

Work of the Parish Council during 2025

- Visa application for Jonas Helgesson, new priest in Sydney – a long and time-consuming process; now completed. This lengthy process was managed and driven by the Board.
 - Work on the Parish Instruction was approved by the Parish Council on 11 December 2025
 - Work on the Parish Regulations was initiated during the year
 - Quotations obtained for repairs to the veranda floor and insurance matters
 - Cooperation agreement with SKUT signed on 16 June 2025
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Clarification of the timeline for the change process relating to the property

In 2023, the Church Board in Sweden (Kyrkostyrelsen) made a principle decision not to own properties abroad (2023:3). Exactly what this would mean for our parish is still unclear.

The principle decision was raised as an agenda item at the annual meetings in 2024 and 2025 (information was also provided at the annual meetings in 2022 and 2023 that a possible change was forthcoming).

There was limited concrete information to share, as no one knew the implications for overseas parishes operating in premises owned by the Foundation of the Church of Sweden.

An investigation was carried out remotely by Bishop Emeritus Per Eckerdal.

“The investigation work began in 2024, and a preliminary version was presented on 19 June 2024. On 26 July 2024, the report was submitted to SKUT.”

Eckerdal’s investigation concludes that the parish has a sound financial position but lacks the required capital to purchase the property at the standard valuation in place. The investigation also advises against the parish ending up in a “rental situation” (§ 2.3).

On 10 June 2025, an email was received from SKUT requesting a response and statement to the proposed document being provided to Kyrkostyrelsen in Sweden. This statement needed to be completed before August 25.

The timing was unfavourable as it coincided with holiday periods. The (KR) and (SCA) acted quickly, and extraordinary meetings were scheduled to move the work on the response and reply.

A strong statement with a clear wish for the parish in Melbourne to remain in Toorak House was drafted and submitted to SKUT.

It was also published for the parish via the newsletter on 31 October 2025.

In the introduction to the statement, it is emphasised that:

- The parish’s fundamental position is to remain in the Church of Sweden’s current premises (Toorak House).

- A decision to sell the property represents an irreversible and definitive endpoint for work that, in various forms, has evolved since 1956. A decision to sell would pose an existential threat to the church's activities and to its more than 700 parish members and over 60,000 annual visitors.

After its meeting on 25 August 2025, the committee for Kyrkostyrelsen in Sweden gave the recommendation that Toorak House should be sold. No solid justification for the decision was provided.

We were offered the opportunity to submit an additional statement as a reply ahead of the Kyrkostyrelsens meeting (held on 18 December 2025). This reply needed to be submitted no later than 10 October 2025.

The (KR) and (SCA) then prepared an information text for the parish in late September, which was included in the October newsletter.

At the same time, a petition was launched, which gathered 6,780 signatures.

Personal comments and reflections from parish members were also collected and included as an appendix to our statement. The strong engagement for Toorak House shown by members and visitors reflects overwhelming and substantial support for our shared cause.

The statement written by the (KR) and (SCA) maintained a clear tone and profile, with the desire to remain in Toorak House as the central theme. The basis and justification for the Committee for Kyrkostyrelsen recommendation were questioned.

At the Church Board's meeting in Uppsala on 18 December 2025, our matter was finally discussed. Our work resulted in a partial victory, as:

"The Church Board discussed the proposal and made a change to the decision regarding the property in Melbourne."

As well as:

"With regard to the property in Melbourne, to instruct the Secretary General to return to the Church Board with proposals for acquiring new premises—primarily through ecumenical cooperation—and that the assignment be carried out in close interaction and dialogue with the parish of the Church of Sweden in Australia."

This is the current situation. The work carried out by the (KR) and (SCA)P in Melbourne has been taken into account, thereby extending the process and postponing a final decision.

SKUT's decision is to first offer all overseas parishes the opportunity to purchase their properties, which also includes our parish.

The complication underlying our statements is the need for a current and realistic valuation of the property so that our parish can make decisions about its future, based on real and realistic financial situation.

That a change will occur is unavoidable. Even if we can find a financial solution to remain in Toorak House (which is what we are working towards), how this might be achieved and what the final outcome will look like remains uncertain.

A divided and fragmented parish is an unsustainable starting point for productive communication and dialogue with SKUT. If, instead, we work respectfully together and focus on promoting unity within the parish, this increases the chances of our continued operations at Toorak House. Respect and unity are also essential for a functional parish.

We in the (KR) and (SCA) take our responsibility very seriously. We communicate and inform the parish to the best of our ability in order to create security and avoid speculation and misinformation. We have considered and acted upon feedback from parish members.

We encourage parish members to continue contributing information and knowledge that benefits our process with SKUT. In this way, the (KR) and (SCA) can receive information and facts that may be helpful in the process. Through statements and dialogue, we can then, with a united front, convey this through established channels to the Church in Sweden with greater impact.

It is important to remember that all members of the Parish Council and the Board are volunteers, with specific roles and areas of responsibility. The change process is complex and time-consuming. Together, we are working to find solutions for way forward.