience over depth and faithfulness, potentially leading to a decline in their spiritual disciplines. Similarly, congregations may start to value efficiency over Spirit-led discipleship and shared discernment.

SECTION 2: THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

2.1 Human Identity and the Image of God

In Christian belief, humans are uniquely created in God's image, bearing the dignity and responsibility of moral and relational beings. This image involves more than just intellectual or rational capacity; it encompasses our embodied existence (Col 1:15), our ability for relationships, moral judgment, creativity, and participation in God's work. Fundamentally, God's calling is not merely to "do" but also to "be." We are called to be creatures in covenant with the Creator, reflecting His character, depending on Him, and acting with love and justice. Greater reliance on machines for reasoning, creativity, or emotional engagement risks diminishing our God-given role as His vice-regents, as those who exercise wisdom, responsibility, and care in the world.

The push to develop machines that imitate or surpass human intelligence may stem from a deeper spiritual desire for control, mastery, or even immortality. Such pursuits could unintentionally redefine humanity in ways that conflict with our true theological purpose, creating intelligence in our own image rather than God's. This also poses the danger of displacing worship; where we once sought guidance, knowledge, and meaning from God, it is increasingly easy to turn to machines promising efficiency, insight, and personalised answers.

This raises a significant theological concern; GenAI challenges our understanding of ourselves and, if unchecked by theological and ethical frameworks, can distort our posture before God. When a created object becomes our ultimate source of hope or dependence, we have replaced God with an idol. Therefore, we must address these developments proactively and without despair, trusting in the Creator, who guides everything according to His purposes, while also responding with the theological and pastoral wisdom that reflects His image.

2.2 Human growth and maturity

Some GenAI initiatives are deliberately connected to broader efforts to enhance or surpass human abilities, whether in intelligence, lifespan, or physical performance. It's likely that more will emerge. These initiatives often equate human identity mainly with mental or informational qualities, viewing the body as secondary or obsolete.

This perspective conflicts with the Christian doctrine of the unity of body and soul, as seen in the incarnation, where the Word became flesh, and in the resurrection, where Jesus Christ, the risen man, became the first to embody an imperishable, immortal body.

Human growth and maturity often develop through challenges and limitations encountered in interactions with the physical world. The constraints we currently face, such as mortality, labour, and frustration, are part of God's just and necessary plan for us as His creatures.

Nonetheless, within His providence, even these challenges are transformed into opportunities for gospel renewal and hope for the future. Technologies aiming to eliminate or minimise human toil in this world by achieving instant, total human optimisation may inadvertently weaken the processes by which the Holy Spirit works to develop spiritual maturity and godly virtues, all within God's sovereign plan. On this, it is helpful to recognise how GenAI can easily feed the desire seen in the Garden of Eden, expressed in our continual desire to become like God.

From a theological perspective, this raises an important question: Are we attempting to break free from the limits God has set? Or are we focusing on learning to live wisely within those boundaries? Additionally, are we pursuing a human-made route to salvation that clashes with the divine path?

2.3 Community and Relational Authenticity

Humans are relational beings, created by God to live in community with others (Genesis 2:18). This inherent need for connection is both social and theological, mirroring the relational nature of the Triune God. Today, digital tools influence how relationships are formed, with some GenAI systems, including emerging GenAI "companions," aiming to fulfil emotional and social needs by simulating friendship and romantic interactions.

Although these tools can respond sensitively, they lack the mutuality, presence, and spiritual or moral depth fundamental to human relationships. Genuine connections involve vulnerability, commitment, and the ability to love and be loved. Importantly, they also depend on physical touch, an essential aspect of embodied care that fosters human flourishing from infancy.

The church, as the body of Christ, is called to embody and nurture authentic community by creating spaces where people can experience real relationships that mirror God's love. In a culture dominated by convenience and disconnection, the church's practices, such as shared worship, hospitality, and in-person fellowship, present a countercultural vision of community. This approach is rooted in the dignity of being physically present and showing personal vulnerability, something that GenAI claims and pretends to offer but cannot.

2.4 Human Moral Agency

GenAI systems can perform tasks that appear intelligent or morally right, but they lack true moral reasoning or accountability. Some creators or supporters may assert they do, but we should, and are right to question what that really means. Is it genuine moral capacity, or simply a functional reinterpretation of moral reasoning, and whose morals are they representing? This highlights the importance of human responsibility in shaping, deploying, and regulating these technologies in accordance with principles of truth, justice, and love. In light of this, it is helpful to remember that our fallenness flows from us into the things we create. It is tempting to think otherwise.

While GenAI brings new tools and capabilities, the underlying ethical issues often stem from human motives. Vices such as pride, greed, and disregard for others can be intensified by technology, but are not caused by it. Christian theology highlights that moral danger originates from human sin rather than the technology itself. Consequently, theology advocates for repentance, accountability, and wise stewardship of the technologies we develop and employ. Recognising sin does not lead to fatalism; Christian ethics remain hopeful, believing that, through the Spirit's power, human hearts can be transformed by God's Word.

2.5 Wisdom, Knowledge, Truthfulness and Discernment

As GenAI systems improve at synthesising, analysing, and presenting information, they are increasingly regarded not just as tools but as trusted sources of interpretation. This development raises concerns about how users perceive truth, authority, and knowledge itself.

Biblical wisdom is not just about having accurate information; it develops through a relationship with God, the source of all wisdom, and with others with whom we strive to live wisely. The church plays a vital role in fostering habits of reflective judgment, prayerful questioning, and ethical engagement, especially in a culture that values speed, efficiency, and simplicity.

While GenAI can be a helpful tool, it cannot replace the spiritual and relational aspects of gaining knowledge and understanding, which ultimately come from the Lord's mouth (Proverbs 2:6). Additionally, wisdom often stems not from being right but from making mistakes. It grows through humility, and technology, including GenAI, can sometimes mask this process.

GenAI challenges our commitment to truthfulness as Christians. Besides the evident issues like deepfakes and disinformation, new, subtler forms of deception are emerging, such as people passing off GenAI-created content as their own. Even without harmful intent, these actions can weaken the virtues of honesty and personal integrity. As such behaviours become widespread in the community, they may be understood as being harmless or efficient, but we are called to live and work in a counter-cultural way.

In light of this, we are reminded that Scripture urges believers to act sincerely from the heart (Colossians 3:22). The church must help believers navigate these complex issues with wisdom and courage, resisting the tide of technological manipulation. In doing so, we testify to the God of truth, the one who examines our hearts (1 Thess 2:4) and who sees through any pretences (Galatians 6:7), by maintaining integrity in our words and actions.

2.6 The impact of GenAI on young (& older) people

Emerging generations are increasingly being influenced from a young age by digital tools, virtual environments, and GenAI interactions. Their social, moral, and educational growth occurs in a world considerably different from that of earlier generations.

The urgent issue is how their engagement with GenAI impacts relational and emotional development. GenAI-driven platforms (e.g. chatbots that mimic friendship or give advice) are increasingly used by young people. These systems can be attractive: they're always accessible, seem non-judgmental, and respond with emotional sensitivity. However, they risk creating false expectations about relationships, replacing genuine human interactions with artificial ones, and promoting introspection without accountability.

While such technologies may provide a form of companionship, they lack the mutuality, physical presence, and moral complexity vital for true human growth and spiritual maturity. How will the church respond wisely and faithfully, supporting not only children and youth but also parents, caregivers, teachers, and youth ministers?

All these things relate in obvious ways to the younger people we minister to, but we must not forget that GenAI could feasibly affect older people in similar ways. As GenAI becomes harder to identify and is undoubtedly used for deceitful purposes, they could find themselves being the victims of deception. It is also feasible that, in the near future, it might become routine for a lonely widow or widower to import a sample of their deceased spouse's speech and manner of speaking to create a GenAI avatar

that mimics their deceased spouse or partner, allowing them to speak with or interact with the avatar, with the goal of reducing their sense of loneliness.

In all of this, the growing divide between those proficient in GenAI-enabled systems and those who are not offers both challenges and opportunities for the church's effort to foster authentic cross-generational fellowship. Christians can embrace the opportunities technology provides, but not at the expense of fostering mutual love and enhancing multi-generational discipleship within the body of Christ.

SECTION 3: FAITHFULNESS IN SERVICE

Our Anglican Faithfulness in Service (FiS) code of conduct includes several policies that interact with the use of GenAI in ministry. The following are listed in the order they appear in FiS, not in order of importance.

3.1 Acting in the Best Interests of Those Ministered To (4.7)

Standard 4.7: *When exercising pastoral ministry you are to act in the best interests of those to whom you are ministering. You must recognise any potential conflict of interest and take steps to resolve it.*

Comment: This is a helpful principle for evaluating any GenAI tool; does using it serve the person being ministered to, or primarily serve the minister's convenience?

3.2 Confidentiality in Pastoral Relationships (4.9, 4.24–4.25)

Standard 4.9: *You are not to disclose confidential information received in pastoral ministry to your spouse, family, friends, colleagues or any other person without the consent of the person providing the information, except where:*

- *the information is known publicly;*
- *as required or allowed by law; or*
- *it is in the public interest (such as to avoid the risk of serious injury or harm to any person).*

Standard 4.24: *When you are seeking or providing pastoral supervision you should not identify any person and only disclose what is necessary to obtain the supervision or advice.*

Standard 4.25: *In most cases you should tell someone who is to give you confidential information of the limits to confidentiality and the arrangements for supervision or obtaining advice. This should be done before the disclosure of the confidential information, such as at the beginning of an interview.*

Comment: This is critical for GenAI use because entering details from pastoral conversations (grief counselling, confessions, disclosures of abuse) into a commercial GenAI system could constitute an unauthorised disclosure, even though the engine is a computer; there is still a question about confidentiality.

3.3 Recognising the Limits of Competence (4.12, 5.21)

Standard 4.12: *Recognise the limits of your skills and experience. Do not undertake any ministry (such as relationship counselling, counselling for abuse or addictions, or an exorcism) that is beyond your competence or the role for which you have been employed or trained. If in doubt seek advice. A person who requires specialised help should be referred to an appropriately qualified person or agency.*

Standard 5.21: *You need to recognise your own limits and not undertake any ministry that is beyond your competence or certification or that is not part of the role for which you have been or are being*

trained. Arrange for any such ministry to be provided by an experienced person or specialist agency. This applies particularly to outdoor or adventure activities such as canoeing, abseiling and hiking. Refer any child who requires specialised help (e.g. counselling for depression, abuse or addiction) to an appropriately qualified person or agency.

Comment: Clergy and church workers should recognise the limits of their skills and experience and not undertake any ministry that is beyond their competence or the role for which they have been employed or trained.

This applies in reverse, too; using GenAI for tasks it is not competent to perform (e.g. nuanced grief support, abuse disclosures, spiritual direction) without human oversight would constitute a failure of this standard. Using GenAI could also mask the fact that a ministry worker/volunteer is not competent in the ministry they are exercising.

3.4 Technology Communication Principles (4.32, 4.35)

Standard 4.32: *Any communication in a ministry context, whether formal or informal, is a pastoral encounter. Communication may be face-to-face, in writing or involve some form of technology. Consider the appropriateness and impact of your words and actions.*

Standard 4.35: *When considering using technology for communication, you should apply the same principles as you would in any other form of communication. Minimise the risk of harming others or yourself by asking:*

- *is this an appropriate way to communicate about this matter?*
- *should this communication be confidential? If so, do not use electronic media;*
- *how will the language and images used impact upon the person receiving the communication and any other person who may access it?*
- *could the circumstances of the communication, including the language and images used, suggest your relationship with the other person(s) is inappropriate?*

Comment: These standards ask helpful questions about communication that are relevant to using GenAI tools as communication aids.

3.5 Record-Keeping and Privacy (4.36–4.37)

Standard 4.36: *If you are engaged in individual pastoral ministry, consider keeping a factual record of your daily pastoral activity. Record details such as the date, time, place, participants, subject, and any proposed action arising from each activity. Record personal remarks accurately.*

Standard 4.37: *You need to know the relevant principles of the applicable privacy legislation in relation to the collection, use, disclosure and management of personal information. These have implications for:*

- *the publication of personal information in church directories, newsletters, rosters and websites;*
- *the recording and publication of voices and images of individuals; and*
- *the use and security of all personal information, and especially sensitive information, held by clergy and church workers or in church offices.*

Comment: GenAI tools that store, process, or log sensitive pastoral or other information directly implicate these standards.

3.6 Risks of Technology — Loss of Control of Information (4.35 guidelines)

Guidelines 4.25: *Clergy, church workers, and other participants in church activities – including children – often communicate using text and picture messaging, email, instant messenger services and chat rooms, video conferencing, blogs and internet forums, websites, social networking sites, and other forms of electronic interaction.*

Remember information posted online is tracked and can be retrieved. Dangers associated with the use of communication technology are not always appreciated by clergy and church workers. These dangers include:

- *losing your privacy;*
- *losing control of information (such as photographs or emails);*
- *ignoring personal security settings on social networking sites;*
- *being unable to determine if people are who they say they are;*
- *being exposed to unwanted information; and*
- *becoming a victim of cyberbullying when someone sends or spreads threatening or embarrassing information.*

Comment: FiS explicitly lists dangers of communication technology that map remarkably well onto GenAI risks: losing your privacy; losing control of information (such as photographs or emails); being unable to determine if people are who they say they are; and being exposed to unwanted information. To this list, GenAI adds the risk of model training itself on submitted data, data breaches, and outputs that misrepresent people.

3.7 Communication with Children (5.45–5.46)

Standard 5.45: *If you have overall responsibility in a Church body, you should ensure there is a policy for clergy and church workers which deals with the use of technology to communicate with children in pastoral ministry.*

Standard 5.46: *When considering using technology for communication, you should apply the same principles as you would in any other form of communication with children. You should take care that:*

- *it is an appropriate way to communicate with a child;*
- *it is an appropriate way to communicate about the matter;*
- *you are sensitive to the impact of your words, images and actions on the child and any other person who may access it;*
- *you do not use sexually suggestive, explicit or offensive language or images; and*
- *the circumstances of the communication, including the language and images used, do not suggest your relationship with the child is inappropriate.*

Comment: Churches and ministries need to have a policy that addresses clergy and church workers using technology to communicate with children in pastoral ministry. Any deployment of GenAI tools in youth or children's ministry contexts would need to sit within such a policy and meet the standards of 5.46.

3.8 Intellectual Property (6.10, 6.25)

Standard 6.10: *You are not to take property belonging to others, including intellectual property.*

Standard 6.25: *You should comply with copyright legislation. Ensure that any licences for the use of copyright material are current and complied with and that copyright is duly acknowledged.*

Comment: Clergy and church workers are not to take property belonging to others, including intellectual property, and they should comply with copyright legislation and ensure that any licences for the use of copyright material are current and complied with. GenAI has the potential to output other people's copyrighted material verbatim without it being obvious, which obviously puts church workers at risk.

3.9 Honesty and Integrity (6.11)

Standard 6.11: *You are not knowingly to make statements that are false, misleading or deceptive.*

Comment: Using GenAI to draft sermons, pastoral letters, or correspondence without disclosure raises genuine questions about integrity, particularly if the output contains hallucinated scripture references, fabricated statistics, or is presented as the minister's own authentic work.

SECTION 4: TECHNOLOGICAL APOCALYPSE AND CHRISTIAN HOPE

Whether viewed as existential hope or doom, the stories about the development of GenAI prompt urgent questions regarding humanity's future, the boundaries of human power, and our final destiny.

Some anticipate that advanced GenAI could surpass human control, causing imminent upheaval, dislocation, and possibly human extinction. In such cases, GenAI not only replaces human labour but may also make humanity irrelevant. While debated, these scenarios act as modern parables of real anxiety, particularly concerning human responsibility and divine judgment.

Some caution that these predictions overstate current and future GenAI abilities and ignore the complexity of genuine (human) intelligence and God's sovereignty.

Christian eschatology provides a helpful perspective. It suggests that the future is directed by God's teleological purposes in Christ, in whom all things in heaven and on earth will be unified (Eph 1:9–10). The future is ultimately dedicated to Christ, not to technological systems. Any threats from GenAI cannot surpass God's sovereign and eternal plans in Him.

Christian theology suggests that, regardless of whether GenAI is a catastrophic threat or not, the fundamental danger is not GenAI itself but the persistent problem of sin. Satan and human rebellion are the primary sources of evil. While GenAI can intensify these issues, it does not create them.

Moreover, Christian hope is rooted not in technological advancement but in the anticipated renewal of all creation through Christ. Therefore, our ultimate hope depends not on innovation or avoiding disaster, but on Jesus Christ's return, who will judge evil, offer forgiveness, and establish the new creation.

SECTION 5: JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

As GenAI systems grow more powerful and widespread, they raise important questions about justice, fairness, and equality in society. Machine learning and automation are neither inherently good nor bad; their impact depends on the character and intentions of those who deploy them. Already, biases in algorithms, exploitative labour practices, and systems that prioritise efficiency over human dignity demonstrate GenAI's potential to reinforce injustice. Christian theology teaches us that technological power, when disconnected from wisdom, truth, love, and justice, can often deepen harm.

5.1 Economic Inequality

A key concern is that emerging GenAI technologies are controlled by a small group of powerful individuals and companies. While they often frame their goals in humanitarian terms, these objectives are often self-serving and aimed at consolidating influence and wealth among a select few. Such dynamics threaten to reshape society based on a technocratic and sometimes eugenic logic, valuing life only if it aligns with the narrow definition of “progress” set by the few.

In addition, we note that GenAI tools are commonplace in creating content for social media platforms that is deliberately designed to undermine authenticity, with the goal of addicting users to the content, usually for financial gain through advertising revenue.

This all conflicts with the core Christian belief in the equal dignity of all people created in God's image and the gospel's message that God’s divine power is made perfect in weakness. However, the gospel not only criticises injustice but also supports the church’s hopeful stance to oppose evil. In the era of GenAI, the gospel encourages us to testify to the future kingdom, where justice will flow abundantly, like water (Amos 5:24).

5.2 Labour, Displacement, and Human Value

Experts warn that GenAI will reshape the economy by displacing both routine and skilled jobs. Unlike past automation, advanced GenAI might automate nearly all labour, raising fears that humans could become economically unnecessary.

This concern echoes previous periods in human history, particularly when blue-collar workers had to adapt to technological shifts. As in the past, the advantages of rising economic productivity are unlikely to be distributed evenly. Christian anthropology teaches that work is more than just an economic activity; it is a divinely ordained means of engaging in God's creative plans.

5.3 Environmental concerns

There is significant tension between GenAI and the environment, particularly the reported heavy demands for energy, water, and land by data centres, alongside concerns about greenhouse gas emissions. As Biblical anthropology makes clear humanity’s God-given dominion over nature, the use of GenAI must be considered against our call to be faithful stewards, evaluating its ecological costs against its purported services to human efficiency and flourishing.

SECTION 6: CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Beneath the numerous specific concerns mentioned earlier, such as those about ministry practice, justice, identity, or technology, lie deeper, more fundamental theological questions. What does it mean to be human? What is the purpose of intelligence? How should we view technology considering God’s providence, human sin, and the gospel’s influence? In an era of swift change, where can we find genuine Christian hope?

Considering the broad questions about GenAI in Christian life and community, our shared goal should be to seek wisdom through prayerful decision-making. This approach must be grounded in Scripture, attentive to our times, and guided by the gospel’s call to truth, justice, and human dignity in Christ. No matter the challenges ahead, our hope must be anchored in the gracious God who governs all of history and who will one day make all things new.

PART THREE: HELPFUL RESOURCES

Articles

- Why the Post-Christian West is Eagerly Pursuing 'Skynet'-Level GenAI by Akos Balogh (au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-the-post-christian-west-is-eagerly-pursuing-skynet-level-GenAI/)
- As a Christian, I Went Down the GenAI Rabbit Hole. Here Are 12 Things I Discovered by Akos Balogh (au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/as-a-christian-i-went-down-the-GenAI-rabbit-hole-here-are-12-things-i-discovered/)
- GenAI in Ministry: A Practical Guide by Luke Prentice (au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/GenAI-in-ministry-a-practical-guide/)
- GenAI and the Deformation of the Student's Soul by David Shaw (au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/GenAI-and-the-deformation-of-the-students-soul/)
- Navigating technology, by Mike Dicker (https://www.youthworks.net/articles/navigating-technology/)

Books

- Made in Our Image by Stephen Driscoll (Book) - Matthias Media
- 2084 and the GenAI Revolution by John Lennox - Zondervan Reflective
- GenAI Shepherds and Electric Sheep: Leading and Teaching in the Age of Artificial Intelligence by Sean O'Callaghan and Paul A. Hoffman - Baker Academic

Papers

- Christian Ethics, Ministry and Artificial Intelligence, by the Social Issues Committee (Diocese of Sydney) - (https://synod.sydneyanglicans.net/s/sfsites/c/sfc/servlet.shepherd/document/download/069OI00000U5M3ZIAV)

Podcasts & Video

- Practising the Way: Spiritual formation and GenAI: A deep dive with Andy Crouch and Jay Kim (youtube.com/watch?v=K2j8053yxbE)
- Triggernometry: The GenAI Expert Who Thinks We've Already Lost - Dr Roman Yampolskiy (youtube.com/watch?v=3I60uZEqXr0)
- Crossway: Answering Your Questions About GenAI and Christianity (https://www.crossway.org/articles/podcast-answering-your-questions-about-GenAI-and-christianity-part-1/?srsltid=AfmBOoqP7iwLnieORY5M7pjn-7ueLttWLhPQhz4S5a28muT6wjB_fI37)
- CPX: The GenAI Revolution and the Human Future (https://publicchristianity.org/podcast/the-GenAI-revolution-and-the-human-future/)
- Ridley College: Books, Graduation & the GenAI Question with Hannah Craven & Mike Bird (youtube.com/watch?v=GPuY3G3PBsA)
- The Pro Church Tools Show: 1 in 3 Christians Trust GenAI as Much as Their Pastor (Now What?) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIyfT7-__SU)
- Understand GenAI in 14 minutes by Chloe Lubinski (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBUniZHgCnE)
- Who does AI serve? by Jonathan Pageau (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZUuKzDQSsI)
- Your Phone Is Destroying Your Sense of Meaning by Arthur Brooks (https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=PfTcgYwW14E&ra=m)

PART FOUR: RECOMMENDATIONS

The working group has four recommendations flowing from this report.

Firstly, that Synod receive this report and that it be made available on the Diocesan website alongside the existing papers from the Social Issues Committee.

Secondly, that Synod urges caution and personal theological reflection, based on but not limited to the categories identified in this report, regarding the use of GenAI in ministry settings in the diocese.

Thirdly, that Synod request that the Bishop and the senior clergy of the diocese (As decided by the Synod - e.g. Archdeacons, the Dean, Vicar General and Deacon for Women) provide guidance to paid and volunteer ministry workers on what they consider appropriate uses of GenAI in the ministries of the diocese, and clarify which uses of GenAI would constitute a breach of the Faithfulness in Service code.

Fourthly, that Synod request that training be given to paid and volunteer ministry workers on the use of GenAI in ministry contexts, with particular reference to Biblical word ministry, theological anthropology, and Faithfulness in Service.