
Exploring Amalgamation Faithfully

Digging Deeper Activities



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Digging Deeper Activities

© Purpose:

This document lines up with the Exploring Amalgamation Faithfully: Participant Handbook and offers additional activities to explore more deeply.

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1. Digging Deeper – Framing the Conversation

• **For:** Amalgamation Teams or Congregations

✓ **Needed:** Participant workbooks; pens; name tags (optional); timer (optional)

◆ **Activity - Shared Covenant of Intention (One-Sentence Round)**

This quick opening activity helps the group publicly commit to a faithful process before any content is discussed. Invite participants to sit or stand in one circle (or remain seated where they are).

Name the frame: **no decisions today, listen to understand**, and **speak from lived experience**. Then go around the room and invite each person to offer one sentence beginning with the prompt below; participants may “pass.” Keep the pace gentle (about 10–15 seconds per person). Do not respond to any individual statement—simply receive them. After the round, the facilitator names 2–3 themes they heard (e.g., honesty, courage, care for one another) and thanks the group for entering the space together.

? **Prompt:** “For this discernment season, I commit to...”

2. Digging Deeper - Entering the Conversation Well

• **For:** Amalgamation Teams or Congregations

✓ **Needed:** Participant workbooks; pens; flip chart/chart paper; markers

◆ **Activity - Small Group Reflection**

Break into smaller groups (4-6 people). Have each group appoint 1 person to report back for the group.

? **Prompt:** Which of these perspective shifts feels hardest for our congregations right now - and why?

Large Group Harvest

Bring people back into one group. Have one person from each group share their groups thoughts.

Record on flip chart.

▶ **Facilitator:** Name common themes without problem-solving.

3. Digging Deeper - Preparing the Ground: Naming the “Why” and Setting the Tone

• **For:** Amalgamation Teams or Congregations

✓ **Needed:** Participant workbooks; pens; sticky notes (multiple colours); flip chart/chart paper; markers; painter’s tape

◆ **Activity - Why We’re Here Circle**

Invite everyone to stand (or sit) in one circle to signal that we are entering this process as equals. Going around the circle one person at a time, each participant shares one brief sentence beginning with the same prompt; participants may “pass” if they are not ready to speak. Ask the group to listen without response, debate, or clarification—simply receiving what is said—and keep the pace gentle so every voice has space (about 30–60 seconds each). The facilitator may capture a few key themes on flip chart afterward, but the main purpose is to name motivation and set a tone of honesty, respect, and shared discernment.

? **Prompt:** “I am willing to explore amalgamation because...”

◆ **Activity - Hopes & Hesitations Wall**

- Anonymous sticky notes
- Group themes without debate
- Normalize mixed emotions

Set up two clearly labelled spaces on a wall (or two flip-chart sheets): **Hopes** and **Hesitations**. Give each participant several sticky notes and invite them to write *one idea per note* (anonymously, if that feels safer), then place their notes on the wall in the matching column.

► **Facilitator:** When everyone has posted,

- group similar notes into themes (without naming who wrote what),
- read the themes back to the room, and
- ask one or two gentle questions such as, “What do you notice?” and “What would help these hesitations be held with care?”

The goal is not to solve problems immediately, but to surface what people are carrying, normalize mixed emotions, and identify what the process must pay attention to as discernment continues.

4. Digging Deeper - Sharing Stories Before Solving Problems

• **For:** Amalgamation Teams or Congregations

✓ **Needed:** Participant workbooks; pens; timer; flip chart/chart paper; markers; sticky notes (multiple colours); painter's tape; refreshments (optional)

◆ Activity - Congregational Storytelling Night (Structured Sharing)

Hold this as a simple, welcoming evening where each congregation shares its story in a consistent format so that everyone hears the same kinds of things (history, pride, losses, change, hopes) without debate or comparison. Set the room in a semi-circle or at tables with mixed seating from both congregations.

Begin with a short prayer and a clear covenant: we listen to understand, we do not correct details, we do not respond with speeches, and confidentiality/pastoral care are honoured.

Give each congregation equal time (e.g., 10–15 minutes) with 1–3 designated storytellers, using the guided questions as prompts; a facilitator or timekeeper gently keeps the pace.

After each congregation shares, allow 2–3 minutes of silence for people to jot down what they heard (themes, values, griefs, moments of joy). Then invite a brief, structured reflection from the whole group (5–10 minutes): "What did you notice?" and "What felt meaningful or familiar?" - no problem-solving, proposals, or rebuttals.

Close by naming a few themes that emerged, offering gratitude for what was shared, and ending with prayer (optionally inviting people to stay for refreshments and informal conversation).

Each congregation responds to guided questions:

- Where did we come from?
- What are we proud of?
- What losses still matter?
- How have we experienced change?
- What are our hopes and fears?

◆ Activity - Timeline Walk

- Physical timeline on wall
- Major moments, transitions, and turning points
- Shared curiosity rather than commentary

Create a shared, visual timeline that helps both congregations see one another's history at a glance and name key moments without interpreting or debating them.

Tape a long sheet of chart paper (or several sheets) on the wall and mark a simple time line (e.g., decades or 5-year intervals) from the congregation's founding to today; use two colours of sticky notes or markers (one colour per congregation) so stories are easy to distinguish.

Invite participants to walk the line and add brief notes for major moments—celebrations, turning points, ministries launched, leadership transitions, building projects, conflicts resolved, seasons of decline/growth, and significant community events (one event per note; include a year if possible).

After posting, give people 5–10 minutes to quietly “walk the timeline” together, simply noticing patterns and asking clarifying questions (not commentary). Then gather the group and harvest learning with a few structured prompts: “What do you notice?”, “Where do you see resilience or joy?”, and “What losses or transitions should we hold with care as we discern next steps?”

Close by naming 3–5 themes that emerged and offering a brief prayer of gratitude for the faithfulness represented across the years.

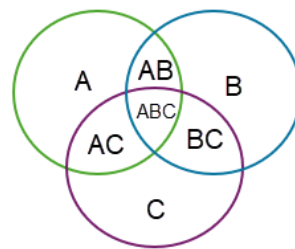
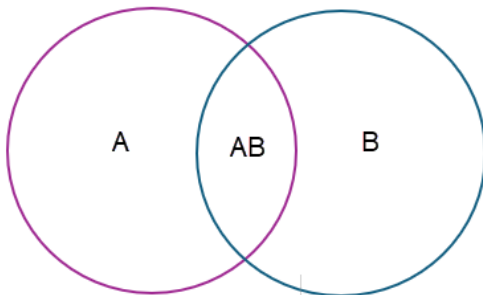
◆ Activity - Venn Diagram

Use this activity to help the group name what each congregation values, what is distinctive, and what is already shared—without debating solutions or making decisions.

Set-up: On chart paper, draw two overlapping circles. Label each circle with the congregation’s name; label the overlap **Shared / In common**.

1. **Invite input:** Ask participants to name key values, strengths, signature ministries, community partnerships/outreach, and hopes for the future (short phrases, not speeches).
2. **Sort as you record:** Write items that mostly describe Congregation A in A’s circle, and items that mostly describe Congregation B in B’s circle.
3. **Name shared ground:** When something fits both congregations, write it in the overlap.
4. **Keep it descriptive:** If people start problem-solving or advocating, gently redirect: “For now we’re just noticing what’s true - decisions come later.”
5. **Harvest:** Ask 2–3 reflection questions, such as: “What do you notice in the overlap?”, “What differences feel important to honour?”, and “What surprised you?”

For three churches, write commonalities for each pairing and for all three.



5. Digging Deeper - Understanding Congregational Culture & Decision-Making

• **For:** Amalgamation Teams or Congregations

✓ **Needed:** Participant workbooks; pens; printed scenario cards/handouts (optional); flip chart/chart paper; markers; sticky notes (multiple colours) + chart paper (for worship expectations mapping); timer (optional)

◆ **Activity - Decision-Making Scenarios**

! Caution: Conversations about how decisions are made can touch on past conflicts, power dynamics, and experiences of not being heard. Invite people to speak from their own experience, avoid naming individuals, and keep the focus on patterns (not blame). Remind participants they may “pass” on any question, and be prepared to pause for prayer or a brief break if emotions rise.

- Fictional situations (budget shortfall, worship change)
- Each group names how they would normally respond
- Compare patterns, not outcomes

Scenario A (Fictional) – Budget Shortfall

Explain the scenario and then ask the questions one at a time. Ask people to respond. Remind participants that they are here to listen, not to comment or give rebuttal.

i Context: Halfway through the fiscal year, the treasurer reports a projected deficit of \$28,000. Giving is down, a long-time donor has moved away, and winter utility costs were higher than planned. The congregation has \$45,000 in unrestricted reserves, but those reserves have been steadily declining for three years.

◆ **Presenting issue:** The Board must decide what to do now to finish the year responsibly, while also considering longer-term sustainability. Options being discussed include: using reserves, reducing paid staff hours, pausing a community meal program for 3 months, increasing rental fees, or launching an emergency stewardship appeal.

! Constraints/complicating factors: (1) A recent staffing reduction left people anxious about job security. (2) The community meal is the congregation’s most visible outreach and is personally meaningful to many. (3) The minister is new (8 months) and has not yet earned trust in financial decisions. (4) Some members are committed to “never touching reserves,” while others view reserves as “for times like this.”

1. Who would normally be involved in a decision like this (Board only, finance team, congregation, staff)? At what points?
2. What information would you want before deciding (numbers, options, impact on people/mission, timelines)? Who gathers it?
3. How would you communicate the shortfall and next steps in a way that builds trust and reduces rumours?
4. Where might conflict surface (values, fear, power, theology of money), and how would you hold that pastorally?
5. What does a “faithful process” look like here, even if people disagree on the outcome?

➤ **Follow-up:** After hearing answers, ask “What emerges for you from what you have heard?”

Scenario B (Fictional) – Worship Change

Explain the scenario and then ask the questions one at a time. Ask people to respond. Remind participants that they are here to listen, not to comment or give rebuttal.

i Context: Two congregations have begun occasional joint worship as part of exploring closer partnership. Attendance is similar in size, but worship styles differ: one congregation values traditional hymns, printed bulletins, and a predictable order; the other often uses contemporary music, more informal language, projection and streaming services.

◆ **Presenting issue:** For the next joint service, the worship planning team proposes introducing a new element: projecting lyrics and readings on a screen (no printed bulletins) and adding a praise band for two songs. A group of members objects, saying the change feels like “giving up who we are,” while others say the current approach feels “stuck” and not welcoming to newcomers.

! **Constraints/complicating factors:** (1) One congregation has members with hearing and vision needs who rely on printed materials; another relies on projection to reduce printing and support accessibility. (2) A prior worship change (years ago) caused deep hurt and lingering mistrust. (3) Volunteers are stretched, and adding a band/screen adds technical complexity. (4) People are anxious that “joint worship” will quietly become “one style wins.”

- Who typically decides worship changes (minister, music leaders, worship committee, congregation)? How is input gathered?
- What values are underneath each reaction (reverence, accessibility, tradition, evangelism, hospitality, identity, grief)?
- What would a “both/and” experiment look like that honours both congregations (e.g., pilot for one service, mixed music set, print + projection)?
- How would you ensure accessibility needs are met and that no one is shamed for their preferences?
- If disagreement persists, what process would help you discern next steps without escalating conflict?

↗ **Follow-up:** After hearing answers, ask “What emerges for you from what you have heard?”

◆ Activity - Worship Expectations Mapping

- Music, language, sacraments, formality, experimentation

Use this activity to surface (and normalize) differences in worship expectations before they become conflict. Post several sheets of chart paper around the room, each labelled with one worship element (e.g., **Music, Language, Sacraments, Formality, Experimentation/Innovation**). On each sheet, draw a simple spectrum line (e.g., "Traditional" to "Contemporary," or "Predictable" to "Flexible"). Give participants sticky notes and invite them to write *one expectation per note* (or one "non-negotiable," one "preference," and one "open to change") and place their notes where they fit on the spectrum for that topic.

➤ **Follow-up:** After everyone has posted, invite a quiet "gallery walk" (5–8 minutes). Then gather and harvest learning.

? Ask:

1. "What patterns do you notice?",
2. "Where are we similar?",
3. "Where are the biggest differences?", and
4. "Which differences feel energizing vs. tender?"

Keep the conversation descriptive rather than persuasive (no arguing for one style).

Close by naming 2–4 themes the group will need to plan for if worship is shared (e.g., accessibility needs, music leadership, bulletin vs. projection, frequency of sacraments) and remind participants that mapping expectations is about understanding and care, not deciding today.

◆ Activity - Conflict Stories

! **Pastoral framing:** Before you invite people to share or discuss, briefly name the emotional/spiritual sensitivity of the topic and set a caring container for how the conversation will happen.

Include:

- **Why we're doing this:** to learn about success in conflict, not to re-argue the past.
- **How we'll speak:** from personal experience ("I"), with humility; no naming/shaming individuals.
- **How we'll listen:** for what matters and what was carried; no rebuttals or correcting.
- **Permission and care:** people may pass; it's okay to feel emotion. Pause for prayer/break and offer follow-up support if needed.

? **Ask:** Share a story of a conflict that was handled well.

6. Digging Deeper - Discerning Shared Purpose Before Structure

• **For:** Amalgamation Teams or Congregations

✓ **Needed:** Participant workbooks; pens; index cards or small paper slips (optional); sticky notes (optional); flip chart/chart paper; markers; painter's tape

◆ Activity - Purpose Statements (Small Groups)

Break into small groups of 4–6 (ideally mixed across congregations). Give each person 2–3 minutes to quietly draft 1–2 completions of the sentence, **“God may be calling us together so that...”**.

Then invite the group to share (in their group) their drafts round-robin style (participants may pass) and listen for common language and themes. As a group, combine ideas into **one or two** short purpose statements that feel true, hopeful, and specific (aim for one sentence each).

Finally, bring everyone back and have each group read their statement(s) aloud.

▶ **Facilitator:** Record key phrases on flip chart and name recurring themes without evaluating or choosing a “winner.” The goal is to hear what shared purpose is emerging—not to finalize a mission statement today.

◆ Activity - Ministry Priorities Sorting

Divide into small groups (4–6). Provide blank index cards or sticky notes. Ask the groups to share ministry categories and have each group write the categories on a card. By the end they should all have the same list of cards.)

Ask groups to sort the cards into three piles: **Essential** (must be protected/central in any future), **Important** (valuable but could change in form, frequency, or staffing), and **Optional** (good, but not core right now).

Encourage groups to **talk about why** items land where they do (values, call, community needs, capacity), and to note any “non-negotiables” or dependencies (e.g., what requires staffing or building access).

After 10–15 minutes, do a large-group harvest: each group names what is in each list.

▶ **Facilitator:** Record themes and differences without forcing consensus; the goal is to clarify shared purpose and realistic capacity, not to finalize a program plan.

Suggested categories (prompt if necessary):

- Worship & sacraments;
- Spiritual formation/faith development;
- Pastoral care & congregational care;
- Children, youth & family ministries;
- Seniors/older adult ministries;
- Outreach & community partnerships;
- Justice & advocacy;
- Welcoming & hospitality;
- Stewardship & fundraising;

- Governance/leadership development;
 - Communications/technology;
 - Property/building use & administration
 - Becoming Affirming
 - Others...
-

◆ Activity - Imagining the New

- Provisional naming of a future community
- Helps shift imagination from takeover to creation

▶ **Process:** Invite participants into small groups (4–6, mixed across congregations). Ask them to imagine they are already one new community of faith five years from now. Give each group 8–10 minutes to draft

1. a provisional name for the new community (or 2–3 name options),
2. a one-sentence purpose statement (drawing from the themes you harvested earlier), and
3. three words or phrases that describe the “spirit” or identity of this new community (Values).

Encourage groups to choose language that is new (not simply one congregation’s name/style) to reinforce that this is **creation**, not takeover.

Bring the whole group back: each small group shares their name(s) and phrases.

▶ **Facilitator:** Record repeated words and images.

? **Ask:** “What feels life-giving here?”, “What might we be grieving as we imagine this?”, and “What themes should guide any future planning?”

Close with a brief prayer of gratitude for imagination and courage.

7. Digging Deeper - Exploring Structures, Property & Finances (When Ready)

• **For:** Amalgamation Teams or Congregations

✓ **Needed:** Community of Faith Profile materials (prepared in advance); participant workbooks; pens; flip chart/chart paper; markers; building access/keys for any tour (optional); A/V or portable speaker (optional); index cards or small paper slips (optional); refreshments (optional)

◆ Activity - Community of Faith Profile Sharing

- Living Faith Story
- Financial Viability & Property Worksheet
- Demographics Worksheet

Use this as a structured information-sharing round so both congregations are working from the same baseline (and rumours don't fill the gaps). Ask each congregation to share in advance their Community of Faith Profile.

Allow for a short, time-bound clarification period (3–5 minutes) for factual questions only—no debate.

Then do a whole-group harvest: "What did we learn?", "What feels hopeful?", "What feels tender or complex?", and "What questions should we carry into next steps?"

► **Facilitator:** Close by naming key themes and any follow-up information needed (who will gather it and by when).

◆ Activity - Property Storytelling

Use this activity to honour the meaning people attach to their building(s) and to surface both pride and grief before property conversations become purely technical.

Invite each congregation to tour each others property. Tour key spaces (sanctuary, hall, memorials, accessibility features), simply noticing and receiving as each congregation shares **"What has ministry in this place meant to you?"**. Encourage storytellers to name memories, milestones, the ways the space has shaped ministry, and what feels tender about change.

Follow-up (harvest): Ask, "What themes did you hear?", "What do these spaces represent (welcome, stability, community service, sacred memory)?", and "What would we need to carry forward—ritually or practically—if property use changes?"

► **Facilitator:** Keep the conversation pastoral and descriptive: this is not the moment to debate which building to keep, sell, or renovate. If strong emotions surface, pause for silence/prayer and name next steps for care (who will follow up, what supports are available).

◆ Activity - Postcard from the Future

Invite people to imagine they are writing a brief postcard from **five years in the future**, looking back with gratitude at what God has done through their congregation.

Give everyone 3–5 minutes of quiet to write a few sentences (or a short headline plus 2–3 details). Offer prompts such as: “Because we chose to walk together, we now...”, “Our community knows us for...”, and “We are serving God by...”.

Then choose a sharing method that fits the room: (a) pair-share, (b) small groups of 4–6, or (c) a few volunteers reading aloud.

► **Facilitator:** Record repeated words/images on flip chart (e.g., welcome, justice, depth, children, neighbourhood presence). Close with a brief harvest: “What themes keep appearing?”, “What feels most life-giving?”, and “What might we need to let go of to live into this future?”

*Try this process again as though you have amalgamated into a new shared community of faith).

Side Note: Staffing Decisions

Consideration must be given to all of the staff (Minister, Administrator, Musician, Caretaker, etc.)

Staffing scenarios

Scenario 1: End all current positions and run a new hiring process

When this scenario fits: When amalgamation creates a substantially new staffing model (new hours, new role design, changed accountabilities), or when there are multiple staff in the same role and the new community can support fewer positions. This approach treats the new community as a new employer structure and invites a transparent, consistent process for everyone.

1. **Name the pastoral frame and commitments:** honour people's contributions, communicate early, avoid rumours, and ensure dignity and confidentiality.
2. **Clarify the future staffing model first:** agree on required roles, hours/FTE, key responsibilities, reporting relationships, and budget capacity (without discussing names).
3. **Set a timeline and decision points:** include dates for posting roles, application deadline, interviews, offers, and transition/last day for current roles.
4. **Create a fair selection process:** consistent job postings, clear criteria, the same interview questions. The Ministry Personnel Committee can seek Pastoral Relations/Human Resources Commission support as needed.
5. **Ministry Personnel:** A search team will need to be appointed and trained in consultation with the Pastoral Relations/Human Resources Commission.
6. **Invite all current staff to apply (if eligible):** provide role descriptions, offer a Q&A meeting, and allow time for discernment and preparation.
7. **Communicate outcomes pastorally:** tell staff first (in person where possible), then communicate to the congregations with gratitude, clarity on start dates, and next steps.
8. **Plan transition and care:** handover plans, access to pastoral support, blessings/rituals of letting go, and clear boundaries about who does what during the transition.

i Facilitator note: Staffing changes have employment, policy, and human impacts. Ensure the Governing Bodies receive appropriate guidance from the Regional Pastoral Relations/Human Resources Minister, and keep the workshop focused on process and care rather than negotiating employment details in the room.

Staffing scenarios

Scenario 2: Retain staff when there is only one person in a particular role

When this scenario fits: When both congregations agree the future structure is largely continuous and there is *not* overlap in a role (e.g., one administrator total, one custodian total). This approach reduces disruption while still requiring clear agreements about accountability, hours, compensation, and supervision in the new structure.

1. **Confirm the staffing principle in writing:** “Where there is one person in a role, we intend to retain and transition them into the new structure, subject to role clarity and sustainability.”
2. **Map the future job reality:** confirm duties, hours/FTE, work location(s), seasonality, required skills, and what will change (and what will not).
3. **Ministry Personnel:** Contact Regional Pastoral Relations/Human Resources Minister for process for new Record of Call/Appointment (ROCA), if applicable.
4. **Clarify supervision and evaluation:** who the staff member reports to, how priorities are set, and how feedback/concerns are handled in the new governance structure.
5. **Hold a transition conversation with the staff member:** share the proposed role, invite questions, name anxieties, and confirm supports (pastoral care, onboarding, training).
6. **Communicate to the congregations:** announce the intention to retain/transition staff with gratitude and clarity about the new role and start date.
7. **If there is overlap in any role:** do not “assume” retention. Name the overlap early and use a transparent discernment/hiring process (often Scenario 1) or an agreed transition plan (e.g., time-limited continuation, reduced hours, or redesigned roles) with appropriate guidance.

! Pastoral caution: Even when retaining staff, name that change is stressful. Attend to workload creep, clarify boundaries, and ensure any staff affected by overlapping roles are treated with dignity and supported through transition and closure.

8. Digging Deeper - Caring for People Through Transition

• **For:** Amalgamation Teams or Congregations

✓ **Needed:** Simple ritual supplies (optional); index cards or small paper slips (optional); printed blessing litany (optional); sign-up sheet (optional)

◆ **Activity - Ritual of Letting Go**

Invite participants to name what they are releasing as this season changes—roles, assumptions, cherished routines, a building, a title, a way of being church—so that grief is honoured and people are not asked to “move on” without closure.

Set a gentle pastoral frame (people may pass; no fixing; confidentiality) and place a simple symbol at the centre (a bowl of water, an empty basket, or a candle).

Give everyone 2 minutes of quiet to write one short phrase on a small piece of paper: “I am letting go of...”. Then, one at a time (or in pairs), participants come forward, read their phrase aloud (or silently), and place the paper in the bowl/basket (or tear it and place it down).

After each 6–8 shares, pause for 15–20 seconds of silence.

► **Facilitator:** When all who wish have shared speak a blessing that names both grief and gratitude (e.g., “What we release mattered; God holds what we cannot carry”).

Close with prayer or a simple communal response such as, “Into your hands, O God, we commend what has been, and we receive what will be.”

◆ Activity - Blessing Leaders and Staff

Use this to publicly honour the leaders and staff who are carrying extra emotional and practical load during discernment, and to reaffirm that they are not expected to hold the process alone.

Invite everyone to stand or remain seated in a posture of prayer. Begin by naming the pastoral frame: gratitude, care, and shared responsibility (not evaluation).

Ask leaders/staff to come forward (or simply be identified where they are), and invite the congregation to extend a hand toward them (without touch).

1. **Name what you are blessing:** leadership, wisdom, patience, courage, healthy boundaries, and joy in ministry.
2. **Invite one sentence of gratitude:** either a single spokesperson offers thanks on behalf of the group, or invite 2–3 brief voices (no speeches).
3. **Offer the blessing:** a facilitator or ministry personnel speaks a short blessing; optionally include a congregational response after each line (e.g., “May God strengthen you” / “We will walk with you”).
4. **Close with a shared commitment:** name one concrete way the community will support leaders/staff (clear communication, sabbath time, prayer team, reduced meeting load, check-ins).

Optional litany (brief):

Leader: “God of wisdom and compassion, bless those who lead and serve among us.”

All: “May God strengthen you.”

Leader: “Give them clarity, courage, and tenderness—and protect their rest.”

All: “May God strengthen you.”

Leader: “When decisions feel heavy, let them remember they are not alone.”

All: “We will walk with you.”

Leader: “In this season of change, hold them in hope.”

All: “Amen.”

◆ Activity - Paired Pastoral Listening Visits

This is a simple, low-pressure way to extend care and reduce anxiety by ensuring that people who are quieter, grieving, or skeptical are still heard. Create pairs of trained listeners (ideally one from each congregation) who commit to *listening only*—not persuading, correcting, or reporting personal details. Visits can be in-home, by phone, or over coffee, and should be offered broadly (not only to those who are “upset”). Keep the purpose clear: relationship, pastoral care, and themes for discernment.

1. **Prepare the listeners:** choose 4–10 trusted people; provide a brief orientation on confidentiality, boundaries, and how to respond if strong emotions surface (pause, pray if welcomed, refer to ministry personnel if needed).
2. **Invite participation:** offer sign-up options and also gently reach out to those less likely to volunteer. Clarify that participation is optional and that people may meet in whatever format feels safe.
3. **Use a simple script:** open with “We’re here to listen and to care; we won’t debate or make promises. We will share only themes (not names) with the discernment leaders.”
4. **Ask 3–4 gentle questions:** (1) “What are you hoping for as we explore this?” (2) “What feels tender or concerning?” (3) “What do you most want honoured, no matter what happens?” (4) “What support do you need right now?”
5. **Close with care:** ask permission to pray; offer a simple blessing; confirm any follow-up requested (a call from ministry personnel, accessibility needs, pastoral support).
6. **Capture themes (not stories):** each pair submits a short, anonymized note with 3–5 themes and any process needs (e.g., “more information about finances,” “fear of losing identity,” “desire for joint children/youth ministry”).
7. **Report back transparently:** facilitators share the compiled themes with the congregation(s), including what will be done next (information to gather, questions to address), so people see that listening leads to care.

i Boundary note: Listening visits are not for lobbying or collecting votes. They are pastoral care and information-gathering for process improvement. If someone raises a safeguarding concern or a serious conflict, follow your congregation’s safe church/pastoral care protocols and involve the appropriate leaders.

9. Digging Deeper - Deciding, Covenanting, and Celebrating (or Releasing)

• **For:** Amalgamation Teams or Congregations

✓ **Needed:** Participant workbooks; pens; flip chart/chart paper; markers; sticky notes or index cards (optional); simple ritual/celebration symbols (optional); refreshments (optional)

◆ Activity - Covenant-writing workshop

Use this workshop to write a simple covenant that names **how** the congregations will walk together in the next phase (communication, decision-making, worship experiments, conflict care), even while outcomes are still being discerned. Begin with prayer and remind the group: a covenant is a shared promise about relationship and practice—not a constitution and not a legal document.

1. **Set up the covenant framework:** Post 4–6 headings on chart paper (e.g., *How we communicate, How we make decisions, How we handle disagreement, How we honour both congregations, How we care for leaders and staff, How we pray/listen for God*).
2. **Draft in small groups:** In mixed groups of 4–6, ask participants to write 1–2 covenant statements per heading, using “We will...” language. Encourage clarity and brevity (one sentence each).
3. **Share and cluster:** Groups post their statements under each heading. Do a gallery walk, then the facilitator clusters similar statements and reads them aloud.
4. **Synthesize:** As a whole group, agree on 1–3 statements per heading that best reflect your shared commitments. Combine duplicates and choose wording that is specific enough to guide behaviour (not vague virtues only).
5. **Test the covenant:** Ask: “Would this help us in a hard meeting?”, “Does it protect the quieter voices?”, “Is it mutual (not aimed at ‘them’)?”, and “Can leaders reasonably uphold this?” Revise as needed.
6. **Affirm and assign next steps:** Read the covenant aloud. Invite a simple gesture of commitment (standing, saying “We agree,” or a spoken Amen). Name who will type a clean draft and when/how it will be reviewed, shared, and revisited (e.g., at the start of each joint meeting).

i Facilitator note: Keep the covenant short enough to remember (often one page). Revisit it at the beginning of future joint meetings, and treat it as a living document: if the covenant is not working, amend it rather than quietly abandoning it.

◆ Activity - Intentional celebration or release

Use this closing activity to mark the end of the discernment phase in a way that is faithful *regardless of outcome*. Plan it intentionally (rather than letting the process simply fade out): choose a date, invite both congregations, and be clear whether the moment is a **celebration** (moving forward together) or a **release** (not proceeding, or pausing).

Keep the tone pastoral: gratitude, truth-telling, and blessing—without re-arguing decisions.

1. **Prepare (before the gathering):** Invite 2–4 people from each congregation to help plan. Decide what will be named publicly (themes learned, gratitude, next steps) and what will *not* be revisited

(debate, blame, detailed arguments). Collect a few symbols: photos, a shared candle, water for blessing, or a simple bread/food item for fellowship.

2. **Open with prayer and a clear frame:** "Tonight we are marking an ending and asking God to bless what comes next." Re-state the covenantal tone (listen, no speeches, no rebuttals).
3. **Name gratitude (both paths):** Invite brief, prepared thanksgivings (30–45 seconds each) for what was learned, for shared moments, and for the faithfulness people offered. Consider reading 3–5 themes harvested throughout the process.
4. **If celebrating (moving forward):** Invite a symbol of shared beginning (lighting one candle from two, exchanging a small gift, or placing two congregational symbols on one table). Speak a blessing over the next phase (courage, patience, unity-in-diversity). Name one concrete next step (e.g., joint committee work, timeline, communication plan).
5. **If releasing (not proceeding or pausing):** Name the truth gently: "We are not moving forward in this way at this time." Invite a short moment of silence to honour grief and relief. Offer a spoken release: "We bless one another to continue in God's call, and we release one another from expectations we cannot carry." If helpful, include a simple action (placing written hopes into a bowl, or pouring water as a sign of returning what is held to God).
6. **Close with blessing and fellowship:** End with a short blessing for both congregations (and for leaders/staff), then share refreshments. If appropriate, share where people can seek pastoral support in the days following.

Optional litany (brief):

Leader: "God of faithful endings and new beginnings..."

All: "Hold us in your love."

Leader: "For what we have learned and shared..."

All: "We give you thanks."

Leader: "For what we must release..."

All: "Give us courage and peace."

Leader: "For what is next..."

All: "Guide our steps. Amen."

10. Digging Deeper - Closing Reflection & Guiding Principle

• **For:** Amalgamation Teams or Congregations

✓ **Needed:** Participant workbooks; pens; flip chart/chart paper; markers; index cards or small paper slips (optional)

◆ **Activity - Clarity Cards (Short Harvest)**

Give each person an index card (or half-sheet of paper). Invite 2 minutes of quiet to write one short sentence answering: **“What feels clearer now than when you began?”**

Then form pairs and invite each person to share their sentence (about 45 seconds each).

After both have shared, each pair chooses **one** clarity statement (or theme) to offer to the whole group. Do a quick round of sharing from pairs (one sentence only).

► **Facilitator:** Record key words/phrases on flip chart.

Close by asking: **“What do these clarity statements suggest we should do next?”** and give thanks for what has emerged.

◆ **Activity - Guiding Principle Commitments (One-Line Blessing)**

Use this brief closing activity to name a shared “guiding principle” for the next phase and to end with mutual blessing rather than loose ends. Give everyone 2 minutes of quiet to write one sentence beginning with: **“As we go forward, we commit to...”** (e.g., transparency, patience, listening, speaking with kindness, protecting the vulnerable, telling the truth in love).

Then invite a simple round: each person reads their sentence (or passes).

► **Facilitator:** Record repeated phrases on flip chart and propose 1–3 synthesized principles that capture what was heard. Ask the group to affirm one principle aloud together (or affirm all three).

Close with a spoken blessing such as: “May God strengthen us to live what we have named,” followed by a communal “Amen.” Or “And all the people say”, “Amen”