

ELHAM DEANERY LAY GATHERING

24th July 2025

The Lads Club, Saltwood

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ELHAM DEANERY LAY GATHERING

24TH JULY 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of the Gathering

The Lay Gathering of Elham Deanery, held on 24 July 2025 in the Lads Club at Saltwood, was convened to listen—not to plan. Its purpose was to create space for the Spirit of God to speak through His people, as they shared their hopes and frustrations, their ideas and longings, around open tables of fellowship. We gathered not to give feedback on diocesan policy, nor to execute a top-down agenda, but to ask a foundational question: *If we were an island in the Pacific, how would we live as a family of churches?*

What would the shape of our life together be?

How would we relate to one another?

And how would we serve the people of our towns and villages?

Each table was encouraged to answer freely. There were no templates, no expectations, and no need to reach consensus. Participants were invited to dwell in scripture, listen to each other, and write what they felt the Spirit was saying.

Purpose of This Report

This document is not a summary of opinions. It is a record of discernment. It seeks to reflect, as faithfully as possible, what emerged from the voices of God's people as they listened together across the deanery. It is not a strategy. It is a mirror. It does not prescribe. It reveals.

We believe this document offers a Spirit-shaped direction of travel. It is meant to be prayed over, weighed, and acted upon—not filed.

Why This Can Be Trusted

While the twenty-five people present may not have been large in electoral roll terms, roughly 2.5%, the quality of the gathering was spiritual, prayerful, and honest. We began in worship, we submitted the process to the Holy Spirit, and what followed was rich, uncoerced, and deeply resonant.

Those who came were not a hand-picked group; they were those who chose to come—and through them, the Spirit spoke. We believe, therefore, that this discernment can be trusted not because of numbers, but because it was offered in humility and received in faith.

Lay Chair Oversight

The gathering was also carefully led. John Campbell, co-lay chair of the deanery synod, deliberately refrained from joining any table in order not to influence the process. His role was to hold the space, frame the questions, and then stand back. Alan, his fellow lay chair, joined a table as one voice among many. This allowed the Spirit's voice to rise naturally—from the ground up, not the top down. The people were encouraged not to sit with others from their own churches, but to mingle with others so that the tables were as random as possible.

Churches Represented

1. St Martin Acrise
2. All Souls, Cheriton
3. St Mary's, Elham
4. St Peter and St Pauls, Saltwood
5. St Eansworth, Folkestone
6. St George's, Folkestone
7. St John's, Folkestone
8. St Lukes's, Hawkinge
9. St Paul's, Sandgate
10. St Peter's, Folkestone
11. Holy Trinity, Folkestone

Three Outstanding Themes That Contain the Rest

While many insights came through, three broad themes stand out as containing within them the essence of the whole:

1. **The Deanery is Called to Become a True Family of Churches**
Not merely coordinated but connected. Not defined by structures, but by relationship. A family where prayer, presence, and joy replace duty, distance, and routine.
2. **Hospitality is to Become the New Evangelism**
The call to gather around food, welcome, and worship came through repeatedly. We are to build relationships through presence—not programmes—so that strangers become guests and guests become friends.
3. **The Laity Must Be Released into Their Gifts**
There is no shortage of willingness—only of permission and trust. If we are to grow, the whole Body must move. The laity are not waiting to be told what to do. They are waiting to be blessed to begin.

A Word to the Clergy and Lay Leaders

This is not a report to read and file. It is a discernment to receive and respond to.

- **Clergy:** you are not being asked to do more—you are being asked to **trust more**.
- **Lay leaders:** you are not being asked to wait—you are being asked to **step forward**.

What we have heard here is not an invention. It is a **reverent response to what the Spirit is already doing** among the people of God.

Let us not miss the moment.

The Tabletop Sessions

These are the questions addressed in each session.

Table Session One – 25 Minutes

1. If you could start from scratch—with a blank sheet of paper—what should the deanery be for and how would it work?
2. Imagine the deanery not as a structure, but as a family of churches. What would God want it to become?

Points to Consider

- a) What does it mean to be a family of churches, not just a structure?
- b) What does God long to see growing among us?
- c) If the Holy Spirit were shaping the future of our deanery, what might start to emerge?

Table Session Two – 25 Minutes

1. **What would be the first visible sign that our deanery is growing into a family?** What would you see or feel that told you this was happening?
2. **What needs to change—either practically or spiritually—for that to become a reality?** Think about communication, relationships, expectations, leadership, prayer, or presence.
3. **What one thing could we start doing in the next three months to take a real step forward?** It might be something small but significant. It might begin in just one parish.

This has been an extraordinary exercise, and the Holy Spirit has clearly shown the way. This is not a plan that must be allowed to experience rigor mortis, but it must always be pliable to the leading of the Spirit. This is simply the starting point.



Alan French
Date: 19th August 2025
Co-Lay Chair Elham Deanery



John Campbell
Date: 19th August 2025
Co-Lay Chair Elham Deanery

Appendix 1

What Should We Be? – Responses to Table Session 1

The Question

1. If you could start from scratch—with a blank sheet of paper—what should the deanery be for and how would it work?
2. Imagine the deanery not as a structure, but as a family of churches. What would God want it to become?

The Analysis

1. Not Just Structure, But Shared Life — Deep, Transforming Fellowship

Across all tables, there was a longing not for more structure, but for fellowship that changes us—something closer to doing life together than simply meeting.

- “Unity not uniformity.”
- “All churches working together.”
- “To share and to love.”
- “A family—not a branch office.”

The handwritten reflection captured it most fully:

- “Be lifeboats for one another.”
- “Do life together—smile and mourn.”
- “Everyone must know that they can belong.”

There is a yearning for a Church that loves with presence, not just principle—where we support, feed, visit, and recognise one another across parish boundaries. A Church where no one feels alone.

Invitation: Might the Spirit be calling us to begin new, regular rhythms of cross-parish fellowship—not centrally imposed, but organically shaped by love? Could we become a network of lifeboats—linked not by programmes, but by shared grace?

2. Communication as Communion – Knowing and Bearing One Another

Another repeated theme was the urgent desire to know one another better—not for administration, but for mutual care.

- “Information sharing – communication!”
- “Get to know each other: who has what?”
- “Share burdens. Share joys. Share gifts.”
- “Listening to one another.”

In one sheet, the call was simple:

- “Knowing Christians can love and support each other.”
- “Encouragement that seeks purpose and joy.”

This is the language of communion, not coordination. The Spirit may be saying: What you do not know, you cannot carry. And what you do not carry, you cannot bless.

Invitation: Might we commit to simple, open-hearted structures of communication—not just to share information, but to carry each other in love and prayer?

3. Hospitality as Evangelism – Opening Our Lives to the Stranger and the Struggling

A thread ran through many pages: we are not yet seeing the people who are not with us—especially the young, the isolated, and the hurting.

- “Encourage young people to come.”
- “Change times so they can attend.”
- “Café Church. Bubble Church. Messy Church.”
- “Ask whether gatherings feed all people: children, lonely, grieving.”

The tone was not judgmental, but reflective. The question was not, Why don’t they come?, but What must we become for them to feel welcome?

Invitation: Might the Spirit be prompting us to reflect deeply on accessibility—not as a strategic problem, but as a gospel posture? What does it mean for us to become a Church where everyone knows they can belong?

4. Prayer and Worship — The Life of the Body, Not the Programme of the Church

Several pages, including the long reflection, placed prayer and worship at the centre.

- “Worship together.”
- “Breaking bread together.”
- “Jesus at the centre.”
- “Spiritual maturity.”
- “Encouragement: people worshipping together.”

One phrase stood out in its quiet insight:

“The Church calendar should feed people—let them grow into what they enjoy, need, and learn.”

This is not about changing doctrine. It is about letting prayer and worship nourish the whole person—children, widows, tired workers, newcomers, grievers, saints.

Invitation: Might the Spirit be calling us to revisit how and why we worship together—so that our rhythms are not burdens, but nourishment? So that prayer is not an agenda item, but the atmosphere in which we breathe?

5. Love Must Lead — Or Nothing Lasts

More than one page contained almost nothing but the word “Love”. But elsewhere too, the message was clear:

- “Love one another.”
- “Encouragement, faith, support.”
- “Love across the generations.”
- “Shared body purpose.”
- “Try not to judge or justify faith language.”

In the deepest reflection, love was not sentimental—it was rooted in Christ:

- “Jesus is the head – we are the body.”
- “God’s Spirit is with us – guiding, sharing, giving courage.”
- “Be part of something meaningful.”

Invitation: Might we receive afresh the call to love—not in theory, but in witness, forgiveness, hospitality, and patience? To make love not our mood, but our structure?

6. No More Waiting – Just Begin

Finally, perhaps the most Spirit-filled line from any sheet:

- “The desire already exists. God is among us.
- Would it help to tidy up things? Perhaps not.
- Just begin to do them.”

This is not impulsive action. It is faithful trust. The people in the room were not asking permission—they were hearing a call to begin loving, worshipping, supporting, and building as a family, one step at a time.

Invitation: Might we trust that the Spirit is already ahead of us? That the longing we feel is not an idea, but a summons? And that we must not now delay?

Closing Reflection

Session One was not just an exercise—it was a holy moment. The responses bear the unmistakable touch of the Spirit. And they reveal a deanery that is:

- Ready to love
- Willing to change
- Hungry for connection
- Grounded in Christ
- And already beginning to rise

“Let all that you do be done in love.” (1 Corinthians 16:14)

Appendix 2

Responses to Table Session 2 - How Should We Do It?

The Questions

1. What would be the first visible sign that our deanery is growing into a family? What would you see or feel that told you this was happening?
2. What needs to change—either practically or spiritually—for that to become a reality? Think about communication, relationships, expectations, leadership, prayer, or presence.
3. What one thing could we start doing in the next three months to take a real step forward? It might be something small but significant. It might begin in just one parish.

The material from Session Two is rich, but in a different tone from Session One—more practical, more forward-facing. The Spirit’s prompting here seems to concern how the longings of Session One might begin to be realised.

Below is the full Session Two reflection, crafted in the same style as Session One. It draws directly from what was written—both plainly and prophetically.

Listening to the Spirit – General Responses - Session Two

1. “The Signs Will Be Visible—And Felt”

Responses suggest that the first sign of a deanery becoming a family is not organisational—it is relational.

- “Together meetings.”
- “A deanery service that feels like going home.”
- “A meal together.”
- “Messy Church and Bubble Church getting done again. Café Church too”
- “More young people—more laughter.”

There was a strong instinct that when God begins to work in this way, the tone of our gatherings will change: they will feel more like celebrations than meetings. There will be warmth, inclusion, food, worship, children, and prayer. People will want to come—not out of duty, but from joy.

Invitation: Might the Spirit be encouraging us to look for signs not only in numbers, but in the atmosphere of our gatherings? When people start saying, “It feels like we belong”—that may be our first confirmation.

2. “Make Room for the Young—and for One Another”

There was a note of both urgency and realism around youth work.

- “Linking with St John’s youth worker and Bubble Church.”
- “Youth groups—people getting older, we need to connect with the Young ones.”
- “Elham benefice needs support on presence—lack of workers and experience.”

Several tables returned to the challenge of sustainability—how good things, once begun, are allowed to quietly fade through lack of support. The Spirit may be pressing gently on our sense of responsibility: Have we left too much to too few for too long?

Yet there was also hope: the answer may be collaboration. What one parish cannot do alone, several can do together.

Invitation: Might the Spirit be asking us to move from a parish-by-parish struggle to a deanery-wide partnership, especially where youth, outreach, and newer forms of worship are concerned?

3. “Communication Isn’t Optional Anymore”

This was repeated so often and so plainly it could not be missed.

- “Communication is imperative.”
- “Getting together – how?”
- “Set up a WhatsApp group.”
- “Secure repository of info.”
- “Share events, share prayers, share encouragements.”
- “Let people know what’s going on.”

There is a deep awareness that connection requires communication—not passively, but intentionally. The vision of a family of churches cannot survive if we do not hear each other’s voices, needs, and hopes.

Invitation: Could we now take simple, deliberate steps to establish communication pathways—WhatsApp groups, regular updates, shared directories, and prayer networks—not as admin tools, but as instruments of fellowship?

4. “Organise for Relationship—Not Just Structure”

Several tables proposed practical sub-groups, but not in a bureaucratic sense. The goal was not governance—it was connection around shared purpose.

- “Subgroups: wardens, treasurers, safeguarding, youth/children, worship.”
- “Deanery reps and lay reps help organise things.”
- “Hospitality team for a shared guest service.”
- “Shared advertisements for courses, events, praise reports.”

This is administration as relationship-building. The underlying call is to equip the saints and draw gifts together, not to centralise control. Every person, every parish has something to give.

Invitation: Might the Spirit be guiding us to shape simple working groups not to manage the deanery, but to knit it together in love and purpose?

5. “Don’t Wait for the Perfect Plan—Just Begin”

In a profound phrase written on one sheet, someone discerned:

- “The desire already exists. God is among us.
- Would it help to tidy things? Perhaps not. Just begin to do them.”

There is a spiritual maturity here. The gathering did not ask for committees, schemes, or even full permission. They asked for space to begin acting in love—to do what they know is good, even if it starts small.

- “Hospitality—deanery shared guest service.”
- “Try a local shared clergy service.”
- “Start with a meal.”
- “Use churches more for schools.”
- “Do something for widows.”
- “Invite people to see what is going on.”

The Spirit seems to be saying: You already know what love looks like. Begin to love one another—and see what grows.

Invitation: Might we identify a small number of immediate, visible acts of love and connection between parishes—and simply do them, prayerfully, faithfully, and together?

Closing Reflection

Where Session One revealed the longing, Session Two began to show us the pathway. It is not a complex one, nor necessarily a fast one. But it is clear:

- Begin with hospitality and communication.
- Join hearts in shared prayer and practical service.
- Focus especially on the young, the isolated, and the hidden.
- Don't wait for perfection. Just begin.

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.....not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24–25)

Appendix 3

Particular Questions for Session 2 - Responses to the Table Session

Session 2 – Direct Responses to the Three Questions

These responses have been culled from the overall sense of the responses

1. **What would be the first visible sign that our deanery is growing into a family?**

The clearest signs will not be structural but relational. The tone of our gatherings will shift—from formal obligation to joyful participation. People will say, “It feels like we belong.” Signs might include:

- A deanery-wide service that feels welcoming, not administrative—more like homecoming than meeting.
- Shared meals that cross parish boundaries—gatherings around tables, not just agendas.
- Increased youth participation, laughter, and the evident presence of children and young people.
- Events and prayer gatherings where people from different churches show up because they want to, not because they have to.

In short, the first sign will be felt before it is counted.

2. **What needs to change—either practically or spiritually—for that to become a reality?**

The responses indicate that several deep shifts are needed, some of them practical and others spiritual:

- Communication: We need to move from isolated knowledge to shared awareness—intentional updates, WhatsApp groups, and informal contact must become part of our rhythm.
- Collaboration: We must shed the idea of “my parish” and begin operating with a deanery-wide mindset, especially in areas like youth work, outreach, and hospitality.
- Expectation: There is a spiritual call to repent of passive maintenance and step into a posture of faith that expects God to build something new among us.
- Clarity of roles and support: Especially for parishes feeling under-resourced or leader-thin, such as Elham benefice, the wider deanery must rally to support, mentor, and lend workers.

Above all, the Spirit seems to be pressing us to move from independence to interdependence.

3. **What is one thing we could start doing within three months to take a real step forward?**

This question yielded practical and immediately achievable ideas:

- Launch a shared WhatsApp group for key roles—starting with churchwardens—to share needs, news, and encouragements.
- Host a deanery-wide guest service or hospitality evening, open to all, especially the unchurched or lonely.
- Trial a youth initiative in partnership between three parishes—linking existing efforts like Bubble Church or St John’s youth outreach.
- Encourage clergy and laity to jointly attend one another’s services as a visible sign of shared spiritual family.
- Use our churches more intentionally as community spaces, including partnerships with local schools and service to widows and carers.
- Form task-specific working groups—treasurers, youth leaders, worship coordinators—to build relationships around shared calling.

None of these require waiting for formal permission. Each can begin in faith, undergirded by prayer, and adjusted as the Spirit leads.

Appendix Four

A Combined reflection – Table Sessions 1 and 2

A Call to Act on What We've Heard

Bringing Together the Voice of the Spirit from Both Sessions

This is not a consultation. It is a discernment. We have listened. Now we must act.

Over the course of two sessions, the lay members of our deanery gathered—to wait upon what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church in this place.

What we heard was not strategy. It was longing. It was invitation. And it was movement. From the deep desire to become a family, we moved towards real signs of how that family might take shape. From naming what holds us back, we stepped into the first actions that might release grace and growth.

This final reflection does not replace Sessions One and Two. It brings them into harmony—a single voice, heard through many mouths.

Six Calls the Spirit Is Pressing Upon Our Deanery

1. A Call to Build Real Fellowship Across Parishes

- “Unity not uniformity.”
- “A family—not a branch office.”
- “A deanery service that feels like going home.”

We are being called to become more than adjacent congregations. The Spirit is summoning us to become a family of churches—sharing worship, testimony, presence, and burden. This is not about meetings. It is about belonging. It is about building the kind of relationships that change the feel of our gatherings from function to fellowship. When someone says, “I look forward to coming,” we will know something has shifted.

2. A Call to Restore the Ministry of Hospitality and Presence

- “Start with food.”
- “Invite people in.”
- “Do something for widows.”

The ministry of hospitality is not an afterthought—it is the starting place. In the answers to the Session Two questions, it became clear that visible signs of growth will not be procedural—they will be

relational. A meal shared. A child welcomed. A table laid in faith. These are the new liturgies of family. Where presence is offered, connection is born.

3. A Call to Reimagine Communication as Communion

- “Information sharing.”
- “WhatsApp group.”
- “Secure place to share prayer and events.”

Communication emerged not just as a need but as a ministry. It is not only about notices—it is about hearing and being heard. The longing for a shared WhatsApp group, secure information platforms, and the telling of testimonies reveals that we want more than updates. We want communion. And communion begins with voices being shared, trusted, and heard.

4. A Call to Prayer That is Shared, Persistent, and Central

- “Worship together.”
- “Breaking bread together.”
- “Shared times of prayer.”

What we saw clearly is that prayer must not be left at the edge of our structures—it must return to the centre. Not just privately, but together. A deanery marked by prayer will be a deanery where the Spirit is free to lead. Prayer is not what we do after the planning. It is what makes the planning holy.

5. A Call to Recognise the Laity as a Gift to the Church

- “The clergy are overwhelmed.”
- “The laity are ready.”
- “Just begin to do them.”

The gift of the laity was felt throughout these sessions—not as a challenge to leadership, but as a partnership with it. The sense was clear: the laity are not seeking permission to act—they are seeking blessing to begin. There is no call for rebellion here—only for release. When the clergy and laity move together in trust, the Church becomes strong.

6. A Call to Begin—Not Wait

- “The desire already exists.”
- “God is among us.”
- “Just begin to do them.”

The final answers to Session Two make this clear: we do not need to wait. The way forward will not be perfect, but it can be loving. We do not need a fully signed-off masterplan. We need prayerful, courageous steps. Some of those first acts are already named: start a WhatsApp group, try a shared service, link youth workers, open a meal table, invite others in. The Spirit is already moving. Let us

move with Him. *“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*(Revelation 2:29)

Appendix 5

An Exploration of Evangelism

Evangelism – The Natural Fruit of Obedient Fellowship

If the Spirit is calling our deanery to deeper love, shared worship, visible hospitality, and mutual trust, it is not simply so that we may be comforted. It is so that others may be saved.

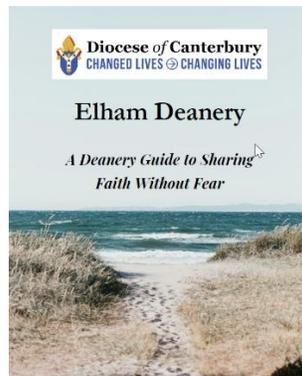
We are not being called to become a more functional family. We are being called to become a fruitful one.

This was reflected in the scriptures we read together at the gathering:

- **Psalm 133** – *“How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity... there the Lord commands the blessing.”*
- **Acts 2:42–47** – a picture of the early Church in fellowship, prayer, and sacrificial love—and the result? *“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*

It is no coincidence that when the Church is most united, prayerful, generous, and joyfully obedient, evangelism becomes its natural overflow.

To support this calling, and to equip every Christian in our deanery to share their faith gently and confidently, we have now produced the Elham Deanery Evangelism Booklet: ***“Sharing Faith Without Fear”***



- This short resource is written for ordinary Anglicans—not specialists.
- It explains the gospel clearly and simply.
- It offers reassurance, biblical clarity, and practical help.
- And it aims to be placed in the hands of every church member in the deanery.

This booklet is not a programme. It is a seed—to be sown in lives already being changed by the Spirit’s leading. As we become the Church described in Acts 2, we believe with confidence that God will add to our number—not because of us, but because we are walking in His ways.

Afternote – This booklet is now published and ready for distribution – 5th August 20025

Appendix 6

Deanery and Diocese Cohesion

Alignment with the Diocesan Vision

How Our Deanery Discernment Reflects and Strengthens the Wider Call

The Diocesan Vision was deliberately not shared or alluded to during the sessions, but the congruence is very encouraging.

While the Lay Members' Deanery Gathering arose from local prayer and spiritual listening, it is striking to see how fully our conclusions resonate with the broader vision of the Diocese of Canterbury.

That vision speaks of three bold outcomes, with one identified as foundational, and a further strategic aim of establishing new worshipping communities across the diocese over the next decade.

Our deanery did not set out to echo this vision—but the fact that we have done so only confirms that the same Spirit is at work in the local and the diocesan Church.

1. The Foundational Outcome: Every Parish, Benefice and Deanery Showing Signs of Revitalisation

This bold call is not about numbers—it is about visible new life. The question is asked: “What does revitalisation look like? How will we notice the signs of the Holy Spirit moving—and most importantly, how will we respond?”

Our gathering gave clear answers:

- A hunger for shared worship, fellowship, and prayer
- A movement toward hospitality, mutual support, and youth inclusion
- A readiness among the laity to act with trust and courage
- A call for clergy to delegate, empower, and bless

These are not suggestions. They are signs of revitalisation already beginning.

2. Changed Lives → Changing Lives

The diocesan vision calls for a Church that doesn't just survive but transforms: people changed by Christ's love who go on to change the lives of others.

This was heard at nearly every table:

- Through practical service—meals, transport, intercession.
- Through witness by presence—Bubble Church, Messy Church, Café Church, youth ministry, Other.
- Through growing confidence in faith-sharing among lay people
- Through a longing to be “a Church where everyone knows they can belong”

The transformation we saw in word and tone is the very life this outcome seeks to describe.

3. Practising Noticing and Naming

The Diocese has commended three accessible habits:

- Noticing – becoming aware of God’s presence and activity
- Naming – saying aloud what we’ve noticed
- Responding – acting in faith and obedience

Our gathering was, in fact, a living exercise in all three:

- We noticed what the Spirit is stirring across the deanery
- We named these longings, truths, and insights aloud, on paper and now in this report
- And we are now being called to respond—not as individuals, but as a deanery family

4. A Vision for New Worshipping Communities

The diocese has also set a practical horizon: to establish 200 new worshipping communities within 10 years. These may not all be traditional congregations—but they are all intended to be places of genuine worship, fellowship, and faith formation.

Our deanery is already sensing this shift.

From both sessions, we heard of:

- Bubble Church and the need to support and replicate it
- Messy Church and Café Church, which once flourished but now need help to relaunch
- Youth and schools-based gatherings, where worship is already taking place
- Lay-led prayer groups, guest services, shared meals, and more informal spaces of spiritual community

In short: the seeds of new worshipping communities are already present.

The only thing missing is support and trust—from the deanery and the diocese alike

Final Word

It is important to stress again: this alignment is not the result of policy compliance. We did not write these things to satisfy a diocesan brief. We wrote them because the Spirit of God was speaking at the tables.

That they now align with the wider vision is not a coincidence—it is a confirmation that God is moving in His Church, both locally and beyond.

Our task now is simple:

- **To listen**
- **To trust**
- **To act**

Appendix 7

Deanery Action Plan

Deanery Plan of Action (2025–2026)

The plan is rooted in the discernment of the Lay Gathering, responsive to the Spirit, and entrusted to the Deanery Leadership.

Recognising the age profile and limited capacity in many congregations, each initiative below includes an *Ideal Target* and a *Secondary Target*. The *Ideal* reflects our prayerful ambition; the *Secondary* ensures we remain realistic and faithful with what we have.

1. Establish a Deanery Prayer Rhythm

Objective: To restore spiritual unity and interdependence across parishes.

Actions:

- Design a monthly rota that highlights one parish per week for prayer across the deanery.
- Share a simple prayer prompt in church notices and newsletters, and WhatsApp Groups.
- Encourage intercessions for the designated parish during Sunday worship.

Ideal Target: Launch by Advent Sunday 2025, with visible participation from at least 10 parishes in the first month.

Secondary Target: Launch by Epiphany 2026, with 5 parishes piloting the rhythm for the first quarter.

2. Launch a Deanery WhatsApp or Email Encouragement Group

Objective: To foster relational connection among lay and ordained leaders beyond formal meetings.

Actions:

- Create a moderated WhatsApp or email group for lay leaders and active members across parishes.
- Clarify that this is for encouragement, testimony, and prayer—not notices or rotas.
- Invite each parish to nominate 1–2 members.

Ideal Target: Launch by October 2025, with at least 25 members enrolled across the deanery.

Secondary Target: Launch by December 2025 with 10 committed members and ongoing invitations.

3. Encourage Small-Scale Shared Gatherings

Objective: To begin healing isolation and building cross-parish familiarity.

Actions:

- Identify and promote two “pilot” events this autumn (e.g. a joint evensong, prayer walk, or harvest supper).
- Delegate to laity, with deanery leadership offering light-touch support.

Ideal Target: Host 2 events before Christmas 2025, with attendance from 5+ parishes.

Secondary Target: One event hosted with at least 3 parishes involved by January 2026.

4. Commission Cross-Parish Pilot Groups

Objective: To explore the feasibility and fruitfulness of joint discipleship.

Actions:

- Trial one or two cross-parish study groups using simple material like Dwelling in the Word or the Gentle Evangelism booklet.
- Invite participants from a mix of parishes, lay-led with clergy blessing.

Ideal Target: 2 groups launched by January 2026, each including members from at least 3 parishes.

Secondary Target: 1 group trialled by Easter 2026, with representatives from 2 parishes.

5. Promote the Gentle Evangelism Booklet in Every Parish

Objective: To equip all worshippers with confidence to speak about their faith.

Actions:

- Distribute one booklet per congregant in each church.
- Invite incumbents or wardens to introduce the booklet at a Sunday service.
- Encourage PCCs to discuss how best to make it known and used.

Ideal Target: Full deanery distribution by Advent 2025 (30th November), with at least one follow-up story shared at Synod. No secondary target.

6. Implement Regular Lay-Led Storytelling at Deanery Synod

Objective: To “notice and name” what God is doing and reinforce shared identity.

Actions:

- Invite a different parish to share at each Synod (brief testimony of growth, connection, or answered prayer).
- Keep it informal but meaningful—a story, not a report.

Ideal Target: Begin at next Deanery Synod on 13th November 2025 and maintain as a standing item thereafter.

Secondary Target: Introduce storytelling by Spring 2026 and build from there.

7. Clergy Support and Delegation Plan

Objective: To free clergy from unnecessary responsibility and empower the body.

Actions:

- Invite each incumbent to identify one thing they can delegate to a lay person or parish group before Christmas.
- Offer support to help them identify safe and sustainable options.
- Publicly affirm this model of trust and shared leadership.

Ideal Target: 10 instances of active lay delegation recorded and shared by Spring 2026.

Secondary Target: At least 3 new acts of delegation identified and trialled by Easter 2026.

8. Review and Renew – Mid-Year Discernment

Objective: To assess progress, listen again, and adjust.

Actions:

- Hold a short Deanery Discernment Gathering in May 2026 (can be attached to Synod).
- Revisit the bold outcomes.
- Ask: Where is new life springing up? What are we hearing from the Spirit now?

Ideal Target: Report findings at Summer Deanery Synod 2026, with next steps identified.

Secondary Target: Conduct feedback survey and informal gathering by Pentecost 2026.

Appendix 8

Deanery Synod Change Proposals

A Proposal for Renewed Deanery Synod Meetings

Why Change?

The responses from the lay gathering were not a complaint about structure—they were a cry for substance. The Spirit is clearly inviting us to go deeper, not simply get busier. Our quarterly Synod meetings are an opportunity to become an upper room, not a boardroom. To become a tent of meeting, not just a hub of information.

Let us, then, offer a structure that honours:

- Worship that feeds the soul,
- Testimony that encourages the Church,
- Scripture that renews the mind,
- Discussion that shapes direction,
- Business that is handled with clarity but never dominates.

A New Rhythm for Each Synod Meeting – Total 120 minutes

1. Arrival and Welcome

- Refreshments available on arrival to encourage informal fellowship and conversation.
- A visible “welcome table” with name badges and any handouts or prayer cards.

2. Extended Praise and Worship (15–20 minutes)

- More than just a hymn and opening prayer.
- Intentionally Spirit-led, possibly with a small team from a hosting parish.
- Space for Scripture, silence, prayer, and even brief reflection— A space to meet with God, not just a routine moment.

3. Dwelling in the Word (20–25 minutes)

- Choose a Scripture passage in advance that relates to the season or to the themes being discerned across the deanery.
- Small group reflection (3–4 people)—with two simple questions:
 - What speaks to you from this passage?

- What might the Spirit be saying to us as a deanery through it?
- Return to plenary and name any emerging threads (not conclusions—just noticing). Somehow these should be recorded for the minutes and for future contemplation and consideration. These are not moments to be discarded after the event.

4. Testimony and Encouragement (15 minutes)

- One parish invited to share something the Lord has been doing—a conversion, an answered prayer, a local initiative bearing fruit.
- Keep it real, ordinary, and Spirit-honouring. This is not a PCC report.
- Encourage naming God’s activity and offering thanks together.

5. Thematic Reflection or Input (15–20 minutes)

- A guest speaker is still welcome—but speakers must now be chosen not merely for institutional updates but to feed the body.
- Prefer speakers with a heart for evangelism, mission, renewal, healing, Scripture, or intercession.
- Alternatively, the time can be used for reflective discussion on lay-initiated themes (e.g., follow-up to the prayer gatherings, ideas from the evangelism booklet, or seasonal mission opportunities).

6. Business and Governance (20–30 minutes)

- Efficient, chaired well, and agenda-driven—but not the core.
- Treated as stewardship rather than centrepiece.
- Papers circulated in advance, decisions clearly summarised.

7. Intercessory Prayer and Sending (10 minutes)

- A final time of prayer—either in silence or aloud—for:
 - Parishes
 - Clergy
 - Schools
 - Local needs
- Commissioning one another back into service. A brief blessing and sending.

Additional Enhancements

- Prayer Cards or Visual Boards: One per Synod—people write a prayer or thanksgiving for their parish.
- Worship Led by Rotating Parishes: Builds ownership and shared contribution.
- Synod Stories: A standing agenda item to share a one-page “snapshot” of God’s work in one part of the deanery.

Benefits of This New Shape Synod

- Restores the Synod’s spiritual heartbeat.
- Builds shared identity across the parishes.
- Equips and emboldens the laity.
- Encourages transparency and mutual support.
- Keeps the business in proportion.
- Reflects the direction the Spirit is already calling us toward.

Appendix 9

The Spiritual Structure and Covering of The Lay Gathering

After introductions:

The Lord be with you
And also with you.

Reading Acts 2:42-47

⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

A Prayer for Unity and Vision in Our Deanery – Said Together

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,

you have called us together as one Body in Christ,

that we may grow into the fullness of Him who is our Head.

We thank you for every church, every parish, and every person in this deanery.

We bless you for the bonds of peace that hold us together in one faith, one baptism, and one hope of our calling.

Lord, bind us more closely in the love of Christ.

Help us to bear with one another in humility and gentleness,

to speak the truth in love,

and to seek not our own good, but the good of your Church.

May your Spirit lead us, not into competition or division,

but into joyful partnership,

that we may build one another up,

and serve your purpose in this place.

Grant us a shared vision, Lord—not of our own making,

but of your Kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

And so, with hearts set on Christ,

make us eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. May the fruit of our unity be a great harvest of souls.

For we ask it in His holy name,

Amen.

Hymn – Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah

Psalm 133 – said Together

¹ Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!

² It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.

³ It is like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore. Amen

Hymn – Be Thou My Vision

Question for Session 1 handed out

Prayer for Wisdom – said together before starting the session.

Heavenly Father, As we turn now to listen, share, and reflect together, we ask for Your wisdom - Not the wisdom of the world, but the wisdom that comes from above—pure, peace-loving, gentle and full of mercy. (*James 3:17*)

Guide our thoughts, Lord. Help us to hear not only one another, but Your still small voice in the midst. Let this be a time of holy listening—shaped by love, grounded in truth, and open to Your Spirit. In Jesus’ name we pray.
Amen.

Between table sessions, there was a short reflection by John, reminding everyone that we are not merely an organisation, but a spiritual organism—Christ in us, the hope of glory. We are crucified with Christ; and this is not just a doctrine but a lived reality.

What does that mean in practice? Scripture tells us that we are to abound in love—to one another and to the world beyond. But we cannot abound in love unless we ourselves are being filled with the love of God. This is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

John reminded everyone that we are to “be being filled” with the Spirit. This is a continual state—not a one-time event. And the key to that infilling is worship. For it is in worship that the great exchange takes place. As we lift our hearts to God, He fills us with His love. The supply only stops when the worship ceases. Worship is not a moment—it is a lifestyle.

Question for Session 2 handed out

The sessions were conducted - each about 25 minutes, and a short session on the Evangelism Booklet too. Date of next meeting was set for 30th October 2025.

Hymn – Shine, Jesus Shine

Prayer – said together

Lord God Almighty,
You are the one who builds the house—
and unless You build it, we labour in vain.
But tonight, we have not laboured alone.
We have come together as a family of churches,
to listen, to share, to imagine—
and we believe Your Spirit has been among us.
Thank You for the dreams that have been voiced,
the honesty shared, the courage to speak,
and the longing in every heart for more of You.
We remember the words of Jesus:
*“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you
that you should go and bear fruit—fruit that will last”* (John 15:16).
And so, Lord, we give You this evening,
these conversations, these hopes, these beginnings.
We offer them not as finished plans but as seeds—
and we ask You, gracious Lord, to water them with Your Spirit.
Let what is true take root.
Let what is of You flourish.
Let what is of man be gently set aside.
And let all be done for the glory of Jesus Christ in this place.
Lord, send Your Spirit afresh upon our deanery.
Kindle our hearts with holy fire.
Give us boldness in witness, joy in worship, and unity in love.
May Your presence fill our gatherings,
and may Your grace go before every step we now take.
Now to Him who is able to do
immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,
according to His power that is at work within us,
to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. (*Ephesians 3:20–21*)

A Prayer for our Clergy – said together.

We pray especially for the clergy of our deanery - For those who lead and teach and carry the weight of pastoral care, we ask Your blessing. Strengthen them in their calling, renew them in their faith, and let them sense our support—not just tonight, but always.
Lord, may our clergy not feel isolated or overwhelmed, but surrounded and upheld. Give them joy in their ministry, wisdom for the road ahead, and open hearts to the vision You are forming among us.
As we go from here, may we walk in step with Your Spirit,
may we speak words that build up and encourage, and may we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is both the author and the finisher of our faith. We ask it all in His holy name. Amen.

The Grace – said together

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.