

Mission and Property Strategy Working Group

Acknowledgement of Country

The Working Group acknowledges the sovereignty of the First Peoples of these lands and waters where we meet, the Kaurna Nation.

We also acknowledge the Uniting Church in Australia's Covenant relationship with all first peoples of this country.

We seek to listen and respect their voices and the experience of leaders' past, present, and emerging as we work cooperatively and collaboratively to care for the land, its peoples and all of creation.

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Executive Summary

The Synod continues to focus on the missional health of congregations and the safety and the functionality of our properties. We carry an important mission and steward the resources of generations past to help us live out that mission. Over the past five years the Mission and Property Strategy Working Group has been dedicated to helping to achieve “missionally vibrant congregations in safe fit for purpose buildings”. Since the last Synod meeting progress has been made in several key areas.

- Project officers are now working in each Presbytery, supporting congregations with low missional vitality and low property scores.
- Presbyteries are engaged with a wide range of missional conversations and resourcing for congregations
- The working group is developing assessment tools to help identify strategic locations, buildings and congregations.
- Presbyteries have utilised the feedback on missional and institutional metrics to help inform their conversations.
- The Annual Property Return was conducted with an 85% return rate from congregations.
- Internal tools for sharing of property have been developed with resources for congregations being developed.
- A strategic map is on time to be developed by the end of 2026.
- The 2025 Missional Vitality Questionnaire was completed with an 83% response rate.

We are deeply thankful to the congregations and leaders who have engaged with this process.

As the second collection of congregational reporting, the 2025 Missional Vitality Questionnaire allows the Synod to begin to consider trends and changes over time. There was an overall reduction in the average MVS across the Synod from 2.74 in 2022 to 2.49 in 2025.



With ongoing progress, intentional collaboration, and continued missional and property needs across the Synod, the focus on the Mission and Property Strategy continues to have high importance for the future missional and stewardship health of the UCA SA. Looking forward the MAPS project will need to continue to resources and support Presbyteries as they conduct intentional conversations and

resource opportunities for congregations, ensure high engagement with ongoing reporting of Annual Property Returns and Missional Vitality Surveys, invite UAICC led engagement, engage with CALD communities, and continue progress in creation of key tools and maps to support this vision.

The MAPS work continues to highlight the importance of supporting local congregations as they seek to live out a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world.

1. Introduction

This report is a progress report on the work of the Mission and Property Strategy (MAPS) Working Group, in its 5th iteration. The group has been operating since 2021 when it was called the Strategy & Planning (Mission and Property) Working Group before its name was changed at the October 2024 Synod meeting. The vision and purpose of the working group remains: To develop missionally vibrant congregations and faith communities in safe buildings that are fit for purpose. A key outcome of the MAPS project is the development of a map that shows strategic locations of these congregations and faith communities.

Vision

To develop missionally vibrant congregations and faith communities in safe buildings that are fit for purpose.

The MAPS working group have collaboratively progressed the October 2024 Synod decisions, although at times it has felt like progress has been slow. A key component has been building consensus between the Presbyteries and the Synod so that we have agreed understandings and definitions of the work that we are doing. We have had to change our approach at times. At one point the Secretariat assumed that we would have a 0.5 FTE role in the Synod Office overseeing the Presbyteries work to meet with congregations about their current mission and property and future plans. Over time, it became clear that this was work the Presbyteries would need to undertake themselves and thankfully we were able to source resourcing through UC Invest for this. Currently each Presbytery has its own MAPS Project Officer with the initial task to focus on the 30% of our congregations that were identified as needing Legacy conversations. These congregations had a very low missional viability score (from the 2022 Missional Viability Questionnaire), and a low property score identified through the building audit completed in 2020. There are reports from each of the Presbytery's Project Officers in this report at section 6. Each Presbytery has taken the feedback on missional metrics and institutional metrics from our last Synod meeting and have been developing them for use in their Presbytery.

We conducted the second Mission and Property Questionnaire in 2025. Data and stories from this research are contained in section 5 of this report.

The work of developing a map that shows strategic locations for UCA congregations and faith communities that are missionally vibrant, in safe buildings that are fit for purpose is on track for a first iteration by the end of 2026. The working group is trialling a strategic assessment tool that will identify strategic locations, congregations and buildings/ sites across the Synod.

To our disappointment, the working group has not further engaged with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress about their ministry and mission in SA. We need to listen to Congress as we continue this work.

We also need to explore further listening and work with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The MAPS working group has identified that the membership of the group needs to be refreshed as we move into our next phase. This may include representation from the Mission Resourcing Team, while other members of the working group, who have served since the beginning of the project, and are seeking to conclude.

The working group acknowledges that developing and mapping missionally vibrant congregations and faith communities in safe buildings that are fit for purpose is an ongoing and ever evolving project. Our church is always growing and changing, letting parts of our life go, passing on the legacy of ministry and mission to a new or different way of being church, always seeking to follow where God is leading us in mission and ministry in our growing and changing Synod.

2. Proposals:

That the Synod RESOLVE to:

1. NOTE the Mission and Property Strategy Working Group report 2026.
2. AFFIRM the work of the Presbytery MAPS Project Officers and ENCOURAGE their continued conversations with congregations.
3. INVITE intentional UAICC led engagement with the MAPS project
4. ENGAGE CALD communities in the MAPS project.
5. REQUEST the General Secretary seek suitable resourcing for the project moving forward (including for Presbytery project officers and the future role of the Working Group) and bring a report to the next Synod meeting
6. REQUEST the Synod Standing Committee review the membership of the working group and appoint new members as appropriate.

3. Background

The [‘God’s Church and Its Buildings – Are they fit for Mission?’](#) report that went to the Synod meeting in 2021. It concluded that due to meeting legislative standards of maintenance in asbestos care, fire safety, accessibility and electrical issues in the 503 buildings held by the Property Trust for the use of the SA Synod, 91% were rated as moderate to poor condition, expressed as either ‘near but below target’ and ‘below target’ standard. This presents an enormous safety, financial and missional risk to the church as a whole. At the time it was estimated that \$30M was needed to

meet standards and qualify for insurance. With the rising cost in building materials, construction, cost of fuel, and general inflation in the economy, along with the work of many congregations to undertake repairs, and the sale of some properties, it is estimated that amount is \$37M in today's dollars.

Building on that report, successive Synods have progressively considered how to best foster missional vitality and manage property safety and suitability.

Reports on the progress of the working group were presented to the 2022, 2023, and 2024 Synod meetings:

[2022 Synod Strategy & Planning Working Group Report](#)

[2023 Synod Strategy & Planning \(Mission & Property\) Working Group Report](#)

[2023 Synod Strategy & Planning \(Mission & Property\) Working Group Regional Reports](#)

[2023 Synod Strategy & Planning \(Mission & Property\) Missional Viability Questionnaire Data Report](#)

[2024 Synod Strategy & Planning \(Mission & Property\) Working Group Report](#)

The resolutions flowing from these reports can be found in [9.1](#) – *Synod Decisions relating to Mission and Property Working Group*. This is leading to a vision of missionally vibrant congregations and safe properties that are fit for purpose.

4. Progress since October 2024

Much of the MAPS work since October 2024 has been focused on establishing the Presbytery project officer roles. Their work involves visiting congregations to have conversations, exploring their missional vitality and building safety, to inform future directions. The project officer's role has primarily been to acknowledge and celebrate the worship, witness and service happening in congregations and faith communities, while gently encouraging congregations to look beyond their current patterns toward greater missional vitality or improved functionality of their buildings.

For some congregations, Presbytery engagement has required deeper imaginative and pastoral work. Some are no longer able to fulfil the responsibilities of a congregation as set out in the UCA Regulations or no longer have the energy to continue in their current form. Others, when invited into careful discernment, have embarked on new missional initiatives and are showing signs of renewed vitality and growth in worshipping life.

The General Secretary continues to oversee the direction of the working group which has been resourced by experts in mission planning, property and planning, and key Synod staff expertise, as well as representatives from the three Presbyteries. The General Secretary has been able to secure funding from UC Invest to resource the many conversations, connections and outcomes of the MAPS Working Group.

The Working Group has progressed the 2024 Synod Decision as below:

Synod Decision		Progress
1.	The Synod of SA Resolved (by consensus) to: NOTE the Synod Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) Working Group report (2024).	
2.	REQUEST the Working Group continue to develop a map by the end of 2026 that shows and describes strategic locations for UCA congregations and faith communities that are missionally vibrant, in safe buildings that are fit for purpose.	This is a work in progress. We are developing a strategic assessment tool and are in the early stages of applying it. We are on track for a first version of the map by the end of 2026 but recognise this will be an ongoing endeavour.
3.	REQUEST the Presbyteries report to the working group on congregational conversations before the next Synod meeting.	The Presbyteries have been reporting at each meeting of the MAPS working group on their work. They have each provided a summary report in section 6 of this report.
4.	REQUEST the Working Group (which includes Presbytery Leaders) consider the input from the 2024 Synod Meeting working groups on congregation attributes.	This work has been completed, with the working group looking at the feedback and the Presbyteries developing metrics for congregation attributes that are appropriate in their context.
5.	CONDUCT congregation reporting about mission viability (via a questionnaire) every two years, commencing in 2025.	The questionnaire was conducted early to mid-2025, with 200 of 241 congregations participating.
6.	REQUIRE congregations to submit their annual property returns to their Presbytery and the Synod (Regulation 4.4.3 and 4.11.8).	The 2025 Annual Property Return was conducted in late 2025 with a return rate of 85% congregations.
7.	DEVELOP the framework and tools for sharing of property and distribute across Presbyteries	Internal resources have been developed to support a consistency of approach by Presbyteries and Synod. Public facing tools to be used by sharing congregations are still under development.
8.	REQUEST the General Secretary to seek suitable resourcing for the project moving forward (including for Presbytery leaders and the future role of the Working Group) and bring a report to the next Synod meeting.	The General Secretary secured a grant from UC Invest which will fund the project until 2027. Further funding will need to be sought beyond that.
9.	NOTE the change of name of the working group to Missional and Property Strategy (MAPS) working group.	Complete

The Working Group Members from October 2024 to June 2025 have been/ are:

- Rev Sue Page (Associate General Secretary, Governance & Operations) Chairperson
- Rev Philip Gardner (General Secretary)
- Peter Battersby (Executive Officer, Resources)
- Rev Mike Wardrop (Mission Planning) (concluded April 2026)
- David Bailey (Property Planning)

- Mark Elford (Property Planning)
- Rev Dianne Holden (Mission Planning) then Presbytery rep

Presbytery representatives were nominated by each of the Presbyteries and included,

- **Wimala:** Amy Duke, Rev Dianne Holden and Malcolm Wilson (commenced 2025)
- **Presbytery of Southern SA (POSSA):** Rev Richard Telfer (concluded during 2025), Rev Lawrie Linggood, Bronte Wilson (commenced 2025)
- **Generate Presbytery:** Rev Steph Tai, Martyn Smith (concluded 2025), and Rev Barry Littleford (commenced 2026).

Resourcing Members:

- Michelle Cavallaro (Executive Assistant to the General Secretary) Minute taker
- Matt Wilson (Manager, Property & Projects)
- Darcy Pullman (Project Officer, Data Analysis) (short project engagements in 2023 and 2025)
- Rev Steph Tai has been engaged in the Project Officer, Data Analysis role from April to June 2026.

4.1 Relevant Decision of the Synod Standing Committee

20/02/2025 SSC25.009	The Synod Standing Committee RESOLVED (by consensus) to NOTE that a communication strategy will be developed by the Mission and Property Strategy (MAPS) Working Group to inform congregations about the metrics which have been developed and how they might be used.
26/02/2026 SSC26.007	AFFIRM the General Secretary's recommendation to pause distributions from the Synod's New Church and Ministry Development Fund until UCA SA strategic locations are established by the MAPS Project
26/02/2026 SSC26.008	AFFIRM that this decision will be reviewed at the first meeting of the Standing Committee in 2027, or when UCA SA strategic locations are established by the MAPS Project, whichever is sooner

5. 2025 Missional and Property Questionnaire

5.1 Background

In June 2022 the Synod meeting determined to further progress discussion and information gathering as part of what is now known as the Mission and Property Strategy project (MAPS). The Missional Viability Questionnaire (MVQ) was sent to congregations in November 2022, and the analysis was reported to the 2023 Synod Meeting in the [Missional Viability Questionnaire Data Report](#).

During the 2024 Synod Meeting the Synod resolved to *CONDUCT congregation reporting about mission viability (via a questionnaire and other research methods) every two years, commencing in 2025 (S24.06 (5))*. In following this directive from the Synod, the MVQ was issued again in March 2025, with a few small changes.

Due to the timing of the questionnaires, when congregations report on ‘the last 12 months’ the 2022 responses relate to 2022, while the 2025 responses relate to 2024. The next round of congregational reporting through the Missional Viability Questionnaire will occur in 2027.

A missional vitality indicator (MVS) was created using both numerical and categorical data that came under any one of the following categories: worship, witness and service. These categories are drawn from the Basis of Union, stating ‘The Congregation is the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshiping, witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ’. The same questions were used to form the MVS in 2022 and 2025, although the number of the questions changed due to the changes in the 2025 questionnaire. The list of questions used for the analysis can be found in the Missional Vitality section of this analysis.

5.2 Purpose

The scope of this section of the report is to provide a summary analysis of the South Australian Synod responses to the 2025 MVQ and, where appropriate, compare it with the 2022 MVQ findings. This provides a ‘snapshot’ of the Uniting Church in South Australia over the prior 1-3 years.

5.3 Introduction

There were **241** congregations and faith communities in the South Australian Synod in May 2025. For the purposes of this data report all references to ‘congregations’ includes both congregations and faith communities.

200 congregations submitted Missional Vitality Questionnaire responses.

In the 2023 report to the Synod, the Missional Vitality Data was presented on 190 congregations. Following the reporting a further 7 congregations responded. The 2022 data in this report includes (where possible) the additional responses, therefore some data may vary slightly from the 2023 Synod report.

Noting the timing of the questionnaires it is important to consider what external factors may have had an impact on the responses. The 2022 data was collected as congregations were emerging from

COVID and the restrictions and unpredictability of that period. The 2025 data may give us a more accurate picture of the life of UCA SA congregations. Future MVQ's will allow us to see emerging trends.

The 2025 response rate was 83% of congregations (200/241) compared to 74.3% (197/265) in 2022. This represents a positive increase in the response rate of **11.7%** as a percentage of the possible respondents.

The data was collected via Microsoft forms and was collectively exported to one excel spreadsheet.

The questionnaires were self-reported. Upon conducting this questionnaire, an assumption was made that the respondent would gather the suitable resourcing required to answer each question as accurately as possible. In saying that, it is still important to note that the data is self-reported and the questionnaire contents range in subjectivity. I.e. The question 'How many people attend your regular in-person public worship services?' is of a different nature to the question 'Would you say that, at this moment, you have enough resources to effectively operate as a congregation?' and will yield different types of data accordingly.

NCLS data has also been used to bring a wider Australian Church perspective to aspects of this data. Where NCLS data is mentioned this includes 'mainstream denominations' not just Uniting Church in Australia data.

5.4 Responses by Presbytery

What presbytery were responses from?

■ Generate ■ Presbytery of Southern SA ■ Wimala

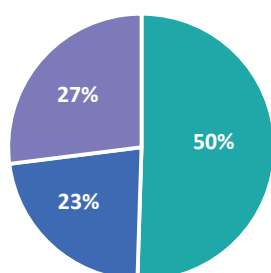


Figure 1

In 2025 there were 200 responses from congregations. Half of these were from congregations in Generate Presbytery (**101**). **54** were from Wimala Presbytery and **45** from Presbytery of Southern SA.

This means that responses were received from **89%** of Generate congregations, **82%** of Presbytery of Southern SA, and **74%** of Wimala congregations. Where UAICC congregations responded these have been included in the Presbytery figures.

No further Presbytery specific data analysis has been done for the purposes of this report. Each Presbytery has access to their data for further analysis.

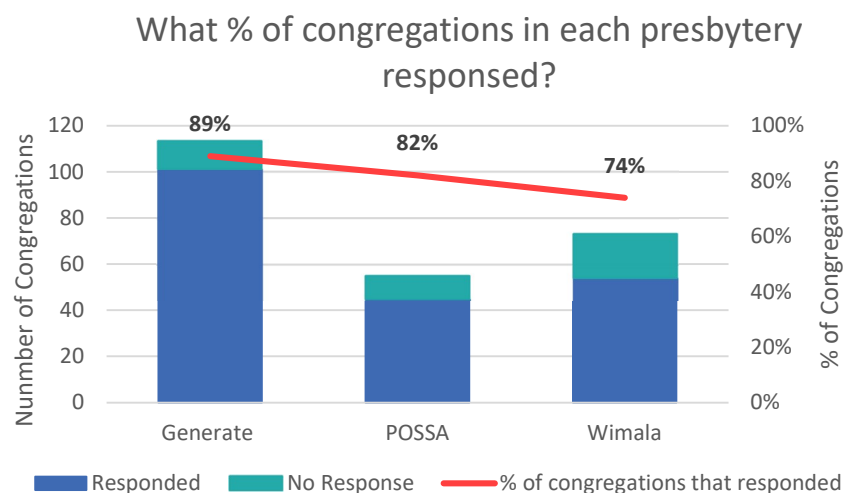
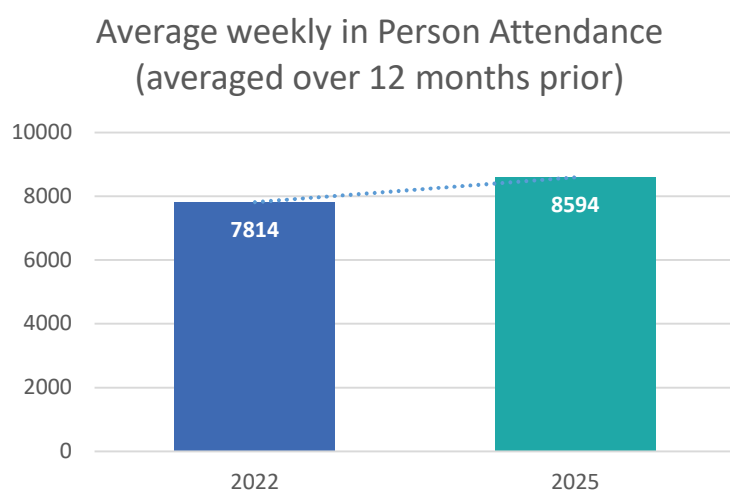


Figure 2

5.5 WORSHIP

5.5.1 Average weekly attendance



10%

In growth in total average attendance across the Synod between 2022 and 2024.

Figure 3

2022 reporting congregations had a combined average attendance of **7814**. As the questionnaire was conducted later in the year this was for the year 2022. In 2025 the questionnaire was conducted earlier in the year, therefore the average attendance was reported on 2024. There was a combined average attendance of **8594** which represents a **10%** increase in average attendance across the Synod between 2022 and 2024. On average this represents **43** people in attendance per congregation. While growth over time is hoped for it is unclear how much of this growth represents a

‘returning to normal’ post COVID. NCLS 2025 Pulse Check indicates that weekly attendance in 2025 had returned to approximately 89% of attendance in 2001¹.

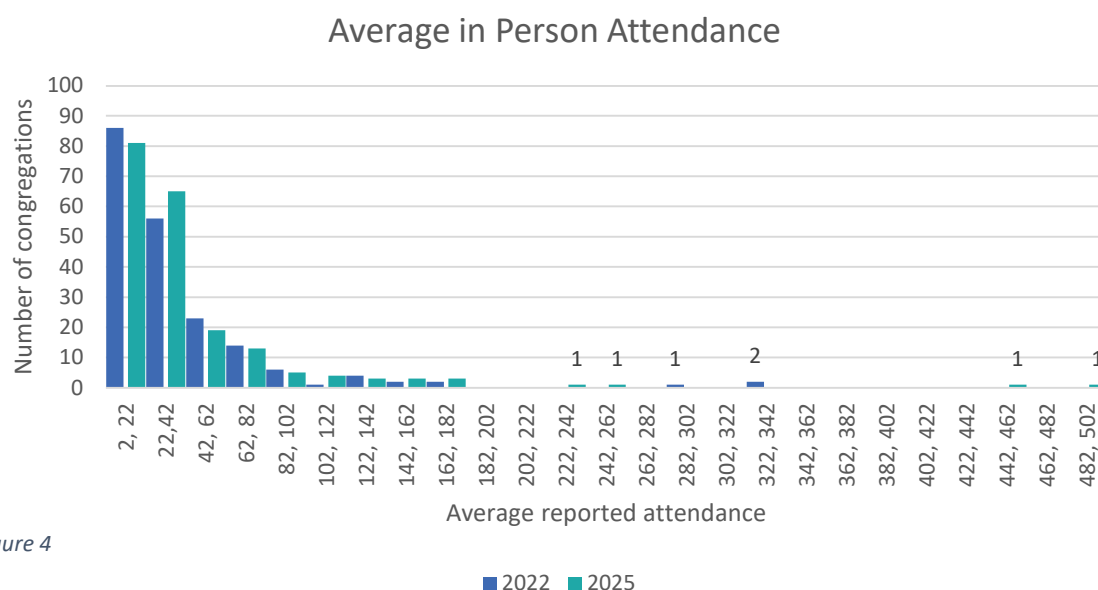


Figure 4

57%

of the growth in average
attendance occurred in the 4
largest churches

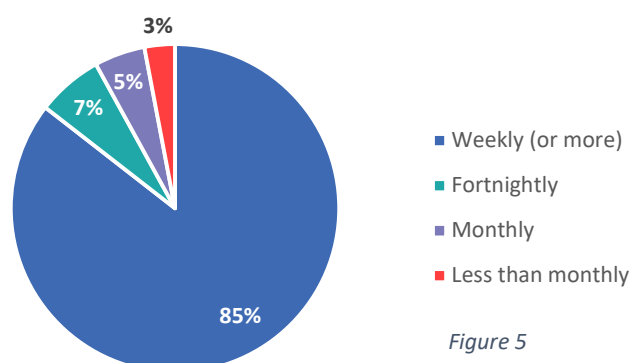
Attendance remains skewed across the Synod. The **range was 497** with 3 being the lowest reported weekly attendance and 500 being the highest. In the 2025 responses 40% of congregations had an average weekly in person attendance **under 22**, with only 12% over **80** people. While the largest 10% of congregations account for **41%** of total average attendance indicating that a few congregations make up a large portion of the total attendance.

¹ Powell R., Sterland S., & Pepper M. (December 2025). Church Pulse Check 2025. NCLS Research.
<https://shop.ncls.org.au/products/church-pulse-check-report-2025>

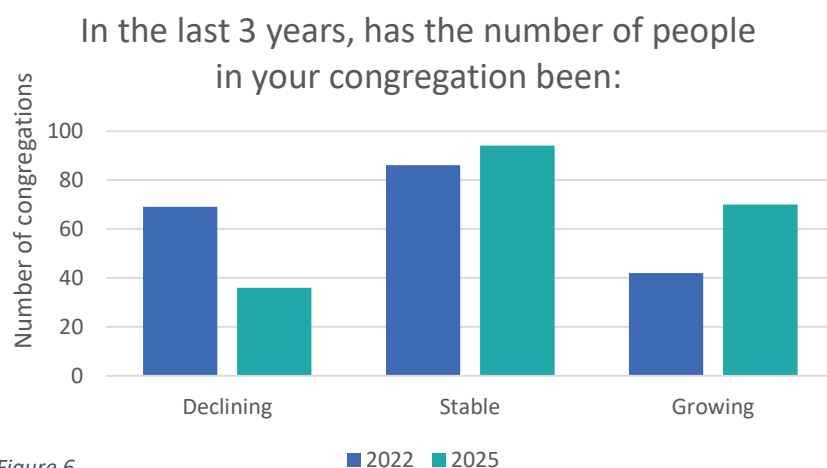
5.5.2 Regularity of gathering

Congregations continue to gather regularly for worship with **85%** of congregations gathering for public in person worship services **weekly**. The frequency of in person public worship services remains largely unchanged from the 2022 overall responses.

How regularly do you gather in person for public worship services



5.5.3 Number of people (growing/stable/declining)



The percentage of **Growing** congregations increased from 21% in 2022 to **35% in 2025**.

The rate of congregations reporting 'the number of people in their congregation' was **Growing** increased from 21% in 2022 to 35% in 2025. **Declining** congregations reduced from 36% in 2022 down to 18% in 2025. These results could be a reflection of the impact of COVID on the 2022 reporting and the recovery demonstrated in the 2025 reporting.

5.5.4 What programmes do you run?

Support for people with a disability and 'other' were both added to the 2025 questionnaire. **Women's ministry** continues to be the most run program beyond regular worship services. While numbers generally followed similar trends to the 2022 questionnaire Family Ministry increased from 30 congregations in 2022 to **44** in 2025.

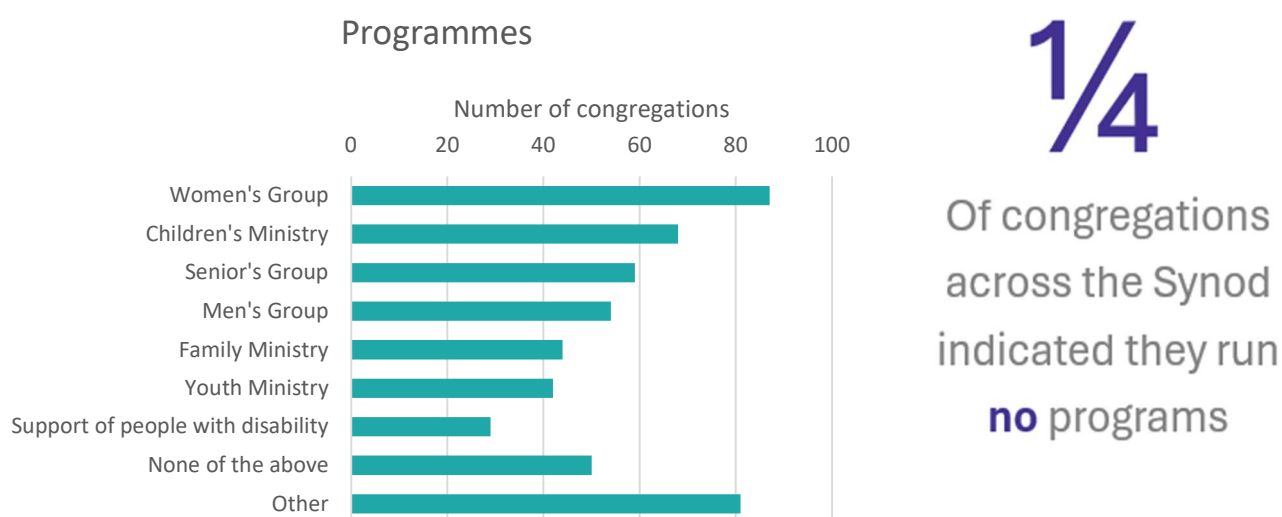


Figure 7

5.5.5 A Story from the Village Church Alberton

*Between 2022 and 2025, Village Church Alberton experienced significant growth in both attendance and congregational vitality. This renewal began when the congregation recognised that if the church was to have a future, it needed to embrace change. Starting in 2021, the church embarked on a **courageous and respectful journey** of strategic renewal, seeking to discern what God was calling them to become. At the heart of this process was a simple guiding focus: Love God, Love People.*

Rather than abandoning what was meaningful to existing members, the church retained its traditional worship service while intentionally building relationships, creating a welcoming environment for families, and reimagining church as an intergenerational community rather than simply a Sunday gathering. In time, a second, distinctly different service emerged within the one church family.

*The journey was **collaborative, pastoral, prayerful, and bold**. Through playgroup, community gatherings, and monthly all-age café-style worship, the church developed strong relationships and became a thriving community marked by spiritual exploration, baptisms, new commitments and renewed faith, and lives being healed and restored in Jesus' name.*

- Simon Story (Pastor)

5.5.6 Worship style

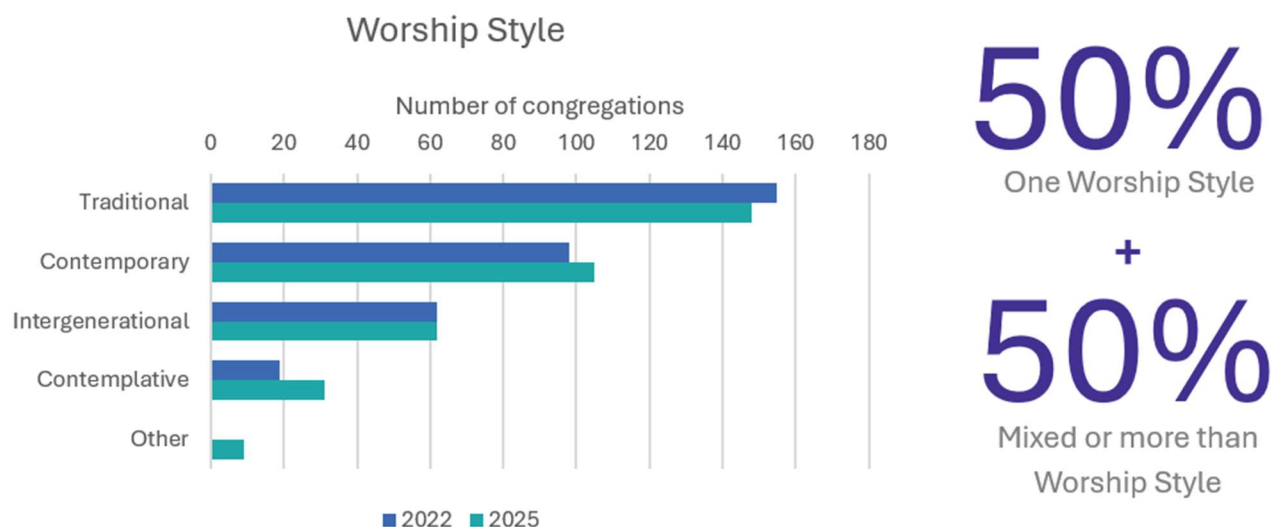


Figure 8

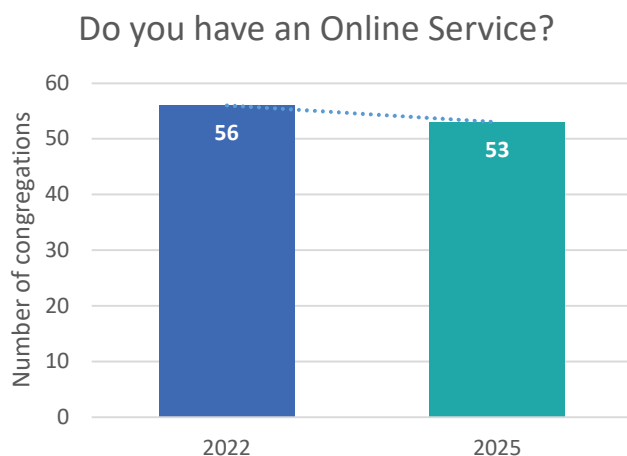
Respondents were given the option of selecting one or more worship styles that describes their worship. Between 2022 and 2025 ‘traditional’ reduced slightly while ‘contemporary’ and ‘contemplative’ increased.

50% of congregations reported only one worship style while the other 50% reported a mix of worship styles across different services or in the one service. **Traditional worship dominated** the responses from the 50% of congregations with a singular worship style (69 Traditional, 23 Contemporary, 7 Intergenerational, and 2 Other).

In the 2016 NCLS report we can see that worship style trends are closely linked to age profiles. Boomers seem to value traditional and contemporary music fairly evenly, while traditional music is valued more highly by older generations (40% by builders) and significantly less by youth and young adults (only 14% by Gen Z and Y). “Conversely, contemporary music is highly valued amongst younger generations (30% of Gen Z and 26% of Gen Y) compared to just 9% of Builders”².

² Powell, R., Pepper, M., Jacka, K. & Sterland, S. (n.d). Builders and boomers bridge. NCLS Research. <https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/builders-and-boomers-bridge/>

5.5.7 Online Service



While 28% (56) of responding congregations had an online service in 2022 this went down to **26% (53)** in 2025. This is below 2016 NCLS data which reported 34% of churches were posting at their sermons online³. The rate of online services reported through NCLS is likely to show an increase in the 2026 NCLS responses, potentially pointed to a greater gap.

Figure 9

5.5.8 A Story from Salisbury Uniting

One of the joys experienced by Salisbury Uniting is people finding ways to connect with Jesus and community. Denise Franklin, Salisbury's chairperson, describes two key areas of connection that have helped the congregation grow by 27%. A new afternoon community called Limitless and their 10am online service. Limitless started as a community space, open service held on Sunday afternoons (at 4pm), specifically catering to reach those looking for a more casual style of worship. This evolved over time and today is being reimaged under new leadership. It will be exciting to see how this is reflected in future questionnaires.

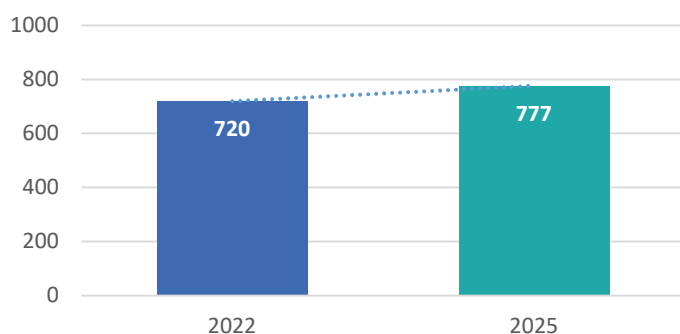
*As Denise shares, you can hear her **heart for people to find places of connection**. She shared about what posting their services online has meant to those no longer able to attend in person. They can **stay connected** and be a part of the service. For some this is the only way they can be a part of the church. For others it has been their **entry point**. Through friend's recommendations, people have started watching online, before eventually joining in person. For Denise, it is not about the 'quality' of the online service which sometimes has tech failures but making sure it is there for people to stay connected and find a **church home**.*

³ Jacka, K., Pepper, M., Ward, N., Powell, R. & Sterland, S. (n.d.) Innovation to include generations. NCLS Research. <https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/innovation-to-include-generations/>

5.6 WITNESS

5.6.1 Came to faith

How many people have come to faith in the last three years?



There were **777** who came to faith in the three years prior to 2025. This was an increase on the 2022 questionnaire where it was reported that **720** people came to faith (from 196 respondents).

Figure 10

In 2022 there were **92** congregations who experienced no one coming to faith in the three years prior. Their average Intentional Faith sharing score was 2.00. In 2025 there were **81 congregations who experienced no one coming to faith** in the three years prior with an Average Intentional Faith Sharing score of 1.95. While less congregations reported no one coming to faith in the three years prior this still represents **40% of the reporting congregations**. This could indicate a larger challenge for mainstream protestant churches with the NCLS Pulse Check 2025 estimating that only 10% of people coming to faith did so in mainstream protestant denominations, like the UCA⁴.

8%
growth in the
number of people
coming to faith

⁴ Powell R., Sterland S., & Pepper M. (December 2025). Church Pulse Check 2025. NCLS Research. <https://shop.ncls.org.au/products/church-pulse-check-report-2025>

5.6.2 Where did people come to faith? (growing/stable/declining)

69%

of those who
came to faith
did so in a
‘growing’
congregation

How many people have come to faith in
your congregation in the last three years?

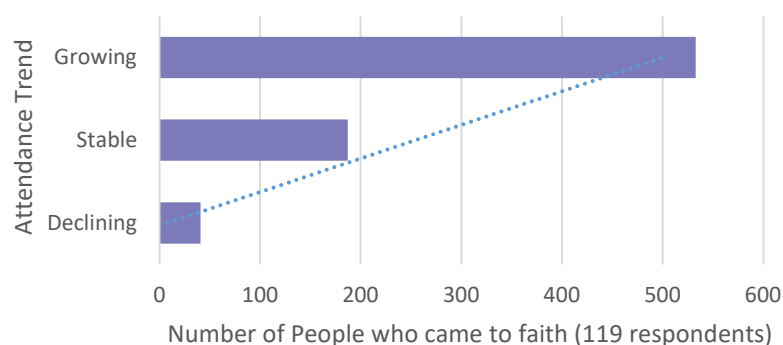


Figure 11

533 people who came to faith did so in a congregation who self-reported that their attendance was **‘growing’**. Only **41** people came to faith in congregation who reported they were **‘declining’**.

Attendance (Growing, Stable or Declining)
from those who reported **no one coming to
faith** in previous three years (81 responses)

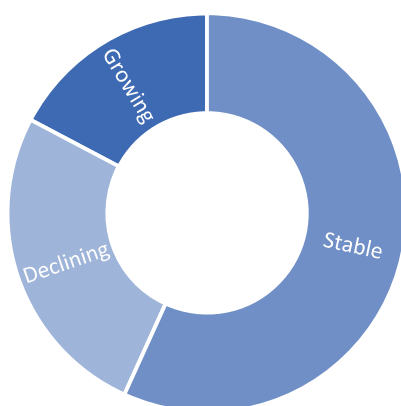


Figure 12

In congregations who experienced no one coming to faith, only 25% reported they were **declining** compared to only 13% of those who saw someone come to faith.

Conversely only 17% of those who saw no one come to faith reported that they were **growing** compared to 47% of those who reported someone came to faith

Attendance Growing, Stable or
Declining from those who **had someone
come to faith** in the previous three
years (119 responses)

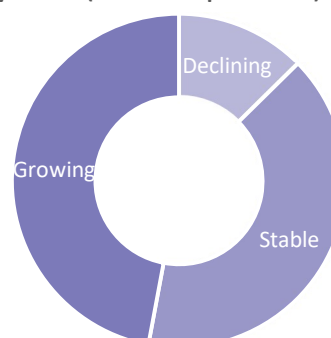


Figure 13

Those who reported that no one came to faith in the three years prior to the 2025 questionnaire saw their average for intentional **faith sharing model** reduced by only 0.05 while their average in an intentional **discipleship model** reduced from 2.173 in 2022 down to 1.888 in 2025.

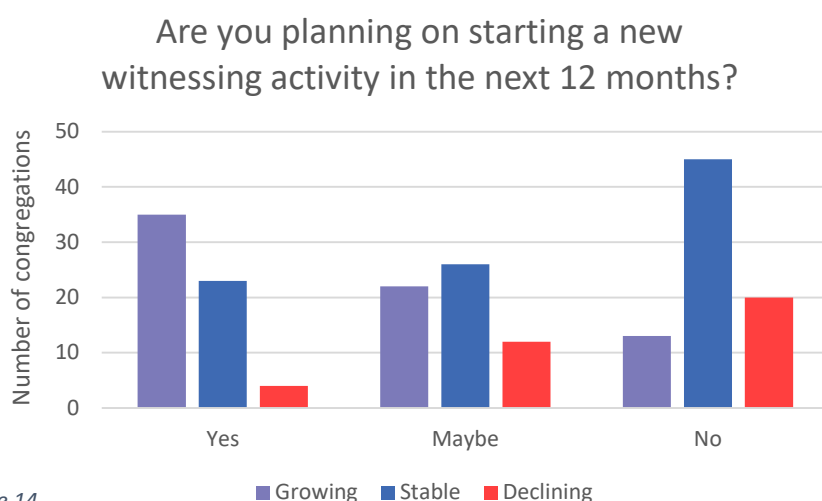
5.6.3 Congregations where no one has come to faith in last two surveys (5 years)

50 Congregations have seen no one come to faith in at least 5 years

When comparing reporting congregations, 50 congregations reported no people coming to faith in the three years prior to 2022 and 2025. **Meaning ¼ of the Synod respondents have experienced no one coming to faith in at least 5 years.**

5.6.4 Starting a new witnessing activity

In the 2025 survey respondents indicated yes, no or maybe to whether they were planning to start a new witnessing activity in the next 12 months. **62** congregations are planning to start a new witnessing activity. Only **4** congregations that report **decline** (11% of total 'declining') are planning to start a new witnessing activity. While 56% of declining congregations have no plan to start a new witnessing activity. 48% of **stable** congregations are not planning to start a new witnessing activity, while 50% of **growing** congregations are planning to start a new witnessing activity.



60% of congregations planning to start a new witnessing activity are looking to start an Alpha Course

Figure 14

In the 2021 NCLS findings only 19% of attendees in mainline protestant denominations saw faith-sharing and inviting as a priority of their church in the next 12 months⁵. While NCLS 2021 63% responded that the Church intentionally acts to have a visible Christian Witness in their community⁶.

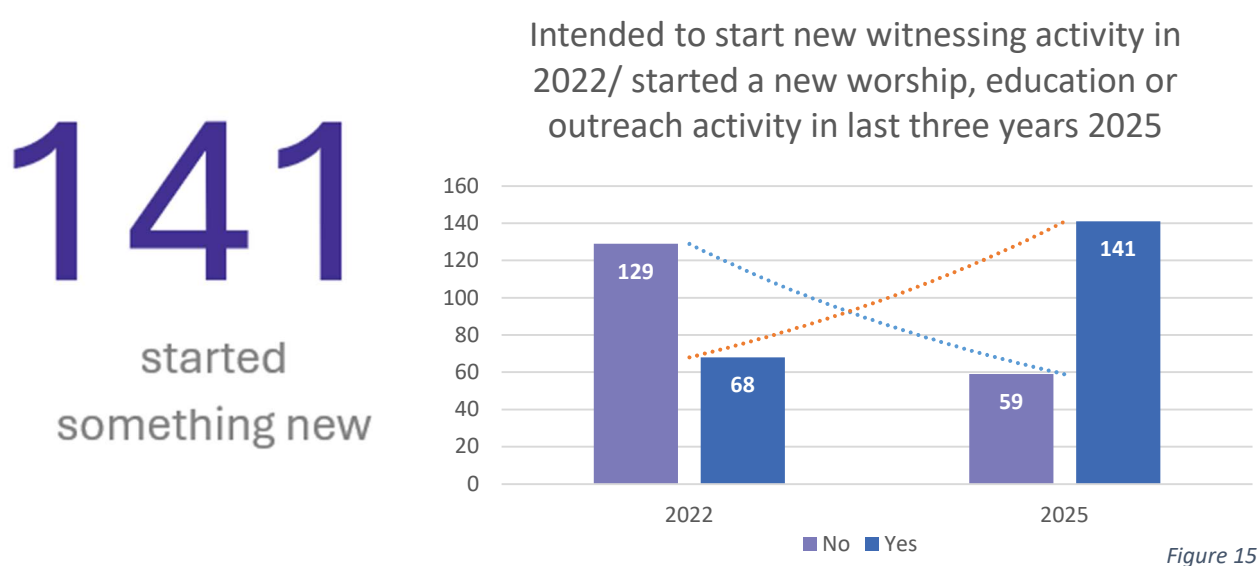
⁵ Churchgoers priorities community. NCLS Research. <https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/churchgoers-prioritise-community/>

⁶ NCLS Research. (2024). Summary Report: Faith Sharing, Discipleship and Evangelism. NCLS Research. <https://www.ncls.org.au/publications/faith-sharing-discipleship-and-evangelism-summary-report/>

5.6.5 New witnessing activity in last three years - impact from 2022

In 2022 **129** congregations said they were **not** intending to start a new witnessing activity in the next 12 months with only 68 indicating they were. While 35% of reporting congregations starting something new seems low, it is higher than might have been expected given the impact of COVID. Similarly, in 2021, when given the choice of 'three priorities for your church in the next 12 months' only 2% of NCLS responses, by attendees in mainline protestant churches, selected 'starting a new mission venture'⁷.

Despite only 35% of MVQ respondents indicating they were planning to start a new missional activity in 2022, over the last three years **141** congregations started a new worship, education or outreach activity with only 59 indicating they did not start any new activity.



5.6.6 A Story from Mount Barker (Dunn Memorial)

*At Mount Barker Uniting Church, our vision is “To be the heart of God open to the community,” and our mission is “To provide and build a spiritually enriching Christian community that creatively and courageously explores ways for people in our region to encounter God.” These statements continue to **guide and shape** all that we do as a faith community.*

As Mount Barker is one of the fastest growing regions in South Australia, we see both the opportunity and responsibility to create welcoming spaces where people can connect, belong, and explore faith.

*Our outreach ministries play a significant role in this mission and include our Food Pantry, weekly free community meal, and community café, all designed to provide **practical support, hospitality, and connection** for people across our region.*

^{7 7} Churchgoers priorities community. NCLS Research. <https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/churchgoers-prioritise-community/>

Through the support of Uniting Foundation, we have also been able to employ a Children and Families Worker. This has enabled us to establish a playgroup, youth group, and a range of family-focused events that have created meaningful pathways for people to engage with the church community. We have been encouraged to see new people come to faith, while others have reconnected with church and rediscovered their spiritual journey.

As a church, we seek to:

- **Create** programs and events that welcome and engage people
- **Share** the message of Christianity in relevant and accessible ways
- **Provide** opportunities for people to explore and commit to faith
- **Integrate** people into a worshipping and serving faith community
- **Encourage** people to share their own faith experiences with others

At the heart of our ministry is a desire to love and accept people as they are, offering compassion, care, and support to all.

One of our ongoing challenges is ensuring our heritage buildings remain fit for purpose as we continue to grow and adapt for the future.

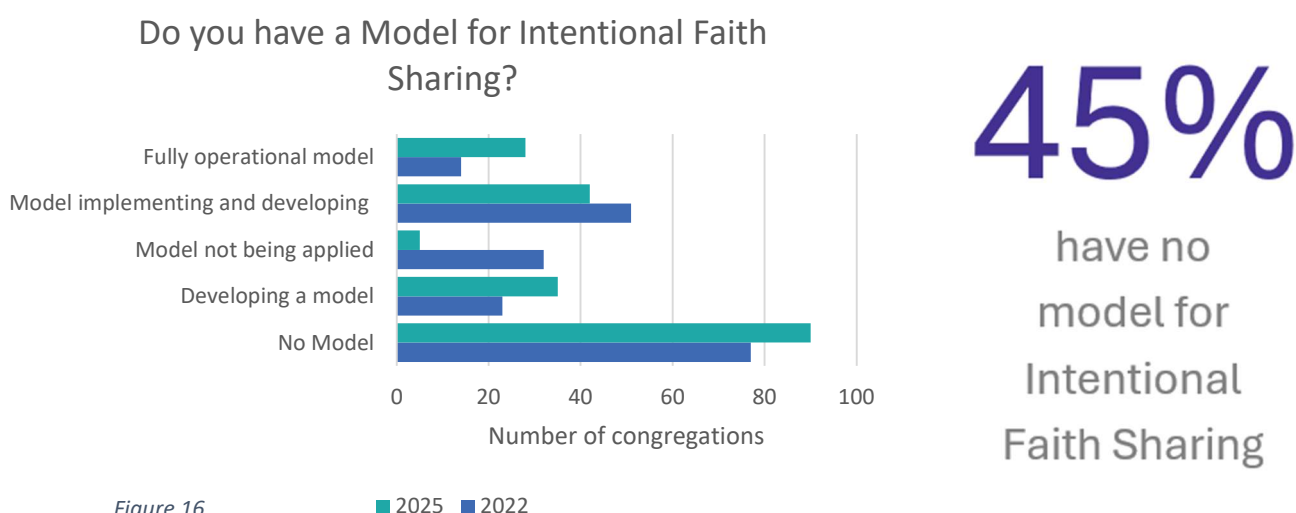
We are also deeply grateful for our faithful weekly prayer group, whose ongoing prayers continue to support and strengthen the life and ministry of our church.

- Rev Haydn Lush

5.6.7 Intentional faith sharing

The number of congregations reporting a fully operational model doubled with **28** responses (**14%**) compared to 14 (7%) in 2022. Only 3 of the congregations who had a fully operational model in 2022 reported having a fully operational model in 2025.

Interestingly, more congregations answered that they had 'No Model' for Intentional Faith Sharing in 2025 (**45%**) than 2022 (39%).

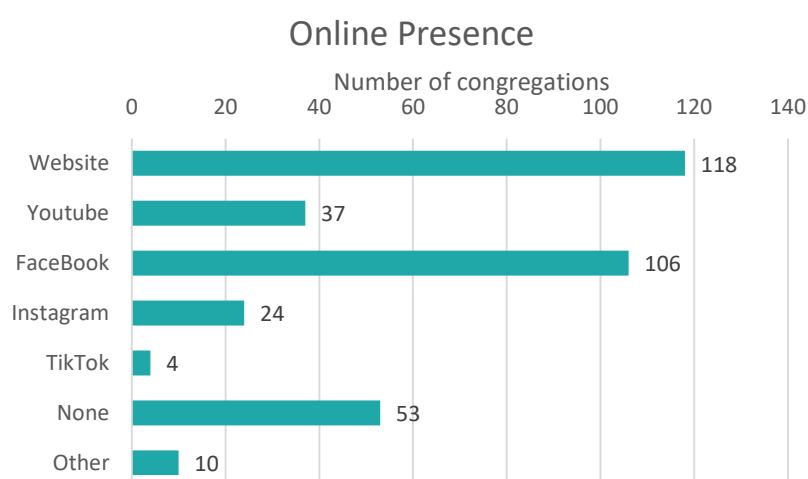


The number of congregations who have a **‘model that is not being applied’** reduced significantly from **32** in 2022 **to only 5** in 2025. 56% of these respondents from 2022 have reduced the rating in intentional faith sharing moving down to developing a model or no model. Only 6 congregations moved towards implementing or a fully operational model. 1 remained at model not being applied. 7 did not respond to the 2025 questionnaire. This means that the majority of those who had a model which was not being applied in 2022 became less likely to have a model in 2025.

While 2021 NCLS indicates that 74% of church attenders say they feel mostly or fully at ease talking about faith, and 72% are willing to invite family or friends, **only 31-38% of attenders did**. Three key barriers to faith sharing hold people back: fear of damaging the relationship, lack of confidence or uncertainty about how the invitation will be received⁸.

5.6.8 Online presence

An online presence is described as the **“new sign out the front”** of churches with most people searching online before setting foot in a church building. The NCLS data shows that 71% of congregations nationally had websites in 2016, while in the 2025 MVQ data only 58% of UCA SA congregations have a website⁹. This is up from 107 (54%) out of 197 congregations in 2022. While we see growth in the number of congregations with a website ("sign out front"), it is still well below the rate of Christian churches nationally from almost 10 years ago.



In 2022 there were 135 congregations (68%) reported that they had some online presence. In 2025 we see an increase to **147** congregations or 73% of reporting congregations. 27% (53 congregations) have no online reach, a slight improvement on 31% in 2022.

Figure 17

⁸ Talking about faith: How comfortable are we. NCLS Research. <https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/talking-about-faith-how-comfortable-are-we/>

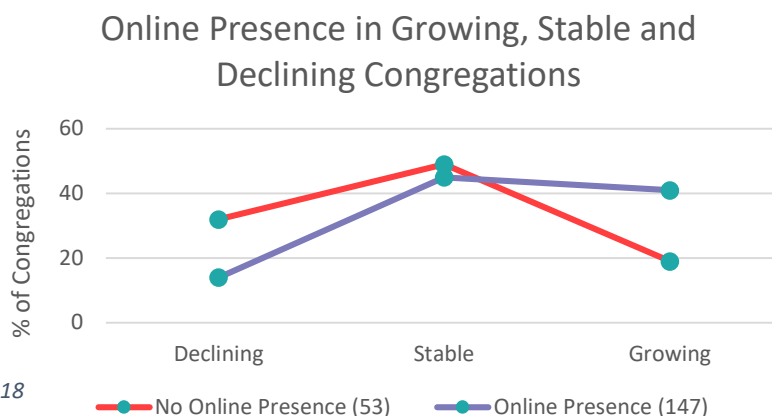
⁹ Jacka, K., Ward, N., Pepper, M., Powell, R. & Sterland, S. (n.d). Bridging the tech divide. NCLS Research. <https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/bridging-the-tech-divide/>

5.6.9 Visitors finding a church home

Congregations reported a total of **1371** visitors in 2024 who became regular attendees. **45** congregations have had no visitors who stayed in 2024, while **155** had at least one visitor who stayed. NCLS 2016 survey identifies several reasons that ‘newcomers’ made the decision to attend a church with 29% of people feeling like something was missing in their lives, 10% moving into the area, 8% invited by a spouse, 8% had a conversion experience and 8% having a personal crisis. ‘Knowing people’ was the most common reason visitors chose to stay¹⁰.

One of the key connections revealed in the data is the link between visitors and online presence. It is unclear whether congregations that are growing are more capable of having an online presence or if having an online presence helps congregations to grow. It is likely to be both. While 70 congregations across the Synod reported they were growing only 10 were doing so with no online presence. Congregations who had an online presence **averaged 4 times more visitors** who stayed than those who had no online presence. Only 13% of those with an online presence reported 0 visitors who stayed compared to 49% of those who had no online presence.

90%
of visitors who
stayed did so in a
congregation with
an online
presence

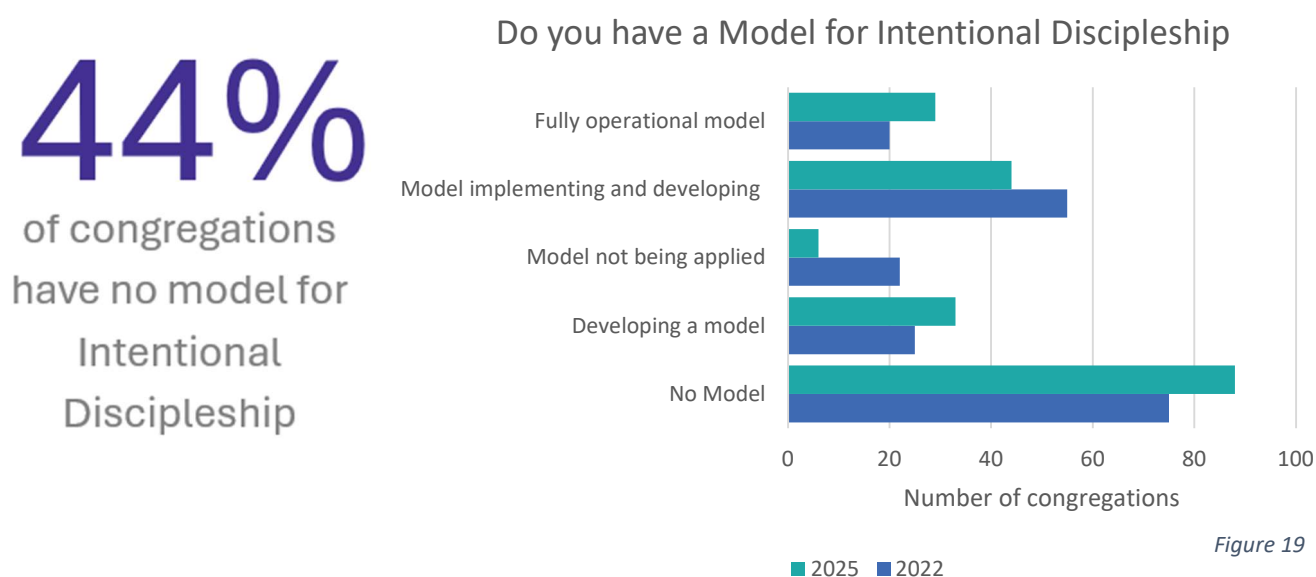


¹⁰ Powell, R. & Jacka, K. What draws newcomers to church?. NCLS Research.
<https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/what-draws-newcomers-to-church/>

5.7 SERVICE

5.7.1 Intentional Discipleship

29 congregations (14.5%) have a fully operational model for Intentional Discipleship up from 10% in 2022. **44%** of congregations have no model for Intentional Discipleship which is higher than the 38% who reported no model in 2022. As with Intentional Faith Sharing Models; ‘model not being applied’ saw the greatest reduction in response between the two data sets. Nationally, and interdenominationally, NCLS 2021 respondents reported that 77% of churches work to develop the discipleship of current and new members¹¹.



5.7.2 A Story from Unity Hill (Port Lincoln)

*Unity Hill has had a long history of being missionally engaged in their community. However, the church experienced a difficult season with significant leaders leaving for various reasons, with COVID, and with some other things. Missional momentum had drifted as they learned what mission looked like for them in a differently shaped congregation. A concerted effort was made to turn up the heat in their **intentionality** in disciple making and mission.*

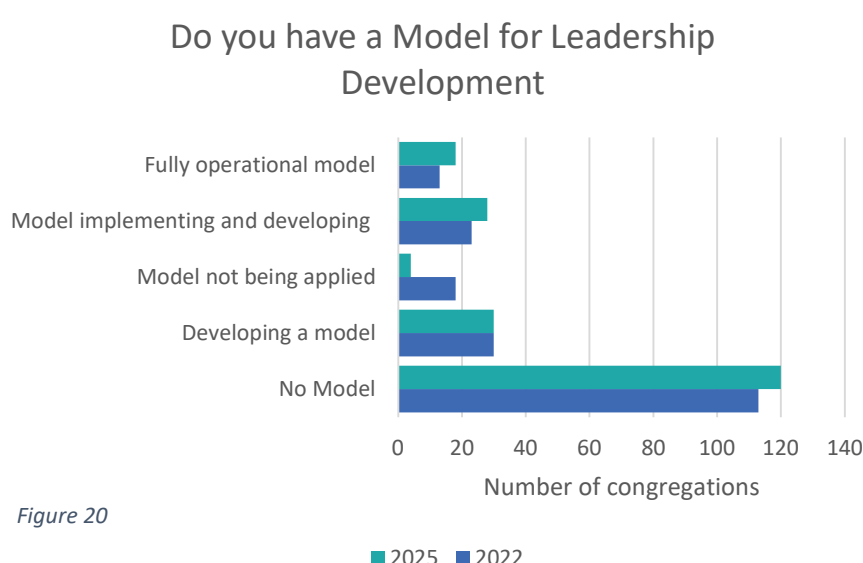
*In the 2022 MVQ they reported they were developing a model for intentional faith sharing and intentional discipleship. And they did just that. Part of their vision statement says, “We speak gentle words of invitation to love God, to love one another, and to believe in Jesus.” In their preaching and language, they used the phrase **Gentle Invitations** to spread discipleship and mission to every part of life. They also engaged with BDC (Building Discipling Culture) which has helped to develop some structure and practical tools for their intentional, gentle invitations. Unity Hill began a prayer group and invited people to commit to **praying intentionally** through a prayer calendar for people to come to faith. They have also*

¹¹ NCLS Research. (2024). Summary Report: Faith Sharing, Discipleship and Evangelism. NCLS Research. <https://www.ncls.org.au/publications/faith-sharing-discipleship-and-evangelism-summary-report/>

provided spaces for members to gently invite people to gather and to learn about faith, such as Alpha and Life Groups. One lady from the Linc'n'Learn craft group was gently invited to church and she took that invitation up. She has since come to faith and is currently doing Alpha.

What excites Rev Nathan Whillas is that the **shift in culture has been owned** by more than just those who are part of the Alpha team and the BDC cohort. The wider congregation are becoming more **bold** in sharing their faith and inviting friends and family to church, activities, and particularly Alpha. It has been a small shift, which over time, has led them to a healthier missional posture as a congregation. Between 2022 and 2025 they experienced 19% growth in attendance, 5 people coming to faith and are now strengthening their intentional models for both faith sharing and discipleship.

5.7.3 Model for Leadership Development



18 congregations have a fully developed model for leadership development. This is up from 13 in 2022. 6 congregations reported a fully operational model in 2022 and 2025. **60%** of congregations have no model for leadership development. Only marginally worse than 57% in 2022.

5.7.4 Serving regularly

The questionnaire asked, “How many people from your congregation serve at your regular in person public worship service/s on a ministry team?” In the 2025 responses, **5305 people** served on ministry teams at regular in person public worship service/s across congregations. On average this equates to **62%** of the average worship attendance.

This is a 28% increase on the **4144** who were serving on ministry teams in 2022. This is possibly due to COVID effecting the normal operations of worship services. Will need to wait for the next MVQ to see where the trend lies.

28%
increase in serving
likely a reflection of
emerging from
COVID

5.7.5 Wider community building use

Does your wider community use your building?

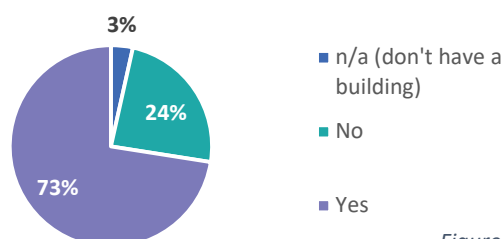


Figure 21

There continues to be strong usage of UCA buildings by the wider community. This follows the pattern in the 2022 report with no real change.

5.7.6 Practically supporting ministries

Two new categories were included in this year's questionnaire that were not included in the 2022 Questionnaire; Inclusive practices for people with disability and Inclusive practices for LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people. Congregations continue to practically support a variety of ministries. 142 congregations identified two or more ministries they practically support.

Practically Supported Ministries



Figure 22

5.7.7 Relationships

Congregations reported on the level of 'relationship' they had with a range of groups. Patterns were largely the same as shown in the 2022 data.

First peoples

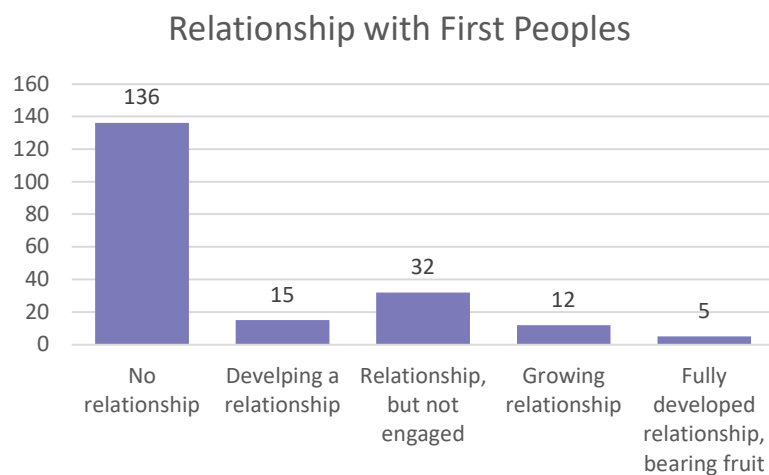


Figure 23

CALD

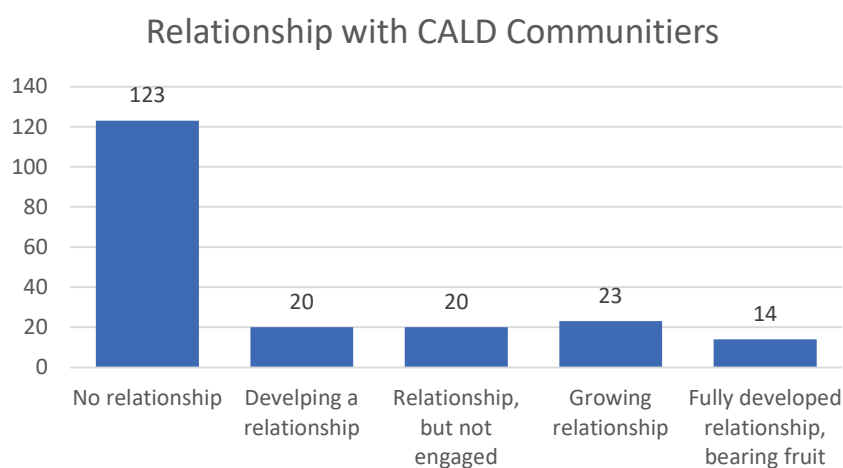


Figure 24

Local Council

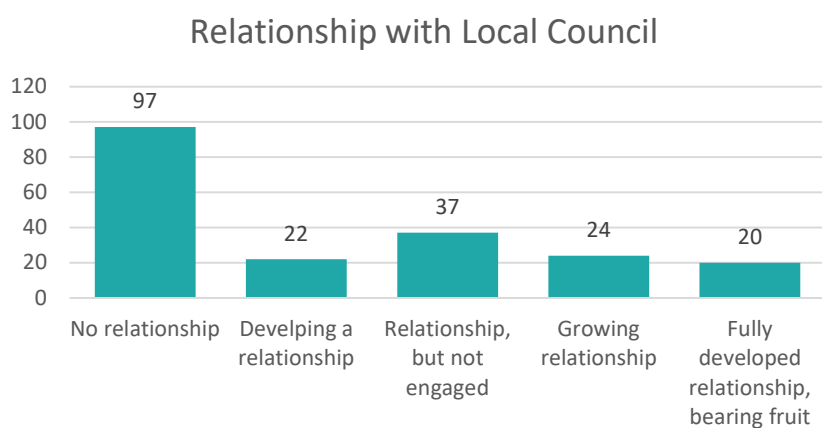


Figure 25

Neighbourhood Service Group

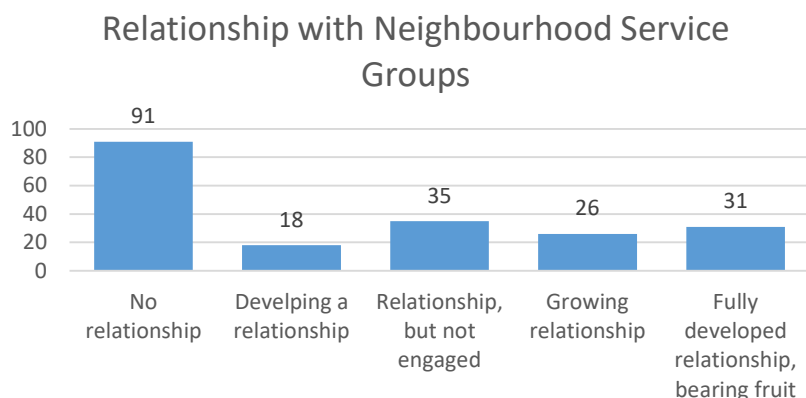


Figure 26

5.7.8 Engagement with the Covenant

New to this year's survey was a question about how congregations engage with the Covenant with UAICC. Acknowledgement of country was by far the most common response with 51% indicating it is one of the ways (or only way) they engage with the covenant. 57 congregations indicated they have no engagement with the Covenant and UAICC or did not respond to the question. Many other congregations selected multiple ways that they engage with the Covenant and UAICC. Some of the most common responses in 'Other' were Oodnadatta, Reconciliation Week, Uluru Statement from the Heart, key people, displaying covenant or other posters.

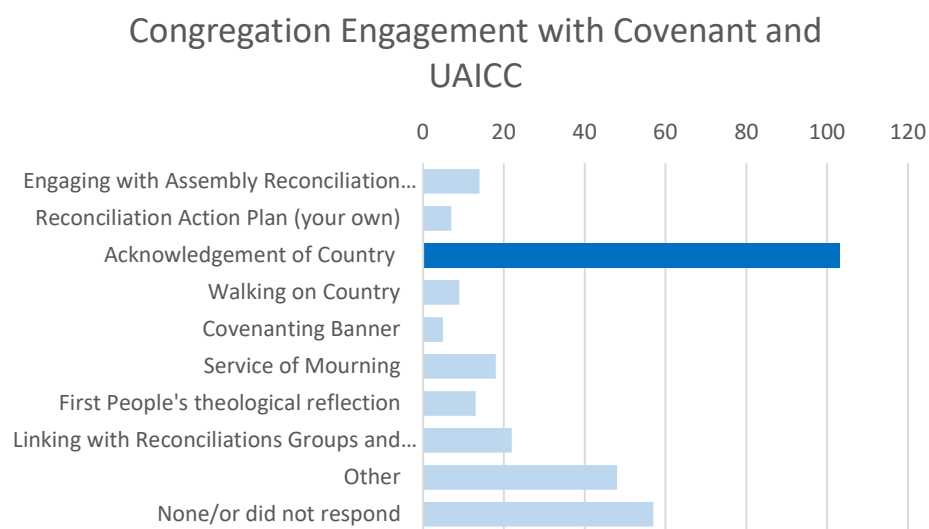


Figure 27

5.8 STEWARDSHIP

5.8.1 Financial overview (percentage of income)

In 2025, congregations reported an estimate of their sources of income. 34 congregations (or 17%) report only one income stream. There remains a strong reliance on **Tithes and Offerings**. 85% of congregations state that Tithes and Offerings make up around or over 50% of their income. With only 23 congregation reporting that Tithes and Offerings contribute 25% or less of their income.

There were 60 congregations report income from **Manse Leasing**, however for the majority (72%) it is 25% or less of their total income.

A higher proportion of congregations (50.5%) report income from **hiring out church property**. With only 17 stating that it amounts to 50% or more of their income.

While 83 congregations (41.5%) report income from **financial investments**, 71 state that it amounts to 25% or less of their total income.

Only 17 (8.5%) report income from **property investments**, however for 53% of these congregations it is 50% or more of their income.

55%
of congregation
state that Tithes and
Offerings make up
over **75%** of their
income

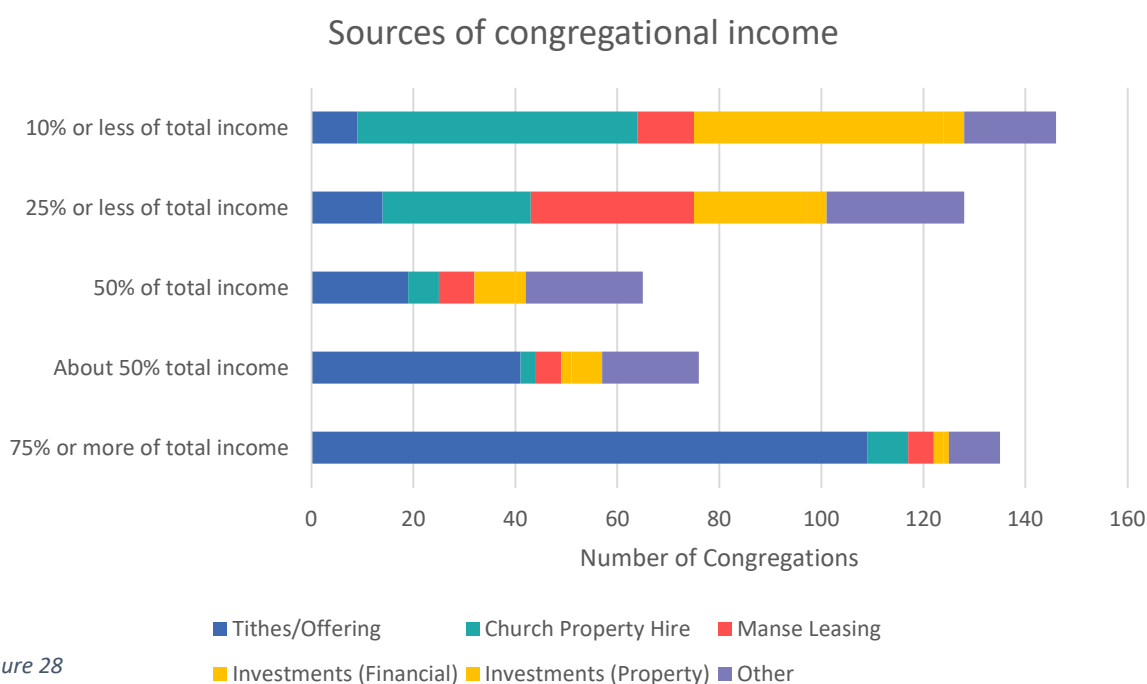


Figure 28

5.8.2 Capacity to manage the building and expenses

Is there enough capacity and 'people power' to manage building over next 3 years?

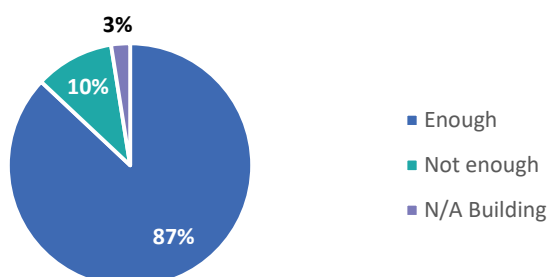


Figure 29

21 congregations (10% of responding congregations) stated that they did not have enough capacity or people power over the next three years to manage their building. This list has been passed on to their Presbyteries for follow up support.

Congregations were asked to consider their financial capacity to meet the following...

Operation of Property

■ No ■ Yes

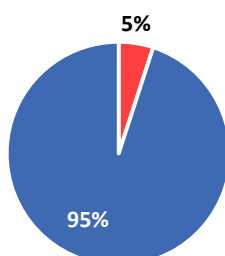


Figure 31

Maintenance of Property

■ No ■ Yes

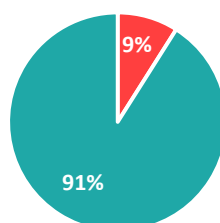


Figure 30

Insurance of Property

■ No ■ Yes

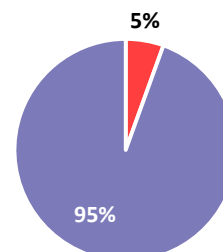
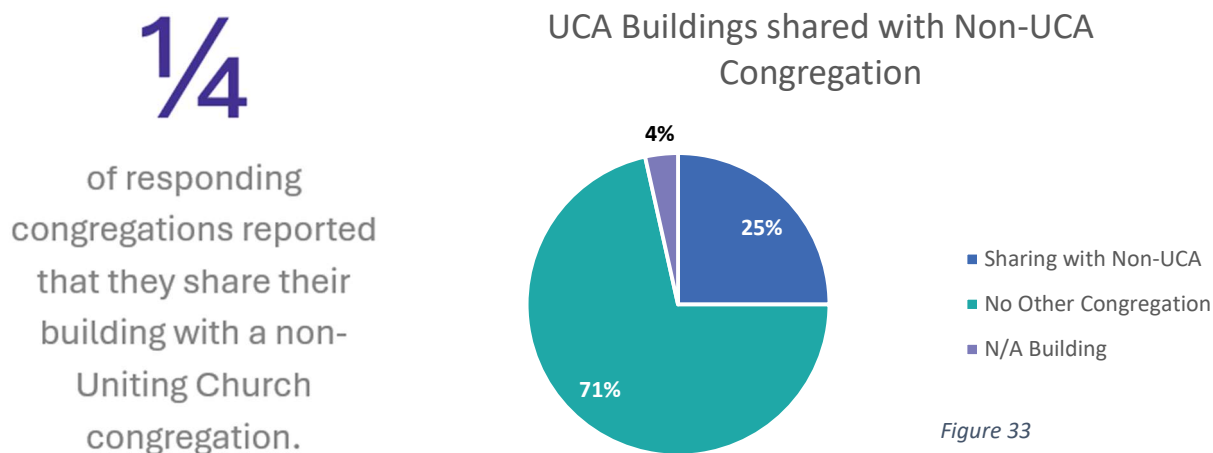


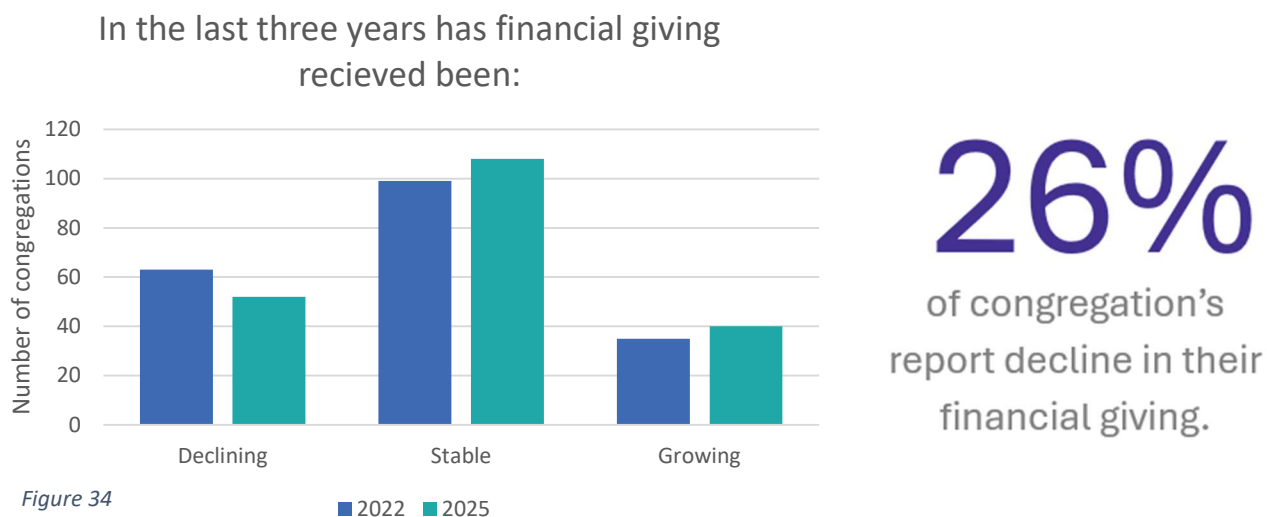
Figure 32

5.8.3 Non UCA congregation use of buildings



5.8.4 Financial giving (grow/stable/decline)

There has been a modest increase in congregations who have seen growth in the financial giving they have received. In 2022, 32% of congregations were experiencing decline in giving. This has slightly improved to only 26% of congregation in 2025, however this represents over 1/4 of UCA congregations across the Synod.



5.9 MISSIONAL VITALITY

A portion of the questionnaire response data was used to develop an indicator of Missional Vitality (MVS) ie. a score out of 5, 1 being the least missionally vitalised and 5 being the most. This particular scale was used for the sake of congruence with the property safety scores, which were also out of 5.

The subjectivity with which responders answered questions means that the indicator is not an *absolute* measure of missional vitality for individual congregations, but one that has been thoughtfully constructed using the diverse information collected from the questionnaire.

The following figure outlines which data was factored into the Missional Vitality Score by way of the initial question. This refers to the contents of Attachment 9.2.

Worship	Witness	Service
Questions 9 and 11 (as a ratio of question 7)	Question 10 (as a ratio of question 1)	Questions 21 and 27 (binary)
Questions 14, 15 and 24 (as a proportion of the total number of categories)	Question 16 (binary)	Question 35 (as a proportion of the highest possible scores)
Questions 19 and 30 (binary)	Question 26 and 31 (conversion to a proportion of 1)	
	Question 34 (as a proportion of the highest possible scores)	

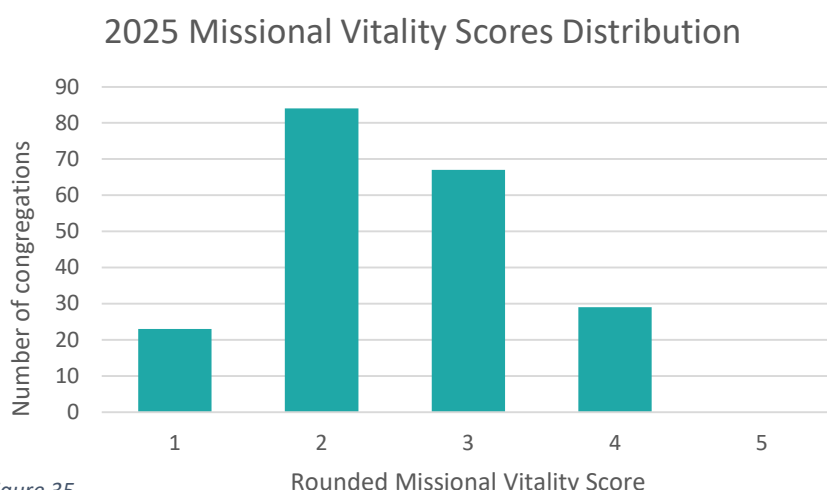


Figure 35

There was an average MVS of **2.49** in 2025 compared with the average of 2.74 in 2022 (188 responses calculated). This represents a **9% reduction** in the overall Missional Vitality Score.

56 congregations saw a **decrease** in their Missional Vitality Score.

21 congregations saw an **increase** in their Missional Vitality Score.

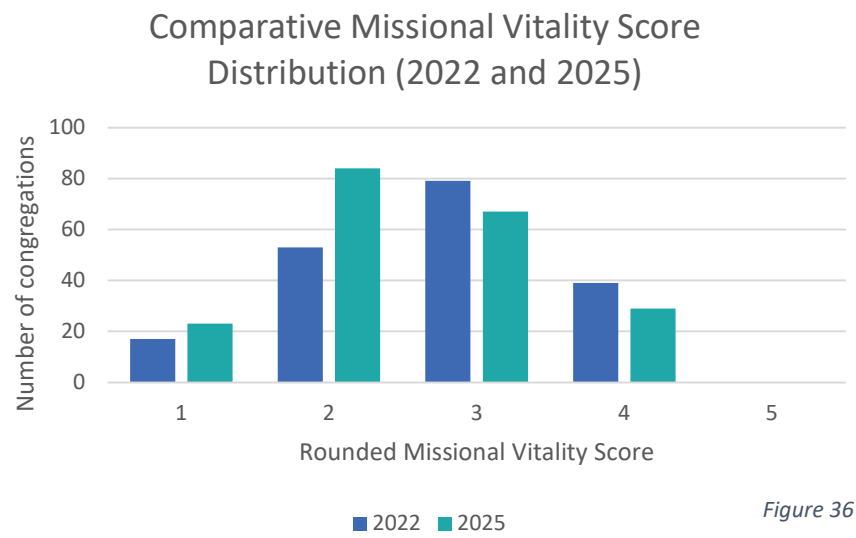


Figure 36

6. Presbytery Reports

6.1 Wimala

Since commencing in February 2025, the MAPS Officer has visited and conversed with approximately 28 congregations across the urban and rural areas of the Presbytery. In addition, he has had conversations about, or undertaken property inspections for another 6 -8 congregations. While the MAPS Officer role was not developed to “close congregations”, it became obvious that Wimala Presbytery has several congregations which have declined in missional effectiveness and numerically, while continuing to utilise poorly maintained properties which in some situations are unsafe, non-compliant and not fit for purpose. The MAPS Officer role is primarily to work with Legacy (small and declining) congregations to determine their futures.

The outcomes of these conversations and visits have ranged from finding congregations with reasonably high levels of vitality, engaged in effective mission and vibrant worship through to numerically very small congregations struggling to maintain an effective presence in the community with insurmountable issues relating to property maintenance, safety and compliance. Following conversations about the mission and vitality of a congregation the MAPS Officer submits a report to Standing Committee who consider the assessments and makes relevant and appropriate decisions. It is the responsibility of the MAPS Officer to then inform congregations of Presbytery decisions and assist them to facilitate the discerned outcomes.

Wimala Presbytery in collaboration with the MAPS Officer have developed and adopted guidelines to resource and inform deliberations regarding future directions for congregations and associated property matters. The guidelines are based around a range of missional markers and vitality indicators.

Below is a summary of the work occurring across the Presbytery.

- Several numerically small congregations with minimal outreach mission have, following conversations and considering options, chosen to close and transfer property to Synod prior to end of 2026.
- A relatively high average age congregation with a reasonable weekly worship attendance decided, following extensive conversations and discernment, to close and transfer property to Synod.
- A congregation, consisting of 4 persons has requested Presbytery to transfer the property to Synod mid-2026 and allow them to continue as a congregation without property for a further few months.
- In at least one situation alternative missional possibilities for utilisation of the property are being explored.
- A non UCA congregation who had been utilising UCA property for several years has chosen to vacate the property which has been returned to Synod.

Wimala Presbytery acknowledges the importance of continuing to support congregations which are struggling to provide effective outreach mission activities. It is also important that congregations occupy

well maintained, compliant and fit for purpose buildings. Without this intentional work, we risk facing the same challenges into the future as in most situations congregations continue to decline numerically. We are also dealing with an increasing average age of attendees with buildings requiring additional maintenance.

The MAPS Officer continues conversations with several other congregations across the urban and rural areas of the Presbytery assisting them to identify a sustainable future.

Malcolm Wilson, Wimala Presbytery MAPS Officer.

6.2 Presbytery of Southern SA

In January 2025 the Presbytery of Southern SA appointed Bronte Wilson as Mission and Property Officer, working two days per week, instigating conversations with all congregations about their mission and property and to develop appropriate ways to work with congregations to achieve the aim of having all congregations and faith communities that are missionally vibrant, in safe buildings that are fit for purpose.

For some congregations this means acknowledging and celebrating what is already happening, while for others there is a need to imagine with them what a different future might look like and help them along this path.

The Presbytery has appointed a committee to work with the Mission and Property Officer and to be a sounding board for thoughts and ideas.

There are currently 52 congregations and faith communities who are a part of the Presbytery. Each has been assessed as to their strategic potential in the life of the Uniting Church. Over half of our congregations are regarded as stable or gradually declining, with several becoming revitalised or growing in recent times, with one planting a new community. Serious conversations are being had with others who need to consider their future.

One of the issues facing us is that in some of the locations the Presbytery would consider strategic, such as Glenelg, Strathalbyn and Victor Harbor, the cost to bring buildings up to scratch is beyond the capabilities of the congregation. It is a challenge to discover workable solutions for situations like these.

With the implementation of Pool Ministry, we expect that some congregations will work more closely together, which may result in revitalisation of each, or some amalgamations to increase vitality, particularly in metropolitan areas.

Many of our rural congregations are a significant distance from each other, and in some cases are the only active denomination in the community. The Presbytery seeks to work with them in developing new missional initiatives.

Although there have been some arguments put forward to reduce the number of our metropolitan congregations, there are equally valid arguments to retain most of them at this stage. We note several

areas have been earmarked for urban growth and are keen for the Church to consider how these areas may be serviced in the future.

Through both the Pool Ministry and working with congregations in other ways we hope to increase the vitality and sustainability of our remaining congregations and potentially foster new expressions of ministry on the edges of our current engagement.

Bronte Wilson, Mission and Property Officer

6.3 Generate

The desire to see missionally vibrant congregations in safe, fit for purpose buildings, resonates with the key priorities of Generate (evangelism, discipleship, leadership and renewal and church planting). Missionally vibrant congregations and faith communities have both a plan and an active expectation of the Holy Spirit at work within their congregations, across these areas.

Over the last year Generate has undertaken a variety of activities, missional and pastoral conversations, and resourcing opportunities which have progressed this work. These include:

- Chairpersons retreat held in August 2025 with Chairs from 30 congregations.
- Developed and resourced over 20 church councils with a devotion on evangelism.
- Resourced and or coached 9 congregations in Generate and 6 or more in other Presbyteries through the Renewal pathway.
- The Generate South East Hub gathered online in December which included a resourcing session in a Mission Planning process for their congregations.
- There are a series of missional partnership conversations emerging between urban and rural/regional congregations.
- Hub Leaders have provided support for several congregations regarding mission planning.
- Garden's Parish Mission was established in Jan 2025 as a replant in the Windsor Gardens congregation and is seeing growth and engagement across Alpha and Good Neighbour (support).
- Regional work is occurring regarding establishing youth and kids ministry
- Churches are strategically praying and fasting for grace, guidance and growth.
- A joint, cross Presbytery and Synod engagement, has assisted the Mount Gambier Congregation to discern a way forwards given challenging building risks and costs.
- Rev Marty Rosenberg, funded through the MAPS project, has been meeting with congregations regarding their missional future and capacity to continue in their buildings. Although challenging conversations at times, he is working pastorally to support

congregations on this journey. He has met with congregations in the Mid North, Yorke Peninsula and Adelaide Hills thus far.

- Worked to support Church Plants and Missional Amalgamations through the Synod processes.
- Hub retreats and gatherings, particularly across our rural hubs.
- Several Young Adults across Generate have been active in creating joint prayer and worship gatherings for Young Adults both within and beyond the UCA.
- Financially supported travel to the Synod Renewal event from rural areas.
- Pastors Retreat held in December with 65 Pastors and Ministers engaged.
- Our 2025 Presbytery Gatherings were focused on Ministry on the Edge and Awaken, highlighting resourcing across our key foci.

Scott Button, Chairperson and Steph Tai, Executive Officer

7. Strategic Assessment Tool

In order to map strategic locations for UCA congregations and faith communities that are missionally vibrant, in safe buildings that are fit for purpose, the working group is developing a strategic assessment tool that will identify strategic locations, congregations and buildings/ sites. This is not understood as a once off assessment, rather tools that can inform our response to the ongoing changes in our communities, buildings and congregations. We are trialling and testing various combinations of questions, and as we move through the assessments, we are learning that it may be possible to identify strategic locations where we do not currently have any buildings or congregations. One key factor is population growth. We identified some of these areas in our last report to the Synod. See the table below.

Location	Long Term Population	When Residents Move in
Copper Coast		
Two Wells Korunye	40,000	Underway
Riverlea (west of Virginia)	30 - 50,000	Started 2023
Concordia (east of Gawler)	30,000	Possibly after 2030
Kudla (west of Gawler)	32,000	Possibly after 2030
Roseworthy	100,000	Underway
Metropolitan Adelaide		
Around Modbury, West Lakes, Seaton, Port Adelaide, Marion,	50,000	Underway

Lonsdale, Noarlunga Centre, Christies Beach, and many major road corridors in inner Adelaide		
Hindmarsh/Thebarton	30,000	Ongoing
Keswick Barracks	5,000	Early 2030s
Murray Bridge	40,000	Early 2030s
South Coast		
Goolwa North	15,000	Possibly 2028

It is also possible to identify congregations that are considered strategic, but their buildings are not (either due to major maintenance issues, or that they are not fit for purpose). Questions arise about whether it is possible to repair buildings or make them fit for purpose.

We also identified the need for a different assessment criteria for rural, peri-urban and urban locations.

Descriptions we are working with at the moment are:

*A **Strategic Location** is where people access higher order services (higher order health and community services, schools and/or shopping/town centres). This may or may not have a current UCA presence. A strategic location is situated where the church can best serve its target community.*

*A **Strategic Site** (including all buildings and land) is currently or economically viable to make a safe building/land, fit for purpose and accessible for disability.*

*A **Strategic Congregation** is a congregation that is healthy, growing and missionally vibrant. While all congregations are significant, strategic congregations are positioned and able to support the missional growth of the UCA beyond their own congregation*

This work is in its early stages, but it is on track to have a map by the end of 2026 that captures the comprehensive and complex considerations of what are known facts and potential opportunities for the future of the church. The depth of the work at this stage will build a solid foundation for sound planning and cohesive decision making.

The strategic assessment tools and subsequent mapping will assist the project officers in their conversations with congregations, where to focus our energies in developing new church plants or revitalisations, and the congregational renewal stream of the Synod Strategic Plan.

The strategic mapping project is not a fixed picture of the Synod. It is an ongoing process as Presbyteries, congregations and the Synod continually seek the leading of the Holy Spirit in where and how we are to be the Uniting Church in South Australia.

7.1 Strategic and Significant congregations

In our conversations about strategic congregations, we recognised the need to name the difference between strategic and significant congregations. Identifying strategic congregations supports intentional planning, resourcing and decision making when responding to emerging needs presented to Synod.

Strategic congregations are those that have capacity to support and resource others.

There will also be congregations that are not identified as strategic, but that does not mean they are not significant. Congregations can be identified as significant for a variety of reasons. Congregations hold significance to their members, for their community, may exercise a particular ministry that holds significance, or is historically significant.

In identifying strategic congregations the working group does not intend to disregard significant congregations. As a Synod, we honour these significant congregations, but the focus of the MAPS working group is to identify strategic congregations that can resource and support other congregations or contribute to growing new communities of faith.

8. Conclusion

There is much to celebrate across the Mission and Property of the Synod. We praise God for the 777 people who have come to faith in our congregations. We are delighted to see the number of new outreach, education and worship opportunities that congregations have created over the past three years, giving people opportunity to find faith, grow in their discipleship and their sense of belonging. More congregations are becoming clearer about their models for Intentional Faith Sharing, Discipleship and Leadership. Attendees in UCA SA congregations are faithfully serving in increasing numbers. Congregations continue to have strong engagement with their community. Great variety and creativity is expressed in the programs run, ministries supported, and in the ways congregations are engaging with the Covenant and UAICC.

These signs of missional improvement stand alongside continued challenges facing congregations. While clarity on faith sharing and discipleship is being found by some congregations, an increasing number of others have no model to support their ministry in these areas. ¼ of responding congregations have not experienced the joy of being part of someone coming to faith in at least 5 years. These areas of need have been articulated within the Synod Strategic Plan 2026-2030 with a goal to “Ensure the majority of congregations have articulated plans for helping people go from no espoused faith in God to being mature followers of Jesus.”

With a goal to see “well-formed leaders”, “councils of the UCA encouraging healthy leadership development” and an “increased number of Ministers of the Word and Deacons” it will be necessary

to see an increase in the number of congregations with a fully formed leadership development model (Synod Strategic Plan 2026-2030).

Capturing a picture of the breadth of engagement with the Covenant and UAICC is only the start of supporting congregations to “create spaces and environments for welcoming First Peoples and expressing the Covenant”. Our hope in this next season of the MAPS work is that we will be able to more deeply listen and engage with Congress.

Faithful and Wise Stewardship continues to be a focus throughout the Synod. By identifying and mapping strategic locations, buildings, and congregations, the intention is to ensure that limited resources are used faithfully, and new opportunities are recognised and responded to. As seen in the MAPS data, resourcing is vital to the missional health and effectiveness of congregations and our objective to see “growing number of vibrant congregations and communities of faith, in safe buildings that are fit for purpose to ensure a sustainable future for the Synod.”

The overall decline in the Missional Vitality Score is an indicator of the work to be done by Congregations with the support of their Presbyteries and the Synod. In the often-complex challenge of how to live out our mission, the internal and external pressures facing a congregation can prevent us from seeking clear, creative and achievable ways forward. Congregations are not facing this challenge alone. Presbyteries and the Synod will continue to work with congregations to help them live out their mission.

The data from the MVQ will continue to inform the work of the MAPS Working Group. Specific insights from the data will flow through to councils, committees, and ministry centres throughout the Synod and Presbyteries to inform conversations across the Synod. For example, the online presence data will assist the Engagements Team to connect and invite more congregations into the Congregational Websites program so that they have a “new sign out the front”.

The next stages of the MAPS Working Group will continue to track, promote, and resource missional vitality and safe fit for purpose property across the Synod. The development of the Strategic Map will inform and support focussed resourcing for church planting and congregational renewal. Through an intentional approach, the work of MAPS will help various councils, committees and teams, in their engagement with the Synod Strategic Plan 2026-2030.

Sue Page
Chairperson MAPS Working Group
 27 May 2026

Steph Tai
MAPS Project Officer Data Analysis



The Uniting Church in Australia
 Synod of South Australia

9. Attachments

9.1 Synod decisions 2021-2024 related to the MAPS Working Group

2024 Decision #S24.06

The Synod of SA RESOLVED (by consensus) to:

1. NOTE the Synod Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) Working Group report (2024).
2. REQUEST the Working Group continue to develop a map by the end of 2026 that shows and describes strategic locations for Uniting Church in Australia congregations and faith communities that are missionally vibrant, in safe buildings that are fit for purpose.
3. REQUEST the presbyteries report to the working group on congregational conversations before the next Synod meeting.
4. REQUEST the Working Group (which includes Presbytery Leaders) consider the input from the 2024 Synod working groups on congregation attributes.
5. CONDUCT congregation reporting about mission vitality (via a questionnaire and other research methods) every two years, commencing in 2025.
6. REQUIRE congregations to submit their annual property returns to their Presbytery and the Synod (Regulation 4.4.3 and 4.11.8).
7. DEVLEOP the framework and tools for sharing of property and distribute across presbyteries.
8. REQUEST the General Secretary to seek suitable resourcing for the project moving forward (including for Presbytery Leaders and the future role of the Working Group) and bring a report to the next Synod meeting.
9. NOTE the change of name of the working group to Missional and Property Strategy (MAPS) working group.

2023 Decision #S23.04

In June 2023, the Synod of South Australia, based on the intent to foster missional vibrancy and missional viability information received, resolved to:

1. NOTE the Synod Strategy and Planning Mission and Property Working Group report.
2. REQUEST Presbyteries to work with their congregations to:
 - a. Consider the draft property strategy based on missional viability as it relates to congregational property in the context of all Uniting Church congregations, regional

population change, opportunities for sharing of properties, and exploration of greater use by culturally and linguistically diverse congregations/ faith communities and church plants

- b. Complete and/or update the Missional Viability Questionnaire by end of November 2023.
3. REQUEST the General Secretary to facilitate the work with Presbyteries and Congress to identify missionally vibrant congregations in safe properties in each region.
4. MAKE the 2019 Building Safety reports for all congregation properties available to the relevant presbytery.
5. REQUEST the General Secretary to investigate suitable resourcing for the project moving forward – including the future role of a Working Group - and to bring a report to the next Synod meeting.

2022 Decision #S22.08

ALTERNATIVE MISSIONAL USE OF PROPERTIES

Refer the ideas raised in Proposal 11, particularly that of the value of encouraging conversation about beneficial use between congregations and across Presbyteries, as well as comments via the Facilitation Team and on the floor of Synod, to the Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) Working Group.

2022 Decision #S22.05

It was AGREED (by consensus) that the Synod of SA resolve to:

1. RECEIVE the Report of the Strategy and Planning (Mission & Property) Working Group.
2. RECOGNISE the Report has been discussed with the Presbyteries leaders and Synod Standing Committee in its preparation.
3. REQUEST Congregations and Faith Communities to continue to actively work with their Presbyteries to collect and collate information to assist the Working Group to map vibrant missional communities, encompassing:
4. APPROVE the preparation of a Draft Property Strategy, including 'maps' that identify the number and geographical location of missionally vibrant and viable communities
5. REQUEST the Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) Working Group present the Draft Property Strategy Report to the June Synod meeting in 2023.
6. REQUEST the General Secretary to:

- a. Progress the proposals approved by the Synod with appropriate ongoing work of the Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) Working Group.
- b. Regularly update the Synod Standing Committee and Presbytery and Synod Leaders and relevant Congregations.
- c. Provide regular communication updates to the Synod with the help of the Engagement Ministry Team to ensure accurate information is being shared across the church.

2021 Decision #S21.10

Property Review Report

It was AGREED (by consensus) that the Synod of SA RESOLVE to:

1. COMMEND the diligent work of the Property Services Team in undertaking the building safety inspections.
2. ACKNOWLEDGE with thanks the generous and loyal commitment of many people who have contributed to the care and maintenance of congregation properties over many years.
3. RECOGNISE that although the buildings themselves hold special significance for many congregation members the buildings are primarily to be used to progress the mission of God and REQUEST every Church Council in consultation with their congregation to:
 - a. GIVE ATTENTION urgently and diligently to their Buildings Safety Report.
 - b. DETERMINE whether the property can be made safe and compliant in order that it might be used for continuing ministry and mission.
 - c. ACKNOWLEDGE any shortfalls in safety and compliance which cannot be met.
 - d. WORK with Resources staff of the Synod and their Presbytery to address the issues.
4. RECOGNISE that the Synod does not have the financial capacity to make and keep safe all the properties currently vested in the Property Trust; REQUEST appropriate Synod staff and Presbytery leaders to work with Church Councils in consultation with their congregations to:
 - a. DEVELOP financially manageable plans to upgrade congregational property to a safe and compliant standard.
 - b. Where such upgrades are not feasible, WORK with congregations on suitable plans for the future of buildings and property.
 - c. CREATE opportunities for discussion with surrounding congregations to discover appropriate pathways for future use of buildings and property.

d. DETERMINE the future of the ministry and mission currently conducted in those buildings.

e. DEVELOP essential requirements to assist congregations to manage future on-going beneficial use.

5. REQUEST the General Secretary in consultation with the Synod Standing Committee to develop a future-focused strategy (to include the establishment of a working group and an implementation plan) to determine the number and geographic locations of buildings to house vibrant missional communities including a framework to identify potential 'strategic' buildings, working:

a. collaboratively with appropriate Synod staff and Presbytery leadership; and

b. interactively with Church Councils in consultation with congregations as they seek to undertake the tasks in (3) and (4) above.

6. REQUEST a report detailing the outcomes of these proposals be presented to the next Synod meeting.

9.2 Missional and Property Questionnaire 2025 (questions only)

1. Please indicate the date you are completing this survey?
2. What is the name of your congregation?
3. Which Presbytery you are in?
4. Please indicate your full name and role
5. What email address can be used to contact you
6. How is your congregation engaging with the Covenant between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress (UAICC) tick all that apply
7. What was the average in person attendance at your regular worship service/s in 2024? (If you have multiple services please provide an approximate aggregate total)
8. What was your average online attendance for regular worship in 2024 (If not applicable to your congregation please answer with n/a)
9. How many people from your congregation serve at your regular in-person public worship service/s on a ministry team? Eg. Music and tech, kids ministry, bible readings, greeting, worship leading, hospitality, car parking etc
10. How many people have come to faith in your congregation in the last three years?
11. How many people in 2024 visited your congregation and are now regularly attending worship?
12. Of the following list, which provides income for your congregation
13. Give a broad indication of how the income streams of your congregation fit together overall. (This is an indication only, your answers do not need to come to a 100% total)
14. How regularly do you gather in-person for public worship services
15. In the last three years has the number of people in your congregation been: Growing, Stable or Declining
16. Are you starting a new witnessing/faith sharing activity in the next 12 months?
Eg. Church planting, developing a Fresh Expression, Alpha, Living the Questions etc,
17. If you are starting, or planning to start a new activity, give a brief indication of the type of activity you have planned.
18. Where do you primarily gather for regular worship?
19. Would you say that, at this moment, you have enough resources (people and financial) to effectively operate as a congregation?
20. Is there enough enthusiasm, capacity and 'people power' to continue to manage your building over the next 3 years?
21. Does your wider community use your Church Building?
22. Are you open to sharing your building with other UC congregations/faith communities (subject to agreements being in place)
23. Are there any non-uniting church congregations using your building for worship services?
24. In the last 3 years, has financial giving received from your congregation been: Growing, Stable or Declining
25. From the following categories, how would you best describe the worship style/s for your congregation? You may choose more than one
26. What is your congregation's online presence
27. Which of the following are practically supported by your congregation? Eg volunteer, financial, etc
28. Which of the following formal and informal functions are currently able to be fulfilled by your congregation
29. Is there financial capacity to meet the costs relating to the following:
30. Separate from regular worship services, which of the following programmes do you run?
31. Does your congregation run any of the following?
32. What paid staff does your congregation employ?

33. Select the most accurate total full time equivalent (FTE) for paid staff in your congregation in the following categories (if no paid staff select None)
34. For the following statements, indicate the category that your congregation most aligns with:
35. For the following statements, indicate the category that your congregation most aligns with:
36. What, if any, new worship, educational or outreach activities have you commenced in the last 3 years?
37. Are there any known external factors in your wider community that might significantly impact your congregation's attendance in the future? Please describe (e.g. new housing estate, new industry, loss of industry etc).

9.3 Principles applied to the Data Analysis

Where a response gave a number range rather than a whole number

- The average of the range was taken and rounded up to the next whole number.

Where a congregation had submitted two identical responses

- The most recent response was retained and the other/s deleted.

Where a congregation submitted two responses that differed in responses

- The most positive response overall was retained and the other deleted

When percentages have been presented these include rounding where appropriate.

Data is presented on aggregate and non-identifiable.

Further Presbytery-by-Presbytery analysis was not explored in preparing for this report. Each Presbytery has access to their data, should they wish to analyse Presbytery specific data.