

26 March 2023 St Carthage's Annual General Meeting: Report from the Chair Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people
the traditional custodians of the land on which we are gathered.

We celebrate their continuing culture
and their care for this land over many generations.

We pray today with faith and hope for the
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and
ourselves that God's mercy and justice will present
in our lives, our communities, and in the heart of our nation.

We commit ourselves to work with them for
reconciliation, recognition and justice.

- 1. Introduction of members of the Pastoral Council**
- 2. Minutes of Previous AGM**
- 3. Report from the St Carthage's Pastoral Council Chair** (C Mews)
- 4. Report from the Finance Committee** (M Pirotta)
- 5. Report from Fr Joe Caddy, including issue of Sun 5pm mass**
- 6. Activities: Spirituality in the Pub, St Vincent de Paul, Feminist Theology group; proposed group relating to the Indigenous Voice, etc.**
- 7. Thanks and call for volunteers for parish activities, including for Trivia night (Sat. 13 May)**

I would like to begin my report by thanking not just the members of the Pastoral Council and the Finance Council, but the many other members of this parish, who make this community what it is. Special thanks too to Leanne Pereira in the parish office, as well as our parish priest, Fr Joe Caddy. These are not easy times, as we shall hear, but I am grateful to everyone who contributes in one way or another, even if it is just by turning up and making a financial contribution, whatever that might be.

We are now settling into a post-Covid period, but with significantly reduced numbers. As we shall hear, the pre-Covid times under Fr Michael Elligate, when we had up to 900 (on special occasions) has now reduced to a steady loyal group of around 140. We owe a terrific debt of thanks to Fr Joe for taking over the parish, initially in May 2020, only to be confronted with a series of enforced closures during 2020 and 2021. While we are over those times, the process of rebuilding our community is not easy.

Since our last AGM, held on 27 March 2022, the Pastoral Council, and its sister group, the Finance Council (ably chaired by Michael Pirotta). has been engaged in this process of rebuilding within conditions of limited resources. We have evolved recognition of three main areas of activity:

- (1) social and pastoral outreach
- (2) liturgical and sacramental activity
- (3) educational and spiritual development.

All three areas need to develop a Communications strategy, using the website as a point of communication, and working with the parish secretary, Leanne Pereira. We are all grateful for her work over the last year in building up a database of current emails, and in maintaining the weekly parish newsletter, and in regularly updating the parish website.

In relation to the first category, social and pastoral outreach, I must thank a small hospitality group, involving John Drennan, Robert and Angela Mandile, Maureen Hoare, Liz Dohrmann others in their helping to serve coffee and tea after the 10am mass. Without a church hall or a school, we have difficulties in getting to know each other. I am always conscious that there are individuals who turn up to any one of our services, who might now know anyone else in the parish. It is very easy for each of us to connect to our friends, but we should all make an effort to chat to individuals whom we do not know. It is also surprising to me to discover people who may be returning to the parish after a long period of absence. It is crucial that we reach out to such people. A surprising number I have discovered are not on the current parish email list. It is so important to make these contacts. Obviously, not everyone might want to speak; nonetheless we should be aware of creating opportunities to share. One suggestion that has been made (by Mark Dohrmann) is that we clear chairs from the rear of the church, to create more of a social space, to chat and drink tea/coffee. All such suggestions to the Pastoral Council are welcome, especially when they do not demand extra expense.

Traditionally, there have been two other ways of our parish engaging in community building: a trivia night and a parish dinner. We had a very successful parish dinner at the Treacy Centre on Sat. 4 June 2022. The parish was going to have a trivia night on 25 March of this year, but for various reasons we decided that we did not have enough lead time to prepare for it. In its place, the Council has proposed holding it on the Saturday evening (namely Sat. 13 May), prior to the feast of St Carthage, traditionally celebrated on 14 May. We have not yet decided when to hold the parish dinner.

Also important for building up our community have been some social events hosted by Fr Joe in the parish house, including a farewell for Heather Weedon on Sun. 30 Oct 2022 and pre-Christmas drinks in the parish house. Just as important however is the work done by the St Vincent de Paul conference helping out those in difficult circumstances, led by David Forrest.

Under the category (2) of liturgical and sacramental activity, it has been difficult to find individuals willing to take on these roles. In this respect both Fr Joe and Leanne, with other volunteers have been involved in developing special training sessions. Any measures to help relieve the pressure on our parish priest (who has a day job as Vicar General for the archdiocese) are always welcome, but they rely on having qualified volunteers, to help out with these various roles.

There are many people to thank in relation to our liturgical activity. I am grateful to Maree Rabach for establishing a comprehensive program of readers, an activity with its own demands in diction and use of a microphone. I am also grateful to her, Mary Galea, and Tony Anderson (with back up help from Liz Dohrmann) in setting up the church. We have all discovered by default how much Heather Weedon, when she was here, was quietly helping out the parish in so many ways.

We have also instituted post-communion reflections from parishioners over the seasons of Advent and Lent, as well as on Mother's Day in May and Father's Day in September. The brief is to speak (no more than 3-5 minutes in relation both to the Gospel and their personal experience. My thanks to all who have participated in this. If you are interested in offering a reflection, please let me know.

The parish is also grateful to our resident musicians, in particular Juliette Hughes and Rick Norwood, with Sean McManus and Sophie Nguyen on the organ, as well as Roger and Anne Rassool, along with a good number of choristers. Morag Fraser also plays a key role in choosing hymns that are relevant to the feast and yet are known to the parish (not an easy task).

For reasons which Fr Joe will present, the pastoral council has decided that with an active involvement of some 140 parishioners on a weekly basis, we simply do not have the resources to maintain three masses weekly. This is an immensely difficult subject, as I well know how each service generates its own sense of community. There is also a mass in our church on Sat evening at 6pm. It was hard to choose between them, but the Sun 5pm was the smallest. The Pastoral Council considered but finally decided against a proposal to run a questionnaire on the matter. There are Sunday evening masses available at other parishes: St Francis, Lonsdale St (5.30pm), St Augustine's, 631 Bourke St (5pm); St Joseph's, 183 Hope St, West Brunswick (5pm); St John the Baptist, 61 Queens Parade, Clifton Hill (5pm). Nonetheless, we earnestly hope that regulars at the Sunday 5pm can find other ways of connecting with our parish.

In the third area of activity, loosely called educational and spiritual development, we have had various activities over the last year. On 2 October 2022, Chris Watson and I, along with Catherine Connelly (an Irish harper) and Maryna Mews, presented an afternoon, Celebrating Brigid and Mochuda (St Carthage). There is a Feminist Theology group, currently chaired by Margaret Rush. I am also delighted that Dennis Green and Richard Olive have been regenerating the Spirituality in the Pub group, hosting what I gather was a wonderful event reviewing the Plenary Council on 1 March with John Warhurst. There will be an opportunity today for these various individuals to speak about their activities.

Two groups in the parish, one co-ordinated by Richard Curtain, another by myself, prepared submissions to the Synod on Synodality, for which we had very short notice, to prepare 250 words, as part of a world-wide process of consultation of the catholic faithful. I am very keen to see continuing involvement in this process of consultation, a precious opportunity in the process of reform, of which we are only one small group.

One possible group that Sean McManus is interested in promoting relates to recognition of Indigenous voices, as well as to the forthcoming referendum on constitutional reform. He will speak further about this.

Our parish is only as strong as those parishioners who give their time to coming together. Collectively we have enormous life skills and experience among us. I am enormously grateful to all those who have volunteered to give their time and energy in any way. It is only through such good will that we build up the body of Christ.

Constant Mews, 23 March 2023