

Synod '24



3.1 Synod Strategy & Planning Working Group

Acknowledgement of Country

The Working Group acknowledges the sovereignty of the First Peoples of these lands and waters where we meet, the Kurna 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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Attachments

Attachment 1 – Synod Decisions relating to Mission and Property Working Group

Attachment 2 – Conversation Categories

Attachment 3 – Reference list

1. Executive Summary

This report is a progress report on the work of the Synod Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) Working Group – now to be known as Mission and Property Strategy (MAPS) working group. The Synod Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) Working Group have progressed the June 2023 Synod decisions.

- The three Presbyteries have undertaken an initial desk top review based on categories to better understand the mission and property future of congregations.
- Presbytery Leaders are applying their knowledge to the mission and property of relevant congregations.
- Initial conversations have been held with both Reverend Ken Sumner, State Development Officer of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC- SA) and with Reverend Dr Paul Dongwon Goh, Justice & CALD Multicultural and Cross-Cultural Officer, Mission Resourcing.

This initial review shows us that, broadly speaking our Synod congregations can be categorized as:

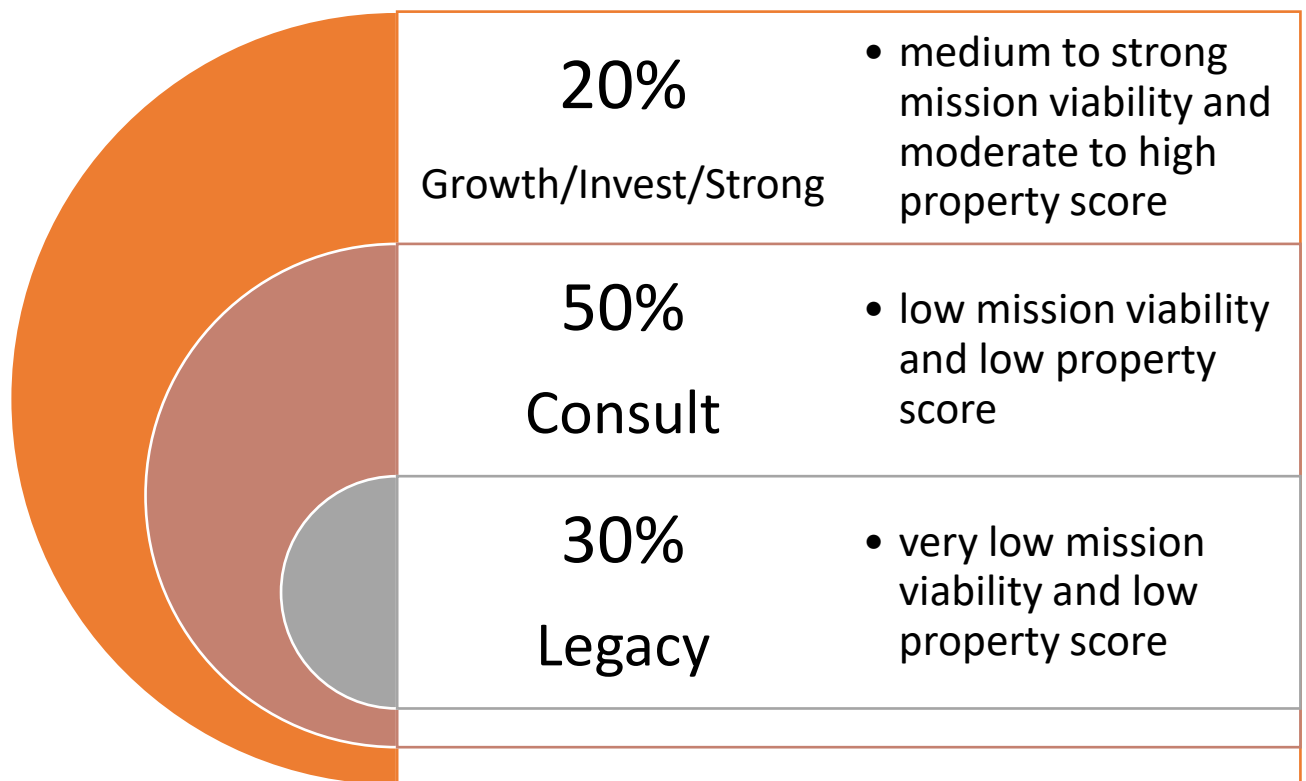


Figure 1 Synod of SA Conversation Categories from Desktop Data

This review and the work to date tells us:

1	Presbytery leaders working with each congregation is the best model
2	Congregations are within a spectrum in each category
3	Fostering congregational mission vitality is the key priority for Presbytery Leaders, the Working Group, and the Synod
4	Building safety matters are being addressed across congregations, with varying levels of implementation. There are still many matters to be addressed
5	A key emerging question is around what comprises congregational vitality, vibrancy or viability
6	Another emerging question is what policies and processes are needed to share property well
7	Stewarding well the legacy of closing congregations is important
8	Congregation conversations are ongoing
9	UAICC ministry is distinct in its focus on First Peoples across SA. We need to listen to Congress in this space
10	There is opportunity for new congregations through population growth and change across South Australia.

Table 1 – 10 Key learnings of the SSPWG

2. Proposals

The Synod Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) working group recommend that the Synod resolve 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 UCA 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 Meeting working groups on congregation attributes.
5. CONDUCT congregation reporting about mission viability (via a questionnaire) 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. DEVELOP the work underway about frameworks 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.



Mission & Property Strategy
▶ Working Group



3. Background

3.1 Vision

The ‘[God’s Church and Its Buildings – Are they fit for Mission?](#)’ report that went to the Synod meeting in 2021 concluded that asbestos, fire safety, accessibility and electrical issues lead to 91% of the 503 buildings rated average. At the time, \$30M was estimated as needed to fix the problem, a figure substantively more in today’s 2024 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 and 2023 Synod meetings:

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

[2023 Synod Strategy & Planning \(Mission & Property\) Working Group Report Part 1](#)

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

The resolutions flowing from these reports can be found in [Attachment 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, as reported to the June 2023 Synod meeting.

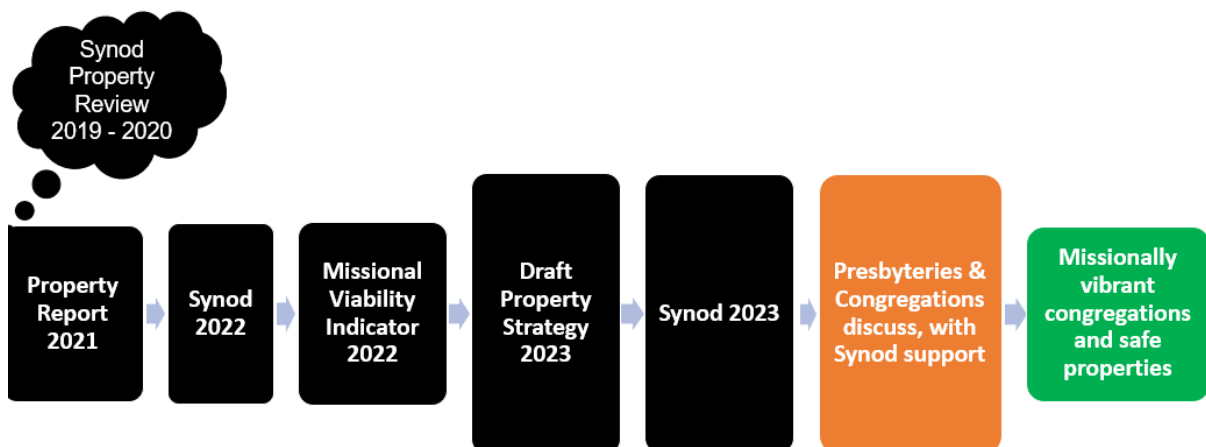


Figure 2 Decisions at Synod Meetings have built on the Synod Property Review of 2019 - 2020

4. Progress since June 2023

In the time between the June 2023 Synod meeting and August 2024, the working group has moved from doing research, big picture work, to more ‘on the ground’ work with presbyteries and into the process of discerning how to work with congregations to progress the strategy of identifying missional vibrant congregations in safe buildings that are fit for purpose and identifying strategic locations for UCA congregations and faith communities.

The General Secretary has overseen the ongoing work of the working group which has continued to be resourced by experts in mission planning, property and planning, and key Synod staff. Representatives from the three presbyteries (nominated by each presbytery) have been added in this past year.

The Working Group has progressed the 2023 Synod Decision as below:

Synod Decision		Progress
1	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	Presbytery Leaders with Working Group advice and the Synod support commenced work to better understand the missional viability as well as property of congregations. Members of the Working Group also met with Paul Goh to discuss CALD communities.
(b)	Complete and/or update the Missional Viability Questionnaire by end of November 2023.	The Synod contacted congregations who had not completed the 2022 questionnaire. 205 out of 263 congregations/faith communities completed the questionnaire. This information was considered by the relevant presbytery.
2	REQUEST the General Secretary to facilitate the work with Presbyteries and Congress to identify missionally vibrant congregations in safe properties in each region.	The Working Group acknowledged the need to walk with Congress. Members of the working group met with Congress representatives.
3	MAKE the 2019 Building Safety reports for all congregation properties available to the relevant presbytery.	The Synod made these available to the relevant Presbyteries.

Table 2 – Synod 2023 Decision & Progress by SSPWG

The Working Group Members are Rev Sue Page (Associate General Secretary, Governance & Operations); Rev Philip Gardner (General Secretary); Peter Battersby (Financial Management); Rev Mike Wardrop (Mission Planning); David Bailey (Property Planner); Mark Elford (Property Planning); Rev Dianne Holden (Mission Planning); and Resourcing Members: Matt Wilson (Manager, Property & Projects); Darcy Pullman (Project Officer, Data Analysis). Presbytery representatives were nominated by each of the presbyteries and included, for Wimala: Trevor Philips and Amy Duke; for Presbytery of Southern SA (POSSA): Richard Telfer and Lawrie Linggood; for Generate Presbytery: Steph Tai and Martyn Smith.

4.1 Relevant Decision of the Synod Standing Committee

Members of Synod will recall that the Presbytery Funding model is based, in part, on the number of congregations in each Presbytery. Given that part of the project will involve the conversations that will lead to the closure of some churches, and the development of new faith communities, the Synod Standing Committee decided at its meeting on 9 May 2024, to introduce a moratorium on adjustments to Presbytery funding while the property and mission review continues. The moratorium commences on 1 January 2025 and concludes at the end of 2027.

The Standing Committee also deferred the review of Synod functions pending clarity on the impact of ACT2 on the process of the Synod.

Over 2025 – 2027, the Presbytery Funding Model review is to be undertaken and finalised.

The Synod Standing Committee RESOLVED (by consensus) to:	
SSC24.64	INSTITUTE a moratorium on adjustments to Presbytery Funding for the next three years while the presbyteries continue their work on the property and mission review. The Moratorium to begin from 1 January 2025.
SSC24.65	DEFER the major review of the Presbytery Funding Model. The review is to take place before the end of the moratorium.
SSC24.66	DIRECT the Presbytery Funding Model review to be finalised before the conclusion of the moratorium on Presbytery Funding (SSC24.64).
SSC24.67	DEFER the review of the Synod functions as requested by the 2022 Presbytery Review until we have clarity on the impact of ACT2 process on the Synod.

Figure 3 Extract of Standing Committee Minutes 9 May 2024

5. Categories to Approach Further Conversations

Commencing early in 2024, utilising the missional viability questionnaire results, property scores, demographics, and 'on the ground' knowledge, each Presbytery undertook an initial desktop review.

The purpose of Presbytery leaders undertaking an initial desk top review was three-fold:

1. Better Understanding

To enable each Presbyteries' working knowledge of congregations to inform an initial desk top review. This enabled the missional focus and knowledge of Presbyteries to be applied to the congregations' self-assessment of missional health as well as the property itself.

2. More Informed Conversations

To inform the start of subsequent conversations by Presbyteries with congregations.

3. Targeted Resource Use

To enable each Presbytery to take an overall view of their 60 or more congregations so that each Presbytery (with support from Synod) can consider with their limited resources how to break down a potentially large task into smaller parts.

This desktop work was guided by Conversation Categories ([Attachment 2– Conversation Categories](#)) used by each Presbytery.

A South Australian wide summary of churches in categories based on desktop identification by each Presbytery in in table 3.

Conversation Category	Brief description of Category	Number	%
Invest/Strong*	Strong mission & high property	29	12
Growth	Medium mission & moderate property	23	9
Consult	Low mission & low property	119	48
Legacy	Very low mission & low property	74	30
Not Listed	-	3	1
TOTAL	-	248	100

Table 3 - SA Wide Summary of Churches in categories based on desktop review by each Presbytery

*Choice of language varied between presbyteries for this category

6. What the Categories Show Us

The SA-wide summary shows us that approximately:

- 20% of congregations are in the growth or invest/strong category, with medium to strong missional viability and moderate to high property score
- 50% are in the consult category, with low missional viability and low property
- 30% are in the legacy category, with very low missional viability and low property score.

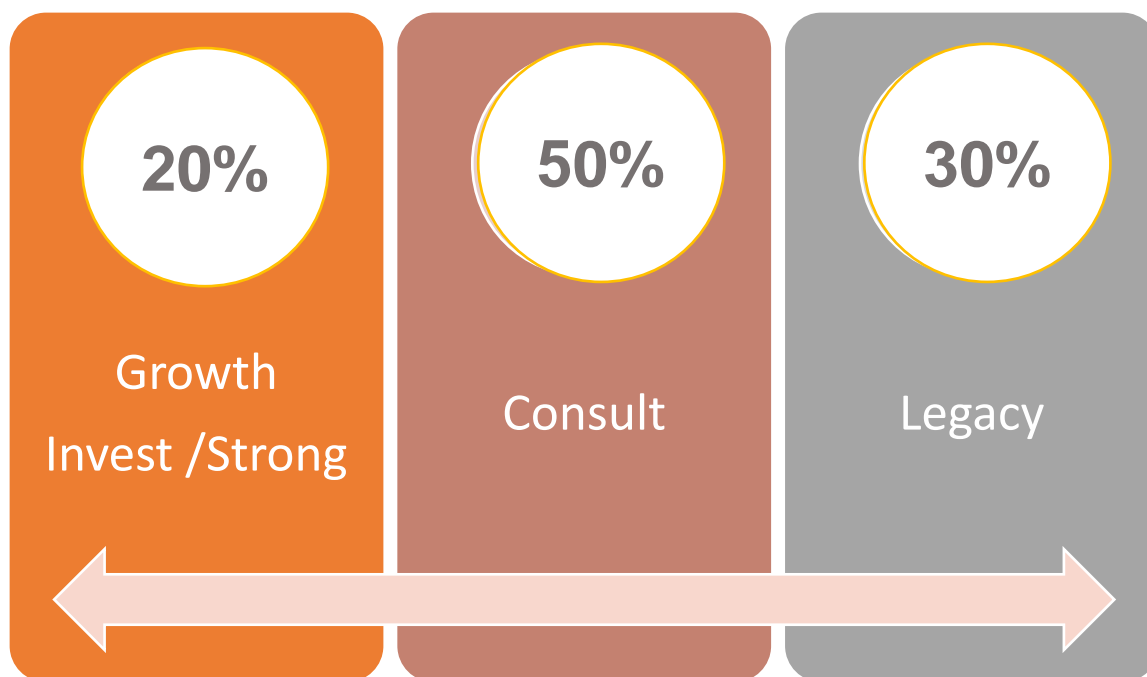


Figure 4 Conversation categories across Synod of SA

For the Uniting Church in SA as a whole, there are congregations growing and active missionally, with safe buildings that reflect this growth. Nonetheless, the generally low missional viability, and property challenges, are a well-known and long-term challenge for the church.

As was outlined in more detail in the Working Group report to the June 2023 Synod, the South Australian population is both growing and changing in cultural and religious make up. Also changing are both the cost to purchase property as well as costs associated with holding a property (e.g. repairs and maintenance, insurance). What remains constant is the need to provide safe buildings and have sufficient resources – generally by each congregation with some support by the Synod – to ensure their property is well maintained and safe.

The working group makes the following observations/ reflections:

- 1 **Presbytery leaders working with each congregation is the best model**
Presbytery leaders working with each congregation is the most workable model to move ahead with (as contrasted with a Synod-led or do-nothing approach).
- 2 **Congregations are within a spectrum in each category.**
For example, within the consult category there are around 120 congregations. With targeted support, some congregations within this category could move into a strong or growth category. Conversely, some consult congregations on their current path are likely to move into legacy category in the next 5 – 10 years.

3 **Fostering congregational mission viability is the key priority for Presbytery Leaders, the Working Group, and the Synod.**

4 **Building safety matters are being addressed across congregations, with varying levels of implementation.** There are still many matters to be addressed.

5 **A key emerging question is around what comprises congregational vitality or vibrancy in addition to viability.**

6 **Another emerging question is what policies and processes are needed to share property well.** Particularly between the beneficial user and church plants/ new congregations, CALD congregations and faith communities or different denominations. The opportunity for growth of the Uniting Church through CALD communities was reinforced in the conversation with Paul Goh. Around 80% of CALD congregations in SA do not have a building. Acknowledging several successful examples in the Uniting Church in SA, sharing of further properties presents as an opportunity.

7 **Stewarding well the legacy of closing congregations is important**
Over the last decade, on average, around 5 congregations have closed every year. Congregations in the legacy category need the opportunity to close well and to know that their people, resources, and building, are going to be stewarded well both for congregation members and for the future of the overall Uniting Church. The term 'legacy' seeks to affirm this stewardship.

8 **Congregation conversations are ongoing**
Conversations are underway between Presbytery leaders and congregations.

9 **UAICC ministry is distinct in its focus on First Peoples across SA.** We need to listen to Congress in this space

10 **There is opportunity for new congregations/ faith communities through population growth and change across SA.**
The Categories review was about existing congregations. Questions arose through this about where population is growing and changing that Presbyteries need to be considering new congregations. This is another emerging question.

7. Emerging Questions

In considering missional viability and property the following questions emerge:

- What constitutes a viable congregation?
- What tools are needed to share property well?
- How to better connect with the growing culturally and linguistically diverse communities?
- Where is opportunity for new congregations through population growth and change?

7.1 What Constitutes a Viable Congregation

Over the course of the Synod Strategic Property Working Group's life (now entering its 4th iteration) we have spent a good deal of time wrestling with how to name the qualities that describe healthy congregations. Part of the background are two documents produced last decade in our Synod. One on Property Viability produced by the Property Team ([Property Viability Discussion Paper](#)) considers what is needed to keep a congregation operating in the twenty-first century. Sometimes people ask, 'how much does it cost?', but it is hard to answer as, for example, the electricity bills or the insurance costs can vary so much from building to building. There is also the related issue of how many leaders are needed to fulfil the roles expected in the Regulations, and to meet compliance and legal requirements. This is all just to keep the doors open and the machinery of the congregation ticking over.

A companion paper on [Congregational Sustainability](#) was produced by the then Pastoral Relations and Mission Planning Team. Part of the thinking came from a presentation that the team had heard in which during the Q&A session someone had commented that "you could be viable but not sustainable." In other words, you might be able to afford to keep the doors open, even pay for ministry but the quality of your congregational life, including your connection to God and to one another, and your connection to the local community in mission and service may not lead to healthy outcomes.

Viability or Vitality?

We realised that terms such as vitality, viability and vibrancy were being used interchangeably but each has a distinct meaning and value. The Working Group came to realise that it is about being more than viable, it is about being in mission that is vital and vibrant. In previous working group iterations, we landed on vibrancy, but we sense that a more appropriate word is vitality.

It does carry a sense of life and health, of both an internal energy and a reaching out beyond the congregation. In 2022, when we did an initial survey on missional viability, it was genuinely interesting work to think through what questions we might ask that could give a sense of congregational vitality. We certainly received feedback that not everyone was happy with the questions that we asked, and we continue to be interested in how we might improve on that initial work.

As the working group continues to meet, remembering that our goal is for us to have “**missionally vibrant/vital congregations, in safe buildings that are fit for purpose**”, more topics for us to wrestle with arise. One of the latest conversations is in some ways back to the issues of viability and sustainability.

- How many people does it take to maintain a healthy congregation?
- What numbers might be a catalyst for a conversation between the presbytery and the congregation?
- What issues around safe church matters or property safety might be a catalyst for a conversation with the Synod and/or a presbytery?

In the last few meetings, we have begun to discuss these questions. We are genuinely interested in your thinking on these matters. We have revisited the Viability and Sustainability papers, we have looked at some of the criteria being used by presbyteries and have been inspired by the General Secretary’s reflection on Gil Rendle’s book, “Doing the Math of Mission”.¹

In a discussion paper, inspired by Rendle, the General Secretary suggested that “institutional metrics” might spark a conversation, but then “missional metrics” might be discussed to help make a decision about a congregation continuing as the responsible body for that building.² Please note that this is not about closing congregations, but whether their current circumstances, including maintaining a building, is helping them be a missionally vital or even viable congregation.

These metrics are listed below:

Missional Metrics



1. Clear sense of identity, purpose/call and strategy. (in Mission Plan)
2. Intentional practices for helping people move from no espoused faith to being mature disciples.
3. Wisdom on what mature discipleship looks, sounds and feels like—individually and corporately.
4. Connecting meaningfully to bless their neighbourhood.
5. Healthy governance that is missionally focused.

Figure 5 Missional Metrics

¹ Gil Rendle : *Doing the Math Of Mission*. 2014 Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham.

² “Responsible Body” in the language of the Regulations, “means a body that is responsible for the management and administration of property”. Regulations 4:1 Definitions.

Institutional Metrics



These might be a catalyst for conversations with the presbytery

1. Numbers attending worship
e.g. 20 in suburban setting, 15 in rural settings.
2. Regularity of worship services and building use
3. Achievable repairs following the Property Safety Report
The figure in the report of \$40,000 of repairs was suggested as a catalyst for conversation.
4. Financial viability
Including the ability to meeting Insurance affordability and contribute to the Mission and Service Fund.
5. Affordability of paid ministry
6. Proximity to other Uniting Church buildings
7. Openness to and/or possibility of other options
e.g. sharing property with a CALD congregation or church plant.
8. Following Safe Church policies.
e.g. Adopt/adapt safe Church Policy, Screenings, Mandatory reporting training, Called to Care.
9. Capacity to keep congregational property for which it is has 'Beneficial Use' in an adequate state of repair
10. Building is considered fit for purpose'
What might we include in fit for purpose? Note: it will be contextual – different communities will have different expectations. There have been changing expectations regarding air conditioning, kitchen facilities and child safety since most of our churches were built! It will also relate to a congregation's mission.

Figure 6 Institutional Metrics

One of the reasons for this conversation is that when the Synod develops an MOU with a Church Plant or new faith community to use a building we use 'Missional Markers' that are the basis for a conversation for the plant / faith community's continued use of the building at the three-year mark, and whether they will be the 'responsible body' after the five year mark. These markers vary from context to context, but an example is given below. Often when sharing these markers we hear the comment, "What would happen if we used these markers with existing congregations?"

Missional Markers

Figure 7 Missional Markers 2.5 and 4.5 years review

2.5 Year Review

Core team of two or more people has been formally established and endorsed by the Presbytery to lead the church plant/ new faith community/ congregation (core team should be stable and cohesive)

A worshipping community with average weekly in-person attendance of at least 15 adults (over the last 6 months) has been birthed and is meeting regularly

A core evangelism and discipleship strategy can be articulated and is demonstrating fruit

Financial giving has been established providing at least \$15k pa (that is, \$7,500 in the previous 6 months). This is separate to any income that the property generates from external users.

Property is being well maintained, incorporating a visit from Synod Property Services team.

Essential governance practices (eg Safe Church, separated accounting) are established

4.5 Year Review

A worshipping community with average weekly in-person attendance of at least 35 adults (over the last 6 months) is meeting regularly

The church plant/ new faith community/ congregation is financially self sufficient from the giving of the attendees, and is fully meeting the Mission & Service Fund contribution obligations

20 people have committed to “membership”/partnership in the church plant/ new faith community/ congregation

New leaders have been identified and leadership of key ministry areas has been established

New converts are being baptised

Property is being well maintained, incorporating a visit from Synod Property Services team

Examples of engagement with and service to (or with) the local community

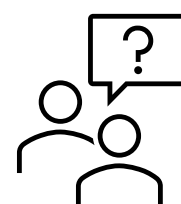
A related topic of conversation is what 'levers' does the Synod and the presbyteries have if there is significant risk to public safety or reputational damage? The Synod Standing Committee has been working on a by-law that gathers what is in the regulations and clarifies the processes that can occur. We have been greatly helped by work already undertaken by other synods on this.

There are many options open to congregations upon exploring these metrics. The historical understanding of the church's life is that there can only be a congregation within a building. Some may be relieved to know that they may be able to remain a congregation without a building to maintain but find an alternative meeting place like a community hall. Some will transition to being a faith community, being released from the governance commitments of a congregation, but still able to share ministry and mission, perhaps meeting in someone's home.³

This conversation led the working group to determine that regular reporting by congregations on missional viability and property matters (among other things) will be helpful in opening up conversations between presbyteries and congregations. The Synod is exploring ways for this information to be gathered in a user-friendly way.

Questions intended to be explored in working groups at the Synod meeting include:

- What do you think of the metrics for describing a viable congregation?
- Would you apply a minimum number of adults for congregational viability? What would that be? In an urban context? In a rural context?
- Is there a definable point at which a congregation needs to move to become a faith community?



7.2 What tools are needed to share property well

In the 2022-23 mission viability survey that 205 congregations across the Synod completed, 178 churches said they would be open to sharing their building with other Uniting Church congregations or faith communities (subject to suitable agreements being in place). That is approximately 87% of our congregations said they are open to sharing their building.

³ The responsibilities of a congregation are found in Regulation 3.1.1. Faith Communities are described in 3.9.2

However, there have only been a few success stories where this has worked, and we have had a handful of cases where things have not gone well and sharing of buildings has not eventuated.

It would be helpful for congregations to have some guidance as to what this sharing might look like. There is much to navigate when undertaking sharing of property. There are the practical realities of meeting times and space required, as well as the relationships between the presbyteries, the responsible body / host congregation and the new faith community / congregation / church plant.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been developed for use in this space, most recently used at Grange sharing with Encounter Henley and Rose Park (Gartrell Memorial) sharing with The Journey, and previously with Enfield and Encounter.

The Joint Presbytery and Synod Leaders meeting (JPSM) has begun exploring what some key learnings are from these experiences and are developing guidelines to assist all parties in these conversations.

8. Uniting Aboriginal Islander Christian Congress - SA Regional (UAICC-SA)

An initial conversation was held with Rev Ken Sumner, State Development Officer, Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress SA Regional Council (UAICC- SA); Rev Philip Gardner, General Secretary; and David Bailey, SSPWG Working Group.

Rev Ken Sumner outlined that understanding the context of UAICC ministry is critical and the five core frameworks to Aboriginal experience of mission and worship

- Land
- Language
- Law
- Kinship
- Ceremony

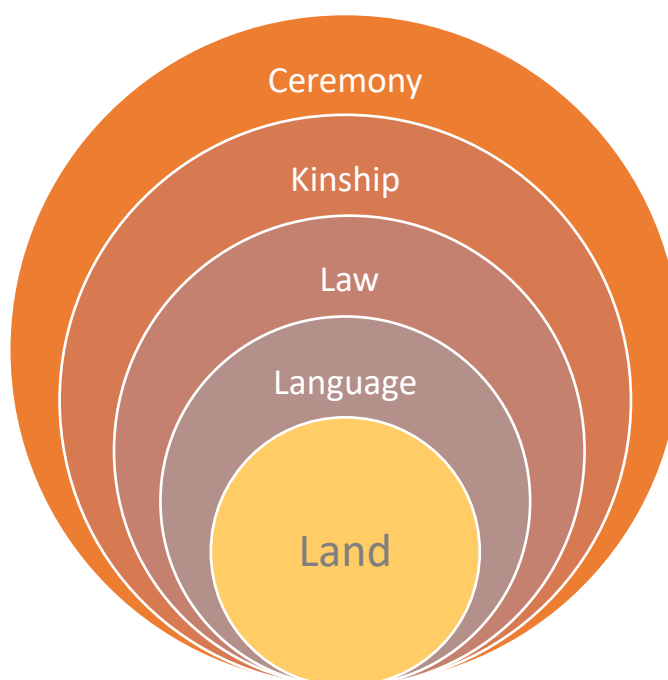


Figure 8 UAICC core frameworks to Ministry

Aboriginal communities recognise different boundaries and borders than the way, for example, demographic data is put together. It is important that UAICC-SA engages with the framework in its own way. Respectful ways of engagement are important. It can take several people to develop ministry.

The mission for SA Regional Congress is dynamic and moving. We are always rethinking it. Current mission focus is on Oodnadatta; Pt Augusta; Salisbury and Murray Lands Missions (encompassing Raukkan, Murray Bridge and the wider region).

There was also preliminary discussion on fostering connections, building relationships and creating tools that would simplify and support the potential to share properties along with looking further ahead ten or fifteen years to the potential to strengthen ministry in Boandik country, encompassing Limestone Coast and Southern Adelaide and the demographic trends for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in South Australia.

9. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities

In South Australia, there are CALD congregations that cover the whole of metropolitan Adelaide and other major centres. Regions and council areas within regions vary with degrees of cultural diversity. Inner Adelaide for example is highly culturally diverse.

An initial conversation was held with: Rev Dr Paul Dongwon Goh, Justice & CALD Multicultural and Cross-Cultural Officer, Mission Resourcing; Rev Philip Gardner, General Secretary; Rev Sue Page, Associate General Secretary Governance and Operations; David Bailey, Working Group.

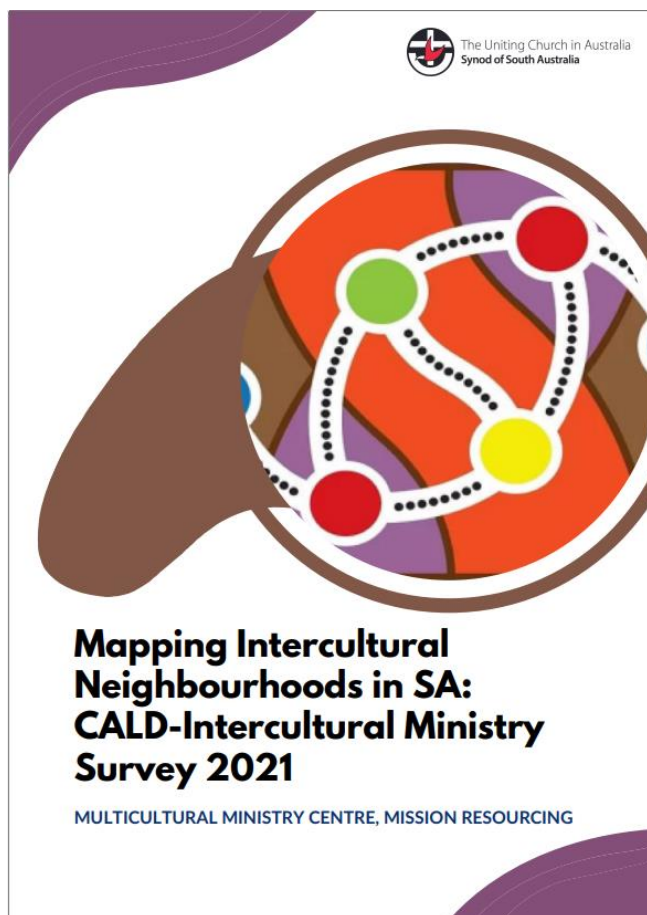
Rev Dr Goh outlined:

- Research confirming the gap between the aspiration for cultural diversity in congregations and what occurs in practice.
- Changing demographics in SA presents an opportunity for congregations to renew themselves (e.g. In 2021, there were more church attenders born overseas (37%) than in the Australian community (28%) and it has risen over time, 2021 NCLS).
- There are some CALD specific congregations and some congregations that have low cultural diversity. While most congregations can be described as “mono-cultural Anglo,” there are some multicultural (i.e. where no one ethnic group accounts for 80% or more of the membership) and CALD congregations/faith communities in UCA SA.
- Some CALD congregations in SA have their own building, but more than 80% are hiring or leasing space. Three CALD congregations in UCA SA who have beneficial use of property are: Vermont Fijian, Adelaide Korean, and South Sudanese Uniting Church.
- A hope that there is an intentional approach and investment in seeing CALD congregations as a missional partner rather than a tenant, or solely as a source of income.

- Hearing from CALD church leaders they don't have the capacity to maintain the property to meet the safety standards.
- There is a challenge to align the ethos, governance and policies of the UCA in CALD churches. While UCA is open to multiculturalism, a lot of CALD congregations we are in relationship with are theologically different (some of them come from Pentecostal traditions) which presents significant work to bridge the gap.
- Affirmed the acknowledgement of CALD opportunity in the report to the 2024 Synod

Further discussions touched on:

- The overall vision of working towards missionally vibrant multicultural and intercultural congregations in safe properties
- CALD congregations/faith community sharing by way of lease from a congregation with responsible authority (beneficial use) of property may over several years move to hold the responsible authority (beneficial use).
- Work by the Presbytery Leaders and the working group about the sharing of Uniting Church property, developing tools to make this easier, and how this may present missional opportunities for CALD congregations and faith communities in the future. Discussion affirmed the benefit of fostering relationships that are mission/ministry based and not purely lease/income based.
- Both David Bailey and Paul Goh felt it was necessary to have an MOU template for a property sharing with CALD churches that could be used Synod-wide.
- The lack of an intentional culturally relevant system/mechanism within the Presbyteries and Synod to support CALD congregations to meet their obligations.
- The need to create protocol or guidelines to guide how to share properties to make it easier to draw on the CALD opportunity. If CALD congregations don't have any friends or connections between congregation and the synod office, it makes it very hard to connect.
- Lack of awareness about who are the CALD congregations and how to contact them.
- Congregations can develop intercultural capacity through participating in Mission Resourcing's Awaken Adelaide (Intercultural Neighbourhood Congregation Pilot) and Cross-Cultural Workshops (e.g. Living together as God's people in this place).
- The [Mapping Intercultural Neighbourhoods in SA Ministry Survey 2021](#)
- In need of continuing implementation and monitoring of the Synod Action Plan for Becoming a CALD and Intercultural Church: [2022-2025 UCA SA - Culturally & Linguistically Diverse \(CALD\) Ministry](#)



The challenge of making easier pathways into the Uniting Church for CALD congregations was heard in the final report of Act2: The Gift of the Spirit (Assembly July 2024). We heard stories where the vibrancy and experience of CALD communities was not matched by the practical support offered from their presbytery. We heard about difficulties applying the regulations for faith communities and the challenges of sharing property (p.20).

There may always be a clash of cultures for any group seeking to find a pathway into the Uniting Church. CALD communities face particular challenges. We seem at times to get caught up in the complexity of our structures and processes. As one group observed, “Complex structures mean we spend a lot of time talking about who and what the UCA is instead of talking about Jesus.” We are concerned to assure ourselves about new communities’

commitment to us and our identity. As one group put it, ‘How do you ensure there is alignment of new communities with the governance, polity and ethos of the Uniting Church and its Regulations’ (p.35).

10. Opportunity through population growth and change

The categories review was about existing congregations. Questions arose through this about where population is growing and changing that Presbyteries need to be aware about in considering new congregations.

The State Planning Commission are responsible for planning the regions of SA. Online tools for different regions show plans for population growth⁴. This includes planning ahead for land release, such as new suburbs and redeveloping existing suburbs.

Long term major growth areas are in table 4.

⁴ [Regional plans | PlanSA](#)

Location	Long Term Population	When Residents Move in
Copper Coast		
Two Wells	20,000	Underway
Riverlea (west of Virginia)	30 - 50,000	Started 2023
Concordia (east of Gawler)	30,000	Possibly after 2030
Kudla (west of Gawler)	8000	Possibly after 2030
Roseworthy	20,000	Underway
Metropolitan Adelaide		
Around Modbury, West Lakes, Seaton, Port Adelaide, Marion, Lonsdale, Noarlunga Centre, Christies Beach, and many major road corridors in inner Adelaide	50,000	Underway
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

Table 4 Population Growth Areas in SA

11. CONCLUSION

The next steps are for the Presbyteries to continue having conversations with their congregations about where they are in terms of missional viability and building safety. These conversations will be supported and in part resourced by the Synod.

Progress has occurred towards a vision of vibrant congregations in safe buildings that are fit for purpose. The next stage of conversations are happening now and will continue over 2025 and into 2026 to enable by the end of 2026 the development of a map that shows and describes strategic locations for UCA congregations/ faith communities across SA that are missionally vibrant, in safe buildings that are fit for purpose.

These conversations with congregations will involve taking time to listen, explore, pray and discern the future. For some it will be continuing to be faithful in the worship and witness and service that they have been exercising. For some it will be taking bold steps to revitalise and renew their congregational and missional life. For others it will be moving from being a congregation with a building to meeting in another space or becoming a faith community. For some it will be making the difficult decision to close and joining another congregation. This may involve handing on the stewardship of the mission to another group who may carry it forward.

These are important conversations to enable the love of God to continue to be known through our congregations, including ones yet to be started, across a growing and changing South Australian community.

Synod Strategy and Property (Mission and Planning) Working Group

Date of Report – 1st October 2024



**SYNOD DECISIONS 2021 – 2023 RELATED TO THE
STRATEGY AND PLANNING (MISSION AND PROPERTY) WORKING GROUP**



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia
11-13 February 2021

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.

Synod 22



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia
 24 & 25 June 2022

2022 Decision #S22.05

STRATEGY AND PLANNING (MISSION & PROPERTY) WORKING GROUP

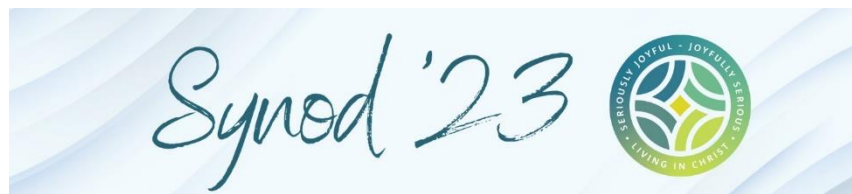
It was AGREED (by consensus) that the Synod of SA resolve to:

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.

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.



2023 Decision # S23.04

SYNOD STRATEGY & PLANNING (MISSION & PROPERTY) WORKING GROUP

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.



Attachment 2 to the Synod Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) Working Group Report

CONVERSATION CATEGORIES

These summary classifications are used by each Presbytery to allocate a congregation on the basis of the Property Viability Score, the self-rated Mission Viability Score, and the knowledge the Presbytery has of the congregation. They are meant to be used as starting point for helpful missional conversations and not to be used as a final determination of the current or future state of any church.

Mission is the primary consideration in these classifications. Property is secondary.

INVEST/STRONG	<p>Invest includes strong congregations with strong missional viability and probably high property score</p> <p>Invest means a vibrant and strong missional congregation (strong missional viability) in a functional and safe property. It means a growing congregation, normally 120 plus with several staff, strong discipleship pathways and good missional outcomes. These churches have the greatest potential to grow further and plant new churches in an ongoing way.</p> <p>Invest also includes church plants with strong missional viability and irrelevant property score. Church plant means a new and vibrant missional faith community (usually) which may or may not have its own property. It may be a restart, a campus or a new start from nothing. It has been started with a very clear missional focus and is in the process of developing areas of worship, witness and service – as well as overt assimilation and discipleship pathways.</p> <p>There is no doubt that church plants provide one of the best ways for the church to fulfil God's mission. As part of its Strategy and Planning for Mission and Property, Presbyteries and the Synod need to look at ways to exponentially increase the investment in church planting.</p>
GROWTH	<p>Growth includes congregations with medium missional viability and moderate property score</p> <p>Growth means a healthy missional congregation (mid missional viability) in a functional and safe property. It means a congregation (rural normally 30-100, urban normally 60-120) usually with a full-time or part-time ministry agent with some evidence of discipleship pathways and some missional outcomes.</p> <p>Especially for rural churches - these churches are important to the local community and have ministries that reach out to their community – Op shop, Coffee Mornings, Craft Group, Ladies/Men's Groups etc.</p>

CONSULT	<p>Consult includes low missional viability and moderate property score</p> <p>Consult means a congregation in maintenance mode in a functional and safe property. It means a congregation (rural normally 10-30, urban normally 20-60) usually with a paid (part-time) ministry agent with a strong pastoral culture of caring for the members. Members have been faithful Christians but now they are generally tired. Most of the ministries are for the current membership and most energy and time goes to keeping the congregation functioning each week and fulfilling the requirements of the Regulations for congregations. There is usually little evidence of discipleship pathways and missional outcomes. Finances are just okay – but urban congregations they are often subsidised by the renting out the property to other groups but with no missional intent.</p> <p>These congregations have provided and still provide a faithful witness to the Gospel in their local community - and this should be celebrated - but they usually do not have the energy or inclination to take any proactive steps towards renewal by themselves.</p>
LEGACY	<p>Legacy means congregations with low missional viability and probably low property score</p> <p>For small rural congregations, legacy means a congregation which is normally less than 10 people and who usually have minimal paid ministry time. There is usually little evidence of discipleship pathways and missional outcomes. However there is a strong sense of community with the faithful members supporting and caring for one another and serving the church well. The members want to keep the church going as a witness in the community but each year more responsibilities fall on fewer people and maintaining the building (even insuring) is a challenge. Members are tired. These congregations probably will not move into growth mode and are not usually suitable for a new church plant.</p> <p>For small urban congregations, legacy means a congregation which is normally less than 20 people and who may still have a paid ministry agent – often subsidised by the renting out the property to other groups. There is usually little evidence of discipleship pathways and missional outcomes. Members are tired and finances are dwindling. These congregations could still move into growth mode but it will take some courageous, proactive, selfless, missional decisions to do this. Some of these churches would be ideal for church plants with new leadership and members coming in to start a new service.</p> <p>They have limited years, are probably aware of this and so is the wider church. They should be given appropriate final care but minimal other resources. Presbyteries need to take the mission of God and the stewardship of limited resources seriously and progress courageous conversations with these congregations about closing well with members being supported to</p>

LEGACY	go to other nearby UCA churches or meeting together in a home. The properties if suitable should be used for new church plants – or if not suitable sold and the resources ⁵ used for church planting elsewhere.
Strategic Opportunities & Locations	This classification refers to new opportunities in greenfield sites (eg Riverlea) and also churches that are in strategic urban and rural locations where we would almost certainly want to retain a presence and a building. It includes strategic urban locations, regional centres, new opportunities.

⁵ Using resources from sale is called 'Alternative Missional Use' in Regulation 4.11.10 "Alternative Missional Use" means use of property or the income from or proceeds of sale of property by or for

- * new Congregations, faith communities or new worship gatherings within existing church buildings;
- * future new Congregations or faith communities, as stipulated by Synod upon recommendation from the Presbytery;
- * Congregations with inadequate property resources;
- * any Congregation which in the opinion of the Presbytery has significant engagement in mission;
- * Synod or Presbytery approved strategic mission initiatives; or
- * such other missional priorities as the Synod determines;"

Attachment 3 to the Synod Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) Working Group Report

Reference List

Figures:

Figure 1 Synod of SA Conversation Categories from Desktop Data

Figure 2 Decisions at Synod Meetings have built on the Synod Property Review of 2019 - 2020

Figure 3 Extract of Standing Committee Minutes 9 May 2024

Figure 4 Conversation categories across Synod of SA

Figure 5 Missional Metrics

Figure 6 Institutional Metrics

Figure 7 Missional Markers 2.5 and 4.5 year review

Figure 8 UAICC core frameworks to Ministry

Tables

Table 1 – 10 Key learnings of the SSPWG

Table 2 – Synod 2023 Decision & Progress by SSPWG

Table 3 - SA Wide Summary of Churches in categories based on desktop review by each Presbytery

Reports

- God's Church and its Buildings – Are they fit for mission? Synod of South Australia Property Report (2021)
- Synod Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) Report (2022)
- Synod Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) Working Group Report (2023)
- Synod Strategy and Planning (Mission and Property) Working Group Report Regional Reports (2023)
- Property Viability Discussion Paper, Resourcing Ministry Centre (2016)
- Congregational Sustainability Report (2017)
- Doing the Math of Mission. Gill Rendle 2014 Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham
- 2022-2023 Mission Viability Survey
- Mapping Intercultural Neighbourhoods in SA Ministry Survey (2021)
- 2022-2025 UCA SA Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Ministry
- Act 2: The Gift of Spirit (July 2024)

Contact synod@sa.uca.org.au