

IMAGINE

Leadership Discernment Paper

Kirk Session follow-up to Imagine

Purpose

This paper identifies six strategic issues arising from the feedback of the 11 Imagine groups. It is deliberately a discernment paper, not an action plan. Its purpose is to help leadership agree what questions need to be answered before particular programmes, structures, times, venues or resources are chosen.

COVERING INTRODUCTION

This paper is for Kirk Session's first substantive follow-up to Imagine. The purpose of the meeting is to receive and test the evidence, discern the strategic questions that now require leadership attention, and agree a small number of priorities for the next stage. It is not an action-plan meeting. Particular programmes, staffing arrangements, service times, venues or budgets should only be considered after the strategic direction and principles are clear.

DECISIONS / OUTCOMES REQUIRED TONIGHT

1. Receive the six strategic issues in this paper as a fair summary of the main matters arising from Imagine, subject to any amendments Kirk Session believes are necessary.
2. Identify no more than two or three areas that require active leadership attention now.
3. Identify which remaining issues need further prayer, evidence or exploration, and which should be kept in view rather than treated as immediate priorities.
4. Agree the core biblical convictions, relational qualities and missional commitments that must be protected as future responses are considered.
5. Agree the next step: what further work is required, who will take responsibility for it, and how and when the congregation will be updated.

SCOPE FOR TONIGHT

Unless a separate item on the Kirk Session agenda requires it, tonight does not need to settle individual programmes, detailed implementation, staffing, budgets, changes to worship times or commitment to particular venues. The desired outcome is clarity about direction and the questions that must be answered next.

Evidence-first principle

The group, rather than the number of written comments, is treated as the primary unit of evidence. Recurring themes, table priorities and the three-year Looking Forward responses have been considered together. Frequency indicates breadth, not a vote.

Overall direction emerging from Imagine

We value the caring Christian community God has already given us and want to protect the fellowship, ministry, biblical teaching, prayer and Gospel identity that shape our church. At the same time, there is very widespread recognition that we need stronger connection with our wider community, particularly younger generations and families. We want to become more present where people are, create more accessible ways for people unfamiliar with church to build relationships and explore faith, and become more intentional about helping those relationships lead towards Jesus.

1. BECOMING MORE PRESENT IN THE COMMUNITY

WHAT WE HEARD

Across the 11 groups there is very widespread desire for stronger connection with the wider community. The language includes going where people are, meeting people on their terms, community spaces, outreach, serving community needs, widening Christian witness and becoming a more open community church.

WHY IT MATTERS

This appears to be deeper than a request for additional events. It raises a question about the church's basic posture: are we mainly available for people to come to us, or intentionally present among people where they already live their lives? That could shape priorities, staff and volunteer time, use of buildings, partnerships and how fruit is understood.

EVIDENCE

Community connection was evident across all 11 groups in the wider analysis. It was also explicitly prioritised by several groups: Group 1 wanted to meet the community where people are; Group 7 prioritised community outreach, schools and SU; Group 8 chose taking church out into the community; Group 10 chose widening community witness.

QUESTION LEADERSHIP NEEDS TO ANSWER

What would it mean for Chryston Parish Church to be genuinely present in the community rather than simply available to the community?

WHAT SHOULD DELIBERATELY NOT BE DECIDED YET

Do not yet decide whether this requires a shop, another venue, a new event, changes to existing ministries, a particular staffing pattern or a specific community partnership.

2. HELPING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS LEAD TOWARDS JESUS

WHAT WE HEARD

The church's community activities and relationships are strongly valued, but several groups also expressed concern that community contact should have a clearer connection with Jesus, Christian witness and the Gospel. Other groups stressed friendship, listening, trust and meeting people where they are.

WHY IT MATTERS

Leadership therefore needs to discern the relationship between service, friendship, community presence and evangelism. The evidence supports greater intentionality about Jesus, but it does not establish one agreed method. A forced or purely programmatic response could damage the very relationships the congregation values.

EVIDENCE

Groups 5, 8, 9 and 10 were especially explicit about Christian input, Gospel identity or Jesus-focus. Group 9 summarised the distinction as not 'recruiting' but sharing the Gospel. At the same time, Groups 1 and 2 strongly emphasised relationships, personal conversation and prayer.

QUESTION LEADERSHIP NEEDS TO ANSWER

How can we be unmistakably about Jesus without making genuine relationships feel instrumental or forced?

WHAT SHOULD DELIBERATELY NOT BE DECIDED YET

Do not yet decide that every community activity requires the same Christian element, a formal Gospel talk, a testimony, a course invitation, or any single evangelistic model.

3. RESPONDING TO THE MISSING GENERATIONS

WHAT WE HEARD

Children, young people, younger adults and families recur throughout the feedback. Groups refer to young families, younger men, people in their 20s and 30s, youth, children, university students and 'missing generations'. The three-year hopes repeatedly imagine a more intergenerational congregation.

WHY IT MATTERS

The strategic issue is not simply whether more children's or youth activities are needed. Some feedback questions the fruitfulness or Christian connection of existing provision. Leadership first needs to understand where the pathway is breaking down: initial contact, follow-up, belonging, Sunday accessibility, peer relationships, faith exploration or discipleship.

EVIDENCE

Ten groups gave clear evidence of concern for younger generations/families, with the remaining group expressing a hope for a church filled with all ages. Group 3 explicitly identified 'missing generations'; Group 7 prioritised children, young people and families; Group 11 identified university students and a gap between Tiny Tunes and school.

QUESTION LEADERSHIP NEEDS TO ANSWER

What would a genuine pathway from first contact to belonging, faith and discipleship look like for children, young people, young adults and families?

WHAT SHOULD DELIBERATELY NOT BE DECIDED YET

Do not yet decide that the answer is simply more children's activities, a particular youth programme, a family service, changes to Hub Kids, or a particular appointment. First identify the actual gaps in the pathway.

4. CREATING ACCESSIBLE FIRST STEPS TOWARDS CHRISTIAN FAITH

WHAT WE HEARD

Many groups recognised that normal Sunday worship may not always be the easiest first step for someone unfamiliar with church. Suggestions included Christianity Explored, Alpha, discussion groups, informal meals, alternative services, midweek gatherings and community-based settings.

WHY IT MATTERS

The individual suggestions differ, but they point towards a common underlying need: an accessible intermediate space between little or no church connection and comfortable participation in normal congregational worship. This is a strategic question about pathways, not programme selection.

EVIDENCE

Ten groups gave clear evidence of an accessible 'stepping-stone' theme. Group 2 explicitly used the language of stepping-stone services and activities. Groups 5, 7, 8 and 9 independently suggested Christian exploration or discussion environments in different forms.

QUESTION LEADERSHIP NEEDS TO ANSWER

What should an accessible first step towards Christian faith and church community look like in Chryston?

WHAT SHOULD DELIBERATELY NOT BE DECIDED YET

Do not yet choose Alpha, Christianity Explored, Messy Church, a meal, a discussion night, a new service or another named programme. First agree what the first step is intended to accomplish and for whom.

5. DISCERNING WHAT CAN BE FLEXIBLE IN TIME, FORMAT AND PLACE

WHAT WE HEARD

A substantial majority of groups raised alternatives around service times, days, formats or locations. Concerns included unfamiliar church culture, singing, prayer, language, walking into the building, working patterns and the difficulty of fitting existing times.

WHY IT MATTERS

Sunday worship, preaching, prayer and teaching are also repeatedly valued. The issue is therefore not whether normal worship should be abandoned, but which aspects of present practice are theological convictions and which are inherited habits that could be adapted to remove unnecessary barriers.

EVIDENCE

Nine groups gave clear evidence of interest in flexibility of time, format or place. Group 2 repeatedly raised timing and accessibility; Group 7 spoke of flexibility while retaining Sunday worship and using community spaces; Group 11 selected other days and times to go to church as its Explore priority.

QUESTION LEADERSHIP NEEDS TO ANSWER

Which parts of our current church pattern are convictions we should protect, and which are habits we should be willing to adapt?

WHAT SHOULD DELIBERATELY NOT BE DECIDED YET

Do not yet change Sunday service times, alter the sermon, remove singing, launch another service or commit to a new venue. First establish the principles that should govern flexibility.

6. CHANGING WITHOUT LOSING WHAT IS ALREADY HEALTHY

WHAT WE HEARD

The 'Don't Lose' responses consistently protect fellowship, caring relationships, ministry, welcome, prayer, Bible-based teaching, Christian witness, Jesus-centred identity and church-family intimacy.

WHY IT MATTERS

Imagine therefore cannot fairly be interpreted either as a mandate to preserve everything or as permission for wholesale reinvention. Leadership needs to identify the theological and relational qualities that must remain recognisable even if methods, programmes and patterns change.

EVIDENCE

Nine groups gave clear evidence of wanting to preserve the caring, relational church-family identity. Explicit commitment to the Christian/biblical core appeared strongly in several groups and more broadly across the document: teaching, prayer, God's Word, Jesus, Gospel witness and the Lord's presence recur in both priorities and Looking Forward responses.

QUESTION LEADERSHIP NEEDS TO ANSWER

What must remain recognisably the same about Chryston Parish Church even if many of the ways we express church life change?

WHAT SHOULD DELIBERATELY NOT BE DECIDED YET

Do not yet decide which existing activities must be retained or stopped. First name the biblical convictions, relational qualities and missional commitments by which future decisions will be tested.

MEETING OUTCOME

Kirk Session should leave this discussion able to say: These are the strategic priorities we believe require our attention now; these are the matters we still need to explore; and these are the convictions and qualities we are committed to protecting as we move forward.

A FRAMEWORK FOR LEADERSHIP DISCERNMENT

The six issues can be held together in three layers:

CORE IDENTITY

How do we change without losing our Christ-centred, biblical, prayerful and caring church family?

MISSIONAL DIRECTION

How outward-facing should we become, and how do community relationships lead towards Jesus?

MISSIONAL PATHWAYS

How do we respond to missing generations, create accessible first steps, and become more flexible about time, format and place?

Suggested discipline for the discussion

For each issue, leadership should aim first to agree the strategic question and the principles that should guide an answer. Only after that should particular programmes, staffing, budgets, venues or timetable changes be evaluated.

The distinction to preserve

WHAT THE CONGREGATION SAID → WHAT WE BELIEVE IT MAY MEAN → WHAT LEADERSHIP BELIEVES WE SHOULD DO

Imagine has provided substantial evidence about direction. It has not, by itself, decided the action plan.