



Synod Strategy

Note:

The Southern Synod Strategy is a document for use for all members of Synod including Synod Together, Synod Council, Synod Trust, all Synod Committees and Synod/United Area meetings and Pastoral Committees, Synod office and field staff, local Churches and all members who make up those churches across the Southern Synod. It seeks to be a living document that is open, transparent and regularly reviewed.

Purpose and Functions of Synod

The Synod exists to encourage, challenge and resource the life and mission of the congregations of the United Reformed Church within the geographical area of Southern Synod. It does so recognising the authority of all four councils of the URC (General Assembly, Synod, Church Meeting and Elders Meeting) The functions of Synod are given in the Manual of the United Reformed Church ⁱ.

Synod Mission Criteria and URC initiatives

The Southern Synod Mission criteria (agreed in 2010) support the purpose and functions of Synod ⁱⁱ. This Strategy seeks to implement the purpose and function of Synod in line with those criteria. This Strategy also acknowledges the influence of various URC programmes, such as Catch the Vision, Vision2020 and Walking the Way.

It is also aware of current work being undertaken by General Assembly regarding the Church Life Review. It acknowledges that proposals will be brought in 2025 concerning financial resource sharing, employment of lay workers and provision of shared support services. Whatever is agreed in 2025 may impact this strategy.

Renew, Reimagine and Reorder

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Synod now seeks to renew the life of Synod and local churches, reimagine ways of being church in the next few years and to reorder the way Synod implements its purpose and functions.

Renew:

Given that the Lord Jesus Christ is the reason for all that we do, Synod seeks to support faithful disciples who 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 appropriate ways of telling the story, of explaining the faith and giving a reason for the hope that is in us. (1 Peter 3:15). We will do this by:

- Encouraging personal and corporate devotion. For example, church retreat days.
- Promote prayer
- Support evangelism programs.

Implementing renewal will be the responsibility of the whole Synod but will be regularly monitored by Synod Council, Pastoral Committees. LMMRⁱⁱⁱ provides a useful tool to help churches renew their life and mission.

Reimagine

We will reimagine how to be church by:

- making good use of the rich resource of volunteers and paid staff. These include our field staff for example the Children's and Youth Development Officer (CYDO), Ecumenical Officer (EO), Mission and Discipleship Officer (MDO) and Training and Development Officer (TDO) as well as the office staff.
- Addressing the needs of the local churches by looking at additional and new ways the Synod can support lay and ordained ministry; for example, preaching and by the implementation of the Synod Deployment Policy for Stipendiary Ministry. This will be regularly reviewed by the Synod Ministries Committee.
- Ensuring good pastoral care is given to local churches and ministers through the care and attention of the Synod Area Pastoral Committees and the United Area's Executive:
- Helping each local church discern its priorities by informing, stimulating and supporting through the provision of financial resources for churches in their pursuit of mission. This may be through the Strategic Mission Fund or the Buildings Grants and Loans Panel but not exclusively. The needs and resources available will be regularly monitored by the Synod Finance and Property Committees.
- Encouraging local churches to draw on the richness of our ethos as the United Reformed Church, as they explore different ways in what it means to be a community of faith.
- Providing advice for Local Churches and Pastoral Committees on issues of compliance e.g: Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Annual Returns etc
- Promoting the importance of attendance of local churches and their representatives at Synod Together twice a year
- When appropriate, work with other denominations as we seek to address the global issues confronting society that every person of God may flourish.

Reorder

Over the next few years Synod will seek to reorder the way Synod implements its purpose and functions. It will do this by:

- Ensuring that staff are aware of the Synod Strategy, and have live objectives in line with this strategy. This will be monitored by staff line managers.
- Encouraging church members to participate in the life of the Local Church as well as the wider Councils of the denomination. This will be the responsibility of all Ministers and Elders.
- Reviewing the structures and committees supporting the life and witness of the Synod. This will be the responsibility of Synod Council.
- Working with the Deployment Subgroup to encourage use of the new Deployment Strategy, to be monitored by Synod Ministries Committee.
- Promotion of Safer Recruitment (the responsibility of all)
- Striving for an equitable and appropriate use of financial resources for the Synod and for the National Church (to be implemented by Synod Council in consultation with Synod Trust and Finance Committee).

Implementation and Review

As a Living Document for the life of the Synod, this will be promoted in every committee and working group of the Synod and monitored every year. We ask churches to keep a 'living document' and so we also keep this as a living document. However, it is important to remember to do a few things and to do them well – the 7th Mark of a Healthy Church. Synod Council will undertake a full review of this strategy in 2027.

ⁱ the full functions of Synods in the United Reformed Church as shown in the manual at

https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/B_The_Structure-The_Manual.pdf

ⁱⁱ Synod Mission Criteria

The Synod

1. Is committed to looking for new opportunities for being the church in the geographical area of the Southern Synod
2. is committed to supporting and resourcing the local churches to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ
3. is committed to caring pastorally for its local churches, ministers and staff
4. is committed to supporting and resourcing local churches to provide relevant, inspiring and engaging worship
5. is committed to 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
6. is committed to the proper care and administration of its resource through its personnel, finance and buildings
7. is committed to the wider Church of God through the United Reformed Church nationally, with ecumenical relationships and the world church
8. is committed to addressing the issues of justice, peace and the environment

9. is committed to regularly reviewing its life and mission in light of the above criteria, always seeking the prompting and guidance of the Holy Spirit
iii (General Assembly 2024 Paper H5 and associated Resolutions)