

Good Listening

The lifeblood of a creative learning community

Paul and Jenny Rolph - with John Cole



PREFACE

Several recent Parish and People publications have highlighted the need for all of us to check our listening skills, and to see how drawing people into genuine dialogue will strengthen us in the service of God's

mission. An important place where this can happen is the deanery. Deaneries need to develop as *creative learning communities* – communities that are able to build relationships and bridge divisions because they have opened themselves to the connection-making of the Go-between God, the Holy Spirit. Without this openness to the Holy Spirit, deaneries will be indistinguishable from any other human organisation and will have nothing to offer to our fragmented society.

David Edwards, formerly Provost of Southwark Cathedral, had this in mind when he proposed the deanery as the setting for Bible Study in “Does the C of E really value the Bible?” (P&P 2009). John Cole saw the potential of the deanery as a learning environment in “Church Without Price” (P&P 2009) and recognised the need for a booklet looking more closely at the art of listening in “Discerning the Mind of the Deanery” (P&P 2010).

For this new booklet, Jenny and Paul Rolph bring us their rich experience as counsellors and teacher trainers. Currently they are both Fellows of Glyndwr University. Until recently Paul was County Ecumenical Officer for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Jenny was the founding Director of Olive Branch Christian Counselling in Winchester.

Although this booklet has been written specifically with the deanery in mind, its insights are applicable in any context where Christ’s disciples come together to discern what God is requiring of them – and, indeed, anywhere where human beings want to build true community.

Developing the Deanery as a creative Learning Community

THE SELF-MOTIVATING DEANERY

It all depends on what you think the deanery is for!

Cynics might see the deanery as no more than a line on the map within which parish representatives are called to elect members of Diocesan and General Synods.

With few external constraints or requirements, however, what you together decide to do in deanery synod, or in Chapter meetings or more widely across the deanery, is very much up to you. An energetic Area or Rural Dean may be able to push through his or her own ideas – but apart from that, if there is no mechanism for growing a common mind about what you could usefully do together, nothing much will happen.

And yet, as several recent Parish and People publications have been arguing, the deanery is uniquely placed to do two things:

1. Take local church people forward on their journey of faith by helping them to step away from the comforts of their familiar congregational life – but not too far in one go!
2. Build on the diverse resources of our parishes and our different church traditions to engage in God's mission across a wider but still recognisable local area in ways that no parish could tackle on its own.

This booklet focuses on one of the key mechanisms for developing a creative common mind in the deanery - *the art of listening*. The message is simply this:

- **Good listening** contributes to
- **Constructive dialogue**, leading to
- **Committed learning**, out of which comes
- **Creative community**

THE GOAL OF GOOD LISTENING

The ultimate aim of good listening within a Christian community is to hear not just each other, but also the Holy Spirit. When communities of Christ's disciples invest in listening and learning together, they increase their capacity to hear and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit. They discover the creative potential of being a 'learning community' – and, most probably without realizing it, they will have begun to *do theology* together.

A shift will have taken place in the style of their conversation. Instead of debating different beliefs and opinions *about* God, they will be exploring together how they can strengthen each other's faith *in* God. A church that is a learning community recognises that all its members are not only on a journey of learning *about* Christian discipleship but on a journey of learning *to be* Christian disciples.

Deaneries that invest time and effort into enabling church people to listen carefully to each other, and to develop constructive dialogue with each other and with those around them, will find the Holy Spirit opening up for them new opportunities for sharing in God's mission together, new ways of being a creative Gospel community bringing hope and reconciliation to those around them.

THE GOOD LISTENER

The Deanery is possibly the only setting within our Church institutions that is informal enough and local enough to allow members of different traditions to talk and really listen to each other.

Avoidance, however, is still the strategy for many if not most Deanery Synod members – always taking care only to sit with those they know. Those who plan the Synod agenda can easily collude with this, organising meetings where nobody really *meets*!

The other problem is that most of us, and perhaps especially those in professional caring roles such as clergy, tend to think we are much better listeners than we are.

Good listening doesn't just 'come naturally'. Listening to people expressing convictions that we do not share is both a discipline and a skill. Good listening is hard work, but deeply rewarding.

Six characteristics of a good listener

- **A good listener's first priority is to create an atmosphere in which other people feel secure enough to express themselves.**

In the absence of such safe spaces, people will usually restrict what they say to what they think the listener wants to hear. They may even feel so constrained that they are reluctant to say anything at all.

- **A good listener concentrates and is always attentive.**

The listener needs to convince each other person that he or she is really interested in what is being said. And this, of course, is no charade; the listener's interest must be genuine and authentic.

- **A good listener will not ‘jump in’ as soon as something is said with which the listener agrees – or disagrees.**

Instead the other person will be given the time and space they need to present their views, beliefs and perspectives.

- **A good listener is committed to achieving *understanding* - ‘an understanding of the heart’.**

All of us as adults have got used to seeing the world in a particularly way. Other people may present us with ideas that simply do not fit our mental jig-saw. So do we assume they are wrong? Or are we prepared to take the risk of re-assembling our own mental jig-saw to take account of this new insight? It can be difficult to listen to another person with an open mind.

- **A good listener is committed to offering *affirmation* of the other person.**

Children who are listened to say they feel accepted by the other person – and they are then able to accept themselves. This is true in adult life too. We feel valued when we are listened to; and when we listen attentively to others we are letting them know that we value them. Of course, the reverse, is also true: Those who are persistently *not* listened to are likely to come to believe that they are of *no* value – and will behave accordingly!

- **A good listener is committed to *respect* for the other person.**

Even if the listener does not agree, it is possible to make it clear that he or she is taking very seriously what the other person has to say. The most damaging form of lack of respect is to behave as though the other person is not there. Sadly this lack of respect can be found in Christ’s Church no less than in society as a whole.

Even today, despite all the politically correct talk about ecumenism, most Christian denominations equip themselves for mission initiatives totally within their own resources, oblivious to the very existence of other Christians in the area! It is hardly surprising if the result is a creeping alienation and division, the onset of what some are experiencing as an 'ecumenical winter'.

Alarming, overcoming the lack of listening at this level within the Churches is proving to be as difficult as dealing with the systemic, 'dormant' racism that is found in the dominant ethnic group in any society. As Christians we should know better!

Genuine listening needs far more effort than we suppose – far more than we are usually prepared to give. Most of us will at some stage have learned the basic disciplines of listening set out on the next few pages, but how consistently do we follow them?

LISTENING TO INDIVIDUALS

1. Hindrances to good listening

a. External factors

Many factors can hinder good listening. Obvious things include background noise and the likelihood of interruptions. It is always annoying when a serious conversation is interrupted by a phone ringing – even more so when the individual decides to answer the call! But there are plenty of other distractions – for example, if the speaker has an unfamiliar accent or dialect, or seems anxious or aggressive.

b. Internal factors

Sometimes the hindrances to good listening are within the listener. Our minds may be full of our own thoughts. This could be whatever is preoccupying us at the time or what we anticipate the other person is likely to say. We listen best when we are able to put all our current concerns and preconceptions about the other person to one side and then focus on what is being said.

c. Preconceptions and stereotyping

The most serious barrier to good listening, however, is when we prejudge the speaker – when we decide, consciously or not, that the speaker is not worth listening to. We see the speaker not as an individual but as representing a stereotype. For example, if the person in front of us has arrived wearing a particular style of clothing, we can too easily assume that this represents a particular set of values.

Stereotyping is the easy way out when relationships are strained and when groups distrust each other. In these circumstances, people construct narratives about each other or attach labels, which derive essentially from a lack of understanding and insufficient contact. If one group appears to have more power and influence than the others, the other groups may well fear being dominated. If steps are not taken to clear the air, the fears will fester.

One important way of dealing with stereotypes and rewriting the unhelpful narratives is by making deliberate efforts to get to know the members of the other group and establishing meaningful links with them.

Good communication is essential (a two-way listening) if stereotyping is to be overcome between the various denominations and traditions

that make up Christ's Church. When it happens, the added bonus will be a huge release of potential for working together in God's mission.

2. Aids to good listening

a. The right environment

Time and space are essential to create an atmosphere in which others feel comfortable to talk. The space will be where we are unlikely to experience too many interruptions, and enough time is needed so that we can be relaxed in our listening.

A true story:

Penny is a Catholic and Nicky attends a community church. Through working together in a counselling organisation, they have become friends and grown to appreciate each other's Christian faith.

Nicky's husband is the pastor of her community church, so she decides not to tell him that Penny and her husband are Catholics when she invites them to dinner at their home.

The four of them enjoy their meal and then spend time listening to each other on what their faith means to them.

Afterwards Nicky's husband says how good it was to spend the evening with such like-minded Christians. Nicky can't resist telling him that they are Catholics and that she had already learned how much they shared and could learn from each other.

The story of Nicky and Penny suggests that good listening and frank speaking between individuals is actually something that develops over quite a long period of time and perhaps needs a variety of contexts. It perhaps begins as people share in a common task. It continues as they gather round a table for a meal – but not ideally on their own. A one to one conversation between two relative strangers will always be to some degree confrontational – too much like a job interview or a visit

to the doctor. Two couples sitting round a table, as in the story, takes the spotlight off any one individual and allows different conversations to ebb and flow. Genuine relationship-building will at some point address difficult issues – but overall the process is best not taken too seriously. Time spent in small talk and banter is not time wasted!

b. Door-openers

Many people do not find it easy to express themselves, and conversation may need to be encouraged by what have been called ‘**door openers**’.

- Initial door openers can be simple sentences that give the other person ‘permission to talk’. They will simply convey that we are keen to attend to what they have to say. For example, ‘I would really like to know what you think about the subject’.
- Door openers can also serve as ‘invitations to continue’. These convey the message, ‘I’m with you, please go on’. Words are not always needed – a simple nod of the head will do. Spoken examples would be ‘I see’, ‘Interesting’ and so on. We have to provide these verbal responses all the time on the telephone; otherwise the caller thinks the line has gone dead!

The use of door-openers is a valuable skill that is not as common in our churches or in wider society as it should be.

c. Body language

Body language (perhaps better called ‘non-verbal communication’) is very important in both helping us to listen and conveying that we are attending carefully to whoever is speaking. Simple things such as sitting still in a relaxed position can help. Eye contact – but it must be *appropriate* eye contact - is necessary. We all know how disconcerting it can be to try to talk to someone who looks away – and indeed how

uncomfortable we can feel when someone fixes us with a stare. Being sensitive to body language helps us to sense how others are feeling. The House of Commons is a wonderful place for observing body language. Take a good look at the dubious body language of front bench ministers while their colleague is making a statement to the House!

LISTENING IN GROUPS

All these basic principles apply in their most straightforward way in conversations between individuals, in one-to-one dialogue and in counselling. In group situations – going beyond the informality of two couples round a dinner table – life becomes more complicated.

1. Practical issues

- *Audibility.*
 - Those who choose to sit at the back of the room put themselves at a disadvantage. Would you choose to sit at the back of the church or behind a pillar if you really wanted to hear the sermon?
 - So-called ‘table groups’ within a larger meeting are only effective if no more than six are at each table. It is hard enough for six people to hear each other against the noise from other groups. Take a lesson from the Quiz Night teams at the local pub!
- *Room layout.*
 - A group discussion is almost impossible when members of the group (e.g. the Deanery Synod) are sitting in rows. Rows of seats serve well enough in the theatre, where the only speakers are on stage – and they know how to project their voices! Good listening is so much easier

– one might even say ‘is only possible’ – when the listener can see the speakers’ faces. All of us who can see will in fact be lip-reading more than we realise.

○ Almost any room layout is better than the traditional schoolroom, which is designed to ensure that students speak only when spoken to! However, any alternative represents a compromise:

- A circle is difficult for more than 20 people at most.
- A horseshoe allows for a ‘top table’ but not a much larger group.
- Table groups of up to six people in a horseshoe arrangement can cope with larger numbers.
- None of these arrangements makes it easy to view a screen presentation.
- People grouped at tables have no easy contact with those on other tables – a particular difficulty if those at any one table are already friends sharing similar points of view.

2. Psychological issues

It could be argued that the silent majority at most Deanery Synod meetings are concentrating hard on their listening. In practice, however, the picture is not so rosy:

- For some the problems just mentioned (room layout and audibility) will mean they have just given up – and are dreaming about what they might do when they get home.
- Others, of a ‘quieter’ disposition, will sit through a lively debate and will feel inhibited about joining in because they feel they need time to think about what they want to say. They can then all too easily be embarrassed when the chairperson turns to them and says “...and what do *you* think?” Alternatively the chair will move to ‘next

business' and their well-thought-out response will never be heard – except perhaps as a gentle protest outside the meeting!

- Others again will be so keen to express their point of view that they stop listening to anything that others are saying. They may even interrupt.
- The more people are committed to their point of view (and particularly if there are others in the room who share their perspective), the less likely they are to pay any serious attention to what others have to say. These vocal minorities will often gain strength from being part of one of the more clearly-defined traditions within the Church. By refusing to listen they can easily impose a permanent veto on new initiatives by making it impossible to proceed by consensus (Consensus is when a whole group can say, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ...” - Acts 15.28).

ENABLING CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE

Maintaining the balance between challenge and support

The process in which good listening and frank speaking can take place between two parties is summed up in one word: **dialogue**.

When two individuals attempt to engage in dialogue, success depends entirely on how much they already accept and trust each other. Without this relationship, dialogue will quickly collapse into argument, and generate more heat than light. Dialogue must never become a battleground where both sides are determined to win. Too often dialogue is combative rather than constructive. It does not have to be so.

It follows that dialogue between groups can have its advantages. In this context the relationships can be overseen and tended – and arguments can be nipped in the bud!

Given the sensitivities involved when Christians of different traditions attempt to listen seriously to each other, such dialogue must be handled carefully. Only then will there be a growing understanding of each other's faith positions.

Dialogue is about providing a space where we truly listen to others and they listen to us. Daloz¹, an American writer, stresses the need for leaders of group dialogues to ensure a balance between *challenge* and *support* if respectful listening is to occur. If this balance can be sustained throughout the dialogue, there is likely to be an effective exchange of meaning between the dialoguing parties.

However, this puts considerable responsibility on the leaders of dialogues – as they discover that their role is crucially that of '*moderator*'. A moderator needs to be aware of group dynamics and needs to know when to exercise challenge and when to provide support.

- Where there is **challenge** and **support**, there is growth in knowledge and understanding.
- Where there is **challenge** and **lack of support**, people may feel pressurised and may withdraw
- Where there is **support** and **lack of challenge**, people may be reinforced in their current pre-conceptions
- Where there is **lack of support** and **lack of challenge**, engagement will simply not happen.

¹ Daloz, L. A. (1999), *Mentor: Guiding the Journey of Adult Learning*, London, Jossey-Bass

If dialogue is attempted as part of a formal meeting, but without either support or challenge from those whose role is to moderate the proceedings, people will simply 'go through the motions' and will go home reinforced in their view that it was all a waste of time. It is a view expressed too often after debates at Deanery Synods. All credit to those who can say, "We can do better than that!"

When discussion gets heated

Follow the way of Corrymeela

The Corrymeela Community was established to contribute to Christian reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

For over 40 years they have sought to create spaces where people of different backgrounds can meet in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance and where differences can be acknowledged, explored and accepted.

Much of their work takes place in groups where people from different backgrounds have the opportunity to engage in dialogue.

Group members listen to each other's stories and perspectives, share their experience, learn from each other and find new ways of moving forward together.

When people in our deaneries find it hard to listen to each other, we can perhaps call to mind Corrymeela's three core values – as a way of dealing with the tensions:

- ***Openness*** expressed by making everyone feel welcome, accepted, included and valued regardless of difference.
- ***Compassion*** shown by walking in friendship alongside others and showing them that they are respected and valued.
- ***Hope*** formed out of a passion to build relationships by finding creative solutions to problems, barriers and conflict.

For more information on the work of the Corrymeela Community, visit www.corrymeela.org.

Ground rules for constructive dialogue

In order to maintain good standards of listening, groups can benefit from having clear 'ground rules', which are outlined and agreed before the session starts. These 'ground rules' can include

- only one person talking at a time
- no private conversations carrying on between members of the group while someone is talking
- no-one allowed to dominate the talk – there is a time limit for talkers
- an agreement not to interrupt
- time provided for comments, questions and requests for clarification.
- whereas ideas can be challenged, no attacks to be made on the talker him or herself.

Dealing with problem people in the group

If there are agreed ground rules the leader can make reference to them when sensitively dealing with problematic group members. For example, the agreed time limit can be referred to when dealing with people who monopolise the talking, and those who want to interrupt can be reminded that time is provided for questions and comments.

Unwillingness to speak can be a problem especially if this is true of a significant number of people in the group. Sometimes it may be necessary to break the group into subgroups to discuss a sensitive issue. Some people may feel more comfortable talking in a smaller group. When hesitant people show a willingness to talk, it is important for the leader to encourage this with warm accepting body language.

A COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

The old idea was that learning is for children. Now we recognise that learning is for life. However, no one comes to a learning situation with an 'empty mind'. This is true for children, but is especially true for adults. When adults listen their minds are full of what they have previously identified with and learned. In addition, adults often belong to groups or networks with similar beliefs and ways of thinking.

This is very much the case amongst Christians. There is valid reassurance to be found by staying within a Christian tradition with which we are familiar. Challenges to our way of thinking by listening to different understandings of the Christian faith can be disturbing and even painful. As adults, we are fully aware that major differences between Christians exist. It is more difficult, however, to accept that we can learn from those differences and grow in understanding of our faith.

Newer insights into the learning process emphasise that both children and adults learn as much (perhaps more) through seeing and doing as through listening. Seeing and doing, however cannot replace listening. Only good listening gives people the tools for reflecting on what they are seeing and doing. Without it they may not experience enough to have their familiar perceptions disturbed.

It can often take quite a jolting for an adult to start learning afresh:

- Learning can be intense when something traumatic happens to shake an adult's personal set of beliefs. It can be hard to incorporate painful experiences into our understanding of the nature of God.
- Adults are also forced into learning mode when faced with a change of career or vocation and the need to acquire new knowledge or gain new skills.

Being committed to learn is, however, the most appropriate adult response whenever we listen to new and/or different ideas that challenge our assumptions and beliefs. Unfortunately people's most common response to unfamiliar ideas is to cling on to what they already believe – frequently by simply denying what they disagree with.

Being possessive about what 'we believe' (however passionately we believe it) is not a particularly intelligent thing to do. *"Belief is when someone else does the thinking; faith is something else."*²

When we come across a way of understanding the Christian faith which differs from our own there is a tendency to begin by affirming that what we believe is both right and good and what others believe is bad and wrong. By listening carefully to the other person, we are reminded that opinions are divided on these matters, and hence there may not be a right or wrong position. The faith behind the beliefs is something deeper, stronger and altogether more important – something (dare we say?) 'God-given'.

If we are willing to move from simply defending our own position, we may then, after listening carefully to what others have said, reach a point where we make what has been called '**a considered personal commitment**'.³ For adult Christians, their 'considered personal commitment' may lead them to affirm their original faith position *or* it may lead them to changes in their faith position in the light of listening to others.

² Quotation attributed to the American scientist/philosopher/innovator, R. Buckminster-Fuller

³ This sequence of adult learning leading to what he labelled as a 'considered personal commitment' was first described by the educationalist William G Perry. (Perry, W.G. in Daloz, L. A. (1986), *Effective teaching and Mentoring*, London, Jossey-Bass)

Whatever the particular outcome of such an encounter, we will have enhanced our *understanding* of our own and the other's faith position, and we will have enhanced the *relationship* between us - making way for the possible development of an even deeper understanding of each other in the future.

A True Story

Colin belongs to a church tradition that is not sympathetic to homosexuals and has been asked to contribute to some church-based research. This involves interviewing several clergy.

When listening to one of the clergy, a rector, Colin is moved by his strength of faith and dedication to his calling. However some way into the interview the rector makes it clear that he is gay. This takes Colin by surprise and, for a moment, he wonders how to proceed with the interview.

After a short while, Colin and the rector decide to spend some time on discussing gay clergy in the church. Colin finds this challenging – to put it mildly.

But he is surprised that by the end of the interview his preconceptions – and even his stereotypes - of gay clergy have been shaken and he will have to rethink this aspect of his faith.

Really listening to another person may reshape our ideas - but this is not a necessary outcome. Nor, when Christians really listen to each other, will it necessarily result in agreement between different Christian traditions. Could it be that we both have important *but partial* glimpses into God's truth that just happen to be incompatible at the level of human understanding?

Whether or not we are led to a consensus, by really listening to those who hold to Christian traditions different from our own, we make

space in our lives for them and for their understanding of the Christian faith. In other words, we come to recognise the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, just as we trust they are recognising the same Holy Spirit in ours.

A CASE STUDY OF A DIALOGUE

Learning to listen to another Christian tradition

Between 1999 and 2007 two of the authors of this booklet were invited to be observers and recorders of a series of residential dialogues. The aim of each dialogue was to explore key theological and biblical themes by listening to and discussing contributions from both the Orthodox and the Evangelical Christian traditions. The key themes chosen included 'God', 'Salvation', 'Mission', 'What it means to be human' and 'The Bible'.

There were several reasons for holding these dialogues. It was hoped that we would learn much more about how to conduct dialogues between different Christian traditions. We also wanted to see if such dialogues could further the understanding between Orthodox and Evangelical Christians and if so, might this help to reduce the tension between the Orthodox and Evangelical Churches in parts of Europe where known hostility exists.

In preparation for each dialogue, Orthodox and Evangelical representatives were invited to prepare papers on the particular theme. After each paper had been presented, time was given for questions and points of clarification. Small group sessions then followed, when issues that were raised were explored in greater depth. The aim of these small group sessions was not to arrive at a consensus but to grow in understanding of, and respect for the

different theological and biblical perspectives on the selected theme. Finally, points arising from the small group discussions were reported during plenary sessions.

At the beginning and end of each day we all met for worship, which was led alternately by Orthodox and Evangelical representatives. We all shared in the beautifully prepared meals. We enjoyed several excursions, which included attending worship in churches of different traditions. In the free time, informal discussions took place and close relationships were established that have continued to the present.

Each of us had the privilege of getting to know each other as friends and not simply as representatives of a particular Christian tradition. We found that our developing relationships were fostered by the shared worship, having meals together, going on outings to special places of interest and enjoying free time together.

Nevertheless problems did arise from time to time. Dialogue between Christians of different traditions is often challenging, sometimes even threatening, and our dialogues were not free from these difficulties. During one of the seminars, the dialogue was so painful for some of the participants that the session broke down. However it was wonderful to see the healing that took place over subsequent days, although sadly one participant did not return to any of the future dialogues.

The outcomes from the dialogues:

- 1. We were renewed in our conviction that we belonged to one another in a fellowship deeper than our common humanity.**
- 2. We were united in our belief in the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to transform lives and communities.**

3. We were renewed in our conviction that we had a common faith and that it had to speak to today's world.

What we learned about listening in dialogue:

- The aim of such dialogue is mutual growth in understanding
- We learned that it was important for each tradition to have appropriate opportunities to present their beliefs and doctrines on the chosen theme and then to listen carefully to 'the other'.
- We learned that our pre-conceived (and sometimes even stereotyped) ideas of what the members of the other tradition believed were rarely matched by what we heard from them.
- We learned of the importance of being able to ask questions and make comments with no hint of a need to defend one's position or to attack 'the other'.
- The differences between us were to be understood rather than dismissed.
- We can disagree with each other but remain in fellowship because each seeks to follow the same Lord.
- One of the unexpected outcomes was that as we grew in understanding of the other tradition, we found that we were growing in understanding and appreciation of our own faith position. This was a great joy that few of us had anticipated.
- New wisdom and insights came when we were willing to be challenged and to challenge each other in love.
- By clarifying our understanding of the other's tradition, beliefs and teachings, it helped to clarify our own.

Three practical ingredients proved important:

1. the value of studying the bible together and sharing one's understanding of the text;
2. that worshipping together enabled us to draw on each other's spiritual resources;
3. the importance of eating and relaxing together to build up relationships.

A CREATIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY

A goal for your deanery?

A residential conference resourced by pre-prepared study papers is 'another world'. No-one is suggesting that the deanery could or should attempt anything so intensive. But the three practical ingredients in the process provide an achievable agenda for any deanery.

Studying together, worshipping together and eating together are hardly novel suggestions. However, what makes the difference may well be the value we place on them and the care and imagination with which we prepare for them. All three could be the cause of embarrassment – a matter of 'going through the motions' – just the same as the formal meetings of synod. But all three are important and complementary ways through which we can all learn and grow through listening – growing up, growing together, growing out and growing more.⁴

⁴ *Growing up, growing together, growing out and growing more* are the four elements in what has been traditionally referred to as 'The Mission Quadrilateral'. It is a pretty good summary of what our common life as disciples of Jesus Christ should be!

Questions

for the Deanery Standing Committee

These questions also deserve to be tackled by the whole Deanery Synod and – with appropriate changes – by every Parochial Church Council or other church decision-making body

- 1. What goals is your deanery seeking?**
- 2. In the context of those goals, what opportunities does your deanery provide to enable church people to share in**
 - a. Good Listening?**
 - b. Constructive dialogue?**
 - c. Committed learning?**
 - d. Creative community?**

NB the three strands of Bible Study, Worship and relaxing together - see p 23

- 3. What ground rules should your deanery adopt for the conduct of its affairs?**
- 4. How will you know that a creative Spirit-led community is emerging?**
- 5. How will others recognise signs in you that the Holy Spirit is at work?**
- 6. How will you know (and celebrate) when those goals are fulfilled?**