



Discussion Resource

For use during the 100 Days of Listening

Travelling Well Together – Sustaining Ministry

Introduction

Across the Diocese of Chelmsford, parish communities are faithfully serving God in many different places and circumstances. We know there is much to give thanks for, and we also know that many churches are carrying real pressures.

The Sustaining Ministry 100 Days of Listening is an invitation to pause, pray and talk honestly together. These questions are offered to help your parish community reflect on vocations, wellbeing, buildings and finances, and to share what matters most in your local context. We are not looking for perfect answers. We want to listen carefully to people's experience, hopes and concerns, and to discern together how God may be leading us as we seek to sustain ministry and mission for the future.

Facilitation Tip: Begin each conversation with prayer, encourage curiosity rather than debate, and ensure every voice has an opportunity to be heard. Thank you!



Question 1: Vocations

The facts: In the Church of England, the number of people training to be vicars has reduced by 38% since 2020. In the Diocese of Chelmsford we have experienced a similar decline in vocations.

The challenge: Vocations don't appear out of thin air! People explore vocation when they are growing as disciples of Jesus and when people around them pray and ask them if they have thought about what God is calling them too. How can we expand the number of growing disciples and pray and encourage people to increase the numbers of people exploring a vocation?

Example talk together topics

- When and how do we pray for vocations in our parish and worshipping community?
- Do we know how to encourage people to explore a vocation and do we know where to find out more about vocations?
- When did someone in our community last explore a lay or ordained ministry?
- In our community, how are we enabling people to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ?
- What in our community has helped people grow as disciples of Jesus?
- What in our community has prevented people growing as disciples of Jesus?
- As a community we feel confident about supporting one another in discipleship, how has this made a difference in our community?
- As a community we don't feel confident about supporting one another in discipleship, are we open to finding out how to do this and do we know who to ask for help?
- How could you encourage people to attend courses like [the Course in Christian Studies \(CCS\)](#) that enable them to grow in discipleship and explore vocation?



Question 2. Wellbeing

The facts: New developments have meant that the number of people living in the Diocese of Chelmsford has increased by over 300,000 in the last ten years. At the same time, across the Diocese of Chelmsford, the number of adults in our churches has decreased by 30% and the number of children has decreased by 37%. While some of our church communities have increased their numbers of adults and children, many are struggling and facing declining numbers.

The challenge: Declining numbers means more responsibility for fewer people. Clergy and licenced ministers are serving smaller congregations but larger populations. Volunteers are being stretched thin. How can we respond to the challenge of increasing populations and the opportunity to share the good news of Jesus when our ministers and volunteers are stretched?

Example talk together topics:

- How do you pray for the wellbeing of the ministers and volunteers in your community and when did you last take time to recognise their service?
- What could you pause or reduce as a community to give space for rest and prayer?
- Do you know when your clergy take time off and what do you do as a community to help them have time to rest?
- In your local context could you share responsibilities across churches or change your governance structures to reduce the demand on key volunteers? What do you need to help you explore this?
- If your church is experiencing growth, how could you pray for neighbouring churches who are struggling and how could you encourage and bless them?
- What could we do to better to support mission in the life of our parishes and diocese?
- Have you thought about using a resource like [Leading Your Church into Growth \(LYCiG\)](#) to help you reimagine mission and ministry as community?



Question 3. Buildings

The facts: In the Diocese of Chelmsford we have 574 church buildings. People in parishes work hard to maintain them. In 2015, 36,786 adults supported 577 church buildings an average of 64 adults per church. By 2023, 25,321 adults supported 574 church buildings an average of 44 adults per church. In many parishes there are less than 44 adults to support the church building.

The challenge: Declining congregations mean there are fewer people to look after all our church buildings. Less people are having to do more work to keep buildings open and maintained. How can we continue to care for our church buildings which are a heritage and community resource when money, time, and people are in short supply?

Example talk together topics:

- What is the purpose of a church building?
- Does maintaining a church building get in the way of mission or can it resource mission?
- If your church building is a heritage building, have you explored creating a “Friends of....” group from within the local community to help support the finance and fabric of the church building? Can you identify one or two community minded people who might be interested in starting a conversation about this?
- Is your church building still in the right place in the parish or benefice? If you were building your church building today, where would you locate it and why?
- How might you invite people outside of the church who may have a passion for buildings, heritage, or simply love their local church building, to become involved in its maintenance without attending the church?
- Can a church building help people to belong before they believe? What might that look like where you are?
- Is closing a church building failure if it enables a benefice to offer mission and ministry elsewhere in another church building?

Church Buildings Support Conversation

This question ties in closely with the work of the Church Buildings Support Conversation that started in our Diocese in 2024. [Find out more here.](#)



Question 4. Finances

The facts: The ending of the Darlow Formula in 2017, a way of using central Church of England funds to enable dioceses to support parish ministry, meant the removal of £3 million of funding per year from the Diocese of Chelmsford. Lowest Income Community funding (LInC) replaced part of the of Darlow Formula and has been used to support ministry in parishes in our most deprived communities. LInC funding has also been substantially reduced recently. The Chelmsford Diocesan Board of Finance (CDBF) is legally required to pay stipends. Parish share is a gift paid from parishes to the CDBF. Pre-pandemic the shortfall between parish share received and expenditure was 92%-94% per annum. Post pandemic the shortfall has been 82%-85% per annum. In 2026 the CDBF spent £16.8 million on local parish ministry. In 2026 the CDBF received £15.6 million in parish share.

The challenge: Supporting ministry at both parish and diocesan level costs money. People and parishes are generous, but everyone's costs keep going up. Increasing our vocations and having more priests and ministers serving our parishes would enable our parishes in their mission and ministry, but a continuing shortfall in parish share means that is not possible. How can we change this situation and increase our giving to increase our mission and ministry in parishes?

Talk together topics:

- How is our journey discipleship in Jesus expressed through our giving?
- How does fund-raising and mission connect together?
- When was the last time your parish community talked about stewardship (giving) and your missional hopes for the future?
- What do you know about the generosity and giving support available from the diocese? Have you seen [the webpages on the diocesan website](#) that highlight the resources available?
- [Cornerstone](#) is a new online generosity tool that helps parish churches have a detailed picture of their finances in an accessible way. Have you thought about trying Cornerstone? If you have, could you share what you learnt with others?
- If parish share shortfall decreased, it would increase the support available for ministry and mission in our parishes. How would you hope that increase in support would be spent?



And finally... Question 5. What's missing?

The facts: Sustaining Ministry started life at our Diocesan Synod in March 2025 and during our 100 Days of Listening is asking questions about 4 big areas of our shared life as a diocese made up of parish communities; vocations, wellbeing, buildings, and finance.

The challenge: In a large and diverse diocese like Chelmsford we know there will be questions that matter where you are and that need to be heard. During our 100 Days of Listening as you continue to pray and listen to God and one another, what would be the big area of our shared life for a Question 5 topic?

Talk together topics:

- How do the 4 big areas of vocations, wellbeing, buildings, and finance, connect together?
- Are there areas of overlap that are being missed in our conversations?
- What are the themes that matter to your community where you are?
- What's missing from the 4 big areas?