



Synod Profile

November 2025

Southern Synod Profile

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Section 1 - Introduction

Welcome to the 2025 Synod Profile for Southern Synod of the United Reformed Church. We hope you find this profile gives an accurate picture of both the Synod and the place of the United Reformed Church in the geographical region of South East England.

If you are reading this profile with a view to considering whether God is calling you to serve as Moderator of Southern Synod, we hope that you will find this profile a useful tool in the process of discernment.

We offer this prayer as you read it:

Gracious God,
As this profile is read and pondered,
we pray for the gift of your wisdom and discernment.
Speak to those who turn these pages,
that they may hear your voice clearly –
whether calling them forward or leading them along a different path.
Give insight to recognise your purposes,
courage to respond to your invitation,
and peace in the knowing of your will.

Guide our Synod in this time of searching,
and guide those who seek to know if this is where you are calling them to serve.
May your Spirit move in both the reading and the discerning,
that your choice and ours may be one.
In Christ's name we pray.

Amen

Further information is available on the Synod's website: <https://southernsynodurc.org.uk>

Section 2 – Synod Outline



The Synod serves United Reformed Churches in the south-eastern corner of England with a large coastal boundary stretching from the Thames estuary in the north, through the Medway Towns and alongside the Straits of Dover, curving around the English Channel westwards through Hastings and Eastbourne to Bognor Regis and Chichester.

Covering over three thousand square miles, Southern Synod encompasses Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex, eastern Surrey and twelve London boroughs south of the Thames – a region of extraordinary variety, from bustling urban communities to rural landscapes. There are new towns and ancient settlements, thriving metropolitan centres and struggling estates, wealthy suburbs and economically challenged coastal towns. There is glorious downland for

renewal and brownfield sites awaiting regeneration. Commercial ports welcome tourists and those seeking refuge. An International Airport connects us globally whilst historic Cinque Ports remind us of our heritage. Cathedral cities, centres of learning, seaside resorts and vibrant nightlife districts each add texture to Southern Synod's picture. Each shapes life, offers opportunity, makes demands, and provides context for mission.

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly reshaped our communities. It exposed stark health and economic inequalities, accelerated digital divides, and left lasting impacts on mental health and social isolation, particularly among young people and the elderly. Hybrid working has transformed commuting patterns and high street vitality. Many have relocated from London, intensifying housing pressures in coastal and rural areas. Yet the pandemic also revealed remarkable resilience, community solidarity, and churches' creative adaptability in maintaining connection and care.

London significantly influences Southern Synod's life. The capital's juxtaposition of wealth and poverty, high culture and social fragmentation, multi-cultural collaboration and persistent racism shapes our experience. We treasure our South London churches, where Christians from diverse nations and cultures worship together, bringing their own vitality, gifts and hope to urban ministry.

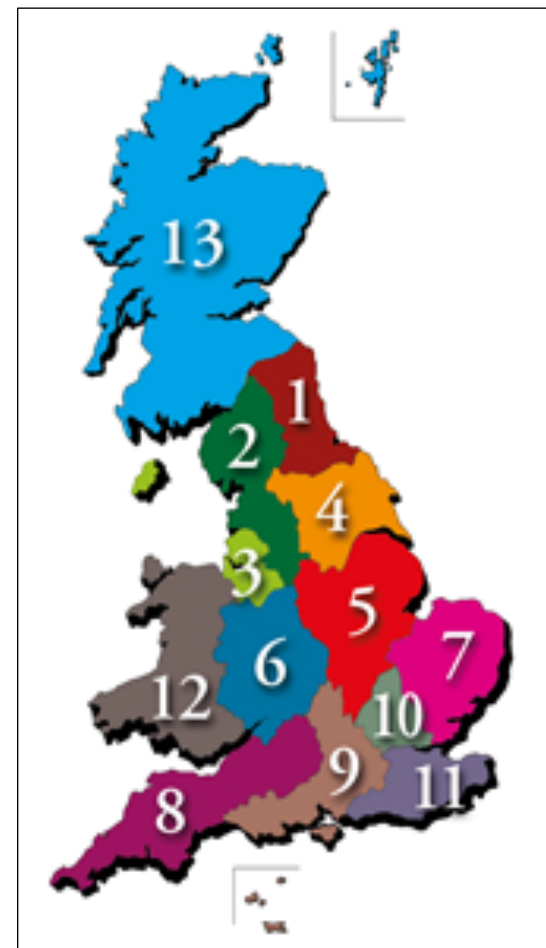
Yet not every Southern community is dominated by London. Distance and perspective vary widely across our Synod, requiring balanced attention to both metropolitan and non-metropolitan contexts when setting priorities. Southern Synod is divided into four distinctive and unique Synod Areas which provides varied and exciting ministerial opportunities.

Post-Brexit, Europe sets more than a geographical boundary. New border complexities affect Kent communities particularly, whilst the southeast continues as a gateway for asylum seekers sacrificing everything for safety and opportunity, stretching local resourcefulness and hospitality amid existing pressures.

Despite perceptions of southeast affluence, poverty sits adjacent to wealth. Areas like Medway contain some of England's most deprived wards. The cost-of-living crisis has intensified struggles for first-time buyers, key workers, fixed-income pensioners, and families. Housing remains critically unaffordable. These realities raise urgent questions about enabling genuine community and tackling inequality.

Southern Synod (Synod 11 on the map) recognises that we exist to engage with the world shaping our members' lives. We are called to embody God's realm of justice and joy, challenge and choice.

Coastal and rural, urban and suburban, our contexts vary considerably, yet all strive to be Christ's people, living out our discipleship in ways that make a difference. We journey into new ways of being Church in an ever-changing world, believing God still speaks, calling and sustaining us as participants in God's mission. Our task remains: to pray, love and live as Christ to those around us, continuing in missional discipleship with purpose and hope.



Section 3 - Challenges and Opportunities Facing Southern Synod

Leading in a Time of Change

Like many denominations across the UK, Southern Synod faces significant challenges that require creative thinking, spiritual discernment, and collaborative leadership. We seek a Synod Moderator who will engage these realities with honesty, hope, and energy - someone who sees challenges not as obstacles but as invitations to reimagine what faithful ministry looks like in our context.

Bridging the Local and the Wider Church

One of our most pressing challenges is fostering a genuine sense of belonging that connects local congregations to the wider URC and Synod family. Many members feel a strong attachment to their local church but struggle to see the value and relevance of denominational connection. There can be a disconnect between grassroots church life and the wider structures - a gap between "us here" and "them out there."

The incoming Moderator will play a vital role in bridging this gap between local to and wider church, helping congregations understand how being part of the URC enriches and enables their mission, while ensuring that Synod and denominational structures remain responsive to local realities. This is about building relationships, telling stories, and creating pathways for genuine participation that make our connectedness tangible and meaningful.

Supporting Collaborative Ministry

An increasing number of our churches are part of multi-church pastorates, where one minister serves several congregations. While this model enables ministry to continue in places that might otherwise struggle, it brings challenges: balancing the needs and expectations of different churches, ensuring each congregation receives adequate pastoral care, supporting ministers who carry complex responsibilities, and helping churches develop their own leadership capacity.

We need creative approaches to resourcing and supporting these pastorates, recognising that "one size fits all" solutions rarely work in our diverse contexts.

Ageing Congregations and Changing Patterns

Many of our churches face the reality of smaller, ageing congregations. This brings both practical challenges - maintaining buildings, sustaining ministries, providing pastoral care - and deeper questions about identity and purpose. How do we honour the faithful witness of longtime members while also creating space for new expressions of church? How do we support congregations through transitions that may feel like loss, while discerning where God is calling us into new life?

Financial Sustainability and Stewardship

Our current financial model presents real challenges. Too many churches have had to become dependent on rental income rather than developing sustainable patterns of giving and mission. At Synod level, we have relied significantly on proceeds from church property sales to finance our work - an approach that is neither sustainable nor missionally focused.

We need to develop healthier financial practices: cultivating generous giving in local churches, helping congregations see their buildings as assets for mission rather than burdens to maintain, and ensuring Synod finances are built on solid foundations rather than one-off windfalls. This requires both practical financial leadership and spiritual formation around stewardship.

The Net Zero Challenge

Like all responsible organisations, we face the challenge of meeting Net Zero carbon targets. Our historic buildings, many of them listed or in conservation areas, present particular difficulties. How do we honour our environmental responsibilities while managing the practical and financial implications of making our buildings more sustainable? This requires technical knowledge, strategic planning, and creative problem-solving.

Southern Synod has already made excellent strides towards Net Zero, achieving the Bronze-Eco Synod Award in March 2025. This was awarded to Southern after tremendous work from all those throughout the Synod, but especially our Green Apostle, Mr Ian Moore. We changed our Manse Policy to ensure that all our manses energy performance certificates at C or better, and made the conscious decision to invest in Epworth, a not-for-profit organisation that focuses on investing for both people and planet. However, this was not only achieved at a Synod level but took great dedication from the local churches as well. Many Southern churches have achieved Eco-Church status too, such as Oxted URC, who achieved Silver-Eco Church Award in January, after implementing a 60-step plan that looks towards a more sustainable future.



In March 2025, Southern Synod were awarded Eco-Synod Bronze Award!

Deployment and Visionary Companions

We recognise that the deployment of ordained stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments is a denominational issue. Currently there are around 30 ordained stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacrament in the Southern Synod but with around 140 churches it is recognised that how this scarce resource is deployed across the Synod is crucial to the flourishing of the whole church. The Synod Ministries Committee and its Deployment Sub Committee have published a robust policy and process for deployment of Ministers going forward. Crucial to the process is the appointment of a 'Visionary Companion' when a Minister moves away or retires. They will work alongside the church to prayerfully discern creative and collaborative models of future ministerial support. The Synod Moderator will have a key role in working with churches, Visionary Companions, Pastoral Committees and the

Deployment Sub Committee to ensure Ministers of Word and Sacraments are deployed in a fair, sustainable and mission-focused way.

Recognising and Developing Lay Leadership

In light of the above challenge, perhaps our greatest opportunity lies in recognising and developing lay leadership across the Synod. Ministry is not confined to those who are ordained; it flourishes through the gifts of Elders, Lay Preachers, Local Church Leaders, those working with children and young people and countless others who serve faithfully in their congregations.

We need to move away from an assumption that "real church" requires an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament and instead celebrate and resource the rich diversity of ministries already present in our midst. This means:

- Providing excellent training and support for lay leaders
- Recognising different forms of ministry as equally valuable
- Helping churches discover and deploy the gifts within their own communities
- Creating pathways for leadership development that are accessible and flexible

The incoming Moderator will have opportunities to champion this broader vision of ministry, helping our churches see that they already have what they need to be faithful, vibrant communities of faith.

Managing Expectations Around Church Life Review

The URC's Church Life Review process has been seeking to find creative ways to support local church ministry and mission. However, expectations around this process can vary widely. If General Assembly in November 2025 agrees with their proposals the Synod will need to help churches engage constructively with this process, seeing it not as a 'quick-fix solution' but, alongside other Synod support, a tool for discernment and planning.



Ministers and Local Church Leaders at the Southern Synod Ministers Gathering 2025

A Word of Hope

These challenges are real, and we name them honestly. Yet we also recognise that periods of change and uncertainty are often when God does something new. We seek a Synod Moderator who can help us navigate these challenges with wisdom, courage, and imagination - someone who will walk alongside our churches and leaders, listening deeply, encouraging boldly, and helping us discern where the Spirit is leading.

The challenges we face are also invitations: to deepen relationships, to discover new forms of ministry, to live more sustainably, and to trust that God's purposes for us extend beyond maintaining what has been into creating what might yet be.

Section 4 - Southern Synod Strategy: Renew and Reimagine

Southern Synod Strategy: Our Direction for the Future Our Foundation

In response to the challenges and opportunities of being God's people in Southern Synod, Synod Together adopted a strategy paper in October 2024 which is the current foundation of our work. The strategy focusses on three pillars: Renew, Reimagine and Reorder. This section of the profile focuses on the first two pillars. The third pillar will be the focus of Section 5.

Our work is shaped by the Synod Mission Criteria established in 2010 and informed by significant URC initiatives including Catch the Vision, Vision2020, and Walking the Way. We remain mindful of the ongoing Church Life Review process and anticipate that General Assembly decisions in 2025 regarding financial resource sharing, lay worker employment, and shared support services may influence our strategic direction.

Renew: Deepening Our Faith

With Christ at the centre of all we do, we seek to support faithful disciples whose priorities and values are shaped by God. We must find appropriate ways of telling the Christian story, explaining the faith, and giving reasons for our hope (1 Peter 3:15).

Our renewal priorities include:

- Encouraging personal and corporate devotion, including church retreat days
- Promoting prayer across our communities
- Supporting evangelism programmes

The whole Synod shares responsibility for renewal, monitored through Synod Council and Pastoral Committees.

Reimagine: New Ways of Being Church

We will reimagine church life by:

- **Maximising our resources:** Making excellent use of volunteers, paid staff, and field officers (Children's and Youth Development Officer, Ecumenical Officer, Mission and Discipleship Officer, and Training and Development Officer)
- **Supporting ministry:** Addressing local church needs through new approaches to lay and ordained ministry, including preaching support and implementing our Synod Deployment Policy for Stipendiary Ministry

- **Providing pastoral care:** Ensuring churches and ministers receive attentive care through Area Pastoral Committees and the United Area's Executive
- **Resourcing mission:** Helping churches discern priorities and supporting them financially through mechanisms like the Strategic Mission Fund and Buildings Grants and Loans Panel
- **Embracing our URC identity:** Encouraging churches to draw on the richness of our Reformed ethos as they explore what it means to be communities of faith
- **Ensuring compliance:** Advising on safeguarding, health and safety, and annual returns
- **Building connection:** Promoting attendance at Synod Together meetings twice yearly
- **Working ecumenically:** Partnering with other denominations to address global issues affecting human flourishing

Implementation and Review

This strategy is promoted across every Synod committee and working group, with annual monitoring. Following the seventh Mark of a Healthy Church - "does a few things and does them well" - we focus our energies purposefully. Synod Council will undertake a full strategic review in 2027.

The incoming Synod Moderator will lead us in living out this strategy, helping us remain faithful to our calling while adapting creatively to changing circumstances.

The full strategy document is found in Appendix A

Examples of Renewal and Reimagination

Below are four examples of ways in which local churches and the Synod have already responded to the vision of renewal and reimagination.

St John's United Reformed Church, Marsh Green

St John's URC's mission is to know God better and make God better known; to channel God's love to people near and far; and to demonstrate God's love by caring for God's creation.

St John's Church is a community gathered from Edenbridge and the nearby villages, including Marsh Green itself. The congregation offer a variety of styles of worship which includes activities for a range of ages. They aim to develop a family-friendly atmosphere and to make decisions with all ages in mind.



"We are a small, lively, family-friendly church with an informal style of worship. Every member of the congregation is valued, and we are a recognised Child Friendly Church. In 2020 we became the first Gold Eco Church in the United Reformed Church. The church benefits from its peaceful setting, opposite the village green and backing onto fields. That, and its simple sanctuary, provide a welcoming place for worship."

Our faith is in one God, present in all that we do and think and feel. The best guide we have to God is Jesus, who shows that the deepest meaning to life is love. And God's Spirit inspires us to know God's love and to share with each other the love that Jesus preached. Faith is experienced rather than learned.

Being part of St. John's Church enables us:

- *to celebrate what is good in life*
- *to explore Jesus' way of love*
- *to share the biblical witness to the Spirit's working*
- *to care for one another and our neighbours,*
- *to care for the world in which we live. "*

St John's has been awarded Gold Eco Church status and a Child Friendly Church award.

Emmanuel Church, Eastbourne: A Story of Vision and New Life



When four Eastbourne congregations - Methodist and United Reformed - came together, they embarked on an extraordinary journey of faith and vision. They made the courageous decision to leave buildings they loved, where they had celebrated weddings and funerals and shared fellowship for generations, to create something new.

The path was far from straightforward. Combining four churches required navigating complex denominational policies, creating a constitution and legal sharing agreement, and securing planning permission - all while selling buildings in considerable disrepair. The pandemic, Brexit, and inflation caused construction costs to soar unexpectedly.

Yet through £3.7 million of funding - including property sales, grants from both denominations, the Beatrice Laing Trust, and countless donations from other churches - Emmanuel Church became reality. The congregation moved into their new, energy-efficient building in September 2023.

Today, Emmanuel Church is thriving. The purpose-built premises house a nursery, community café, Guild, Messy Church, and groups for all ages. Community organizations use the space for dance, yoga, and charitable activities, with hundreds of people entering the building weekly. The church has joined the Inclusive Church Network, proclaiming that all are welcome regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, or disability.

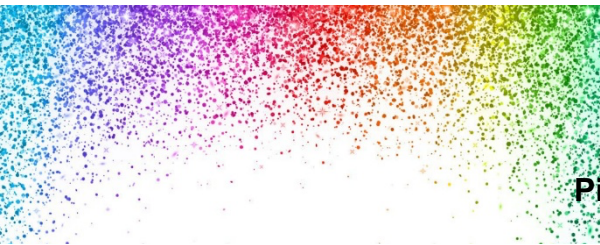
"This scheme could have collapsed various times," reflects their Minister, Revd Paul Tabraham, "but by God's grace every obstacle has been overcome." Emmanuel Church stands as a powerful example of what becomes possible when congregations embrace change with courage, work collaboratively across denominations, and trust God's leading into new expressions of faithful witness.

Union Church, Margate: Food for Thought

About six years ago, Union Church, Margate, a joint URC/Methodist Church, faced a crisis. Margate had changed. Residents were increasingly either poor or attracted by the 'trendy' scene in the seaside resort. But the congregation was only addressing the needs of those who had been associated with church in a different age. So, it was decided to do something different, something more artistic and inclusive. Through drama, arts and crafts, interesting speakers addressing real issues, Food for Thought has thrived with the congregation and community fully backing it. It is now visibly a church which celebrated and affirms every person and does not discriminate.

Due to the work of Food for Thought, Union Church was one of the recipients of the 2025 URC Community Project Awards.





Pioneer Ministry with the LGBTQIA+ Community in Brighton & Hove



Rev'd Martin Knight, who was called to pioneering ministry, working alongside the queer and non-binary community in Brighton & Hove in 2024 describes his work as “a gift given by Southern Synod in the name of Jesus Christ.” He describes his work below:

To be a pioneer in this setting is:

- getting involved with some of the brilliant work that is already happening, spotting the gaps, and enabling the community to flourish.
- walking in Pride, seeing the surprise of the crowds at how broad and wide the love of God is.
- singing in the Rainbow Chorus and sharing in the abundant joy of those who fight, every day, to accept every part of themselves.
- wearing my collar whilst sitting in cafés and hearing the joys and struggles of people's lives, gossiping the story of God's love.
- exploring how new worshipping communities, like Open Table, might be formed.
- supporting other affirming and inclusive churches, clergy and Christians, across denominations.
- to 'sign-post' LGBTQIA+ folk, of all ages, to fully welcoming churches.
- to say 'God loves you' to those who have only heard words of hate and anger from the church and the world.
- to share the gifts, joys and call of those who are queer and non-binary back to the URC.
- and so, so much more...

This ministry is an act of bravery by Southern Synod, to work outside of the box, on the margins, seeing what God is already doing and joining in!



Section 5 - Reorder: Synod Structures and Governance

Reorder: Implementing Change

The third pillar of the Synod Strategy is to Reorder how we structure our work. The current committee structure of the Synod is currently under review to ensure that it enables our life and mission to flourish. This section outlines our current structure, but the review seeks to ensure that over the coming years, we will reorder how Synod implements its purpose through:

- ensuring staff understand the strategy and have objectives aligned with it
- encouraging church members to participate in local church life and wider denominational councils
- reviewing structures and committees supporting Synod life and witness
- implementing our new Deployment Strategy
- promoting Safer Recruitment practices
- ensuring equitable and appropriate use of financial resources for Synod and the national Church

A Collaborative Approach to Ministry

Southern Synod is one of 13 Synods within the United Reformed Church, operating as both a registered company and charity: The United Reformed Church (Southern Synod) Trust Limited. Our structure balances effective central coordination with responsive local leadership, enabling us to serve our diverse communities across South London, Surrey, Sussex, and Kent.

Synod Together: Where We Gather

Twice each year - typically on Saturdays in March and October - our Synod community comes together for Synod Together meetings. These one-day gatherings, normally chaired by the Synod Moderator, provide opportunities for worship, discernment, decision-making, and fellowship. Additional meetings may be convened when special circumstances or urgent business requires it, ensuring we remain responsive and agile.

Our Central Structure: Coordinated Leadership

Our governance model ensures strategic oversight while supporting local ministry. The central structures include:

- The URC (Southern Synod) Trust Ltd – providing legal and fiduciary oversight
- Synod Council (with Nominations) – guiding strategic direction
- Synod Officers – Synod Moderator, Synod Clerk, Convenor of Synod Council, and Synod Treasurer
- Synod Finance Committee – stewarding our financial resources
- Synod Ministries Committee – supporting and developing ministry across the Synod
- Synod Property Committee – managing property matters strategically
- Synod Youth and Children's Work Committee – investing in the next generation
- Various sub-committees, panels and ad hoc groups – addressing specific needs as they arise

Synod Areas: Ministry Closer to Home

The real vitality of Southern Synod happens through our three Synod Areas and one United Area, each with its own character and context:

- South London Synod Area (SLSA)
- Surrey and Sussex Synod Area (S&SSA)
- Kent and East Sussex Synod Area (KESSA)
- Central Sussex United Area (CSUA) – an ecumenical area united with the Methodist Church.



A Partnership Model

Our Synod Areas exercise delegated powers in most matters, working collaboratively with Synod Moderator, Synod Officers and staff to maintain our sense of being "one Synod." Key concerns - particularly deployment, finance, property, and Trust matters - are

coordinated centrally to ensure fairness, consistency, and the wise use of our collective resources. Each Area is well-represented on central committees, creating a genuine partnership where local insight informs central decision-making.

This collaborative approach means that decisions are made with the full context of the Synod's resources and expertise, while remaining grounded in local realities.

Each Area is supported by a dedicated team:

- Area Leader – providing pastoral and strategic leadership
- Area Administrator – ensuring smooth operations
- Area Treasurers – managing local finances
- Pastoral Committee Convenors – guiding the work of Pastoral Committees
- Area Property Advisers – offering expertise on property matters

The Heart of Area Life: Pastoral Committees

Each Area's Pastoral Committee serves as the primary hub for ministry and church oversight, making recommendations to the Synod Area on a remarkable breadth of responsibilities:

- Vacancies and interim moderator appointments
- Concurrence in calls, ordinations, and inductions
- Lay preacher oversight and deployment
- Support for mission initiatives and strategic ministries
- Church groupings and oversight visits
- Care for candidates, students, ministers (serving and retired), their families, and Church Related Community Workers
- Ecumenical partnerships

South London Synod Area, reflecting its size and diversity, operates two Pastoral Committees (East and West), each with its own leadership structure.

Working Together: Local Vision, Synod-Wide Wisdom

Decisions about ministerial deployment quotas, grants and loans, and mission and regeneration projects are made by the relevant Synod committees, informed by recommendations and insights from the Areas. This ensures that resources are allocated fairly and strategically across the whole Synod, while remaining responsive to local opportunities and needs.

This collaborative structure is fuelled by a dynamic team working with the Synod Moderator, supporting local ministry while maintaining the strategic coherence that enables us to do together what we could never accomplish alone.

Section 6 – Synod Office and Staff

Synod Office

The Synod Office is located 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, with fast rail links to central London and to the south coast.

Moderators' Manse

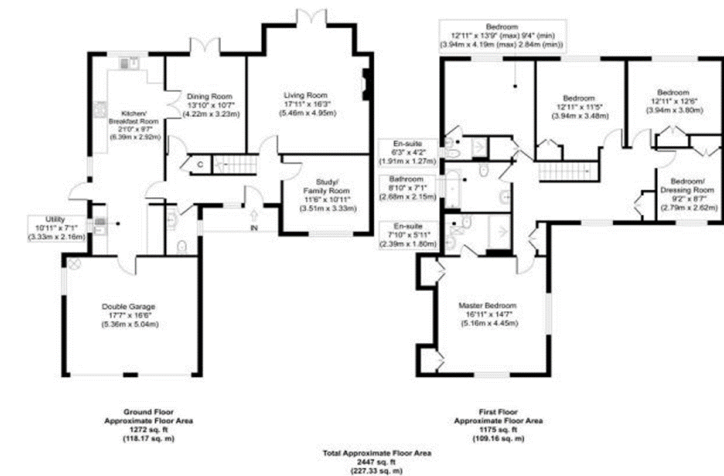
The Moderator's manse is located in South Coudsdon (8 Starrock Road), within reasonable distance of Coulsdon South railway station, with a good rail service to East Croydon, central London and the south coast. It is close to the motorway network (M25 and M23) allowing good access to the whole Synod.



The Southern Synod Office



8 Starrock Road



Synod Officers and Staff

Synod Officer

Moderator	Vacant
Clerk	The Revd Martin Hayward
Treasurer (Honorary)	Mr John Denison
Convener of Synod Council	Revd Russell Furley-Smith

Convenor of Synod Trust

Mr Alan Kirby

Synod Office Staff

Moderator's & Synod Clerk's PA	Mrs Lauren King
Finance Officer and Trust Secretary	Mrs Catherine Kingdom
Property Officer and Assistant Trust Secretary	Mr Colin McCracken
Property Administrator	Mr Mark Price-Haworth
Office and Finance Administrator	Mr Ross Furley-Smith

The Synod staff work with appropriate Synod Committees, helping 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.

Finances

The Southern Synod Trust holds all the funds. As at 31st December 2024 total net funds were £35.1 million. Most are invested through Epworth with the balance held at CAF. At the end of 2024, Restricted Funds totalled £1.2 million, Designated Funds – mainly the Manse Fund – totalled £13.2 million with General Purpose Funds (GPF) totalling £20.7 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 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 and established two new funds: “Strategic Mission Fund” and “Church Building Fund”. The funds each have an annual budget of £750,000 in 2025 and 2026 and since their inception, in 2020, over £4.3 million has been awarded to local churches and ecumenical projects under this scheme. Over the same period £988,000 has separately been granted to churches amalgamating with another congregation to improve their premises and almost £4 million has been paid to support Central URC requests and Inter Synod Resource Sharing. All URC owned church buildings are also entitled to an annual grant of £2,500 to help them cover the costs of day-to-day repairs and maintenance and over £1 million has been awarded since 2020.

Synod Property

The Synod has on its role 149 churches and between 70 and 75 manses at any given time of the year. Of these churches 2 are without a congregation and currently let out. There are 18 Listed Churches with a further 15 within conversation 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. A new policy has been agreed, dedicated to the distribution of grants and loans specifically for church buildings. Included in this a Pastorate can claim up to £2,000 per annum for building maintenance. The area 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.

Synod Field Staff

Ecumenical Officer – Revd Cristina Cipriani

The Ecumenical Officer is responsible for promoting and supporting the United Reformed Church's engagement in ecumenical life and witness within the Synod. The role encompasses three principal areas of work.

Firstly, the Ecumenical Officer represents the Synod within Churches Together in England, both nationally and regionally, ensuring that participation reflects the diversity and priorities of the Synod's local areas. Secondly, the officer supports congregations involved in an Ecumenical Partnerships (LEP, Partnership Agreement) by assisting in the maintenance or renewal of Ecumenical Agreements and by offering guidance to those exploring new ecumenical partnerships. Thirdly, the Ecumenical Officer encourages and equips local churches to develop cooperative and imaginative forms of ecumenical engagement in mission, worship, and community life.

The Ecumenical Officer works closely with the Synod Moderator, particularly when decisions involve other denominational structures, ensuring that due processes and relationships are respected. When required, the officer represents the Moderator at ecumenical gatherings.

At a Synod-wide level, the Ecumenical Officer collaborates with the other Field Officers to support congregations in discerning new and faithful ways of serving God's kingdom through shared witness and partnership.



Mission and Discipleship – Mrs Jo Patterson



As full-time Mission and Discipleship officer (MDO) for Southern Synod my work seeks to enable and equip churches to flourish in mission for both themselves and the wider world.

I encourage a contextual approach, often working with local churches within the particularity of their situation and the mission of God in that place. We focus on the gifting in local churches and how we are collectively fulfilled as the people of God.

Over my first twelve months in the role, I am already seeing the green shoots of renewed energy and evangelism in the congregations I often visit. Many are ready to recognise where they need equipping, often in evangelism and outreach, and we work closely as a team of officers and staff to support them with this.

Alongside my role as MDO, I am also the secretary for our Strategic Mission Fund and the Director of Mission Projects. Here, I work with churches on how to fund their mission and discipleship, as well as identifying possibilities for continuing mission once the congregation has achieved the goals of its current project.

I work within the structures of the Synod, reporting to Synod Ministries Committee, as well as participating in a diverse range of meetings and area pastoral committees to assist with deployment and other issues. I believe we are turning a 'deployment misery' corner and many churches can now not only see transformational ways of worship, but also how to offer hope to their local communities.

Through our work with 'unusual ministries' such as our CRCW, chaplains, and Synod posts we are currently identifying new worshipping possibilities, in both established congregations, as well as across the wider community.

Training and Development – Revd Dr Charisa Hunter-Crump

The position of Training and Development Officer ensures ongoing education for all lay and ordained ministries, for local congregations, and for the Synod, as outlined here.

1. Training

- a. Eldership Training – covering spiritual leadership, trusteeship, worship leadership, mission, and pastoral care
- b. Sacraments Training for Authorised Elders
- c. Locally Recognised Worship Leader Training – a year-long training with a final assessment and certification to lead worship locally
- d. Mandatory Safer Sacred Spaces Training
- e. Visionary Companions and Interim Moderators Training to work with churches in transition
- f. Work with other Field Officers on other trainings such as Compliance, Mission, Ecojustice, DEI

2. Development

- a. Support and encouragement for Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Church Related Community Workers through EM1 RCL education and ordination, EM2 ongoing education for first three years of ministry, EM2 and EM3 two weeks of education, and EM3 sabbaticals
- b. Annual Spring School for all MWS, CRCWs, and Local Church Leaders
- c. Support and encouragement for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers through discernment and application process, and for continuing education
- d. Worship and Preaching Refresher Courses for any level of training
- e. Stepwise programme organisation, oversight, and cohort groups
- f. Programme to support the development of faithful and competent congregations



Children's and Youth Work – Mr Tom Hackett

Southern Synod has a full time Children's & Youth Development Officer (CYDO) who supports local churches in their engagement with children, young people and families. We strive to encourage and enable faith development across the age ranges of URC Children (0-11s) and URC Youth (11-25s) and offer support for adults working with these age groups. This includes consultations with local churches to help them explore how to serve families in their local contexts. The work goes beyond the boundaries of Sunday worship, recognising the variety of programmes taking place throughout the week.

Work includes accompanying churches through the "Children & Youth Friendly Church Scheme", a tool to help churches explore their welcome and inclusion of all ages. Regular training is offered, including online sessions around "Inclusive practice: Pastorally supporting LGBTQ+ young people" and Youth Mental Health First Aid Training which equips adults working with young people to recognise and respond to struggling mental health. Both trainings are in direct response to motions raised by young people attending URC Youth Assembly. We work closely with Thames North Synod, running an annual joint Synod Youth Residential and youth get togethers for participants from both areas.



Tom (centre) presenting a Lundie Memorial Award to a recipient from Gillingham URC.



Fun at Southern Synod's Youth Residential 2025!

Safeguarding – Ms Natalie Van Camp

Since 2019-2025 Southern Synod have shared a Synod Safeguarding Officer (SSO) with Thames North. Having identified changing dynamics within the context of safeguarding needs, both within the Synod and the increasing statistics nationally there was a noted overall impact on the denomination. With firm commitment to safeguarding, Southern Synod employed their own Synod Safeguarding Officer in October 2025.

The role of the SSO is to oversee and advise on safeguarding matters across the Synod, to ensure local churches are complying with URC safeguarding policies/regulations to protect the vulnerable. The SSO should be the main point of contact where concerns are raised, to advise, inform, support or act on behalf of. This includes coordinating responses, reporting on serious concerns to statutory services and regulatory bodies where required, and ensuring risk is assessed to create safe environments for both children and adults. The SSO will also deliver and actively encourage safeguarding training to Local Churches, staff, and volunteers within Synod to promote awareness, responsibility, and accountability. Training is delivered at Foundation, Intermediate, and Advanced levels. The SSO in part is reliant on local churches to be transparent in their reporting of safeguarding concerns and to report at the earliest stage to act in preventative way to achieve the best outcomes, because in the URC safeguarding is all our responsibility.

The SSO upholds a high standard of safeguarding practice with Good Practice 6, the URC's commitments, values, and responsibilities, and by promoting safeguarding as a fundamental facet which underpins all aspects of church life. It is a supportive advisory role available to all in the URC extending to church leadership and the Moderator, including in situations involving ministers.



Appendix A – Southern Synod Strategy: Renew, Reimagine, Reorder

Adopted by Synod Together – October 2024

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 is 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 (Resolution H5, 2024)

Appendix B - Diagram of Southern Synod Committee Structure

