

Hinckford Deanery Ministry and Mission Plan 2025–2030

Diocese of Chelmsford | Colchester Episcopal Area | Stansted Archdeaconry

Deanery Composition: 38 Parishes | 42 Churches

Deanery Structure: One Mission and Ministry Partnership (MMP) with Five Families:

Area Dean: The Revd Mark Payne. Lay Chair: Helena Gee

VISION STATEMENT

We celebrate our diverse context by being, sustaining and growing a faithful Christian presence across the Hinckford Deanery, rooted in Word and Sacrament as followers of Jesus, growing in prayer, discipleship and community engagement, resourced through collaborative lay and ordained ministry and empowered through the Holy Spirit.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Hinckford is the largest and most rural deanery in the Diocese of Chelmsford with the market town of Halstead forming the largest area of population of some 14,000 souls. In our rural villages our churches serve small, dispersed populations with deep local identity, often acting as the spiritual and social heart of their communities. Despite falling numbers in some of our congregations, our churches continue to offer regular worship, life events, community ministry, and outreach in ways not easily captured by attendance metrics. There are good connections with Community and Church of England Primary Schools, good ecumenical relations and, in some of our parishes, signs of green shoots of enquiry and spiritual and numerical growth.

We believe that rural ministry matters, and our plan is built on what we can do, not only on what we lack.

DEANERY STRUCTURE

Hinckford Deanery currently has five ‘families’:

- Halstead Area Team
- Hedinghams and Upper Colnes
- North Hinckford
- Two Rivers
- Wakes Colne, Chappel, Little & Great Tey

Each family has distinct geographical and ministerial dynamics, but we work as one supportive deanery, with an effective Deanery Synod and Chapter, collaboration within Benefices and cross-Benefice support.

MINISTRY STAFFING - MINIMUM PROVISION REQUIRED

The Deanery is served by 6.5 FTE stipendiary plus one House for Duty and currently three Self Supporting clergy posts, plus 4 clergy with Permission to Officiate and 2 Licensed Lay Ministers – and there is very little ‘slack in the system’ to cover holidays, illness etc.

This minimum enables:

- Effective pastoral and sacramental ministry
- Sustainable clergy workloads
- Oversight of growing lay vocations
- Deanery-wide collaboration and mutual support
- Time to address Parish Share and build local mission capacity

Any further reductions would compromise the basic delivery of worship, mission and care, risking:

- Losing irreplaceable trust in clergy presence
- Weakening the training and oversight of lay ministries
- Disengaging small parishes
- Creating a spiral where reduced presence equals further decline
- Clergy burn-out

MISSION AND MINISTRY PRIORITIES

Discipleship:

- Focus on prayer
- Provision of regular nurture groups, e.g. Alpha
- Provision of small groups / home groups

Evangelism and Community Engagement:

- Sustain and grow Fresh Expressions
- Expand agricultural and seasonal outreach
- Strengthen engagement with new housing areas (Halstead, Colne Valley) and increase our physical presence
- Support churches in hosting community-facing events and welcome ministries
- Ministry through Occasional Offices

Children, Youth, and Schools:

- Develop a Deanery Strategy for Ministry to and with Children and Young People
- Maintain and grow school partnerships, including assemblies and services
- Encourage every benefice to prioritise ministry to families with young children

Lay Leadership and Vocations:

- Nurture leadership and vocations in ministry, using Diocesan and other resources, working together as a Deanery or across Benefices where appropriate
- Monitor vocations across the Deanery and share best practice

- Establish an annual Deanery 'Thank You' event for lay and ordained ministers

Pastoral Sustainability:

- Monthly Chapter Team meetings for spiritual and strategic support
- Encourage focus on peer support, quiet days, and wellbeing for clergy / LLMs and other lay ministers
- Care for retired clergy, lay leaders, and volunteers

FINANCE AND PARISH SHARE

Current Situation:

- Deanery share paid: ~76% (2024)
- Many parishes contribute sacrificially, often paying from finite reserves, but rising costs and aging demographics threaten sustainability.

Future Approach:

- Encourage benefice-level conversations to allocate Share fairly and transparently
- Develop giving campaigns, fundraising events, and legacy planning
- Share best practice in areas such as building maintenance, fundraising etc
- Seek SMMIB or diocesan support for benefice administrators to free up clergy time for mission

Buildings and Administration:

- Maintain and adapt buildings for community use and accessibility, where appropriate
- Signpost parishes to support in applying for grants and heritage funding
- Seek external assistance to strategically review buildings with limited congregations, fostering pastoral rather than reactive decisions
- Collaborate on shared admin support at a benefice level
- Facilitate swift and efficient closure of church buildings where that is discerned as the best way forward.

SHARED OBJECTIVES

1. Prioritising growth in the engagement of children and young people in our local churches. We will work together to share best practice and will specifically target growth in the number of children and young people attending our main services, as well as nurturing and developing bridges into these services through other groups and activities. These figures will be monitored through sharing annual statistical returns.
2. Engaging with adults with little previous history of church attendance. As well as continuing to ensure that our churches are places of welcome for all people, we will consciously and specifically seek to make our churches accessible to those with little previous history of church attendance. Courses such as Alpha will be used to provide spaces in which those exploring faith in Jesus can be supported as they question and grow and we will seek to make

our services as accessible as possible for those who are new to faith. We will monitor and reflect together on the numbers of those attending our local churches who have little previous history of church attendance.

3. We will actively work together to support local churches to foster a culture where individuals' callings to both lay and ordained ministry can be identified, nurtured, and celebrated to support the whole Church's growth and mission. Key objectives include growing lay and ordained vocations, promoting the equal status of lay and ordained ministries, reaching out to underrepresented groups, and encouraging a culture of prayerful discernment and service to God and the wider community. We will monitor and reflect together on the numbers of people exploring, training and entering into varying forms of vocation within the life of the Church.

WHAT WE ASK OF THE DIOCESE AND SYNOD

- A moratorium on further stipendiary cuts for **at least** five years
- Recognition of the distinct challenges of rural mission, not reduced to metrics of attendance
- Support for alternative funding streams (administrators, youth ministry, building conservation)
- Partnership in raising up rural vocations and creating realistic pathways for ALM/SSM/lay-led growth

CONCLUSION

Hinckford Deanery remains committed to working collaboratively, resourcing mission, and making Christ known across the Deanery. We believe in the importance of church presence, not just preservation. With the right support and a stable framework, we can build not just sustainability - but hope and growth.