



muylathina takila-ti Le:wun tunk-ungai tuldangk tunk-ungai  
 Ola ma tumau i le alofa' 사랑 안에서 살기 Tinggal di dalam Kasih  
 Nofoma'u i he Ofa 愛中合居



# B20 SYNOD OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

*An innovative growing church proclaiming Jesus Christ, empowered  
 by the Spirit to transform God's world.*

*'Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth ...  
 I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.' Isaiah 43:19*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The South Australian Synod has in recent years mapped the trajectory of congregations, paying particular attention to their missional context and footprint. Similar to other Synods (and denominations) the context is the church:

- Relocating to the edge of its communities - strategies and opportunities for making connections that have received little previous attention
- Ageing profile in pews on Sunday mornings - an expanding participation of chaplains and other lay people through agencies and organisations, most of which are separately incorporated
- Buildings that are increasingly not fit-for-purpose and expensive to maintain - the challenging questions around how we be church in this new COVID world during rapid change?

2005	2015	2019	2021
Presbytery of SA (302)  (2005 Synod moves to one presbytery and Mission Networks are established)	Presbytery of SA (286)  (At the end of 2014 there is a significant change of leadership in the Synod)	Generate Presbytery (92)	Generate Presbytery (115)
		Transitional Presbytery (181)	Presbytery of Southern SA (64)
			Wimala Presbytery (74)
		Congress (3)	Congress (6)
<b>Total 302</b>	<b>Total 286</b>	<b>Total 276</b>	<b>Total 259</b>

## 2. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND PRESBYTERY RESTRUCTURE

The South Australian Synod report to the Assembly in 2018 reported on the:

- Progress of the Uniting College for Leadership and Theology (UCLT), reshaped to resource the Synod of SA in a period of rapid change, giving focus to educating courageous disciples and leaders, lay and ordained for a healthy future-focused missional church.
- Establishment of the Mission and Leadership Development Board thus providing a strategic framework to strengthen the work of public theology and mission, formation education and discipleship and leadership development.
- Resourcing the 'Generate 2021 Project' focusing on congregational rejuvenation and church planting and the 'Uniting Leaders Project,' a partnership with Queensland Synod, working collaboratively to assess future leadership needs and training of emerging leaders.

- Leadership Development Sub-committee providing the link between these activities and a vehicle for discussion and reflection.

## **2.1 A Strategic Mapping process commenced to:**

- Identify strategic locations for new and existing congregations and the allocation of resources to areas to embrace innovation and change.
- Inform a growing concern for the diversity of theological views within the Synod and congregations becoming disconnected from the wider church.
- Reflect on the lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of Councils.
- Consider a review of Uniting Church structures in SA.

## **2.2 Three New Presbyteries**

- By the end of 2019 three new Presbyteries had been formed and Congress (UAICC SA) was considering whether it too would seek Synod approval to form a fourth Presbytery.
- Forming new presbyteries was not without pain, a huge task which involved many hours of consultation and planning.
- We are immensely grateful to the many people who stepped forward to enable the new Presbyteries to embrace their regulated roles and responsibilities; to offer oversight and support to ministers; and congregations within their bounds and to operate within budget.

### **2.2.1 Generate Presbytery**

- Non-geographic presbyteries are not normative in the Uniting Church but its formation enabled a significant number of congregations throughout SA to remain connected.
- Their focus is to see people come to faith in Jesus Christ, grow in their discipleship, to have new leaders raised up and empowered and congregations planted and renewed.

### **2.2.2 Wimala Presbytery**

- Geographic presbytery encompassing the northern half of the Synod.
- Value gathering and celebrating, nurturing and encouraging people in faith, fostering discipleship and a commitment to acts of outreach and social justice.

### **2.2.3 Presbytery of Southern SA**

- Geographic presbytery encompassing the southern half of the Synod.
- Continues the tasks of developing its vision and strategic goals to encourage congregations and other ministries in their worship witness and service.

## **2.3 The UAICC SA Regional Committee**

- Congress SA has received some delegations of a presbytery.
- They are in the process of preparing a series of MoUs to help clarify their commitment to on-going partnerships with the presbyteries and the Synod.
- They have a major focus on training and formation for new and emerging leaders.

During their first 18 months the Presbyteries embraced the challenges of COVID; formed Pastoral Relations Committees (PRCs); delegated property roles and responsibilities to the Synod; and began working collaboratively with the Synod to identify missionally strategic congregations and church buildings. In the second half of 2021 the Synod Standing Committee will conduct a review of the restructure to determine how it has been received across the church. We are not anticipating returning to a one Presbytery model anytime soon.

## **3. ENGAGEMENT MINISTRY CENTRE**

2019 provided an opportunity to review the Synod's communications strategy. The review recommended the establishment of an Engagement Ministry Centre:

- The appointment of a new Executive Officer Engagement.
- A full-time Graphic and Digital Designer.
- An Engagement and Communications Coordinator with experience in social media and website design.

While there have been some recruitment challenges the Engagement Team has significantly increased the capacity and quality of communications and marketing within the Synod and between the church and the wider community.

#### **4. PLACEMENTS AND SAFE CHURCH MINISTRY CENTRE (included Presbytery PRC prior to the restructure)**

- There has been a significant transition for this team with the establishment of presbyteries, continuing to provide support for new PRCs.
- They have a close working relationship with the National Safe Church Unit, education and compliance.
- Manage Redress, complaints processes, chaplaincy and disaster recovery.
- Resource the work of Synod Placements Committee.

#### **5. UNITINGCARE MINISTRY CENTRE**

- Is the conduit between schools, large organisations and the Synod, with great diversity of relationships?
- Provide a 'home' for Synergy
- Facilitate governance training for parish missions, committees and boards.
- Provide important support for congregational Emergency Relief Centres during COVID.

#### **6. MISSION LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT**

- The Uniting College for Leadership & Theology (UCLT) continues to address the challenges facing the tertiary education sector and more specifically the Theological Colleges in the Uniting Church with courage and tenacity.
- The Synod was surprised and saddened to receive the resignation of long-standing and respected Principal, Rev Professor Andrew Dutney in April this year. While Andrew will continue in his roles as Executive Officer Mission Leadership & Development, Executive Officer ACD and continue teaching writing and research, his contribution as principal will be missed. The process of recruiting a new Principal has commenced.
- It has been exciting to witness the awarding of a Doctorate in Divinity to the Rev Denise Champion in November 2020. A special service was held at Yarthu-Apinthi in Adelaide and in Port Augusta where family and friends were able to proudly recognise Denise's on-going contribution to the church, her commitment to sustainable life-giving community and her love and care for country.
- In June 2021 Rev Dr Denise Champion was inducted as Indigenous Theologian in Residence at the UCLT. Members of UAICC and UCLT have joined with the rest of the Synod in being very excited about this appointment and we look forward to a new chapter in our response to the Covenant between First and Second peoples here in SA.

#### **7. SHAPING THE FUTURE – STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

As managing and living with COVID became somewhat normalised in South Australia, a much needed strategic planning process began in 2020. The Working Group:

- Reviewed the previous strategic plan.
- Began an extensive consultation and discernment process, discovering a lot of 'attitude' towards the Synod but very little understanding of the role and function of the Synod.
- Committed to an education process to understand UCA structure, understanding Synod as congregations, presbyteries, chaplains, small and large organisations, lay and ordained leaders, schools, staff, faculty, committees and boards etc.
- Identified 12 Strategic Priorities.
- Using the colours of SA, the elements of play and movement, 'The Wheel' and its associated Action Plan was created.
- We encouraged the Synod to ask: What might God be up to through your committee, council or board? How might your congregation, ministry team or agency respond to God's invitation to nurture disciples, grow community and be at mission? Why do we want to be followers of Jesus? When is the Synod at its best?
- If you would like information please check out our website <https://sa.uca.org.au/about-us/strategic-plan/> , also featured in the April/May issue of the New Times

## **8. SYNOD STRATEGY AND PLANNING (MISSION AND PROPERTY) WORKING GROUP**

Synod Property Review Report, 'God's Church and its Buildings – Are they fit for Mission?' was received by the Synod at its meeting in February 2021.

- The Resources Board had conducted an intentional property audit across the Synod.
- More than 250 congregations had received individual building safety reports.
- The Property report identified challenges in relation to the future sustainability and stewardship of the church's property resources.
- It was acknowledged that buildings remain an important aspect in the life of the Church; there is a need for property in new and emerging regions; the condition of many existing buildings is deteriorating; and increasingly they are not considered fit for purpose.
- The property situation concerns everyone.
- A Working Group has been established to develop processes that will enable the Synod to more effectively resource and respond to current and future property needs of the church. This group will report to the June 2022 Synod Meeting.

## **9. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The Synod of South Australia continues to struggle with significant division within the church. There has been much pain experienced across the church in recent years and we continue to prayerfully struggle in this space.

Alongside this challenge is a seemingly growing number of activities and events which the church would define as a breach of the Code of Ethics for specified ministry agents or a failure to adhere to the Code of Conduct for lay leaders. The growing litigious nature of people's responses to these events is financially costly and causes great concern. The South Australian Synod has requested the Assembly to review the processes and procedures regarding these matters and our Safe Church Committee is working with the Presbyteries to review our local arrangements. They will also work collaboratively with other Synods to prepare resources which we hope will empower and equip Church Councils to better manage these events.

Many congregations have done an extraordinary job of responding to the needs of their communities during COVID. It seems the larger and the smaller congregations have been most affected but we continue to see innovative and creative responses to the pandemic, which have provided opportunities to share the Gospel, care for others, grow virtual communities and develop new ways to be the church.

It is important to recognise and say thank you as the Synod continues to be supported and resourced by an extraordinarily gifted and faithful group of people who serve on committees and boards; give willingly of their time and gifts; work huge hours; and enable the Uniting Church here in South Australia to be a vibrant mission-focused church.

**Rev Felicity Amery**  
**General Secretary**  
**Synod of South Australia**