



SOUTHERN SYNOD



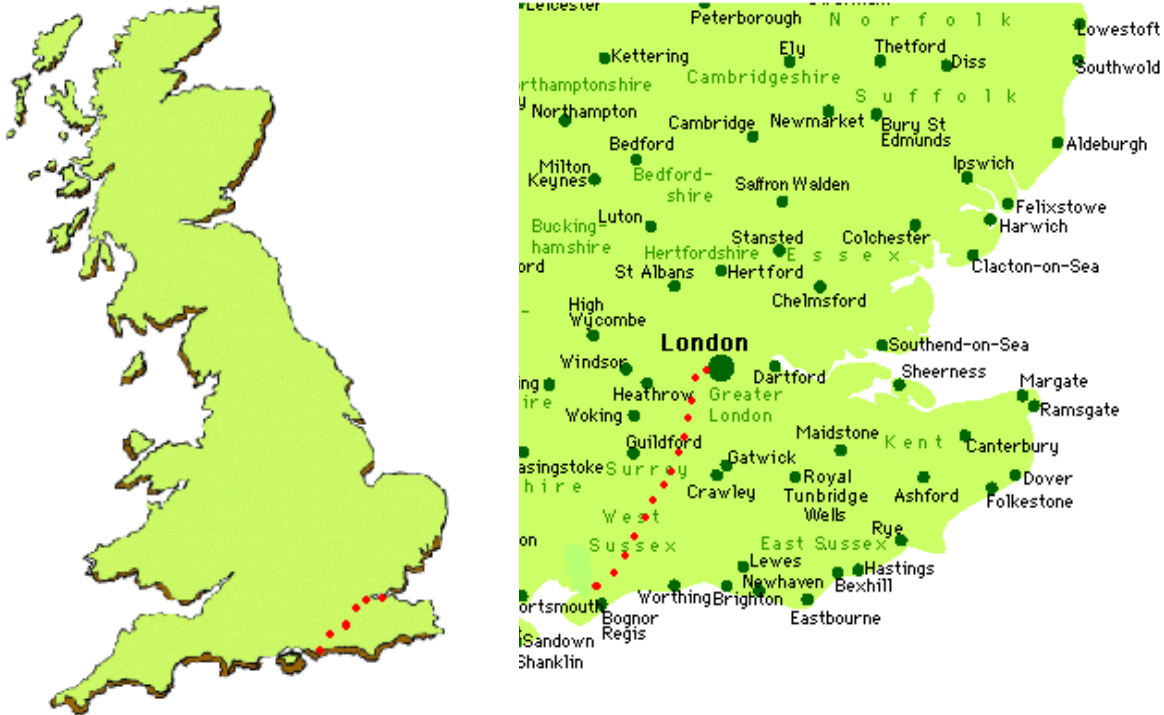
Profile

CONTENTS

NO.	ITEM	PAGE
1	SYNOD OUTLINE	3
2	SYNOD STRATEGY	5
3	SYNOD TODAY	7
4	CHALLENGES	11
5	SYNOD TOGETHER	11
6	SYNOD CENTRAL RESOURCES	12
7	SYNOD OFFICERS & STAFF	13
8	SYNOD COMMITTEE STRUCTURE	16
9	SYNOD AND UNITED AREAS	17

SYNOD OUTLINE

The Synod serves United Reformed Churches in the south-eastern corner of England (on the map below to the east of the red dotted line and south of the River Thames) with a large coastal boundary that stretches from the Thames estuary in the north, bearing east through the Medway Towns and then alongside the Straits of Dover finally curving around the edge of the English Channel westwards through Hastings and Eastbourne as far as Bognor Regis and Chichester.



Covering something in excess of three thousand square miles of England, Southern Synod takes in the whole of Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex, the eastern portion of Surrey and the twelve London Boroughs south of the Thames. It's as varied and stimulating as anywhere. There are new towns, two of the Government's south east 'growth areas' (Ashford and Thames Gateway) but also ancient settlements that welcomed St Augustine. There are thriving metropolitan centres and dying sink estates. There are wealthy suburbs and run down Victorian towns. There is glorious downland to trudge for personal renewal and derelict brown field sites to transform for community regeneration. There are commercial docks and ports of entry for tourist and refugee alike. There is an International Airport for those living for tomorrow and historic Cinque Ports for those who also have an eye for yesterday. There are genteel seaside resorts with easy rides for wheelchairs and cool-as-cool nightlife centres with perilous rides for the jet set. There are Cathedral cities and centres of learning. There is the eastern stretch of the Pilgrim's Way and the western end of the Eurostar line. And each in their own way adds colour and texture to the picture of Southern Synod. Each shapes life. Each offers. Each demands. Each is part of the Kingdom. Each provides context for mission. Each beckons out of the Synod a response, a message, an authentic witness.

London plays a significant role in the life of Britain, and not least therefore in the affairs of Southern Synod. The capital influences who we are and how we experience life, with its heady juxtaposing of wealth and poverty, of high culture and narcissism, of multi-cultural collaboration and racism. Southern Synod treasures the place that its London churches have within its life and work, especially as enthusiastic Christians from other parts of the globe increasingly people these urban congregations, bringing a life and hope that had previously begun to disappear.

Of course, not every community in Southern is close to London. It's a long way from East Wittering. In some areas of white, middle class Kent it seems that London's multi-culturalism is a world away. For thousands in Surrey it's the place to escape from come 5:00 pm (or much later). For the many who think small is beautiful it's the sleeping giant 'out there'. Serving a Synod of such disparate characteristics care is needed to give balanced focus to London and not-London when setting the Synod's priorities and programmes.

Europe also sets more than a geographical boundary for Southern. European Union enlargement has brought renewed emphasis upon issues of free trade, open borders and increasing integration, bringing both promises and threats that stir the feelings of Europhile and Europhobe alike. Brexit threatens to make the border more complicated with uncertain consequences for communities nearby. The Kent coast is one of the gateways to the continent making the south east of England familiar with asylum seekers from countless countries, many of whom have sacrificed everything for 'the good life' here. It stretches the resourcefulness and hospitality of a people already under strain.

Contrary to popular opinion, though the southeast is home to some exceptionally privileged and financially rich people (many young professionals in particular) there is not unbounded wealth in the Home Counties and wealth and poverty are often adjacent. Statistics show that some of the poorest wards in England are to be found in areas like Medway and Hastings, and that the standard of living even for apparently well-paid people is compromised by a high cost of living, especially in relation to housing. First time buyers, low paid key workers and fixed income pensioners can struggle. These factors raise the issues of how to enable and enrich community.

The Southern Synod recognises that, with the whole Church, it exists to engage with the world which shapes the lives of its members. It is called to be a foretaste of the Kingdom of God which is 'justice and joy', 'challenge and choice'.¹

Coastal and country, city and suburban, our context and lifestyles vary considerably but all of us in our own ways are striving to be "Christ's people transformed by the Gospel, making a difference", as the United Reformed Church puts it.

We are on a journey into new ways of being the Church in an ever-changing world. We believe God is still speaking: calling, using and sustaining the Church as doers of God's mission and that is the source of our purpose and hope. Our task is to pray, love and live in such a way as to become Christ to those around us. So we continue in Southern Synod on our missional discipleship.

¹ Bryn A. Rees 1911-83 (Rejoice and Sing 200)

SYNOD STRATEGY

(As agreed by Synod Together October 2018)

1. Introduction

The Synod Structures report in 2010 boldly declared that we strive always to be 'Christ's people ... transformed by the Gospel ... making a difference.' This is why we exist, and as this vision becomes reality we seek to be a foretaste of the kingdom of God, which is justice and joy. With a renewed ecumenical focus, we are driven by the Synod Mission Criteria which undergirds all our thinking. The Synod's mission is to encourage and enable local churches in God's mission. By God's grace, we want to encourage growth in depth and breadth.

2. The Synod exists to encourage, challenge and resource the life and mission of the local church or clusters of local churches within the geographical area of Southern Synod of the United Reformed Church, its people and buildings.

3. The Synod Mission Criteria document agreed in 2010 stated that the Synod is committed to:

- looking for new opportunities for being the Church in the geographical area of the Synod
- supporting and resourcing the local churches to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ
- caring pastorally for its local churches, ministers and staff
- supporting and resourcing local churches to provide relevant, inspiring and engaging worship
- being aware of the economic, political and social context of life in Southern England and will seek to help local churches address the implications of these issues for their life and work
- the proper care and administration of its resources through its personnel, finances and buildings
- the wider Church of God through the United Reformed Church nationally, ecumenical relationships and the world church
- addressing issues of justice, peace and the environment
- regularly reviewing its life and mission in light of the above criteria, always seeking the prompting and guidance of the Holy Spirit .

4. These are complementary to the full functions of Synods as shown in The Manual at https://www.urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/B_The_structure_of_the_URC_18_10_17.pdf

5. Growth is never accidental. We grow in breadth and depth because of the grace of God. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit we will discharge these responsibilities by helping each local church discern their role in God's mission by

- a) Being transformed by the Gospel
- b) Making new disciples
- c) Serving the people of the geographical area known as Southern Synod

5.1 Transformed by the Gospel. The Catch the Vision Prayer declared that we seek to be Christ's people transformed by the gospel, announcing good news to the poor proclaiming freedom for those in prisons of wealth, poverty, disease and disorder, committed to making a difference to the world's kingdoms as we live Christ's kingdom. We need to allow ourselves to be transformed by the Gospel in order to live a life close to God. This means taking risks as we become more honest with ourselves and more honest with God by

- encouraging a sound prayer life through Walking the Way resources on the Synod website and the Mission and Vision Newsletter;

- encouraging growth through training provision regardless of age or ability which supports a variety of ministries: training elders or accrediting lay preachers or simply encouraging people to learn more about being the people God intends them to be; this may include MAD (Make a Difference) Days, Stepwise, Working with Small Groups and Growing Discipleship to give confidence;
- helping each local church discern their role in God's mission by nurturing a vision which is attainable through the LMMR process;

5.2 Making new disciples. A disciple is someone who follows Jesus Christ. With him as our companion and guide we can travel through life differently, and we hope others will share the adventure with us. We want to be more faithful in our discipleship and allow God to shape our priorities and values by developing our faith and the faith of those we encounter. The Christian gospel is good news and we need to find new ways of telling the story, of explaining the faith and giving a reason for the hope that is in us by

- making good use of the rich resources of paid staff and volunteers especially the Children's and Youth Development Officer (CYDO), Ecumenical Development Officer, Mission Officer and Training Development Officer;
- addressing the needs of local churches by looking at ways the Synod can ease the lack of lay preachers and treasurers within our Synod;
- ensuring good pastoral care is given to local churches and ministers through the care and attention of Synod Areas and the United Area.

5.3 Serving the people of the geographical area known as Southern Synod. If we are to be transformed by the Gospel, then we need to be active in making a difference in the world by witnessing to God's love and justice. Working in partnership with others who are transforming people's lives we will need to seek to address the global issues confronting society so that every person of God may flourish by

- helping each local church discern its priorities by informing, stimulating and supporting through the provision of financial resources to support the mission of local churches through investment in buildings, facilities and projects;
- providing high quality speedy advice on a variety of issues for local churches when they feel out of their depth especially easing administrative burdens.

6. Over the next five years the priorities of the Southern Synod will be:

1. Supporting Walking the Way as the cornerstone of our planning and activity.
2. Encouraging local churches to review their local mission and ministry and to identify their own priorities within Walking the Way.
3. Working for an equitable use of resources within the Synod and across the URC.

7. These priorities will be reviewed every three years so that this becomes a Living Document. The above lists are not exhaustive. However, it is important to remember to do a few things and to do them well - the 7th mark of a healthy church.

SYNOD TODAY

Many pages could be filled with stories of work being undertaken faithfully and with imagination across the 146 churches of the Synod. The ones selected to be featured on these pages are intended to give some flavour of life around the Synod today with a principal focus on projects where some form of Synod support has been crucial.

WEST THAMESMEAD

The Revds Sally and Andrew Willett, Special Category Ministers were called to plant a church in West Thamesmead. They arrived in April 2016, with no team, no building, but with a faithful God. He sent them a Bible college student to work with them on placement. They knocked on every door in West Thamesmead to say hello, and it was heart-warming to have a positive reaction from most. There are lots of stories to tell of encounters with people as they organised many community activities, each one having a little more spiritual input. Then at the end of January 2017 they started regular Sunday worship. It seems to be going well and by their 2nd anniversary in January 2019, they had over 70 attending their inter-cultural church.

FOREST CHURCH COMES TO BRIGHTON

"I would rather be in the mountains thinking about God, than in church thinking about the mountains," said John Muir, the 19th Century conservationist. With Forest Church, you can do both! Forest Church not only takes away the walls, it seeks to make a deeper connection with God through paying closer attention to nature.

Brighthelm started a Forest Church in November 2016, in collaboration with a Baptist church. They call themselves 'Open Sky'. They meet every month, on the second Sunday. They have met on the beach and on a golf course, but since February 2019 have been meeting in the same woodland clearing on the Downs at the edge of the city. It has been great to see the wood change through the seasons, and different aspects of these changes have triggered the different themes of the gatherings. Find out more at www.openskybrighton.com

CROSSWAY CHRISTIAN CENTRE

By the time the new building at Crossway, Elephant and Castle was open the Borough Councillors claimed it to be 'the jewel in the crown of regeneration'. The scheme was only made possible with the support of the Synod Moderator, Trust Company and Property Officer, who worked tirelessly with the Special Category Minister to negotiate the terms by which the United Reformed Church would move the church building to its new home. Once this was secured the work to design and build a new church was put in motion and the teamwork between all those involved resulted in the 'gem' that now serves the community. The Synod did not stop with the opening of the building and have secured further ministry to ensure that mission and evangelism is at the forefront of their efforts going forward.

CHAPLAIN & ADVOCATE TO THE ELDERLY: The Revd Dr Janet Hopewell

My brief as Southern Synod Chaplain and Advocate for the Elderly is to promote the importance of spiritual care in later life. The responsibilities of the post are split between Bognor Regis, West Sussex, with a higher than average demographic of retirees, and the mostly ageing congregations scattered in local churches throughout the Synod.

At Pagham URC we have been running a flourishing drop-in dementia-friendly café for over a year now, which draws in the local community. Some guests come from the care homes in Bognor where I take services. We are known as providing a welcoming and safe space for people with dementia.

For local churches who wish to explore supporting older congregations, including people living with dementia, I offer an introductory session: "What is dementia and what can the church do to help?" This includes sign-posting to further resources and food for thought for future Church Meetings.

KOREAN MINISTRY: The Revd Dr Suk In Lee

New Malden and Kingston are home to the largest Korean community in Europe. There are 50 independent Korean Christian congregations in the area, which tend to be very conservative and inward looking. I was appointed 13 years ago as a 'bridge' minister (special category ministry, stipendiary), working equally in Kingston URC and New Malden URC, to try and bring the North and South Korean communities together with the British Christians, both locally and internationally. There have been most encouraging results. The Koreans seem to like the URC and its style of worship (despite the language and culture barriers). Even some North Koreans appreciate the warm welcome we give them. The North and South Koreans may be at war in the Korean peninsula but in our churches they seem reconciled and generally get along peacefully and happily.

I am now being assisted by So Young Jung who has come from the Presbyterian Church in Korea, our sister Church, to minister particularly to children and women.

PARTNERSHIP WITH LONDON INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANITY (LICC)

From September 2019, ten churches from across Southern Synod have signed up to be part of a Learning Hub led by LICC, designed to help them move towards becoming churches growing missional disciples. Through meeting together on four occasions in the first year, the delegates will be given the vision, motivation and tools to make key changes within their local churches. With resources to work through with their congregation, this is a journey which could fundamentally change the ethos and mindset of these churches.

EMMANUEL PROJECT EASTBOURNE

A church that is not large enough to hold its Sunday congregation! What a headache! Emmanuel Eastbourne was formed from four former Methodist and United Reformed congregations and worshippers have learned that they need to arrive early, to ensure they get a seat at the Greenfield Road Methodist church, currently being used for Sunday services. However, help is at hand. The site of the former Upperton URC has been cleared and work has begun on a building designed to meet Emmanuel's declared aim which is: 'Expecting great things from God - attempting great things for God'. The new church will include seating for 250 people, a cafe, lots of community space, and on-site parking.

With a scheduled completion in 2021 it will be an exciting time for the congregation and a real opportunity for this new church to serve the people of Eastbourne.

Find out more and see an architect's drawing at www.emmanueleastbourne.org.uk

SYNOD TOGETHER

There are two, one-day **Synod Together** meetings a year, normally on Saturdays in March and October. Exceptionally, Synod Together meetings may also be called for special purposes or if business requires it. Meetings are normally chaired by the Synod Moderator.

Membership

Membership of Synod Together is as stated in the URC Manual Section B 'The Structure of the United Reformed Church' para 2.(4)(a) to (j). Following the demise of District Councils and the formation of Synod and United Areas in 2010, Synod agreed to the addition of Area Leaders, Treasurers and Administrators from each Synod/United Area, where they are not already a member of Synod, on a co-option basis.

Central Structures

1. The URC (Southern Synod) Trust Ltd ("The Trust Company")
2. Synod Council (with Nominations)
3. Synod Officers
4. Synod Finance Committee
5. Synod Ministries Committee
6. Synod Property Committee
7. Various sub-committees, panels and ad hoc groups

More information on the committees can be found in the *Welcome to Southern Synod* document:
<https://southernsynodurc.org.uk/welcome-to-southern-synod>

SYNOD CENTRAL RESOURCES

The Synod Office is for the time being at East Croydon United Reformed Church. It is the focus of the Synod's central functions and the base for the Moderator, the Synod's administrative, finance and property staff and the core Committees and Trust. Local churches may wish to make initial contacts with their Area Officers, but they are also encouraged, whenever necessary, to contact the Office. The offices are within three minutes' walk of East Croydon station. A major redevelopment of the whole church and office premises is planned which would require the Synod Office to be relocated elsewhere temporarily.

Southern Synod functions in four areas called **Synod Areas** and one **United Area** to which some authority and powers have been devolved. It must be stressed that there is still one Southern Synod, but meeting and functioning in areas and coordinated by its central committees.

The Synod still has **one** Moderator, whilst the Areas have Area Leaders who are unpaid volunteers.

Moderator's Manse

A new manse will need to be purchased and it is proposed that this is not done until the new Moderator has been appointed. The manse will need to be reasonably near to the Synod Office and within the M25. Initially a temporary manse will be provided.

Finances

The Southern Synod Trust holds all the funds. As at 31st December 2018 total net funds were £24.1 million. Most are invested through Epworth with the balance held at CAF. At the end of 2018, Restricted Funds totalled £933,000, Designated Funds – mainly the Manse Fund – totalled £9.9 million with General Purpose Funds (GPF) totalling £13.2 million.

The Synod does not levy a charge on the local churches to cover its costs. Income from investments is allocated towards Synod costs. Historically this is insufficient to cover all the Synods expenses. Where possible the proceeds from the sale of church buildings are used to balance the accounts. In years when no church building is sold the deficit is balanced by funds from the General Purposes Fund.

In 2016 the Synod reinstated a policy of providing grants and loans to churches to assist with their mission projects. This was the result of a significant improvement in the in the finances of the Synod following difficulties in 2011. In 2018 a review of the grants and loans scheme was commissioned by Synod Together. The revised scheme was agreed by the October 2019 Synod Together meeting for implementation in January 2020 with a review of progress to take place in September 2021.

The revised scheme has established two new funds: "Strategic Mission Fund" and "Church Buildings Fund". The funds will each have an annual budget of £1.0 million in 2021 and 2022. Within the Church Buildings Fund each of the Synod's churches will be able to draw on a £2,000 per annum grant for building work.

SYNOD OFFICERS AND STAFF

Synod Officers

Moderator
Clerk
Treasurer (Honorary)

The Revd Bridget Banks
The Revd Russell Furley-Smith
Mr John Denison

Convener of Synod Trust (Honorary)

Mr Alan Kirby

Synod Office Staff

Finance Officer and Trust Secretary
Moderator's & Synod Clerk's PA
Office and Finance Administrator

Mrs Catherine Kingdom
Mrs Lauren King
Ms Bea Gobey

- This post holder also provides Administrative Support for:
Children's and Youth Development Officer, Ecumenical
Development Officer, Mission Development Officer and
the Training and Development Officer.

Property Officer and Assistant Trust Secretary
Property Administrator

Mr Colin McCracken
Mr Mark Price-Haworth

Synod Field Staff

Children's and Youth Development Officer (CYDO)
Ecumenical Development Officer (EDO)
Mission Development Officer (MDO)
Safeguarding Officer (SO) - Shared with Thames North Synod
Training and Development Officer (TDO)

Mr Thomas Hackett
The Revd Dr Paul Dean
Mr Martin Hayward
Mrs Belinda Herbert
The Revd Andy Twilley

The Synod staff work with appropriate Synod Committees, servicing them as necessary. They also work closely with the relevant finance and property people in the Synod and United Areas (S/UA) and develop their relationships with Area Meetings and local churches. They offer support to S/UAs and local churches as necessary and appropriate.

Children's and Youth Work

Our CYDO's role is to support and equip local churches in their work with children and young people, both on a Sunday and throughout the week.

The Synod's Children and Youth Work Committee sets the strategy. It has a **vision** for churches which offer opportunities for children and young people to:

- have fun, make friends, and find a sense of belonging in a safe and welcoming community
- experience worship and explore spirituality in a way which helps them find faith for themselves
- be heard, take responsibility, and make a difference to the Church and the world
- experience the Church beyond the local level – regional, national & international.

The Committee **aims** to use its resources, training provision and influence to encourage and enable churches to:

- recruit and develop more leaders
- get more involved with the children and young people in their community and congregation
- provide opportunities for participation in the life and mission of the Church, including its worship.

We offer funded places at URC Youth Assembly and have a representative on URC Youth Executive. Our young people have also represented the URC internationally, including recently at the Mission House in Amsterdam, at the Starpoint Festival in Hungary and in Israel/Palestine.

Ecumenical Work

The Moderator's ecumenical role in the Synod is exciting in a number of ways, with good opportunity to take part in Church Leaders' meetings. The pan-London meeting is seeking to focus on topics such as social engagement/cohesion; asylum seekers and refugees; needs of homeless people; and responses to climate change. The Kent Church Leaders meet at Aylesford Priory periodically for breakfast together. Churches Together in South London has a Big Gathering organised by an effective Ecumenical Officer; recent issues they have tackled include responses to the introduction of Universal Credit, and how to support young people and communities facing the problem of knife crime.

As over 30 of our churches are in Local Ecumenical Partnerships, particularly with Methodists, good liaison with ecumenical Church Leaders is important. There is a Liaison Committee with the Methodist South East District. In March 2018 Synod appointed a half-time Synod Ecumenical Development Officer and it is part of the Moderator's role to supervise this post.

Mission Development

Southern Synod has a full time Mission Development Officer. The aim of this role is: to help equip the churches in their missional discipleship and growth; to affirm their witness and good practice; enable them to see potential; encourage necessary/suitable changes; and to give them the tools to fulfil their calling as a fellowship. This role was created before "Walking the Way - Living the life of Jesus Today" but fits ideally with the ethos of promoting and enabling missional discipleship.

This is achieved through: working with and through the councils of the church to promote, encourage and undertake the promotion of mission to the whole people of God to facilitate the development of the life of the Church at all levels.

Safeguarding

Southern Synod has a Safeguarding Officer who is shared with Thames North Synod. The post holder is:

- to be an advocate and role model for safeguarding in the Synod
- to advise and support the Synod and local Churches in safeguarding matters
- to ensure that accurate records are kept and relevant reports are completed
- to keep abreast of developments in safeguarding and maintain appropriate links.

Synod Property

The Synod has responsibility for 149 church buildings and between 70 and 75 manse at any given time of the year. Of these buildings 2 are without a congregation and currently let out. There are 18 Listed Churches with a further 15 within conservation areas. The Synod also supports one LEP church mission which meets in a school and is without a building. The Synod has a robust Manse Policy which has been recently updated. The aim of the policy is to ensure that all Ministers (including CRCWs) are accommodated in appropriate properties from the resources of the Manse Fund. The Synod has a number of major developments in process which include 2 full redevelopments of large church sites and renovations of other buildings to meet modern requirements.

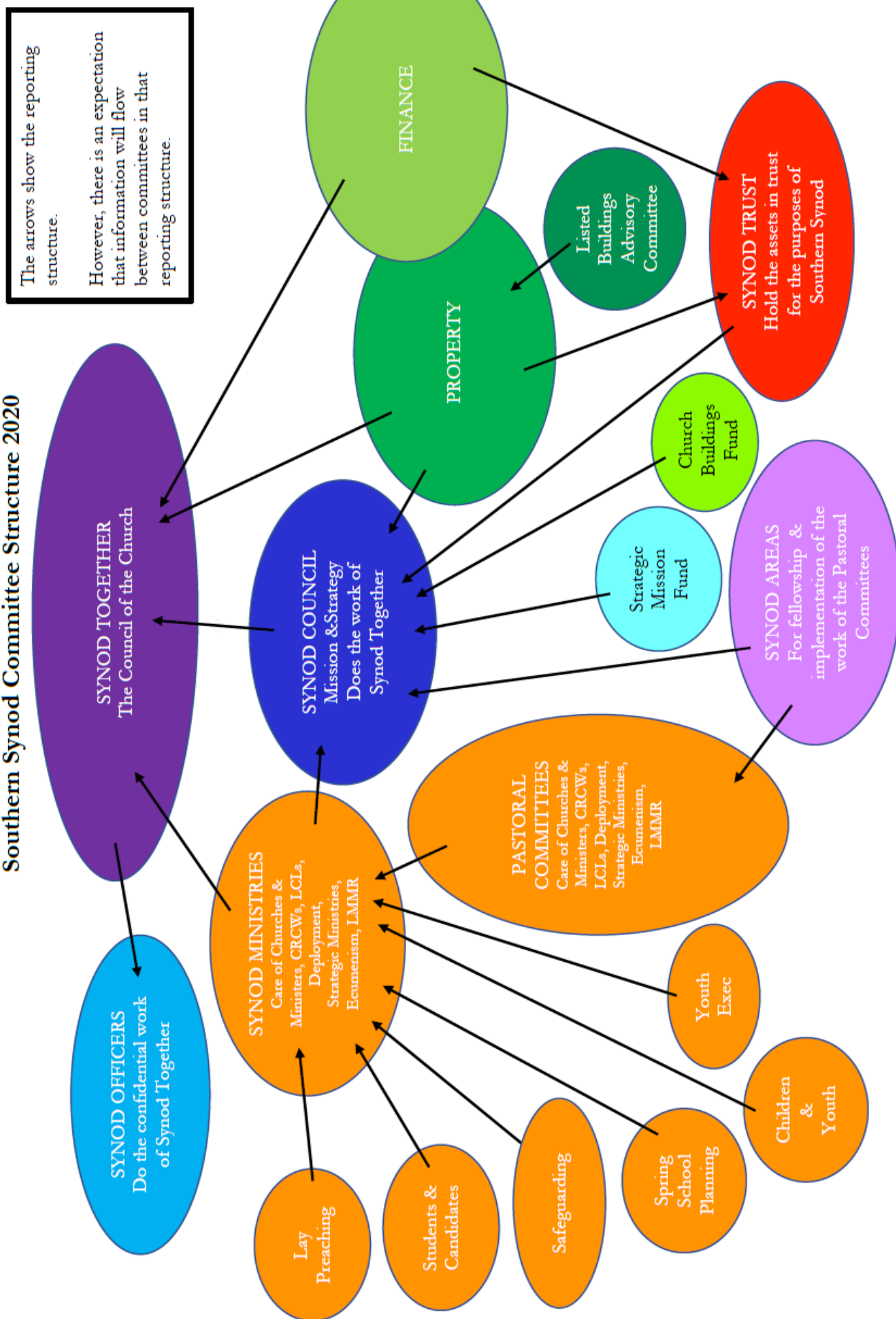
Training and Development

Southern Synod has a full time Training and Development Officer who has a passion to envision and equip Ministers, Elders and churches as a whole, to become the dynamic organisms God has designed them to be. This has led to an increasing sense of expectancy within many of our churches as they have benefitted from the diverse range of training seminars he offers.

M.A.D (Making a Difference) Days: these training days were launched in 2017 and held in each of the five Synod areas. A really good number of folk attended each one (between 60 & 85) and as a result, went away re-enthused and re-envisioned in their walk with God.

Lay Preaching Training: as the number of ordained ministers reduces within the URC, there is an increasing need for more folk to be equipped to lead worship and preach. In 2018, a brand new eight session Lay Preacher's training course was launched. In the first year we had 13 people attend and then in 2019 we were delighted to have 23 people attend. Through this increase there is a sense of anticipation of how God will be using them in the months ahead. We now look forward to the course running again in 2020.

Southern Synod Committee Structure 2020



SYNOD AND UNITED AREAS

Synod Areas

There are four Synod Areas (SAs), viz.

1. **East Kent Synod Area (EKSA);**
2. **South London Synod Area (SLSA);**
3. **Surrey & Sussex Synod Area (S&SSA); and**
4. **West Kent & East Sussex Synod Area (WKESSA).**

The Synod Areas have the delegated powers of Synod in most matters which are exercised in collaboration with Synod Officers and staff to retain the sense of being one Synod. However, some concerns are coordinated centrally, particularly in relation to deployment, finance, property and Trust matters. Each SA is adequately represented on these bodies and takes clear recommendations to the appropriate body. The central Committees dealing with these matters set out guidelines to assist SAs and their Officers in their tasks and ensure there is a fair and consistent approach to these matters. This process of collaboration then leads to informed decisions being made centrally and in partnership, within the context of the whole Synod's resources and expertise.

The key committee in each Area is the **Pastoral Committee**, responsible for dealing with vacancies, interim moderator appointments, concurrence in calls, ordinations and inductions, lay preachers, deployment, support of mission initiatives, grouping, oversight visits, candidates & students, strategic ministries, ecumenical matters, care of ministers (serving and retired; widows and widowers) and CRCWs, resignations, Local Mission and Ministry Review (LMMR), etc. The Pastoral Committees carry out their work in consultation with the Synod Ministries Committee in particular.

Because of the need to weigh resources over the whole of the Synod, ministerial deployment quotas, grants and loans, mission and regeneration projects are made by the relevant Synod Committees, based on recommendations and advice from the SAs.

The Synod/United Areas have the following personnel: Area Leader, Area Administrator, Area Treasurer, Area Pastoral Committee Convenor and Area Property Adviser.

Each Area is free to set up such committees, working groups or individual co-ordinators or posts as it considers necessary to deal with the concerns of the churches in the Area. In some cases, a convenor or post-holder works in an informal network with similar personnel from other Areas, co-ordinated at Synod level. Among these other concerns are lay preaching, youth and children's work, and training.

East Kent Synod Area (EKSA)

East Kent Synod Area (EKSA) is bounded by coastline on three sides and ranges southwards to Hythe, northwards to Margate and eastwards to Dover, with many Kent roads leading to the Cathedral city of Canterbury at the centre, and Ashford in the west. The M2 and M20 are major transport arteries to the Channel Tunnel at Folkestone, and to the port of Dover with its continental trade and travel. HS1 trains connect Ashford International Station to London in less than 40 minutes, as part of a network linking Kent's major towns. Urban regeneration is urgently needed in some places. There are also nature reserves and picturesque villages. Several URC churches trace their roots back to the 17th century, but not all are traditional in worship, and fresh expressions are being explored. With eight LEPs and shared and collaborative ministry with Methodists and Anglicans, there is close cooperation with the two Methodist Circuits and the Kent Church Leaders meeting. Examples of mission work include our involvement with the ecumenical Cross-Links project in Dover, and a New Housing Missioner post at Chilmington Green (Ashford) funded by Methodists and URC. There are many Churches Together groupings, working on projects such as Street Pastors.

South London Synod Area (SLSA)

South London Synod Area is typical of many parts of the URC. We have a very diverse range of churches with members from many ethnic groups. Immigration has been a great gift to our Churches. Many churches have experienced severe decline in the last 30 years. Many used to be larger and this has been particularly tough. A number of churches are run by members in their seventies and eighties. There have been some exciting initiatives and we continue to pray that we will take hold of opportunities to further God's Kingdom.

Surrey & Sussex Synod Area (SSSA)

The Surrey and Sussex Synod Area is a large part in Southern Synod. This presents challenges and opportunities.

Challenges faced include making sure that churches have good pastoral support and keeping up to date with all their needs. We have a good Pastoral Committee made up of people from both Surrey and Sussex. But in recent times it has become increasingly difficult to find people to take on responsibilities.

Opportunities include a number of our churches being in areas where there are growing communities with the building of new homes. We have two Special Category Ministers: one based in Bognor, focusing on the large number of nursing homes and who advocates in the Synod for ministry to the elderly and those suffering from dementia. We also have one based at Brighthelm Centre in Brighton, exploring fresh expressions of church who also champions green issues.

Although it covers a large geographical area from Caterham in the north to Brighton in the south and Chichester to the west and Telscombe Cliffs to the east, most churches are reasonably accessible by good roads (A23, M23 and M25) and rail services. Meetings are held centrally in Crawley.

West Kent & East Sussex Synod Area (WKESSA)

The West Kent and East Sussex Synod Area stretches from urban Medway towns southwards through the affluent commuter areas of Sevenoaks and Tonbridge to the South Coast at Bexhill and Hastings. There are three village chapels but most churches are near the centres of towns with memberships ranging from 20 to 90. Most churches come out of the Congregational tradition.

For over thirty years the area has encouraged what are now called Local Church Leaders. There are currently five in post with two in training. Most of the churches that have grown over the last decade have been led in this way.

Building on this history, in 2018 the Area agreed a Deployment Implementation Plan which rejects the default model of spreading ministers ever more thinly. The precious gift of ministers we want to deploy in a focused way in places where there is energy for mission and signs of hope and growth. The normal pattern is now that a stipendiary minister based in a congregation or congregations also has a percentage of their scoping devoted to Synod Area directed work. This is unlikely to be focused on one church and aims to reflect the minister's individual gifts and enthusiasms.

United Area

There is one United Area (UA) made up mainly of Methodist and United Reformed Churches, viz. **Central Sussex United Area (CSUA)**.

Although the United Area functions very much as the other four Synod Areas there are some inevitable differences in the way it works, dependent on the terms of the constitutions and shared agreements. Steps are taken to ensure adequate consultation with those concerned and to keep the Liaison Group with the Methodist South East District informed of developments.

Central Sussex United Area (CSUA)

The Central Sussex United Area is a large ecumenical region of 24 churches in villages and towns by the sea, in and around the Ashdown Forest and South Downs. It symbolises the unity between denominations as we seek together to share God's love through our mission and ministry in a variety of communities. The CSUA facilitates the sharing of resources, ideas, individual and corporate gifts, in the churches' life and mission and enables them to fulfil mission in the communities they serve, to grow as disciples of Christ, celebrate ecumenical diversity and encourages working together.

Strategies for mission and ministry require ongoing liaison between the denominations to ensure the good deployment of ministerial resources across a widespread geographical area.

Challenges include the need to review frequently ministerial staffing levels and church oversight, which can need sensitive handling and clear direction. Maintaining close relationships and the ecumenical character of the CSUA during times of change or challenge is also a priority.

The CSUA has a supportive leadership team and continues to encourage lay leadership where possible.

To find out more about the CSUA visit: <https://www.csua.org.uk/welcome.htm>

The following map shows the Synod and United Areas:

