



The United Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia

Synod Strategic Plan

2026 – 2030

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How to read this Plan

The Synod Strategic Plan 2026–2030 is designed to guide the shared work of the Synod over the next four years. It is not a detailed instruction manual, but a resource to support discernment, conversation, and decision-making across the life of the Church.

The Uniting Church in SA operates through interconnected councils – congregations, presbyteries, agencies, and the Synod. As such, this plan does not attempt to prescribe actions for every part of the Church. Instead, it identifies key areas of focus where the Synod will prioritise attention, resourcing, and leadership.

In a complex and changing environment, this plan encourages an adaptive approach. This includes:

- taking thoughtful, incremental steps rather than relying solely on large-scale initiatives
- being willing to test new ideas in ways that allow learning and refinement
- recognising that not all initiatives will unfold as expected, and that learning is a vital outcome of faithful action.

This approach reflects a commitment to being a learning Church – one that listens, responds, and grows in faithfulness over time.

This Strategic Plan is not a detailed instruction manual, but a resource to support discernment, conversation, and decision-making across the life of the Church.

Building on the Synod Vision 2021–2025

The Synod Vision 2021–2025, *Shaping the Future* (Appendix A) has provided a strong foundation for the Church's work in recent years. It has helped articulate a vision of the Uniting Church in SA as a diverse and interconnected community, engaged in mission across a wide range of contexts.

This vision has shaped relationships, encouraged collaboration, and supported a deeper understanding of the shared nature of ministry. It has also guided significant progress across a number of strategic priorities, with outcomes emerging both through intentional effort and through broader changes.

At the same time, the Church continues to experience substantial shifts – social, cultural, and organisational. These changes present both challenges and opportunities. They invite renewed attention to how we live out our calling in contemporary Australia.

This Synod Strategic Plan 2026–2030 builds on the foundations of *Shaping the Future* while offering a refreshed focus for the next phase of our journey. It represents:

both continuity and change:

holding onto what has been life-giving,

while responding to new realities with clarity and purpose.





Who is the Synod Strategic Plan for?

Because our Church is a series of inter-connected councils, some of what we talk about in this paper will be done by presbyteries and congregations. When we are writing a Synod Strategic Plan we are talking about our priorities around focus, discernment, conversation and investment. Other work will continue to be done.

This plan is primarily intended to guide the work of the Synod – particularly in its roles of leadership, support, and resourcing. It speaks to Synod bodies, ministry centres, and decision-making groups as they consider priorities and allocate resources. At the same time, it is relevant to the wider Church. Congregations, presbyteries, and associated organisations may find in it a resource that supports their own discernment and mission planning.

Importantly, this plan does not encompass everything the Church does. Many faithful activities and ministries will continue beyond its scope. Rather than attempting to be comprehensive, it seeks to be focused – identifying key areas where intentional effort and collaboration can make a meaningful difference.

This is a moment of opportunity for the Synod. Building on past work and shaped by present realities, the Church is invited to renew its sense of purpose and direction.

The next four years will require:

- attentiveness to the changing context in which we serve
- openness to new ways of being and doing Church
- a willingness to act with courage, humility, and hope.

This plan is offered as a resource to support that journey—grounded in faith, attentive to context, and oriented toward God's ongoing work of renewal.

Our Mission and Values

The Uniting Church in South Australia understands its mission as participating in God's work in the world. This mission is not something we create for ourselves; it is something we are invited into.

We seek to be a growing church that proclaims Jesus Christ and is empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate in God's work of transforming and renewing the whole creation.

This calling shapes both who we are and how we act. It invites us to:

- nurture communities of faith that are open, welcoming, and life-giving
- grow disciples who follow Jesus in everyday life
- engage in acts of justice, service, and reconciliation
- care for creation as part of God's good gift.

In living out this mission, we continue to be guided by the values expressed in *Shaping the Future*. These include:

Strength in Diversity

Recognising the richness of different cultures, expressions, and experiences within the Church

Innovation and Courage

Being willing to respond creatively and faithfully in changing contexts

Creation Care

Committing to the stewardship of the earth

Safe Church

Ensuring that all people experience respect, dignity, and safety within our communities



We are grounded in the Basis of Union

As the Uniting Church approaches the fiftieth anniversary of Union, the *Basis of Union* continues to offer a rich and enduring foundation for our life and mission.

At its heart is a focus on Jesus Christ—his life, death, resurrection, and ongoing presence. Jesus is both the foundation of our faith and the model for our discipleship. In him, we see God's intention for the world and the shape of a life lived in obedience, humility and trust.

The Basis of Union also reminds us that God's mission is the reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation. The Church is called to participate in this mission as a sign, foretaste, and instrument of that reconciliation. This means that our life together is not only about belief, but also about embodied practices of justice, service, and community.

A key feature of the *Basis of Union* is its emphasis on participation. Rather than prescribing fixed ways of believing, it invites members into active engagement—through practices such as reading Scripture, worship, prayer, and service. Faith is understood as something lived and continually formed.

The *Basis of Union* also highlights the importance of being an informed and listening Church. It recognises that we are shaped by Scripture and tradition, through engagement with the contemporary world, other Christian communities, and the insight of scholars and practitioners. This calls us to be open, discerning, and responsive—ready to express our faith in ways that speak to each new context.

Taken together, these themes point to a vision of the Church as:

- centred on Jesus Christ
- committed to reconciliation and renewal
- actively engaged in practices of faith and service
- open to learning and responsive to the world around us.

Our other commitments as a Church

Alongside the Basis of Union, the Uniting Church has made further commitments that continue to shape its life and witness in Australia.

The Covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), first affirmed in 1994, calls the Church into a relationship of deep listening, mutual respect, and shared journeying. It challenges the Church to embody reconciliation not only in words, but in sustained practices of truth-telling, justice, and partnership.

The Revised Preamble to the Constitution and the *We Are a Multicultural Church* statement further affirm that the Church is called to be a community that reflects the diversity of God's people. These commitments invite ongoing growth in cultural awareness, inclusion, and equity.

Together, these commitments require us to be a Church that:

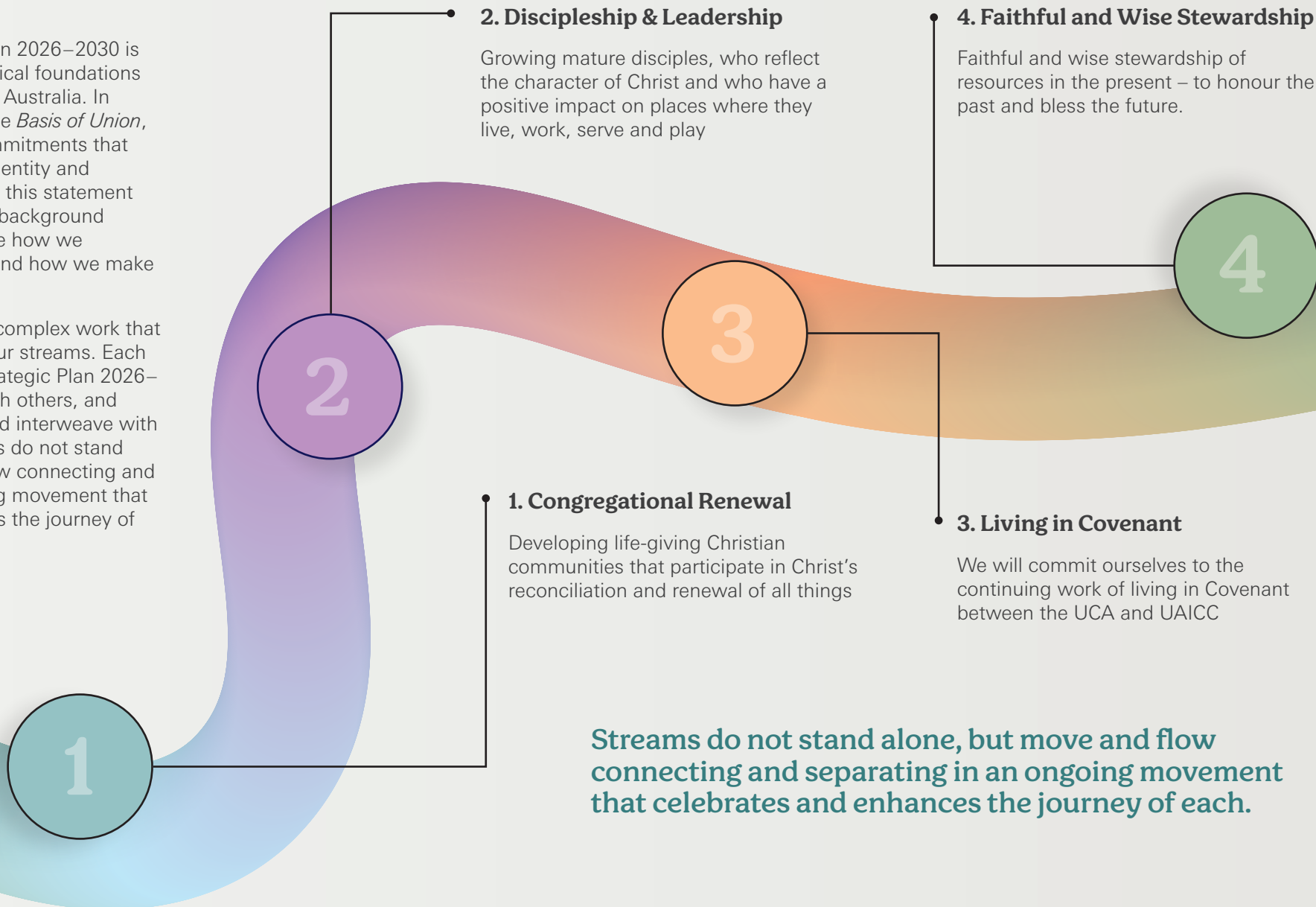
- listens with humility to the experiences of others
- engaged in practices such as lament, confession, intercession, and celebration
- works towards reconciliation in both relationships and structures
- embraces the richness of a multicultural and intercultural community.

The Church is also shaped by its wider context, including lessons learned through national inquiries, changing community expectations, and evolving social realities. These influences call the Church to ongoing reflection, accountability, and transformation. Two of the most significant in the last decade are the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*, and the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability*. Both of these have called us to repentance and led to changes in policies and practices.

The four streams

This Synod Strategic Plan 2026–2030 is grounded in the theological foundations of the Uniting Church in Australia. In particular, it draws on the *Basis of Union*, alongside other key commitments that continue to shape our identity and practice. The purpose of this statement is not simply to provide background information, but to guide how we understand our calling and how we make decisions as a Church.

We have described the complex work that we need to do within four streams. Each stream of the Synod Strategic Plan 2026–2030 shares aspects with others, and may depend, overlap and interweave with another stream. Streams do not stand alone, but move and flow connecting and separating in an ongoing movement that celebrates and enhances the journey of each.



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Stream 1:

Congregational Renewal

Developing life-giving Christian communities that participate in Christ's reconciliation and renewal of all things.

As communities we constantly need to be seeking the renewing work of the Spirit in our lives. Some of this is accomplished by through practices of worship, prayer, Bible Study and Christian community. There are also times that it is helpful to review and refresh those practices and initiate new work and practices. A key part of congregational renewal is for congregations to have given thought to how people with **no espoused faith** in God move to becoming mature followers of Jesus. This will include intentionally identifying and strengthening current practices and pathways, and developing new ones where needed.

An opportunity for congregational renewal and for sharing the good news with new communities is church planting. Another is the renewing of current congregations. A third is a new expression of being a church together. The Basis of Union reminds us that "In his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his church" (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 4).

Congregational renewal calls for intentional reflection and discernment. Congregations are encouraged to regularly ask:

- How are we growing as disciples of Jesus?
- How are we connecting with people beyond our current community?
- What practices are life-giving, and where might renewal or change be needed?

Objectives

Sustaining life-giving communities of lifelong discipleship through worship, witness and service

Developing strong missional connections with local community

Reimagining rural and regional ministry to make it more effective

Strengthening evangelism and capacity for faith sharing

Building intercultural capacity and inclusion

Supporting and facilitating new and renewing expressions of church

Goals

Ensure the majority of congregations have articulated plans for helping people go from no espoused faith in God to being mature followers of Jesus.

Develop local, rural and regional ministry models.

Revitalise lay education in the Synod.

Develop a church planting culture within the Synod (including strengthening of accredited courses).

Affirm our heritage, strengthen our identity and engender hope and courage for our continuing mission.

Foster avenues for active engagement that is intergenerational and intercultural.

Congregational Renewal looks like:

- A mission plan in every congregation
- A strengthened culture of evangelism
- Congregations that have a growing connection with presbytery and synod
- New churches planted and new expressions of church developed
- CALD communities strengthened
- Intercultural capacity developed
- Congregations that have strengths in a variety of areas eg. Worship, children and youth, seeking justice, prayer, evangelism and service
- Congregations have at least one (or two) ministry programs and activities with their local community
- Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the UCA within every community.

Your reflections on Congregational Renewal:

Let's talk about: _____

Let's work on: _____

Stream 2:

Discipleship and Leadership

Growing mature disciples who reflect the character of Christ and who have a positive impact on places where they live, work, serve and play.

Discipleship and leadership are central to the life and mission of the Church. This is a lifelong journey of following Jesus – shaped by worship, learning, service, and community. It involves both personal transformation and active participation in God's mission .

As the *Basis of Union* states, "Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command people's attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be disciples of a crucified Lord" (Paragraph 4).

Discipleship is being formed in the character of Christ so that we can live in relationships marked by the "love, care and compassion that was embodied in Christ" (Code of Ethics 1.6).

Communities of faith are called to help people explore and discern their vocation. This includes through our daily living, place of work and a life in community. God calls every member to be in ministry in the world, For some this will be in specified ministries. In response, we will intentionally work on a variety of leadership pathways to equip all people to participate in God's work in the world.

Objectives

Understanding what mature discipleship looks like, and creating plans to help people of all ages grow as followers of Jesus

Developing clear and sustainable leadership pathways

Strengthening and resourcing theological education

Equipping disciples for local community mission, advocacy and service

Strengthening intercultural capacity in leadership and discipleship

Equipping leadership in CALD communities

Goals

Increase clarity across Synod around what mature discipleship looks like.

Foster reflection by congregations on discipleship to help increase the intentional growing of mature followers of Jesus.

Encourage the growth of lay education in congregations, presbytery and across the Synod.

Create and support leadership pathways for new and emerging leaders.

Develop ways to oversee and encourage a stronger professional development culture for ministry agents.

Consider culturally appropriate ways to support development of CALD emerging leaders.

Consider culturally appropriate ways to support development in leaders in UAICC.

Explore ways to help people enter into theological education through UCLT and Presbyteries.

Discipleship and Leadership looks like:

- Increased participation in a Period of Discernment
- Increased ministries engaging people of all ages
- Increased number of Ministers of the Word and Deacons
- Councils of the UCA encouraging healthy leadership development
- Leaders who are well informed about community expectations and embody 'integrity, trust and compassion' CoE, and are able to engage with the wider councils of the church
- Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the UCA within every community.

Your reflections on Discipleship and Leadership:

Let's talk about: _____

Let's work on: _____

Stream 3:

Living in Covenant

We commit ourselves to the continuing work of living out the Covenant between UAICC and the Uniting Church in Australia.

Living in Covenant calls the Church into a deeper way of being – one shaped by relationship, truth, and shared faith. It is an invitation to walk together, learning from one another, and participating in God's work of reconciliation and renewal in Australia.

As a Synod we commit ourselves to the continuing work of strengthening and renewing the Covenant between the UCA and UAICC. The Covenant is a gift and a calling. It invites the Church into a deeper relationship grounded in faith, shaped by history, and expressed through shared commitment to reconciliation and justice.

As expressed in the Revised Preamble to the Constitution:

"10. After much struggle and debate, in 1994 the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia discovered God's call, accepted this invitation and entered into an ever deepening covenantal relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. This was so that all may see a destiny together, praying and working together for a fuller expression of our reconciliation in Jesus Christ. AND THUS the Church celebrates this Covenantal relationship as a foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation."

REVISED PREAMBLE TO THE CONSTITUTION
Uniting Church in Australia

This vision continues to guide the life of the Church. Living in Covenant is not a one-time commitment, but an ongoing journey – one that calls for listening, learning, humility, and action.

Objectives

Broadening, deepening and personalising our living out of the Covenant between UCA and UAICC

Advocating for respect and reconciliation in Australia between First and Second Peoples

Understanding and learning from the history of engagement between First and Second Peoples (such as through the Preamble)

Deepening Second Peoples' engagement with First Peoples' worldviews including spiritualities for authentic Christian discipleship, understanding and relationship

Create spaces that respect, honour and listen deeply to UAICC

Goals

Resource Congregations to mark and participate in significant events for First Peoples, e.g. Day of Mourning, NAIDOC week, Reconciliation Week.

Equip Congregations and Councils of the Church to create their spaces and environment for welcoming First Peoples, and expressing the Covenant.

Resource Second Peoples to engage with opportunities to deepen understanding of First Peoples, colonisation, history, current Australian context and indigenous theology, including experiences of country.

Review governance structures of the Synod to ensure they enable and honour UAICC.

Engage in conversation with UAICC to ensure Congress can minister to First Peoples in culturally appropriate ways.

Living in Covenant looks like:

- Visible representations of First Nations People and culture through language, arts or acknowledgement of country
- Recognising anniversaries and significant dates
- Creating space for new relationships
- Shared understanding of the past
- Growing connection and trust between First and Second Peoples.

Your reflections on Living in Covenant:

Let's talk about: _____

Let's work on: _____

Stream 4:

Faithful and Wise Stewardship

Faithful and wise stewardship of resources in the present – to honour the past and bless the future.

All that we are and all that we have is first a gift from God. We seek to respond to God's generosity to us through faithful and wise stewardship, using what has been entrusted to us in ways that sustain and grow the Church's mission, now and into the future – nourishing our people, resources, property and the wider creation.

To the church in Corinth, Paul wrote that he had laid a foundation on which others had built. "Each builder must choose with care" how they will build on that foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10). In John 4, Jesus says to his disciples "others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour" (John 4:38).

Both of these verses are talking about ministry rather than property or finance. However, they help us understand some key principles about stewardship. The recognition that we receive and step into the work of others, and in turn pass on our work or responsibilities to others. Stewardship recognises that we are called to service, protect and invest in the present and then graciously pass it on to the next people.

Wise stewardship in the present – to honour the past and bless the future – is a key part of our life as a church, so that we may pass those resources on to the next generation. Stewardship is therefore wise financial management and use of property. It is also about the care and development of people, and the care of God's creation. God calls the church to act with care, courage and responsibility – to use what has been entrusted to us in ways that sustain and grow the Church's mission now and into the future.

Objectives

Growing the number of vibrant congregations and communities of faith, in safe buildings that are fit for purpose to ensure a sustainable future of the Synod

Identifying and investing in new and emerging opportunities for mission

Ensuring a Uniting Church that is a safe place for all

Living out our calling to be stewards of God's creation

Goals

Partner with congregations through presbyteries to reflect on their mission and the use of property, developing plans that support safe, sustainable buildings and strengthen ministry; especially in rural, regional, and strategically important communities.

Build the knowledge, skills and capacity of people in congregations for their mission.

Ensure sustainable financial and property resources are available.

Develop sustainable ways to deliver fit for purpose theological education and formation for the Synod of SA .

Develop and implementing systems that improve communication, transparency, and reporting for presbyteries and congregations.

Strengthen policies and practices to ensure the safety and wellbeing of people in the life of our congregation and ministries.

Faithful and Wise Stewardship looks like:

- The Uniting Church being a Safe Church for all
- Safe buildings that are fit for purpose
- Sound financial practices encouraging wise investment and missional entrepreneurship
- Financially and organisationally encouraging active engagement with the Synod Climate Action Plan incorporating NetZero initiatives
- A just resource base for UAICC
- Building the capacity of people and communities.

Your reflections on Faithful and Wise Stewardship:

Let's talk about: _____

Let's work on: _____

What this means for our life and work

The Synod Strategic Plan 2026–2030 offers direction for how the Synod lives and acts so that we may continue to participate faithfully in God’s work in the world. The plan calls the Synod to:

- support communities that are growing in faith, discipleship, and mission
- prioritise practices that embody both word and deed—proclamation and service
- invest in leadership that is grounded, reflective, and responsive
- act with integrity, accountability, and care in all aspects of Church life.

We seek to hold together belief and action, reflection and practice, tradition and innovation in a stream running along a strong theological foundation in the Basis of Union. It also reminds us that theology is not separate from practice. The way we organise our life, use our resources, and relate to one another are all expressions of what we believe.

During the consultation process we received feedback to clarify some terms used within the Plan. This has been outlined in the *Glossary of Terms* at the end of this document. It is included as a resource for the conversations we hope you have within your community and your congregations; a tool to assist your group to clarify the nuances of meaning behind our purpose and action as you navigate your engagement with and response to the Synod Strategic Plan 2026–2030.



Glossary of terms

The Synod Strategic Plan is not a detailed instruction manual, but a resource intended to support discernment, conversation, and decision-making across the life of the Church – holding onto what has been life-giving while responding to new realities with clarity and purpose. While it is primarily designed to guide the work of the Synod in its leadership, support, and resourcing roles, and to assist its bodies, ministry centres, and decision-making groups in setting priorities and allocating resources, it also offers a framework that may inform the wider Church's own discernment and mission planning.

Recognising both the focused nature of the Plan and the complexity of the context in which it will be received, this glossary is offered as a companion resource: a space in which key phrases, particularly those that may be experienced as complex or contested, can be more fully explored and interpreted. It does not extend the scope of the Synod Strategic Plan, nor does it seek to be exhaustive, but rather invites deeper reflection, enabling a shared understanding as the Church engages faithfully with its mission.

Advocacy

Advocacy is speaking on causes or on behalf of others, especially those whose voice is not being heard to the public square. The Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) recently passed the following summary on Advocacy:

When speaking in public, the Assembly (*November 25, 2025, ASC*) will act in accordance with the following engagement principles, to:

- model humility and confidence in the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- speak with compassion and authenticity, informed by the voices and perspectives of people whose lives are most impacted
- give a fair and honest interpretation of facts and evidence, informed by credible and expert voices
- acknowledge complexity of issues and diversity of perspectives, and to speak with clarity about our position
- affirm that in our posture of engagement that we will seek to bear witness to the reconciling love of God.

Church Planting

When the term Church Planting was used we worked within the paradigm of the Church Planting Task Group definitions which have been in place since 2018.

Church Planting definitions:

Church plants	New churches which did not exist before. We envisage they will be primarily either new start-ups from nothing or campuses from existing churches.
Regenerations	Re-plants within existing churches whereby the existing church agrees to hand over their future to a new group on an agreed date.
Revitalisations	The general renewing of existing congregations, are important but are not considered part of Church Planting culture.
Amalgamations	Not considered as part of Church Planting culture.

Church Planting culture

Ric Thorpe's books on Church Planting were informative to the development of the Synod Strategic Plan. In *Resource Churches* he talks about developing a 'Culture of Church Planting'. He speaks about four stages which are something to consider when you are responding to the objectives and goals that refer to Church Planting culture.

Passive Approach	A few plants; not well supported, sometimes discouraged.
More Intentional Approach	Church Planting churches created and become part of the strategy of a synod or presbytery.
Strategic Approach	Many plants happen, especially in strategic locations.
Planting Culture	Every congregation is involved in planting fresh expressions, missional communities and planting teams to reach new people in their neighbourhood. 'Multiplication is the norm'.

Cultural terms

Multicultural describes the reality of Australian society and the Church: we are many. It points to the presence of people from different cultural and language backgrounds living together in the one community.

Cross-cultural refers to our calling as followers of Jesus to live in respectful relationships across cultural boundaries. Cross-cultural living happens wherever people engage across difference, open to learning, mutual blessing, and at times challenge or repentance.

Intercultural moves beyond simply existing side by side. An intercultural church intentionally accepts, supports and celebrates each cultural group, and encourages people of all cultures to share in relationships, leadership, mission and ministry. This especially calls those from the dominant culture to learn to live and act cross-culturally. Intercultural practice includes:

- learning from one another across cultures
- valuing and sharing power equitably
- respecting differences
- celebrating diverse cultural traditions

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) refers to distinctive cultural and language communities within the wider Church and society. In our life together, this includes congregations that primarily gather around a shared language and culture (for example, Korean speaking, Dinka speaking, Fijian, or various African language communities).

Multicultural congregation refers to a congregation where people from different cultural and language backgrounds worship and participate together. Where there is intentional recognition and celebration of these differences, such congregations may also be described as moving towards being intercultural.

Fresh Expressions

New contextual churches are new Christian communities that are defined by Michael Moynagh as 'Fresh Expressions'. They are an important part of new ways that church communities evolve and change, related to Church Planting but quite distinct in nature. Fresh Expressions is missional in the sense that, through the Spirit, they are birthed by Christians mainly among people who do not normally attend church. Contextual – they seek to fit the culture of the people they serve. Formational – they aim to form disciples and Ecclesial – they aim to become church for the people they reach in their contexts (Figure 1).

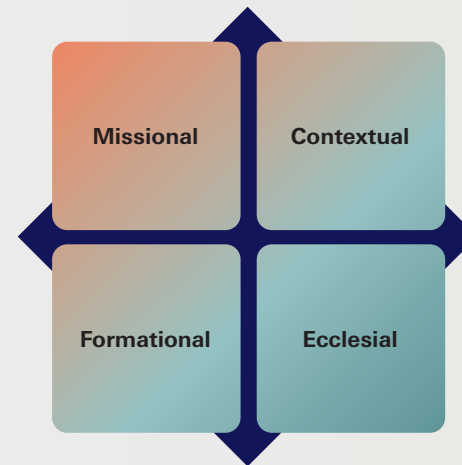


Figure 1. Fresh Expressions

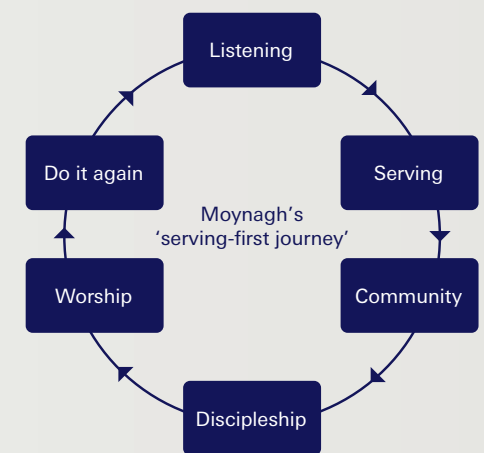


Figure 2. Serving-first journey

Moynagh's 'serving-first journey' is helpful as a spectrum, as well as a process. It is (loosely) thought of as starting with Listening; then Serving, Community and so on as per Figure 2. Some church plants start with discipleship (e.g. an Alpha Course), some with worship first, but each can be an appropriate starting point.

Evangelism

In a seminal book on evangelism, William F Abraham writes that “evangelism is the intentional initiation of people into the kingdom of God”. This is a definition that clearly includes discipling people into the way of following Jesus. However, although there are a variety of definitions for the context of the Synod Strategic Plan, it was assumed that evangelism would normally include a willingness to reply to anyone who inquires about your “hope as a believer” doing it with “gentleness and reverence” (1Peter 3:15–16, using NLT and NRSV respectively).

Justice

Justice is intrinsic to each of the streams. It underpins, overlaps and informs every part of our practice and faith and therefore has not been separated out within this plan. Congregational renewal leads to engagement with local community, making disciples includes helping people to act justly and love mercy; living into Covenant is growing in relationship with First Peoples and working to end racism; and good stewardship assumes using our resources, caring for our people in just and life-giving ways.

These include:

Creation. Our world is a gift of God, it was created good, affirming the value of all that we experience of God’s creation, and we are called by God to be stewards of God’s good creation.

Created in the image of God. The Creation stories affirm that human beings are created in the image of God, and while there a number of ways to understand this affirmation, it includes the dignity and worth of all people.

Love of Neighbour. (Matthew 22:37–40) This theme runs throughout Scripture – it recognises that the person before us is our neighbour and therefore calls from us mercy and compassion, and a willingness to share resources and act justly.

Shalom/Reign of God. A strong theme in the prophets which is carried through into the New Testament is Shalom, or the Reign of God. Scripture abounds with

various images of what the world looks like when God’s purposes are being fulfilled; images of peace and wholeness. Shalom is announced and embodied in the life and ministry of Jesus. After Jesus’s death, resurrection and ascension the church is called to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of that coming reign.

New Creation. The scripture also points to when God’s reign is experienced in all its fullness. The church is called to live, act and work towards this new creation.

Acting for justice is not an odd or extra activity for the church, for justice is central to the Scriptural understanding of the nature of God and God’s purposes in the world. Our responses to issues of injustice are prompted by the church’s vision of the reconciliation and renewal of all creation. We are called to be peacemakers and to pray for our enemies, informed by the descriptions of the early church worshipping, building community and sharing resources together.

Mature discipleship

There is discussion about the best way to describe the goal of following Jesus. Mature discipleship is one of the accepted ways of describing that goal, although some people dislike the term. Paul uses the term in Ephesians 4:13, describing the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit,

“to equip the saints, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of faith and of knowledge of the Song of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ”.

Mature discipleship has the advantage of suggesting that growth as a disciple doesn’t happen all at once; it takes time. When we seek to allow certain items to mature, we often can’t force maturity, but we can undertake certain practices or create conditions in which things can mature (like fruit and cheese!). Similarly, communities of faith can model and teach, encourage and equip, and create opportunities for people to grow as followers of Jesus.

Mission

Defining mission resists simplicity; as David Bosch famously demonstrates by delaying his own definition until deep into *Transforming Mission* (Page 519!) it is a reality best approached through multiple voices, images, and practices rather than a single, neat sentence. The word ‘mission’ is used throughout this plan, and each occasion of its use requires of us to reflect on its meaning. Below you’ll find a range of texts that were influential on the use of the term throughout the Strategic Plan and your understanding of mission in your own context.

David Bosch states in *Transforming Mission* that, “Mission is ... the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus, wagering on a future that verifiable experience seems to belie. It is the good news of God’s love, incarnated in a community, for the sake of the world”.

Michael Frost, in his presentation at Uniting College for Leadership and Theology in 2023 on Uniting Foundation Grant Guidelines stated that:

“The mission of God’s people is to alert everyone, everywhere to the universal reign of God through Christ,
by both speech and action,
by explaining and demonstrating,
by word and deed”.

We proclaim it with our mouths, through our joyful witness to our experience of God’s reign and through evangelistic preaching about God’s reign. And we show it with our actions, by demonstrating God’s reign through acts of kindness and hospitality, healing and serving others, and by contributing to the flourishing of a just and equitable society. We can see it as a spectrum from announcement to demonstration: Actions without words do not encompass the entirety of God’s mission, and explaining without demonstration is also unhelpful.



Five Marks of Mission

The Five Marks of Mission were developed by the Anglican Communion in 1984. They have been widely influential beyond the Anglican Church. They define the mission of the Church as the mission of Christ, whereby we:

1	Proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2	Teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3	Respond to human needs by loving service
4	Transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5	Strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Steve Taylor, as part of the *Angelwings* consultation, suggested that it might be helpful to **reverse the order of the 5 Marks**, to emphasise care of creation and relationship with First Peoples, and to remind people that proclamation flows from living lives that reflect the good news.

Missional

The word 'missional' is one that people sometimes question, in part due to the variety of ways in which it has come to be used. Central to the understanding of 'missional' is that the church is a 'sent' people – we are called to participate in God's mission in the world, not just through programs but a whole-of-life response. One of the classic texts on this is *The Missional Church* (edited by Darrell Guder, 1998).

The authors suggest five key elements:

- 1) Biblical – our mission is informed by Scripture. Particularly key gospel texts like Luke 10.
- 2) Historical – an awareness of how the mission of God, and the call to the church, changes through time and different contexts.
- 3) Contextual – the mission needs to be incarnated within specific historical contexts.
- 4) It participates in God's purposes to renew the whole creation.
- 5) It can be practiced and will be embodied in practices.

No espoused faith

There have been a variety of terms used to describe those people with whom we might engage in evangelism. For a while 'un-churched' was a popular term, along with 'de-churched' for those who had ceased regularly participating in the life of a congregation but might still consider themselves in some ways Christian, but there was a sense that these terms were judgemental. For a while the term 'nones' was popular – those who didn't register religious affiliation on their census form – however that is a tad confusing – given that it is a homophone for 'nuns'!

Another term – still not completely accepted – is 'no espoused faith' – simply meaning that they are people who do not name themselves as religious. It is not a felicitous term but hopefully avoids some of the concerns above.

It is used in the goals as a way of describing how we are trying to help people make their way from little interest in the Christian faith to being mature disciples who seek to be like Jesus. We hope that congregations, presbyteries and other bodies will consider the practices and programs they have in place to help encourage and strengthen people in their journey.

Appendix A

Outcomes of Shaping the Future 2021–2025

Since 2021, the Synod has seen significant changes and challenges, such as rebuilding our communities after the COVID Pandemic, and the restructure of Synod and Presbytery.

Our church had a number of meaningful anniversaries including the 30th Anniversary of the Covenant, the 15th anniversary of the Preamble and the 40th anniversary of *We are a Multicultural Church*. The 17th Assembly saw a commitment to *ACT2: The Gift of Spirit*, a major review and reform of the Uniting Church in Australia.

This graphic shows some of the outcomes of the Strategic Priorities from 2021 through to today that reflect the focus and commitment of all within the Synod of South Australia to God's work through the mission of the Church.

