



LEADER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

A complete guide to listening, prayerful discernment and faithful next steps

A CHURCH DISCERNMENT PROCESS

A ready-to-use framework to help a whole congregation celebrate what is fruitful, consider what may need to change, imagine faithful possibilities, and give church leaders trustworthy evidence for prayerful discernment.

Listen faithfully • Discern prayerfully • Respond courageously

Developed in the life of a local church and designed to be adapted for churches of different sizes, traditions and structures.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

More than we can imagine

“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,”

Ephesians 3:20 (NIV)

Imagine begins here. The name is not an invitation to trust our creativity. It is a reminder that the church belongs to God and that his power, purposes and possibilities exceed our own plans. We therefore listen carefully to people, seek God together in prayer, and remain open to possibilities that are faithful to Scripture and appropriate to the place in which God has set us.

THE CONTROLLING CONVICTION

Imagine is not first about what we can imagine, but about the God who is able to do more than we can ask or imagine.

This verse provides the biblical foundation for the whole process. It should shape the tone of the gathering, the analysis of feedback, leadership discernment and the move towards action.

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START HERE

Welcome to Imagine

Imagine is a ready-to-use process for churches that want to listen well before deciding what to do. It creates space for the congregation to recognise what is fruitful, speak honestly about what may need to change, and prayerfully consider where God may be leading next.

It was developed in the life of a local church, but it has been deliberately written so churches of different sizes, traditions and leadership structures can adapt it to their own context.

THE AIM

The aim is not a hurried list of new programmes. The aim is to hear well enough that faithful next steps can be discerned well.

Three principles to protect

- The gathering is for listening and discernment, not instant decision-making.
- Frequency is evidence of recurrence, not a vote.
- Keep distinct: what people said > what the evidence may mean > what leadership finally decides to do.

What Imagine is not

- A strategy launch or a consultation designed to approve a plan already made.
- A popularity contest in which the most-mentioned idea automatically wins.
- A substitute for biblical leadership, prayer, safeguarding, legal advice or specialist conflict mediation.

THE FRAMEWORK

People • Prayer • Possibilities

	WHAT IT MEANS	PROCESS LINE
PEOPLE	Listen to the people God has placed among us and around us. Hear gratitude, concern, hope, minority voices and the experience of those less connected to church.	LISTEN FAITHFULLY
PRAYER	Bring what has been heard before God. Test themes, resist easy answers, attend to Scripture, and ask what may deserve particular spiritual attention.	DISCERN PRAYERFULLY
POSSIBILITIES	Explore faithful responses without confusing an idea with a decision. Move from strategic questions to action only after discernment.	RESPOND COURAGEOUSLY

The three words are the public identity of Imagine. The three verbs are the process leaders follow. Together they prevent the resource from becoming either a vague conversation or a purely managerial exercise.

A SIMPLE SENTENCE

Imagine is a process of listening to people, seeking God in prayer, and becoming open to faithful possibilities.

ONE-PAGE MAP

Imagine at a glance

See the whole journey before you read the detail.

STEP	MOVEMENT	PURPOSE
1	PREPARE	Pray, invite broadly, prepare questions, number tables and sheets.
2	LISTEN	Celebrate > Change > Imagine across the three main conversations.
3	PRIORITISE	Each group names what not to lose, what to explore and what may deserve attention.
4	LOOK FORWARD	Describe the kind of church people hope to be thankful for in three years.
5	PRESERVE	Transcribe the evidence faithfully before interpretation begins.
6	ANALYSE	Identify themes, build an evidence matrix and test first conclusions.
7	DISCERN	Leadership receives the evidence, prays, tests strategic questions and prioritises.
8	RESPOND	Report back, explore options, decide, act and review.

Listen faithfully > Discern prayerfully > Respond courageously

ADAPTING THE RESOURCE

How to adapt Imagine for your church

Imagine is designed to be flexible. Churches differ in size, culture, tradition, leadership structures and available time. You do not need to reproduce every detail exactly.

KEEP THESE ELEMENTS	ADAPT THESE ELEMENTS
• A clear biblical foundation centred on Ephesians 3:20. • The movement of People • Prayer • Possibilities. • Genuine listening before decisions are made. • Prayerful discernment rather than voting on ideas. • A faithful, traceable record of what people actually said. • Leadership responsibility for weighing the evidence and deciding next steps. • Communication back to the congregation.	• The length and timing of the gathering. • The number and size of discussion groups. • The wording of local examples and practical instructions. • Terminology for leaders or governing bodies. • Venue, room layout and visual presentation. • The number of follow-up meetings. • The format of summaries, papers and presentations.

DO NOT COPY BLINDLY

The aim is not to copy another church's event. Preserve the principles of Imagine while shaping the process for your own context.

RESOURCE MAP

Contents

SECTION	FOCUS
Start Here	Biblical foundation; framework; at-a-glance map; adapting Imagine.
Part 1 - Listen Faithfully / People	Preparation; communication; running the gathering; discussion materials; group priorities; Looking Forward.
Part 2 - Discern Prayerfully / Prayer	Preserving evidence; AI safeguards; seven prompts; evidence matrix; worked example; leadership discernment.
Part 3 - Respond Courageously / Possibilities	Reporting back; outputs; moving from priorities to decisions; review; resource pack; troubleshooting; closing prayer.
Appendix	Compact worked example and copy-ready leadership meeting sheet.

COMPANION FILES

Keep the full-size discussion sheets, participant booklet, editable master feedback form and 16:9 visual pack as separate companion files. This guide explains how and why to use them.

PART 1

Listen Faithfully

PEOPLE

Good discernment begins before the first table conversation.

Imagine

People • Prayer • Possibilities

PART 1

Preparing for the gathering

Simple preparation protects the quality of both the conversation and the evidence that comes later.

Before the day

- Invite the whole church family, not only existing leaders or highly involved members.
- Aim for tables of around 5-7 people, mixing ages, length of church involvement and areas of service where practical.
- Number every table and every feedback sheet so evidence can later be traced accurately.
- Give each table a recorder. Their task is to capture the group's words, not steer the conversation.
- Ask participants beforehand to think of one real person they know who has little or no church connection.
- Decide who will lead transitions, keep time, collect sheets and oversee refreshments.

The lens

KEEP ASKING

Would what we are talking about genuinely help someone with little or no church connection take a step towards Jesus?

The person is a lens, not a mission project. Not every part of church life should be judged only by outward mission. The lens simply helps the church resist speaking only from the perspective of people who already know its patterns.

Practical setup

- Arrange the room around tables rather than rows.
- Prepare one clearly labelled folder or envelope for each table.
- Place a complete set of discussion sheets and pens at each table.
- Use a simple 16:9 presentation only to support transitions; the conversation is the main event.
- Plan refreshments so the break does not consume discussion time.

PART 1

Communicating before Imagine

Make the invitation clear: everyone can contribute and no plan is being smuggled through.

Initial invitation - ready to adapt

WEBSITE OR CHURCH NOTICE

Imagine is a time for our whole church family to step back, listen to one another and prayerfully consider where God may be leading us next. Together we will celebrate what is fruitful, consider what may need to change, and imagine new possibilities - particularly as we think about loving our community, developing a culture of invitation and helping people encounter Jesus. This is not a meeting with decisions already made; it is an opportunity for everyone to contribute. Join us on [DATE] from [TIME] at [VENUE].

Short invitation

SUNDAY NOTICE OR SOCIAL MEDIA

What could God do through us? Join us for Imagine on [DATE] at [TIME] - a time for our whole church family to pray, listen and imagine together. Everyone is encouraged to take part.

Reminder a few days before

EMAIL OR MESSAGE

Please come ready to listen, contribute and pray. You do not need to prepare answers or arrive with a plan. It may help to think of one real person you know who has little or no church connection. As we talk, we will sometimes ask whether what we are discussing would genuinely help someone like them take a step towards Jesus.

PART 1

A sample two-hour running order

TIME	MOVEMENT	LENGTH	PURPOSE
10.00	Welcome	5 min	Explain purpose and tone.
10.05	Worship / Prayer	5 min	Place the morning explicitly before God.
10.10	Getting Talking	5 min	One thankful thing about the church.
10.15	Why Imagine?	5 min	Explain the journey, lens and method.
10.20	Loving Our Community	20 min	Celebrate > Change > Imagine.
10.40	A Culture of Invitation	20 min	Celebrate > Change > Imagine.
11.00	Coffee Break	10 min	Keep it to time.
11.10	Encountering Jesus	20 min	Celebrate > Change > Imagine.
11.30	What Are We Hearing?	10 min	Each table chooses its own priorities.
11.40	Looking Forward	10 min	Imagine the church three years from now.
11.50	Next Steps, Prayer + Close	10 min	Explain what will happen to the feedback.
12.00	Finish		

Getting Talking

OPENING QUESTION

If you were talking to a stranger about your church, what is one thing you would tell them you are thankful for?

The day should feel purposeful but not rushed. The facilitator protects time and culture; the tables do the listening.

PART 1

Facilitator's key words

Opening the day

SAY THIS

We have called today Imagine because we want to make space to listen to one another and to God. There are no decisions already made, and we do not need to decide everything today. We want to celebrate what is fruitful, be honest about what may need to change, and imagine what God might be calling us to do next.

Explain the rhythm

WORD	WHAT TO SAY
CELEBRATE	Before we talk about change, recognise what God has already given us. What is fruitful? What are we thankful for? What should we be careful not to lose?
CHANGE	Be honest. What could we do differently? Is anything no longer helping as it once did? What may need to stop, simplify or be rethought?
IMAGINE	Think beyond what we currently do. What are we not doing that perhaps we should? Do not begin with cost, volunteers or all the reasons something might be difficult.

POSSIBILITIES FIRST; PRACTICALITIES LATER

First ask whether an idea is worth exploring. Feasibility belongs to a later stage.

Table culture

- Listen as much as you speak.
- If you have spoken, make space for someone else.
- Invite quieter voices in; passing is always acceptable.
- Do not rush to defend an existing activity or dismiss a new idea.
- For each question, consider one brief thought or a pass from everyone before opening discussion.

PART 1

The three main discussions

Use the same Celebrate > Change > Imagine rhythm in each conversation. Keep the questions open and avoid supplying examples too quickly.

Loving Our Community

How are we already loving and serving the people around us - and where might God be opening new possibilities?

- CELEBRATE - Where are we already building good relationships and seeing fruit?
- CHANGE - What may need to be done differently or stopped?
- IMAGINE - Who are we not reaching, what needs are we missing, and what might be worth trying?

A Culture of Invitation

What helps ordinary Christians naturally invite others into relationships, community and opportunities to explore faith?

- CELEBRATE - When is it already natural to invite someone?
- CHANGE - What makes invitation harder than it needs to be?
- IMAGINE - What would help invitation become a normal part of church life?

Encountering Jesus

How can people with little or no church background take genuine steps towards hearing, exploring and responding to Jesus?

- CELEBRATE - Where are people already hearing about Jesus accessibly?
- CHANGE - What may be confusing or intimidating to someone unfamiliar with church?
- IMAGINE - What could provide a simple first step for someone curious about Jesus?

PART 1

What Are We Hearing?

Let the groups identify what mattered most before leadership or AI begins analysing.

GROUP CHOOSES	PURPOSE
ONE THING WE REALLY DON'T WANT TO LOSE	What is so important or fruitful that change should not accidentally damage it?
ONE IDEA WE REALLY THINK IS WORTH EXPLORING	Not a commitment to launch it - simply something the group believes deserves serious attention.
ONE THING WE THINK GOD MAY BE DRAWING OUR ATTENTION TO	A concern, opportunity or challenge that feels spiritually significant.

These are participant-selected priorities. A theme chosen by several tables is strong evidence of recurrence, but it still needs interpretation and prayerful discernment.

DO NOT TURN THIS INTO A VOTE

The purpose is to hear what each independent group most wants leadership to notice, not to announce winners.

Looking Forward - Imagine

MAIN QUESTION

Imagine it is three years from now. If you were talking to a stranger about your church, what would you hope you could tell them you are thankful for?

1. 3 minutes - imagine alone and write.
2. 3 minutes - share one thought each.
3. 4 minutes - imagine together and capture 3-5 shared hopes.

Keep Looking Forward evidence distinct. Present frustrations reveal pressure points; future hopes often reveal the desired destination.

PART 1

Closing the gathering well

A strong close protects trust. Participants should know exactly what happens to their words next.

SAY THIS NEAR THE END

We will bring together everything that has been shared, look carefully for the themes, pray and discern what God may be saying to us, and report back before decisions about particular responses are made.

Collecting the evidence

- Collect every original sheet.
- Keep each table's bundle together and clearly numbered.
- Do not photograph a pile of mixed sheets and attempt to reconstruct tables later.
- Store the material securely until transcription is complete.
- Do not announce a "top three" or promise that the most frequently mentioned suggestion will happen.

The transition

At this point the public gathering ends, but the Imagine process does not. The next movement is from listening faithfully to discerning prayerfully.

PART 2

Discern Prayerfully

PRAYER

Preserve the evidence first. Interpret it second. Recommend action last.

Imagine

People • Prayer • Possibilities

PART 2

Preserve the evidence

The master transcription is the bridge between the room and later discernment.

- Keep each table's original sheets together and clearly numbered.
- Transcribe wording as closely as possible. Do not improve grammar or merge similar comments.
- Use [unclear] where handwriting cannot be read rather than guessing.
- Use one master document, with each table clearly separated and the original Celebrate / Change / Imagine headings retained.
- Do not begin interpretation until all tables have been entered.
- Leave a section blank if a group gave no response; do not infer what they might have meant.

The key safeguard

USE THE GROUP AS THE UNIT OF EVIDENCE

Ten comments from one table do not equal ten independent expressions of congregational support.

How to judge a theme

TEST	QUESTION
Breadth	How many independent groups raised it?
Depth	Did a group return to it across several questions?
Priority	Did the group select it under Don't Lose / Explore / Notice?
Future hope	Did it reappear in Looking Forward?

Frequency is evidence of recurrence, not a vote. A minority observation may still be spiritually or strategically important.

PART 2

Before using ChatGPT or another AI tool

AI can help organise evidence; it must not become the church's discernment.

Data and privacy

- Remove names and personal details that are not necessary for analysis.
- Do not include private pastoral information or information participants would reasonably expect to remain confidential.
- Follow your church or denomination's data-protection policy and the current terms of the AI service you use.
- Keep a clean copy of the original master transcription so later summaries can be checked.

AI is useful for

- Finding recurring themes across a long transcription.
- Building a group-by-theme evidence matrix.
- Testing whether first conclusions are overstated or understated.
- Separating participant priorities from wider discussion.
- Helping phrase strategic questions without jumping immediately to programmes.

AI should not decide

- What God is saying to your church.
- Which biblical convictions should govern the decision.
- Which programme should be launched.
- Whether a minority concern is spiritually significant.
- What leadership should finally decide.

DO NOT ASK THIS FIRST

Avoid beginning with: "Here is our feedback - what should our church do?" That skips the evidence stage and invites generic recommendations.

PART 2

AI Prompt 1 - evidence-first analysis

Upload the completed master transcription, then copy and paste:

PROMPT 1

I have uploaded the completed feedback from our church's Imagine day.

Analyse it as qualitative congregational feedback. Do not make recommendations yet.

Important rules:

- Treat each table/group - not each individual written comment - as the primary unit of evidence.
- Preserve Celebrate, Change, Imagine, the table's chosen priorities, and Looking Forward as distinct evidence.
- Let themes emerge from the feedback rather than imposing categories beforehand.
- For each theme distinguish breadth, depth, participant priority, and whether it appears in Looking Forward.
- Frequency is evidence of recurrence, not a vote.
- Do not give extra congregational weight to a group simply because it wrote more.
- Identify strong recurring themes, recurring themes, significant minority observations, practical suggestions, tensions/differing views, and areas of insufficient evidence.
- For every major conclusion show the evidence from the groups that supports it.
- Clearly separate: (1) what people actually said, (2) what the evidence may mean, and (3) what leadership might eventually consider.
- For this first stage concentrate only on (1) and (2). Do not recommend programmes or actions.

Begin with a detailed evidence-first analysis of the complete feedback.

PART 2

AI Prompts 2-4 - test before acting

Prompt 2 - Build an evidence matrix

PROMPT 2

Now produce a group-by-theme evidence matrix.

For each emerging theme show exactly which groups raised it. Distinguish, where possible, between: raised somewhere in the discussion; selected as a group priority; reflected in the group's Looking Forward response.

Use the group as the unit of evidence. Repeated references within one group add depth but must not increase the breadth count.

Use the matrix to test your first conclusions. Tell me clearly if any conclusion now looks overstated, understated or needs to be changed.

Prompt 3 - Analyse chosen priorities separately

PROMPT 3

Now set aside the wider discussion temporarily and analyse only the groups' chosen: Don't Lose; Worth Exploring; God May Be Drawing Our Attention To.

Do these chosen priorities reinforce the hierarchy emerging from the wider feedback, or reveal something the wider discussion has hidden?

Do not make recommendations yet. Show the evidence for every conclusion.

Prompt 4 - Identify strategic issues

PROMPT 4

Given everything established from the evidence, identify 4-6 strategic issues that our leadership needs to discern. These must be issues or questions, not proposed programmes or solutions.

For each give: What we heard; Why it matters; The evidence; The question leadership needs to answer; What should deliberately not be decided yet.

Continue to distinguish clearly between what the congregation said, your interpretation of it, and decisions that belong to leadership.

PART 2

Reading an evidence matrix

The matrix is a check on interpretation, not a scorecard for deciding winners.

CODE	MEANING
R	Raised somewhere in the group's discussion.
P	Selected by the group as a priority.
F	Appeared in the group's Looking Forward response.

How to interpret it

- Breadth matters: eight groups raising a theme is different from one group writing eight comments about it.
- Priority matters: a theme chosen by groups at the end may deserve more attention than raw frequency alone suggests.
- Future hope matters: themes appearing in Looking Forward often reveal desired direction rather than only dissatisfaction.
- Absence matters cautiously: if a theme is not present, do not assume people oppose it; simply say the evidence does not establish it.

TEST YOUR FIRST CONCLUSION

After building the matrix, explicitly ask: what now looks overstated, understated or in need of revision? Good analysis is willing to change its mind when the evidence becomes clearer.

PART 2

AI Prompts 5-7 - turn analysis into outputs

Prompt 5 - Congregational summary and A5 booklet

PROMPT 5

Using the analysis we have completed, produce a short congregational summary called What We Heard at Imagine. Keep a clear distinction between what the congregation actually said and what leadership may later decide. Include: a short thank-you and explanation of the process; the 4-6 strongest themes; what people clearly do not want to lose; recurring hopes for the future; any important tensions or differing views; a short explanation of what happens next. Use accessible, warm language suitable for the whole congregation. Do not turn suggestions into decisions and do not say “the congregation decided” unless supported by the evidence.

Optional finished format: turn the summary into a short A5 portrait booklet, around 6-8 pages, with a clear Imagine visual style. Suggested sequence: Cover; Thank you / how we listened; What we value and do not want to lose; Strongest themes; Hopes for the future; What happens next; Final page. Do not add conclusions or imagery not supported by the analysis. If creating the file, ask for a finished A5 PDF.

Prompt 6 - Leadership Discernment Paper

PROMPT 6

Now produce a Leadership Discernment Paper based only on the evidence already established. Identify 4-6 strategic issues leadership needs to discern. For each include: What we heard; Why it matters; Evidence from the groups; What the evidence may mean; The question leadership needs to answer; What should deliberately not be decided yet. End with: What the congregation said > What we believe it may mean > What leadership believes we should do. Do not recommend detailed programmes yet.

Optional finished format: create a polished A4 portrait document suitable for circulation before the leadership meeting, clear, restrained and easy to annotate. Include a short note explaining that it prepares leaders for Receive > Discern > Prioritise, not an action plan. If creating files, ask for both A4 PDF and editable Word version.

Prompt 7 - Congregational presentation

PROMPT 7

Create a short 16:9 presentation to report the results of Imagine back to the congregation. Use only conclusions supported by the completed analysis. Include: Title - Imagine: What We Heard; How we listened; What we value and do not want to lose; 3-5 slides on the strongest themes; Hopes for the future; What happens next; Final slide. Keep wording brief: one clear heading and no more than 3-5 short points per slide. Do not present leadership interpretation or future actions as though the congregation has already decided them. If actual files are wanted, create the finished slides in 16:9 format using a consistent Imagine visual identity.

PART 2

Worked example - from raw comments to themes

This example is fictional. It demonstrates the method; it is not a model answer for what another church should conclude.

GROUP	RAW FEEDBACK	CHOSEN PRIORITIES	LOOKING FORWARD
1	Celebrate: Good Bible teaching; café has helped us know more people locally. Change: Sunday can feel like a big first step. Imagine: relaxed meal/discussion for questions.	Don't Lose: Bible teaching. Explore: informal faith group. Notice: accessible first steps.	People from the community know us, feel welcome and some have come to faith.
2	Celebrate: Strong church family; family events easy to invite to. Change: weak connection with younger adults/families. Imagine: more presence where families already are.	Don't Lose: church family. Explore: links with younger families. Notice: community presence.	Children, young adults and older people worshipping and serving together.
3	Celebrate: Prayer and care are strong. Change: too much happens inside the building; unclear what we stand for. Imagine: community drop-in with natural faith conversations.	Don't Lose: prayer and care. Explore: community presence. Notice: clear link to Jesus.	Known locally as people who love the community and clearly love Jesus.
4	Celebrate: Warm welcome; personal invitations work. Change: services can feel unfamiliar and timing does not work for everyone. Imagine: different times or less formal gathering.	Don't Lose: welcome. Explore: different times/formats. Notice: relationships and invitation.	More people taking small steps from friendship into belonging and faith.

A first-pass theme set

EMERGING THEME	EVIDENCE EXAMPLES
Community presence	Café relationships; places families use; too much happens inside the building.
Accessible first steps	Sunday feels a big step; relaxed discussion; less formal gathering.
Younger generations	Concern about younger adults/families; intergenerational future hope.
Relationships and invitation	Family events; personal invitations; friendship into belonging.
Clear path towards Jesus	Questions; faith conversations; clear link to Jesus.
Preserve healthy identity	Bible teaching; church family; prayer and care; warm welcome.

PART 2

Worked example - matrix to strategic questions

An evidence matrix tests the first interpretation. The exact coding below is illustrative, not a score.

THEME	G1	G2	G3	G4	WHAT THE MATRIX SUGGESTS
Community presence	R/F	R/P	R/P/F		Broad and prioritised.
Accessible first steps	R/P/F			R/P/F	Strong in two groups, with priority/future evidence.
Younger generations		R/P/F		R	Important, but narrower breadth.
Relationships / invitation		R	R	R/P/F	Broad, especially relational.
Path towards Jesus	R/F		R/P/F	R/F	Broad future-direction theme.
Preserve healthy identity	P	P	P	P	Universal Don't Lose pattern, though different wording.

Move from themes to strategic issues

- How can we become more present in the community without weakening the healthy Christian identity people value?
- What intentional pathway could help someone move from community contact and friendship towards belonging, exploring faith and encountering Jesus?
- How should we respond to the weaker connection with younger adults and families?
- What forms, times or environments might provide more accessible first steps while remaining recognisably church?

KEEP THE THREE LEVELS SEPARATE

WHAT PEOPLE SAID: community connection, accessible ways in, relationships, a clearer path towards Jesus, and healthy identity.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE MAY MEAN: the issue may be less a shortage of activities than a weakness in the pathway from contact to belonging and faith.

WHAT LEADERSHIP MUST DISCERN: what pathway should be intentionally developed, what must remain recognisably unchanged, and which practical responses are faithful and achievable.

PART 2

The first leadership discernment meeting

Once the evidence has been analysed and checked, leadership can move from listening to discernment. The aim of the first meeting is not an action plan, but agreement about the strategic questions requiring attention.

Before the meeting

Send the congregational evidence summary and Leadership Discernment Paper in advance. Ask each leader to consider:

1. What most clearly confirms something you believe God is already showing us?
2. What challenges or unsettles you?
3. Which strategic issue most needs our attention now - and why?

STAGE	TIME	QUESTION / ACTION
Scripture + prayer	10 min	Place the evidence and the church's future before God.
Receive	15 min	Round the room: What is the one thing from Imagine we most need to hear? No rebuttal.
Discern	25-30 min	Test strategic issues: fair reading? important? might God be drawing attention?
Look underneath	15 min	Are fewer governing priorities sitting underneath several issues?
Prioritise	15-20 min	Place issues under NOW / EXPLORE / KEEP IN VIEW.
Close	5 min	Agree no more than 2-3 areas for the next stage and pray.

DO NOT SOLVE EVERYTHING IN THIS MEETING

Leadership is agreeing where to give attention, not yet settling service times, staffing, budgets, venues or detailed programmes.

PART 2

From discernment to decision

Only after leadership has agreed the strategic direction should particular responses be evaluated.

Stage 1 - Strategic significance

TEST	QUESTION
Biblical fit	Does this help us become more clearly the kind of church Scripture calls us to be?
Imagine fit	Does it connect strongly with community, invitation or encountering Jesus?
Evidence fit	Is it a fair response to what was actually heard?
Strategic leverage	Could this unlock progress across more than one issue?

Stage 2 - Practical feasibility

TEST	QUESTION
People and gifts	Who could lead and serve? What gifts are already present?
Capacity	What would need to stop, simplify or change to make space?
Finance	What is the true cost and is it sustainable?
Timing	Is this a now issue, an explore issue or one to keep in view?
Learning	Could we test the idea as a small experiment before making a large commitment?

THE ORDER MATTERS

Significance first; feasibility second. Otherwise the church may reject a faithful possibility simply because the first version looks difficult.

PART 3

Respond Courageously

POSSIBILITIES

Close the listening loop, take faithful action, and keep learning.

Imagine

People • Prayer • Possibilities

PART 3

Reporting back to the church

Trust grows when people can see how their contribution travelled through the process.

First report - What We Heard

- Name the strongest recurring themes.
- Name important things people do not want to lose.
- Acknowledge tensions or different views.
- Explain what leadership will now discern.
- Do not imply that suggested programmes have already been approved.

Later report - What We Believe We Should Do

- Explain the strategic priorities leadership has agreed.
- Show how they connect with the evidence and biblical convictions.
- Explain which ideas will be explored first and why.
- Be open about capacity, timing and things that may need to change or stop.
- Continue reporting progress, including ideas explored but not pursued.

Language that matches the evidence

PREFER	AVOID
A strong theme we heard...	The congregation decided...
A recurring theme was...	Everyone wants...
We believe this may point towards...	Imagine proved that we must...
We heard different views about...	There was complete agreement...

PART 3

Post-event communication

Thank you - immediately after the day

READY TO ADAPT

Thank you to everyone who took part in Imagine and contributed so thoughtfully. We are now bringing together all the feedback from the tables. We will look carefully for the themes that emerged, pay attention to what people most wanted us not to lose, and consider the areas people felt were worth exploring or may deserve further attention. Imagine was not a vote and today's ideas are not decisions already made. The next stage is to listen carefully to what was said and prayerfully discern what it may mean. We will report back once that work has been completed. Please keep praying, listening and imagining with us.

When the What We Heard summary is ready

READY TO ADAPT

We have now brought together the feedback from Imagine and produced a short summary of the main themes - what we value and do not want to lose, where people see opportunities or challenges, and what we hope our church might look like in the years ahead. This is not an action plan or a list of decisions already made. It is our attempt to listen carefully to what was shared and the beginning of prayerful discernment about where God may be leading us next. [INSERT DETAILS OF WHERE THE SUMMARY CAN BE READ OR COLLECTED.]

When leadership has agreed priorities

Explain the move from listening to action without pretending every suggestion will become a programme. Name the agreed areas of attention and the next stage of exploration.

PART 3

The three core outputs

OUTPUT	AUDIENCE	PURPOSE	RECOMMENDED FORMAT
What We Heard	Whole congregation	Faithfully report the strongest themes, things not to lose, hopes and tensions.	Short A5 booklet, around 6-8 pages.
Leadership Discernment Paper	Leadership team	Frame 4-6 strategic issues and questions without jumping to programmes.	Polished A4 document, easy to annotate.
Congregational Presentation	Whole congregation	Communicate the findings simply and explain what happens next.	Short 16:9 presentation with minimal text.

The outputs should look related, but they do different jobs. Do not put leadership interpretation into the congregational summary as though it were raw feedback, and do not reduce the leadership paper to a glossy summary that cannot support discernment.

A USEFUL COMMUNICATION RHYTHM

INVITE > LISTEN > THANK > REPORT WHAT WE HEARD > DISCERN > EXPLAIN NEXT STEPS

PART 3

From possibilities to faithful action

A possibility is not yet a commitment. Once leadership has discerned priorities, decide what happens next with enough clarity that the process does not simply fade away.

For each agreed priority, name

- The strategic question being addressed.
- The person or group responsible for the next stage.
- What further information or consultation is needed.
- Whether the next step is a decision, a small experiment, a feasibility study or simply continued attention.
- A realistic timescale.
- When and how progress will be reviewed and communicated.

Use experiments wisely

Where uncertainty is high, a small, time-limited experiment may be wiser than a permanent programme launch. Define what you hope to learn, who is responsible, what success or useful learning would look like, and when the experiment will be reviewed.

DO NOT CONFUSE COURAGE WITH SPEED

Responding courageously can mean starting something new, stopping something no longer fruitful, simplifying, waiting, or choosing to protect something the church should not lose.

PART 3

Reviewing what happens next

Imagine should create a learning cycle rather than a one-off event.

WHEN	ASK
After the first leadership meeting	Have we agreed the right strategic questions, or have we already slipped into programme decisions?
After the first decisions	Can we explain how these decisions relate to Scripture, prayer and what was heard?
After 3-6 months	What has actually changed? What have we learned? What needs adjustment?
After 9-12 months	Which priorities remain live? What should stop, continue, deepen or be reconsidered?

Report back even when an idea is not pursued. People are more likely to trust the process when they can see that possibilities were genuinely explored and weighed rather than silently disappearing.

THE DAY IS NOT THE FINISH LINE

Imagine is the beginning of a better conversation - one in which listening, prayer and faithful response stay connected.

PART 3

Resource pack contents and printing guide

ITEM	PURPOSE	WHO	QUANTITY	FORMA T
Leader's Resource Guide	Full method and guidance.	Minister / leadership	Digital; print if useful	A4
Leader's Running Order	Timings and prompts.	Day leader	1 per leader	A4
Participant Booklet	Purpose and exercises.	Every participant	1 each	As supplied
Three Discussion Sheets	Celebrate / Change / Imagine.	Each table	1 set per table	A3 landscape
What Are We Hearing?	Table-selected priorities.	Each table	1 per table	A3 or A4
Looking Forward	Three-year hopes.	Each table	1 per table	A3 or A4
Presentation Slides	Supports the day.	Whole room	Display only	16:9
Blank Master Feedback Form	Transcribes every group.	Feedback collator	Digital working copy	A4
Leadership Meeting Sheet	Structures discernment.	Leadership team	1 each	A4

Printing checklist

- Participant booklets - one for every person attending, plus a few spares.
- One complete set of the three main discussion sheets for every table.
- What Are We Hearing? and Looking Forward - one per table.
- Leader's Running Order - one per person helping lead the day.
- Clearly visible table numbers matching the feedback sheets.

PART 3

Practical troubleshooting

IF THIS HAPPENS	TRY THIS
One person dominates a table	Use a one-thought-or-pass round before open discussion; remind the room that listening is part of the task.
The conversation becomes defensive	Return to Celebrate first, then ask what might help rather than who is to blame.
People jump straight to costs and staffing	Repeat: possibilities first; practicalities later.
A table produces very little writing	Do not inflate it. Preserve what is there and let breadth across groups do the work.
One table writes far more than others	Keep the group as the unit of evidence; more words do not create more votes.
A minority concern feels important	Record it as a significant minority observation and let leadership discern its weight.
AI gives generic recommendations	Return to evidence-first prompts and insist on group-level citations before interpretation.
Leadership wants to announce actions immediately	First report What We Heard; then discern; then explain what leadership believes should happen.

CLOSING

Return to the beginning

Imagine began with Ephesians 3:20. It should end there too. The purpose of the process is not simply to gather better information or produce a more persuasive plan. It is to help a church listen faithfully, discern prayerfully and respond courageously under God.

EPHESIANS 3:20

“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,”



Listen faithfully • Discern prayerfully • Respond courageously

The day is not the finish line. It is the beginning of a better conversation.

APPENDIX

Leadership discernment meeting sheet

A compact page to use around the table.

1. RECEIVE - What do we need to hear?

What is the one thing from Imagine that we most need to hear?

Notes: _____

2. DISCERN - Test the strategic issues

For each issue ask: Is this a fair reading of what we heard? Does it matter strategically? Might God be drawing particular attention to it?

3. LOOK UNDERNEATH

Are these really separate issues, or might a smaller number of governing priorities sit underneath them?

POSSIBLE PROMPTS, NOT PREDETERMINED ANSWERS

KEEP - what healthy identity must remain? | GO - where should we become more present? |
 PATHWAY - how do people move from relationship to belonging, exploring faith, Jesus and
 discipleship? | GENERATIONS - who is currently least connected?

4. PRIORITISE

Use NOW / EXPLORE / KEEP IN VIEW. Not everything can be “now”.

5. WHAT WE ARE NOT DECIDING YET

Unless the discussion clearly requires otherwise, do not yet settle particular programmes, service times, venues, staffing, budgets or detailed implementation. First agree the strategic direction.