STRATEGIC REPORT 2026

The future of the DR Church in the Northern Synod

Revised, integrated draft

Compiled by The Task Team Future

Date: 17 May 2026

Status: Draft document for discussion and further modification

The provisional; report is presented to the Synodal Service Council (SSC) for discussion. A final edition with recommendations will be finalised after feedback from the Executive Committee and the SSC. The report should be read with all the addendums and data sets.

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1. Executive summary: Strategic Report 2026

The Northern Synod is at present experiencing a phase of demographic and organisational shifts. Although the church herself is not in an immediate existential crisis, an aging and shrinking membership base is forcing congregations urgently to reconsider the model of 'a fulltime minister with an own church building'. Between 2011 and 2022 the white population in the synodal region declined by 9,1%, while the percentage of persons older that 60 is projected to rise to almost 47% by 2045. (Addendum B; Addendum A).

The aim of this report is to move out of a 'shrink and close' narrative and to focus on **sustainable adjustment**. The essential insight is that the future no longer lies in isolated solo congregational projects, but in the rediscovery of the church as a **community infrastructure**. This entails a purposeful shift to partnerships with other churches (ecumenics) , civil organisations (NGOs) and the private sector, and so to maximise a shared impact (Addendum C).

Key areas of transformation include:

- **Ministry:** The minister moves away from being the primary 'doer' to being a 'connector and facilitator' who unlocks leadership among leaders and external partnerships. (Addendum E; Addendum C).
- **Alternative models:** The implementation of 'Ministers in Service of the Presbytery', interim facilitation of transitions, and the support of 'family-size' community churches where congregants take high ownership. (Addendum E).
- **Asset management:** Buildings and land need to be reunderstood as assets for a missional presence and community service rather than as financial burdens. Capital from the sale of property need to be protected by trust funds for long term ministry. (Addendum C; Addendum E).
- **Data-driven decisions:** The development of a standardised screening framework to identify risks (financial and ministry capacity) in time before crisis points are reached. (Addendum A).

In conclusion, the report asks for a new way of 'reading': to see both the reality of loss as well as the opportunity of a new, intercultural, community-oriented ministry. The church's vocation stands, but the shape of it needs to change to be relevant and sustainable in 2026 and after.

We consciously present the report as a discussion document for congregations, presbyteries, and the Northern Synod. To aid the church in her various forms to consider the way forward, the report brings together in one place ecclesial research, demographic insights, scenario planning, and stories about congregations' and the church's involvement in the community. We present it not only for the sake of signposting but lay the whole report before you as something to be discussed. It shows a space in which we can think and dream about the future of the DR Church. (Addendum F; Addendum C; Addendum E).

2. Introduction and purpose of the report

In 2022, the Northern Synod requested 'Reflection based on research on what the DR Church and the Northern Synod may possibly look like in 10 years' time.' The task team had a first round of discussions in the 2023/24 term and followed up with a second round in the 2025/26 term.

In 2023/24 the task team consisted of

- Cobus van Wyngaard (chair)
- Paul Grobler (ex officio)
- Freddie Prozesky
- Theo Oosthuyzen
- Neels Jackson
- Pieter de Villiers

- Lourens Bosman
- Dewald Roux
- Nicole Hamman
- Nadine Swanepoel[1]

In 2025/26 the task team consisted of

- Cobus van Wyngaard (chair)
- Paul Grobler (ex officio)
- Freddie Prozesky
- Theo Oosthuyzen
- Pieter de Villiers
- Lourens Bosman
- Coetzee Bester
- Niel Roux
- Jacques Heymans

The task team rephrased the assignment set by the Northern Synod as a question: 'What do we learn from reflection about the available empirical data that can help us to anticipate what the Church of Christ in the Northern Synod may look like in 10 years' time?' (Addendum F). In the second round of the task team's work the focus was more specifically on what we can learn about the future of ministers, congregations, members, and the community.

This report presents a revised and more resource-based synthesis of the work of the Tast Team Future about the future of the DR Church in the Northern Synod. Its purpose is to provide the moderamen, presbyteries and congregations with a factual, realistic, and practical basis for strategic planning in the next decade.

The point of departure is not that the DR Church in the Northern Synod will cease to exist in the next ten years. Indeed, Addendum D states clearly that the church is not at present, and will not be in the next decade, in danger of a significant existential crisis. The central question is rather how a smaller, older, unevenly distributed, and financially vulnerable church can keep on being a complete church: missional, locally present, theologically accountable and organisationally sustainable. On the other hand, we do point out that if we do not take trouble to think about the changes that are going to wash over us in the next 20 to 30 years, the DR Church could lose her footprint in various communities. We hope that this report can help the Northern Synod to change course. (Addendum D; Addendum B; Addendum E).

The report therefore moves away from a simple 'shrink and close' narrative. Addendum C and Addendum E indicate a more complex reality: some patterns die, others grow, many change, and several tipping points require purposeful leadership. The strategic challenge is to reorganise the synod's capacity, buildings, leadership, presbyteries, partnerships, and ministry language that congregations in their own context can function sustainably and remain faithful to their calling. (Addendum C; Addendum E).

The addendums to the report were compiled by different task team members and are the result of intense discussions that generated the questions on which this report is based and also discussed the contents of the addenda. The final report used AI at several points to integrate the different addendums more easily.

3. Foundation, method, and data reservations

This draft document integrates material from the addendums: demographic data and projections, historic shifts in ministry and congregational capacity, provisional financial and organisational observations, narrative case studies from Zimbabwe and Pretoria-West/Daspoort; and a broader ecumenical investigation into community involvement and collaboration.

[1] Nadine Swanepoel accepted a call to Skuilkrans in the past months and is no longer part of the Northern Synod.

Because the addendums represent different genres, the statements in this report lie on three levels:

- Data and direct observations: e.g. population figures, age profiles, submitted Kerkspieël [Church Mirror]-data, and trends in full-time ministry;
- Interpretations: e.g. the probable implications of aging for income , church council composition, ministry, and functioning in the local community.
- Task team proposals and signposts: e.g. a screening matrix, Ministers in Presbyterial Service, interim facilitation, partner registers, and new policy on property sales.

Important data reservations must apply throughout. The demographic analysis focuses on congregations that completed the *Kerkspieël* questionnaires in 2018 and/or 2022. Out of 102 congregations 73 in 2018 and 62 in 2022 submitted data, and only 56 submitted data in both years. The Sensus 2022-data is useful as a guiding source, but it was affected by significant undercounting and instability on lower geographic levels.

Police districts and local municipalities were therefore used as rounded up geographical units, and not as precise congregational borders. (Addendum B).

The demographic data further focuses on the white population as the historical congregant source of the DR Church. This is a necessary but limited approach. It does not describe membership itself and must not be understood as a theological or missional boundary to the church's vocation. It does help, however, to understand the pressure on the traditional membership base.

4. Demographic realities

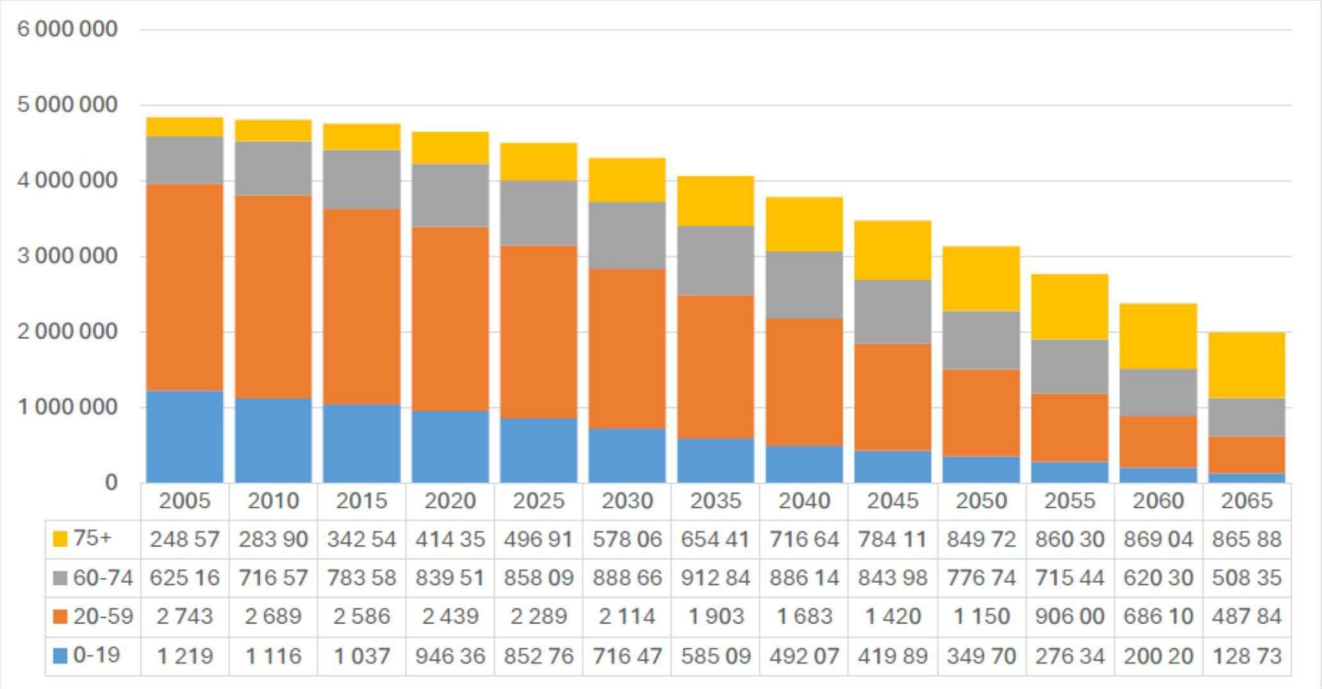
4.1 A smaller and older traditional membership source

Addendum B shows that in 2022 there were about 72 000 fewer white people in the Northern Synod's geographical region than in 2011. This represents a decline of 9,1% over that time. The white population declined in 8 of the 16 municipalities in the synodal region, with the largest absolute decreases in Tshwane, Rustenburg, and Madibeng. (Addendum B).

The most important demographic shifts, however, do not merely lie in a loss of numbers, but also in aging. The percentage of white people older than 60 has risen from 18% in 2005 to 25,7 in 2015, to 30,1% in 2025. Stats SA's long-term projections point to a further rise to 38,6% by 2035, and 46,9% by 2045. The group older than 80 is also growing fast: from 5,1% in 2005 to 11% in 2025, with a projection of 22,6% by 2045. (Addendum B).

At the same time, the children's cohort is declining. The percentage of children in the relevant white profile dropped from 21,8% in 2015 to 19% in 2025, with a projection of 12,1% by 2045. (Addendum B).

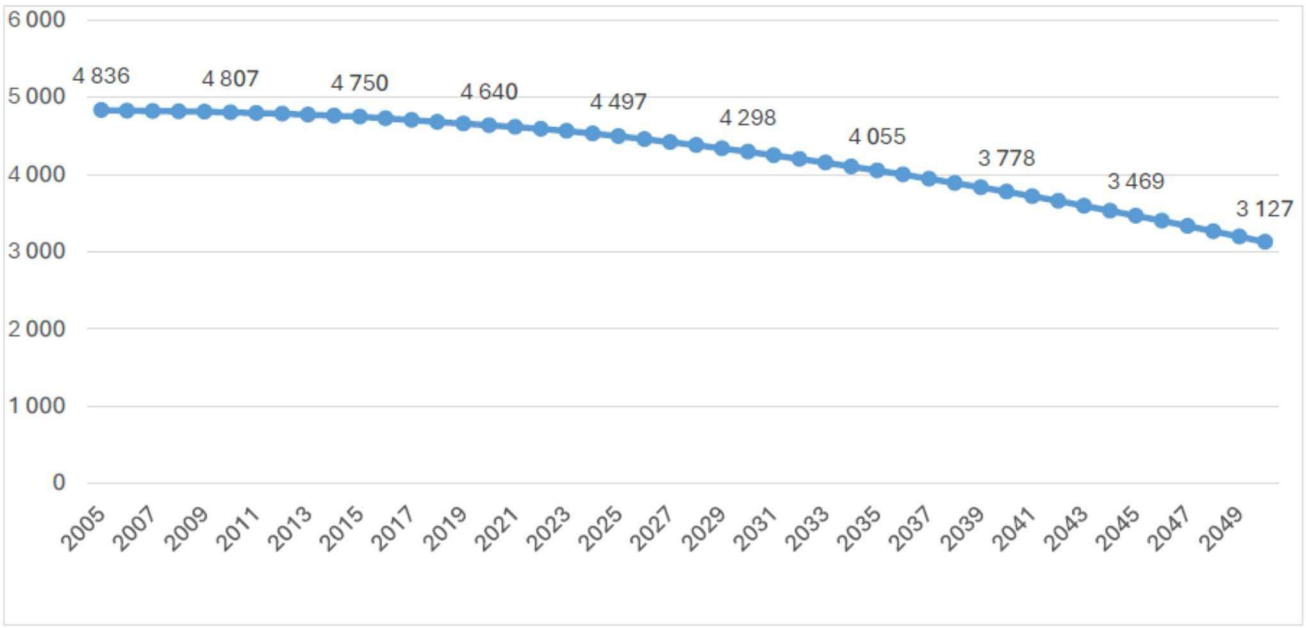
Figure 7: Age distribution of white populations, selected years 2005-2065



	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050	2055	2060	2065
75+	248 57	283 90	342 54	414 35	496 91	578 06	654 41	716 64	784 11	849 72	860 30	869 04	865 88
60-74	625 16	716 57	783 58	839 51	858 09	888 66	912 84	886 14	843 98	776 74	715 44	620 30	508 35
20-59	2 743	2 689	2 586	2 439	2 289	2 114	1 903	1 683	1 420	1 150	906 00	686 10	487 84
0-19	1 219	1 116	1 037	946 36	852 76	716 47	585 09	492 07	419 89	349 70	276 34	200 20	128 73

The national white population is also declining, according to Addendum B: from about 4,8 million in 2005 to 4,5 million in 2025, with a projection of 3,5 million teen 2045. This is the result of a combination of high life expectancy, brisk emigration, and low fertility. (Addendum B).

Figure 3: White population growth, 2005-2050



4.2 Not one synod, one demography

The Northern Synod is not a homogenous area. Some regions show aging and a sharp decline, others still have high concentrations of potential congregants, younger households, or urban influx. The greater Gauteng area, especially Pretoria, functions differently from deep rural regions. Addendum D notes that Pretoria can probably be a nett receiver of the urbanisation of young people from the countryside. (Addendum A; Addendum D).

The strategic implication is that there cannot be one model for the whole synod. Presbyteries and congregations must read their own demographic, economic, and community profiles. The synod cannot simply develop a general shrinking strategy; it must allow for plans that take the character of regions and presbyteries into account. (Addendum B; Addendum D).

4.3 Implications

Aging and population decline will probably lead to drastic consequences for church councils, volunteer capacity, income, property decisions, pastoral needs, and the nature of worship services and community ministry. Pensioners give and serve differently from working families; smaller children's cohorts limit traditional youth- and catechesis programmes, and older people will need more care and community networks. These conclusions are interpretations from the data, and not direct statistical proof of membership changes in each congregation. (Addendum B).

5. The broader operating environment

The future of the Northern Synod is not determined only by congregant numbers and ministers' posts. The scenario framework reveals a broader operating environment in which the church will function in the next decade. This environment contains risks as well as opportunities.

Important external factors include: the CRL-commission and discussions about the Christian sector's self-regulation; a decrease in trust in central and national institutions, specifically in synodal structures and especially in the General Synod, against the backdrop of the international tendency of 'mainline decline', as well as the possible damage internal church conflict can do to the DR Church's credibility; changing legislative and political processes; political control in local municipalities; municipal service delivery; safety; PBO- and Article 18A-requirements; economic vulnerability; water and energy insecurity; collapsing infrastructure; climate and agricultural risks; international and economic pressure; information technology and misinformation; migration patterns; and the uneven distribution of food. (Addendum D).

This does not mean that the church is threatened from outside or is to be dissolved by the authorities. Rather, the point is that the church will have to apply systematic risk management. Congregations will probably have to develop stronger local ethical leadership, community connections, political tolerance, collaboration, and practical wisdom, especially in places where municipal or civil infrastructures are weakening. (Addendum D).

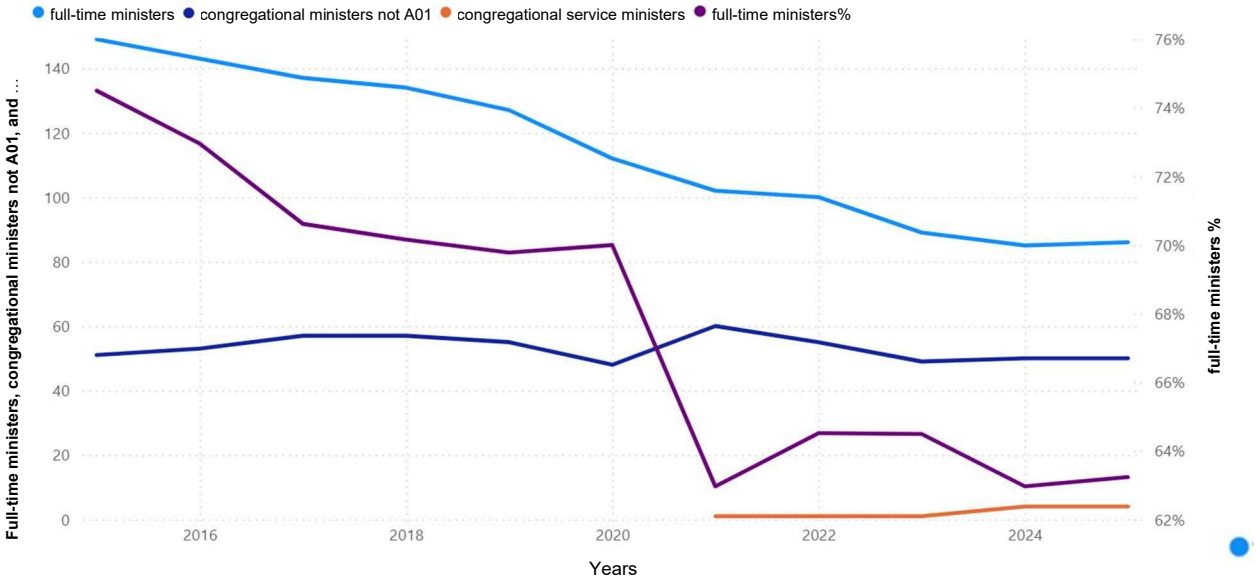
In the coming decade, the church's identity will probably remain predominantly white and Afrikaans, but the reality is that her congregants in most local contexts will be small in number and a democratic minority This means that being a church cannot be sustainable by means of isolation or cultural preservation alone. Collaboration over church boundaries, as well as cultural, language and sector boundaries, becomes an essential skill. (Addendum B; Addendum C).

6. Ministers, ministry, and congregational capacity

6.1 Tendencies in full-time ministers' posts

The historical input on ministers shows that the Northern Synod reflects the broader pattern of the General Synod: the number of full-time congregational ministers shows a significant decrease. The number of ministers in posts other than full-time congregational posts has not increased at the same speed. The decrease is found in all four areas of the synod, even though the synod is not a homogenous environment. (Addendum A).

Addendum A also states that the tempo of decrease has declined since 2023, and in 2025 even increased somewhat; 2026's numbers were not available yet. This point must be carefully phrased: it may point to stabilisation, but not necessarily to recovery. Addendum A states explicitly that we still need congregant numbers per congregation over the past 10-12 years. The report can therefore not claim that ministers' posts directly follow the same tendency as congregant numbers. (Addendum A).



6.2 The changing role of the minister

There is at present no reason to surmise that the pastor's ministry will cease. On the contrary, the Zimbabwe-report states clearly that 'ministers remain important'. A minister provides continuity, focus, care, theological discernment, and specialised pastoral input. Too much minister-dependency can make congregants passive, but too little connection to a minister leaves a gap in leadership, vocation, theology and the pastorate. (Addendum E).

The role of the pastor therefore changes from primary doer to connector and facilitator: someone who can bring together member leaders, service leaders, ministers, church councils, presbyteries, community organisations, other churches, civil structures, and local institutions. We also see a growing need for ministers who can facilitate transitions, mergers, model changes, and even closures. The NH Church's language of 'Interim Facilitation' is mentioned as a possible learning route. (Addendum E; Addendum C).

6.3 Member leadership, women leaders, and local capacity

The future of ministry cannot be planned simply around fewer full-time ministers. We will increasingly have to consider congregant leaders, ministry leaders, service leaders, local coordinators, and women-led community work. Small congregations survive where there is high ownership: congregants take responsibility for preaching, fundraising, upkeep, informal care, visits to the sick, funeral support, and community activities. (Addendum E).

Addendum C especially points to women-led care movements as a source with great capacity. The synod's task must therefore be to equip and train more people than only ministers. It should purposely include congregant leadership, women leadership, diaconal coordination, facilitation, conflict management, partnership management, and simple monitoring and evaluation. (Addendum C).

7. Financial vulnerability and the data project

The financial input in our analysis is provisional. There is also a provisional analysis of three congregations that have closed down, but not yet a complete, synod-wide financial diagnosis of congregations on the verge of closing down. The strongest contribution in Addendum A is therefore not predetermined red-flag thresholds, but rather the proposal for a standardised data project. (Addendum A).

To better judge congregations' risk of closing down, merging, or recovering, a synod should over a range of years build up a standardised data set per congregation. The minimum fields should be: professing congregants, income, expenses, annual surplus or deficit, current assets, number of ministers, administrative health, signs of functional dormancy, properties, exceptional income, and any support from outside the congregation. (Addendum A)

With such a data set a screening matrix can be developed that identifies early warning signs: continuous loss of congregants, recurring shortages, decline in operating capacity, loss of ministry capacity, administrative collapse, and a weakening of local leadership. (Addendum A).

If we look through the lens of our available data at stories of congregations that have closed down, stories that evoke sadness in all of us, we see the markers 10-12 years ahead of time. Congregations living on their reserves year by year, congregations that shrink slowly and disappear swiftly. We want to recommend strongly that the synod should investigate these markers further to be able to guide congregations in time to enter a process of change rather than to close the doors. (Addendum A).

Property sales require especial attention. The report from the Presbytery of Daspoort warns that yields from the sale of church property can easily be used to keep present operating models going for a few years more, often to cover running costs. The better proposal is that presbyteries or the synod should protect capital yields in trusts of funding mechanisms so that they can support long-term ministry, care, and new community models. (Addendum E).

8. Community involvement and collaboration

Community involvement is not a side issue or a diaconal extra. Addendum C offers one of the most strategic building blocks of the report: the church's future does not lie only in restructuring, but in the rediscovery of the church as a community infrastructure, connector, host, and trust-bearer(Addendum C).

Addendum C describes a South African landscape in which the state's capacity is patchy, social pressure is high, and churches are often among the few institutions that are still present weekly. The churches have people, buildings, trust, local memory, and ethical language. Many NGOs, state agencies, and corporate partners have professional capacity, logistics, funding, or knowledge of policy. Sustainable collaboration happens where these capacities join up to complement each other. (Addendum C).

8.1 Five circles of collaboration

Circle	Core insight for the Northern Synod
Church to church	Ecumenical collaboration works best when formed around an actual service and not merely around discussions about unity. Collaboration with the URCSA, NHK, Methodists, Anglicans Catholics, AFM/Pentecost and AIC/ZCC/Shembe must be purposely extended. **(Addendum C)**
Church with FBO	Badisa, Engo, Caritas, Mosamaria and similar faith-based organisations show that professional diaconal capacity often lies outside of the local congregation. Congregations should not try to duplicate everything themselves. **(Addendum C)**
Church with NGOs/civil organisations	Partnerships with NGOs and civil structures can enlarge local impact, but require clear roles, data, follow-up, and protection against founder-dependence. **(Addendum C)**
Church with agriculture	In rural areas collaboration with farmers' unions, farm workers' organisations, and agricultural networking is important. It must, however, not be only directed at Afrikaners; parallel intercultural partnerships are needed**. (Addendum C)**
Church with state	Local collaboration with wards, schools, clinics, CPFs, and municipalities can be vital, but should remain party-politically neutral and be built around concrete community issues. **(Addendum C)**

8.2 Four geographical contexts

Context	Operating pattern

Metro/urban	Structural-ecumenical trusts, professional NGOs, corporate and donor partnerships, university and theological networks, and dense service provider ecosystems. Examples include TLF, MES, PEN and related urban networks. **(Addendum C)**
Small town	Crisis-activated ecumenical collaboration, ministers' networks, personal trust, water/safety/trauma as joint issues, and the church as one of the remaining local institutions. **(Addendum C)**
Township	Women-led care, HIV and GBV work, childcare, youth development, and the strong presence of Pentecostal, Catholic, Methodist, and independent churches. **(Addendum C)**
Deep rural	Mission station inheritance, church buildings, land, homebased care, agricultural and healthcare networks, and a strong need for practical support over long distances. **(Addendum C)**

8.3 Seven practices highlighted by Addendum C

- Work with one coordinator rather than having an overarching structure that merely talks.
- Begin with a concrete matter; unity follows service.
- Work complementarily: The church does what only the church can do, and partners do what they can do better.
- Make the crossing of cultural borders a policy, not merely an incidental matter.
- Explicitly invest in women leadership and local caregiving networks.
- Reunderstand buildings and land as infrastructure for partnerships.
- Let local ownership and synodal support collaborate—congregations and presbyteries execute; the synod supports, learns, documents, and connects.

8.4 Risks in partnerships

Partnerships are vital but not risk-free. Addendum C warns against loss of the prophetic voice, donor-dependence, political or corporate co-optation, municipal volatility, founder-dependence, overloading of ministers, weak follow-up, a data or communication gap, and partnerships that stay within a narrow Afrikaner corridor. Partnerships must therefore purposely be managed by means of clear roles, follow-up plans, measurable outcomes, financial transparency and intercultural broadening. (Addendum C).

9. Case studies and stories of hope

9.1 Mashonaland-West: family-size congregations as a living model

The small congregations in Mashonaland-West—Karoi, Chinhoyi, Chegutu and Kadoma—show that small congregations are not merely 'failed big congregations'. They can function as family-size faith communities where congregants take high ownership, conduct informal pastoral care, present community functions, and are less dependent on intensive service by a minister. This model however demands strong personal leadership, clear ecclesial frameworks, limited but sustained connection with a minister, and denominational support. (Addendum E).

The Zimbabwe Report describes the reality as 'older, smaller, poorer' but not as hopeless. The way forward lies in the transformation of traditional congregations into inclusive community churches. This possibly includes English ministry, ecumenical guest speakers, house rules, local membership rules, training of ministers and service pastors, active younger leadership, Sunday school as door to young families, and service-oriented community involvement. (Addendum E).

The model confirms two tensions that are important for South Africa: Congregations can sometimes survive with little ministry by a pastor, but not without theological and pastoral connectedness; and small congregations can still be a church for the community, but not if they are only focused on their own survival or the preservation of their culture. (Addendum E).

9.2 Harare: organic unification, not forced amalgamation

The unification of the DR Church and the NH Church in Harare is an important story of hope but must be carefully interpreted. Addendum E warns that merging in many cases actually means closing down: Congregants do not necessarily move to the combined congregation, and local presence can be lost. (Addendum E).

The Harare model works exactly because it did not begin as a mere institutional transaction. Informal trust came before formal unification. Leaders tested the water, shifted congregants' attitudes, handled sensitive liturgical differences, and fostered fairness. The model of 'marriage outside of community of property' shared the ministry and day-to-day congregational life, while historical assets, bank accounts, and property decisions remained separate. The formal agreement was the affirmation of a relationship that had grown organically already.(Addendum E).

The lesson is that congregations must not simply be merged. The lesson is: Do not force things; first build trust; differentiate ministry and assets; protect fairness; discuss delicate matters in advance; and let unity grow from shared service. (Addendum E).

9.3 Buildings as community infrastructure

We suggest that we must develop more nuanced language when it comes to buildings. Buildings are expensive and can become a burden, but they are also signs of presence, spaces for social memory, and in some towns the only sacral of community space available to all. There are several examples of congregations whose buildings are used daily by community organisations. Some of these are told of in the stories of congregations. (Addendum E; Addendum C).

The question therefore is not merely how the church can focus less on buildings, but how buildings, land, and historical presence can be understood as missional and community infrastructure. Where buildings are not sustainable, sales, leasing, or redevelopment must be managed strategically, and with ecclesial accountability. Where buildings still have community value, they must be made available as spaces for service, partnership, and local presence. (Addendum C; Addendum E).

9.4 MES, TLF and partnership impact

Urban models such as MES, TLF, PEN and related organisations show that a great community impact is seldom borne by a single congregation. The church's role is often to provide trust, space, ethical legitimacy, and local access, while professional partners supply funding, management, service delivery, and monitoring. These models must not merely be mentioned as inspiring examples; they must serve as learning schools for the synod. (Addendum C).

10. Alternative models for the next decade

We do not propose one new model to be applied everywhere. We rather want to point to a basket of models that can be tested in every presbytery, context, and congregation. (Addendum B; Addendum C; Addendum E).

1. Ministers in Service of the presbytery (PSR): one or more ministers serve a whole presbytery or group of congregations, with responsibility for ministry, sacraments, theological guidance, and oversight over service ministers and ministers. (Addendum E).

2. Interim facilitation: ministers are trained to guide congregations and presbyteries through transitions—not merely to the next call, but by changes in model, collaboration, possible unification, new ministry, of responsible closure. (Addendum E)

3. Family-size community churches are not measured by the standards for large congregations but are supported to function as local faith families and community churches. (Addendum E).

4. Assets as ministry: land, buildings, and capital are reunderstood as instruments for missional presence, community partnerships, income, and long-term sustainability (Addendum C; Addendum E).
5. Trust or funding mechanisms: yields from sales of property are protected for long-term ministry rather than as functioning to subsidise existing expenses temporarily. (Addendum E).
6. Partnership eco-systems: congregations purposely collaborate with other churches, FBOs, NGOs, agriculture, schools, clinics, municipal structures, and corporate partners. (Addendum C).
7. Member and women leadership: training, acknowledgement, and support are extended to local leaders, ministers, service ministers, coordinators, and women-led caring networks. (Addendum C; Addendum E).
8. Synods as eco-system caregivers: the synod gathers data, develops frameworks, connects learning schools, support presbyteries, offer training, and facilitate risk management. (Addendum D; Addendum F).

11. A provisional screening framework

The task team at present provide set red-flag thresholds as final policy. Addendum A rather supports a provisional screening framework that must first be tested by data. The framework below is therefore a first draft for discussion and data collection. We want to recommend that it be developed further in the next term. (Addendum A).

Dimension	What must be measured or assessed?	Strategic questions
Demography	Confessing congregants, baptised congregants, age profile, children, young families, local population change.	Is there a realistic local basis for the current congregational model? **(Addendum B).**
Finances	Income, expenses, surplus/deficit, current assets, extraordinary income, reliance on bequests or property sales.	How long can the current model function sustainably without structural change? **(Addendum A; Addendum E).**
Ministry capacity	Full-time/part-time minister, ministers, service ministers, pastoral care, worship services, and catechesis.	Is there enough theological, pastoral, and organisational capacity? **(Addendum A; Addendum E).**
Leadership	Composition of the church council, new leaders, women leadership younger leaders, decision-making capacity.	Can the congregation make responsible decisions and carry them out by herself? **(Addendum C; Addendum E).**
Administration	Minutes, registers, financial statements, statistics, compliance, property documents, bank accounts	Is the congregation ecclesiastically and legally functional **(Addendum A).**
Community connection	Use of buildings, partnerships, service to the neighbourhood, ecumenical networking, local trust	Is the congregation still as living community of faith in and for the community? **(Addendum C).**
Property and assets	Church buildings, manses, rental income, maintenance costs, potential value for the community, redevelopment	Are the assets carrying the ministry, or is the ministry eating into the assets? **(Addendum C; Addendum E).**
Recovery or turnaround trajectory	New leadership, stabilisation, new partnerships, repositioning, improvement in finances or involvement.	Is the congregation going downhill, or are there signs of a possible recovery? **(Addendum A; Addendum E).**

The purpose of such a framework is not to categorise congregations in order to put in place limits or initiate closure. The purpose is to enable a timeous conversation, support, and decision-making. A congregation that has serious red flags must not be attended to only when the last church council member resigns or the last cash reserves are depleted. (Addendum A).

12. Integration: what is dying, growing, changing, and tipping points

Integration question	Synthesis from the addendums
What is dying?	The assumption that each congregation must have a full-time minister, their own building, complete programmes, and can carry enough young families. Solo-congregational projects, building-centred ministry without a community function, mere retention of culture, unification processes which are forced upon congregants as administrative transactions; and the use of capital to extend old models temporarily. **(Addendum A; Addendum C; Addendum E).**
What is growing?	Ring ministry, community church models, family-size congregations with high ownership, inter-church and inter-sectoral partnerships, FBO/NGO collaboration, women-led caring, member leadership, service ministers and ministers, and the synod as a learning and supporting eco-system **(Addendum C; Addendum E).**
What is changing?	The minster moves away from being the primary doer to become a facilitator and connector. The synod moves from meeting structure to eco-system caregiver. Buildings move from being historical burdens to possible community infrastructure. Finances move from member contributions alone to mixed model. Congregational borders move from set geographical ownership to functional networks. **(Addendum A; Addendum C; Addendum E).**
Tipping points	Aging of the traditional congregant base; loss or retention of local critical mass; municipal and economic collapse; capacity of presbyteries and ministers; ability to collaborate interculturally and ecumenically; and the question whether the church is learning to read data, stories, and local wisdom together. **(Addendum B; Addendum D; Addendum E).**

13. Signposts

The following signposts are put before the Executive Committee and presbyteries as draft proposals. They must not be read as conclusive policy before further data, legal advice, financial modelling and church discussions have taken place. (Addendum A; Addendum D; Addendum E).

1. Accept an adaptation framework rather than an existential crisis framework: the church must not react with panic but yet acknowledge that current forms are unsustainable in many places. The church order must provide guidelines but also be more flexible in order to take unique contexts into account. (Addendum D; Addendum E).
2. Develop a synod-wide standardised data set and use it to build and empirically tested screening matrix. (Addendum A).
3. Build strategies specific to presbyteries and regions because the demographic, economic, and community contextual profiles differ in Pretoria, rural areas, small towns, township extensions, and deep rural contexts. (Addendum B; Addendum D).
4. Create a structured support function by means of which the Future Task Team, or a restructured follow-up assembly, serves as internal consultation or learning forum for presbyteries and congregations. (Addendum D; Addendum F).
5. Develop training in interim facilitation, change guidance, conflict management, partnership management, data interpretation, and responsible closure or repositioning. (Addendum C; Addendum E).
6. Test ministers in presbyterial service where full-time congregational posts are no longer sustainable, with clear ecclesial, financial and pastoral frameworks. (Addendum E).
7. Develop a policy on the sale of properties, capital custody, and trust/fund mechanisms so that assets can serve long-term management. (Addendum E).
8. For use, lease, partnerships, maintenance, Reunderstand buildings as missional and community infrastructures and develop practical guidelines for use, leasing, partnerships, maintenance and redevelopment. (Addendum C).

9. Build up a partner register in each congregation and presbytery: other churches, FBOs, NGOs, schools, clinics, CPFs, agricultural structures, municipal contacts, corporate partners, and local leaders. (Addendum C).
10. Identify 5-7 learning schools or example models—e.g. Harare, Mashonaland-West, Wespoort, TLF/MES, a small-town water/safety model, and a women-led caring model—and document it for training. (Addendum C; Addendum E).
11. Make the crossing of cultural borders, and ecumenical broadening, an explicit part of synodal strategy and not merely an option for congregations. (Addendum C).
12. Purposely invest in member leadership, women leadership, ministers and service ministers as key capacities for the next decade. (Addendum C; Addendum E).
13. Create a simple platform where congregations can share stories, data, models, partnership agreements, house rules, facilitation material, and warning signs. (Addendum C).
14. Avoid forced unification. Use Harare as a model for organic trust, fair representation, advance discussions on liturgy and ministry, and the distinction between assets and ministry. (Addendum E).
15. Develop a communication strategy that helps congregations not merely to note loss, but also to take note of new vocational opportunities, concrete models, and road maps for action. (Addendum C; Addendum E).
16. Motivate and empower presbyteries to have in-depth discussions, to help other congregations in the presbytery to speak honestly about current models of being a church, and to plan for the future. (Addendum F).

14. Conclusion

The church will in ten years probably look different: smaller in certain areas, older in many congregations, less dependent on full-time ministers, more dependent on presbyteries and the synod, partnerships, member leadership, and purposeful connection with the community. It does not have to mean the end of being a faithful church. It does however require of the synod to focus less on maintenance and existent forms and more on sustainable vocations, local presence, community impact, and theologically justifiable adaptation. (Addendum A; Addendum B; Addendum C; Addendum E).

The strongest message out of Addendum B, Addendum C and Addendum E is that the future is not determined only by demographic shrinkage. It is determined by how the church learns to read data and stories, local loss *and* local assets, ministers *and* congregants, buildings *and* community spaces, denominational identity *and* ecumenical collaboration. Where these things are brought together, there are already stories of hope and new beginnings. (Addendum B; Addendum C; Addendum E).

15. Discussion questions for presbyteries

1. When we view our present pattern of ministry, is our minister busy mainly with the ‘internal’ work of the congregation, or has he/she been freed up to act as strategic **connector and facilitator** between the congregation and the broader community?

2. If our church building should vanish tomorrow, who in the broader community (besides our congregants) would miss it most, and how can we reunderstand our physical assets **missional and community infrastructure?**

3. With which local partner (NGO, other church, school, or business) do we at present have the greatest potential for collaboration, and what is the first **concrete matter** on which we can begin to work together?

4. If we honestly apply the **screening matrix** to our congregations, what early warning signs are we currently ignoring and how can we proactively consider alternative models (such as facilitation by the presbytery, or interim facilitation) before our financial assets are depleted?

5. Is our congregation currently trying to keep programmes and structures in place that are designed for a much larger congregation, or are we ready to redefine ourselves as a vibrant **family size community church** with high member ownership?

16. Addendums

This report was compiled from the following addendums. The summaries below show what function each addendum fulfilled in the integrated report.

Addendum A: Historical shifts in the Northern Synod

This addendum provides the key empirical input about historical shifts in ministry and congregational capacity. It shows the decline in full-time ministerial posts in congregations, the relative stability in other ministerial roles, the pattern in several regions of the synod, and the need for more data about congregants and finances. It also motivates the development of a standardised data set and screening matrix to identify at an early stage any risks of closing down, mergers, and loss of ministry capacity

Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/19ynWx1RxcLOzquSegdHtSrXIeN7_K1Ub/view?usp=drive_link

Addendum B: Demography of the Northern Synod and congregations

This addendum is the demographic basis of the report. It describes the shrinking and swiftly aging traditional congregant source of the DR Church in the synodal region, points out regional and municipal differences, and compares, where possible, *Kerkspieël* data with census and policing district data. This addendum is especially important because it shows where there is demographic pressure on congregations, but at the same time declares data-reservations related to under-counting, geographical alignment, and the limits of white population data as an approach to membership.

Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EF7VtAKQc7_Vu8v2M0nG1eLkcHqkbm0c/view?usp=drive_link

Addendum C: Community involvement and collaboration

This addendum offers a countrywide ecumenical synthesis of what is currently working in church community collaboration: four geographical contexts, ten success factors, shared risks, and seven practices for the Northern Synod. The key contribution is that it does not understand the church only as an institution to be maintained, but as a community infrastructure, connector, host, and trust-bearer that must collaborate with other churches, FBOs, NGOs, agricultural, state and corporate partners.

Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/13C3X1hUBX3apW6TeTkSBwoqLvQD2d9x9/view?usp=drive_link

Addendum D: Big shifts in synodal region

This addendum sketches the broader scenario and operational environment in which the Northern Synod will function in the next decade. It places demography, available data, tools, infrastructure, leadership and political milieu all in one framework, and emphasises that the church is not necessarily in an immediate existential crisis, but indeed requires systematic risk management, local community involvement, political tolerance, and strategic management capacity.

Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/14qph8zHCURU4G9S5cH_VtnmC5H3Y-70s/view?usp=drive_link

Addendum E: Stories of hope in the synodal region

This addendum draws narrative case studies from Zimbabwe and the Presbytery of Daspoort into a discussion with the synod's future planning. The stories of Mashonaland-West, Kadoma, and Harare show how small, older, and financially vulnerable congregations can function by means of high congregant ownership, limited but sustained ministerial connection, community church models, house rules organic unification, fair management of assets, and possible trust or funding mechanisms.

Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/14CDP9QhjCKuNnErUy9Q6H_asHl6l9dqD/view?usp=drive_link

Addendum F: 2023/24 Task Team Future Report

This addendum documents the first round of the Task Team Future's work after the 2022 synodal decision. It articulates the task team's key question, describes the initial empirical and interpretative input, and brings

together three important early contributions: historical change in the DR Church, routine data on congregations and ministers, and GMB-based tendencies in ministerial posts. It forms the historical and methodical point of departure for the later, more integrated report.

Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1m2Sclygf-5qI58wvi1ifoFr-TFNG2wVv/view?usp=drive_link