

24 March 2024 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 Council** (M Pirotta)
- 5. Report from Fr Joe Caddy**
- 6. Presentation and discussion of draft strategic plan.**
- 7. AOB**

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, Leanne Pereira in the parish office, as well as our parish priest, Fr Joe Caddy, who gives so much attention to us, even though he has another fulltime job in the diocese as well. 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 be turning up and making a financial contribution, whatever that might be.

At our last AGM, held on 22 March 2023, we as a parish had to face the difficult task of reducing the number of weekend services from three to two. This meant keeping the services on Sat 6pm and Sun 10am, but dropping the Sunday 5pm mass, after 2 April 2023. It was not an easy process. There was a small but loyal group who came on Sunday 5pm, and formed their own community. There was also a regular music group, animated by Roger and Anne Rassool, with many friends. But I am delighted to report that we have successfully negotiated that transition, with two music groups sharing support for the 10am liturgy, with Roger and Anne's group singing on the last and first Sundays of the month, with the other Sundays, co-ordinated by Morag Fraser, and involving Rick Norwood, Juliette Hughes, Sean McManus and others. There is a lot of preparation involved for all of these services, including coming 30 minutes before mass to prepare what we are doing. I think I speak for all the parish in saying that we are grateful to all involved in offering music for these services (sometimes 9-12 people or more). I think the result of this new arrangement is that we have greater variety in styles of worship.

One further development has come about in relation to the pipe organ, which has languished unplayed for too long. In September/October 2023 we benefited for a month from the playing of Miles Pattenden, but following the ructions at ACU he decided to return to Oxford in the UK. But I am pleased to report that another

experienced organist, Gabrielle Mercer (formerly involved in supporting the liturgy at the Benedictine Abbey of New Norcia in WA) is willing to come out one Sunday a month from Olinda to play at mass.

While speaking of liturgical matters, I should also single out the group of sacristans (Maree Rabach, Mary Galea, Liz Dohrmann, who look after preparing the church for each service. Maree also is involved in ensuring that we have readers (an important role, as it is so important for the Word of God to be clearly heard, using the microphone properly). I am also grateful to all those who have responded to my request to offer a short personal reflection on the Gospel during the Sundays of Advent, Lent, Mother's Day and Father's Day. The delight of these reflections is to hear something from such a wide range of people, all drawing on their experience. If you are willing to share something of your experience, but have not yet done so, do mention this to me.

One of the most serious suggestions made at last year's AGM was to draw up a strategic plan for the Parish. This is an idea more easily said than done, but it prompted serious efforts by both the Pastoral and Finance Councils to move beyond day to day management to reflect on broader goals. I am very pleased to report that the Pastoral Council engaged (through the good graces of Trish McNamara) Marlene Ebejer, skilled and experienced in the work of community development to help us work through this process. It involved six stages:

- 1) Meeting with Council to explain the process
- 2) a SWOT analysis involving Pastoral and Finance Council Members
- 3) review of SWOT analysis and creation of an initial report
- 4) initial report discussed by Pastoral and Finance Councils
- 5) discussion of ideas with other members of parish, who offered their own comments
- 6) consolidation of these ideas into a draft strategic plan.

The Council formulated a key set of principles to guide us. After much discussion of many alternatives, we opted for simplicity:

The parish is committed to providing:

- a welcoming and caring community
- an inclusive and inspiring liturgy
- social justice and Gospel values.

These might seem like simple motherhood phrases, but their wording was much debated. One consequence of these discussions is that they were included on a parish bookmark, which gives key information about the parish—particularly for newcomers to the parish to say something about ourselves. The production of the bookmark, co-ordinated by Leanne, was not a simple exercise, but I think we can be pleased with the final result. We can return to the next stage in development of the plan later in the agenda. Its guiding philosophy is to identify what different groups in the parish are doing, and so encourage parishioners, whether long established or only recently arrived (or just looking around), to become involved in the parish. The draft plan groups activity into four main portfolios: Pastoral Outreach, Music and Liturgy, Building and Refurbishment, Education and Spiritual Formation. Each Council member will be asked to monitor and report back on one of these Portfolios, so that the Council can keep track of what is going on in the Parish.

In relation to the first category, social and pastoral outreach, there are two groups we must acknowledge. The first is the St Vincent de Paul Parkville conference,

whose activity is supported by the parish. It services inner city folk with a range of needs, whether in an emergency situation, help with food, utilities, clothing, furniture or white goods. They need not just financial support, but volunteers to do visiting. The second activity I must mention is the hospitality group, involving John Drennan, Robert and Angela Mandile, Craig Martini and Liz & Mark Dohrmann in their helping to serve coffee and tea after the 10am mass. It is so important to make visitors and newcomers to the parish feel welcome. Offering hospitality is a simple but vital gesture to help build up our community. In this vein, the making of a parish bookmark and also an outside noticeboard reporting parish events, are all ways of reaching out to people.

There are other ways in which reaching out can be done. In 2023 we did initially plan to run a trivia night, but we simply did not generate enough interest to make this worthwhile. We may simply revert to holding a parish dinner, perhaps sometime at the Treacy Centre, at a date to be established. I should say that what has been successful have been particular occasions where Fr Joe has invited people back to the parish house.

I have already covered the second portfolio of music and liturgy, and I leave to Michael Pirotta discussion of the third portfolio, namely the building and refurbishment program, the particular responsibility of the Finance Council.

Regarding the fourth portfolio (educational and spiritual development), we have had various activities over the last year. There are a number of activities going on here, listed on the draft strategic plan. The parish decided to support the cause of the Voice referendum (including a banner), and we are grateful to Sean McManus for providing over many weeks little snippets for us to attend to about catholic traditions of social justice in the newsletters. We have also benefited from wonderful talks offered in the Spirituality in the Pub program, a series that is still looking for a replacement activity.

There have also been groups involved in preparing submissions to the Synod on Synodality, a process of consultation that will result in a Second Session of the Synodal Assembly in October 2024. Limited though these efforts are, they are still important sign of the desire of Pope Francis to encourage this process within the Church.

I should conclude by mentioning that having served three years as chair of the Pastoral Council, I am willing to serve another three years. We have two members coming to the end of their term on 30 June, that of Jack Rendle (currently replaced by Craig Martini) and Rosemary Sheehan. I am enormously indebted to both of them. Any individuals wishing to stand for the Pastoral Council in one of those two places should make contact with the chair or the parish office. If there are more candidates than places, an election will be held.

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.

Yours sincerely, Constant Mews, Chair, St Carthage's Pastoral Council