

Deanery Synod Report

A time of challenge

The Deanery Synod and its DMPG are facing a generational challenge as we seek to reverse the long-term decline in church attendance. We are now at the point where there is insufficient income to cover the costs of the current clergy. The usual CofE practice of grouping parishes into larger and larger benefices leads to clergy time being spread ever more thinly, with many struggling to even keep up with basic maintenance roles. Capable lay people are also thin on the ground in many parishes, with few if any younger people to take over from them. The “every member ministry” that we have enjoyed at St James for fifty or more years is still not understood by enough people in the deanery: we have a responsibility to take a lead in showing at least this aspect of the way ahead. This needs to be an ongoing matter for prayer.

Through the year

Here are the reports our Deanery Synod representatives made to the PCC, since the 2025 annual meeting.

Our representatives on the Deanery Synod are Richard Carpenter, Chris Rickard and Martin Wakefield. Richard and Martin have served on the Deanery Mission and Pastoral Group, and Richard is the current Lay Dean.

September 2025

- There are now three benefices in the deanery with upcoming vacancies: St Mary Magdalene with St Johns, All Saints Halcon, and St Andrews. This may result in changes to the structure of benefices in the deanery.

October 2025

- With respect to the vacancy at St Mary Magdalene and St Johns, the PCC of the former will reflect on what it means for them to be ‘The Minster’ beyond being seen as the civic church with a large town-centre building.
- Pastoral reorganisation seeks to better match needs and resources, particularly as the population of the town grows. Planning is on an ‘if required’ basis, which on the one hand might see a reduction in the number of benefices from thirteen to eleven (to match the available finances) or the establishment of new churches such as Orchard Grove (with the resulting increased income).
- Deanery Synod welcomed proposals for reimagining Christians Together in Taunton.
- Deanery Synod focussed the concept of Church-School-Home partnerships (see also 1d, above).
- Deanery Review on 9th October noted that grant income is low for Taunton churches. This may be taken up at the February synod meeting.

November 2025

- In addition to the other three clergy vacancies that are coming up in 2026, Julian Laurence will be retiring from Holy Trinity.

December 2025

- The PCC’s attention was drawn to the needs of neighbouring All Saints parish, whose congregation is now unsustainably small and the vicar will be retiring in February 2026. There is a big mission opportunity here, which the Deanery has recognised but not yet formulated a plan of action.

January 2026

- The Deanery Mission and Pastoral Group (the “standing committee” of the Deanery Synod) is about to begin a major review of the benefice structures within the deanery, to take into account expected reductions in the number of clergy in the future.

March 2026

- The February Deanery Synod meeting had focussed on grant applications. There is a church building projects tool called Cornerstone: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/building-generous-church/generosity-resources/cornerstone> which includes a grant database.