

Proposal 6

Mission-motivated Development

That the Synod of SA resolves to:

1. **RECOGNISE** the Uniting Church's long-term missional aim of supporting the disadvantaged in society.
2. **AFFIRM** the commitments expressed in the Uniting Church Statements to the Nation of 1977 and 1988, which pledged the Church to work to alleviate poverty.
3. **REQUIRE** the Synod Standing Committee to oversee the development of a guide to mission-motivated development that assists congregations and others navigate the path towards the approval of a new project.
4. **REQUIRE** the Standing Committee to make alterations to the Property By-Law (18.5) and other By-Laws as necessary, to recognise the Mission-motivated Development process and the engagement of Congregations and Presbyteries in the application of Regulation 4.11.10 Classifying Property for Alternative Missional Use.
5. **REQUEST** all relevant councils of the church to engage in a mission-motivated development conversation when a property is considered no longer needed for its current missional purpose, and no other council of the church has a missional use for the property. These conversations, informed by the mission-motivated development guide, will occur before the property is dealt with by the Synod's process for managing surplus properties.
6. **DETERMINE** that when, as a result of a mission-motivated development not proceeding, and the property is subsequently sold, a portion of the proceeds will be used to support mission-motivated development and renewal in other congregations.

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The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia

1. Rationale

The Uniting Church in South Australia is the custodian of much property. We have the responsibility to use our property for the mission of the Church.

2. Mission-motivated development

Mission-motivated development, a term we have borrowed from the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, seeks to name something that is alongside the church's traditional mission development work.

According to the Vic/Tas Synod website *Mission-motivated development means discerning God's mission and aligning this with property development so it is consistent with the Church's calling and purposes.*ⁱ

Mission is the bread-and-butter work of the church as it responds to the call of God to the church to participate *in Christ's mission in the world* (Basis of Union para 7, 8, 14, 15). Mission is the ongoing shaping of our calling to celebrate the good news of Christ and meet human need.

Mission-motivated development begins from a slightly different place. Alongside the given mission of the Church, mission-motivated development begins with the needs and concerns of local and national communities.

Mission-motivated development builds partnerships and projects with community groups, organisations associated with the Uniting Church, local, state, and federal government, and people of goodwill outside the church and the faith.

Mission-motivated development explores how the resources the Church has inherited and developed, which are no longer needed for the traditional, congregational-based mission development, can be freed up for a wider range of uses than the traditional options of planting a new congregation or selling the property.

Mission-motivated development could include, but is not restricted to, the building of social and affordable housing, the establishment of jointly operated and funded community centres, the provision of short-term accommodation for persons experiencing domestic, family, and sexual violence, the provision of community gardens and/or community green spaces, and sites hosting community social enterprises. These developments can have financial and social benefits for both the church and the wider community.

Current Regulations of the Uniting Church, and in particular Regulation 4.11.10ⁱⁱ provide for the Synod, Presbyteries and Congregations to work together to find alternative missional use for surplus property. This Proposal seeks to encourage the application of this Regulation in new and helpful ways by engaging a wider range of people and councils in discerning the best use of church property. The current Property By-Lawⁱⁱⁱ refers to a Future Mission Committee. This proposal seeks to enhance the role of that Committee in developing Mission-motivated Development Proposals.

As an example of a pressing community need, affordable housing for both disadvantaged people and those fleeing domestic violence is a key issue across Australia at present. This is reflected in the priority given to it in the Australian Government's 2026 Budget. Conversations in the church have

demonstrated that social and affordable housing are issues of missional concern. As the availability of land for development is a cornerstone issue in the community, the church, along with its partners and other sectors, has a responsibility to address this missional need.

3. Mission-motivated development guide

We seek the church's wisdom in developing a mission-motivated development guide that clearly articulates the questions, issues, and steps that congregations and presbyteries need to address to find a mission-motivated way forward. We envisage that the guide would include the need to explore local and state government regulations and restrictions, how to undertake a local and regional needs analysis, ways to approach and engage with prospective partners, and how to engage with the Resources Board and staff.

It is envisioned that the guide to mission-motivated development would include examples of successfully undertaken projects such as social housing and partnership projects, a commitment to supporting alternative thinking, and a process for exploring and developing ideas in conjunction with the Councils of the Church.

Although the Synod Standing Committee is asked to oversee the development of the guide, it is envisaged expertise would be drawn from across the church and the wider community in its production, encompassing Mission Resourcing, UnitingCare, property experts, town planning and church affiliated organisations among others.

4. The challenge

When properties are surplus to current missional requirements, we have a responsibility to affirm the pledge we made in 1977 at the first Assembly of the Uniting Church in the words of the Statement to the Nation: *to hope and work for a nation whose goals are not guided by self-interest alone, but by concern for the welfare of all persons everywhere — the family of the One God — the God made known in Jesus of Nazareth, the One who gave His life for others*^{iv}.

In 1977, we said: *we will work for the eradication of poverty and racism within our society and beyond, and challenge values which emphasise acquisitiveness and greed in disregard of the needs of others and which encourage a higher standard of living for the privileged in the face of the daily widening gap between the rich and poor.*

Much of the property we currently hold is used by congregations to further their mission and ministry. There is also some that is currently underutilised, whether that be an old netball court out the back, the block of land bequeathed to the church or the patch of grass alongside the hall.

Furthermore, when a congregation wishes to relinquish its use of a property, either by joining with another congregation or by deciding to close, the property becomes available for alternative missional use, and we seek to include properties of that nature in this proposal.

Since the beginnings of our antecedent denominations, we have expressed, in words and actions, support for the marginalised in society and a desire to reach beyond our walls to share the love of Christ.

We generously support those in need through our Relief Centres, our support for organisations associated with the Uniting Church, our many local congregational missional initiatives, and individual acts of kindness.

We seek to build on the stories shared at last year's Renew event, which described how Synods, congregations, and presbyteries working together can develop innovative approaches to support the church's mission. Congregations and others are exploring ways surplus land can be utilised in missional ways that benefit both the church and the wider community.

In recent years, several congregations have considered ways to use their God-given resources to enhance the lives of others. Sometimes there is a spark of an idea, but not the expertise or resources within the congregation to develop it into a firm proposal. On other occasions, a congregation has presented a considered proposal to the wider church and discovered it does not meet with current criteria.

This proposal seeks to clarify the Synod's priorities to assist congregations and others who seek to use our resources in missional ways, and to provide certainty that the Synod is prepared to work towards implementing projects that may not be "what we have always done".

Of particular consideration in this instance is the land surrounding some of our church buildings that is underutilised and properties that are no longer required by congregations. The thinking behind these proposals is to facilitate the use of this land for housing the disadvantaged, or other projects that align with the mission of the congregation and may benefit the congregation, the wider church, and the community.

5. An example – social and affordable housing

The acute need for social and affordable housing is an example of one possible way forward.

As a Church, we do not have to work alone in missional developments on church land. According to Amanda Bailey, CEO of [Faith Housing Australia](#), "Faith-based community housing providers were selected as preferred partners to deliver more than 10 per cent of the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF)' Round 1 pipeline, demonstrating the sector's readiness and governance capacity to contribute to national delivery."

Through the HAFF, Housing Australia provides loans and grants for projects that increase the supply of social and affordable housing and address acute housing needs across Australia, including regional, rural and remote areas. These are business opportunities that bring external resources to the church and allow for a return on property so that the congregation can continue to renew in other ways.

In recent years, potential partners, along with congregations, have proposed making church land available for mission-motivated development without success. This has led to missed opportunities that could have brought investment funds to the church.

6. Conclusion

These proposals do not seek to negate the current treatment of surplus property but instead insert a process that provides an opportunity to use property to further the mission of the church in more ways than the current surplus property process.

Not all underutilised church land will be suitable for projects such as this. Social and affordable housing is but one example of how we might be creative about our resources. We present this particular example because it has been identified as a priority by some congregations. We are sure there would be a variety of mission-motivated developments proposed if there were certainty of support, encouragement, and the provision of expertise. The aim of these proposals is to prioritise mission-motivated development when the opportunity arises.

ⁱ <https://victas.uca.org.au/mission-resources/property-legal/property/>

ⁱⁱ <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/1672> page 160

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://sa.uca.org.au/documents/synod/synod/18.5-Property-by-law.pdf>

^{iv} https://uniting.church/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/1_StatementNation1977.pdf

^v The Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) is a dedicated \$10 billion investment by the Australian Government, established in November 2023 under the Housing Australia Future Fund Act, to improve housing outcomes for Australians.

Through the HAFF, Housing Australia is working in partnership with all levels of government and the community housing, development and finance sectors to support the delivery of 20,000 new social homes and 20,000 new affordable homes across Australia over five years from 2024.