

St Carthage's 2025 AGM – St Carthage's Church, Parkville

Sunday 23 March 11.15am-12.15pm

Welcome to all. 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. Acceptance of the 2024 AGM minutes
2. Finance Council Report (Michael Pirotta, Chair of Finance Council)
3. Pastoral Council Report (Constant Mews, Chair of Pastoral Council)
4. Sacristans (Maree Rabach)
5. SVP Parkville Conference (Maree Rabach)
6. Representative of Future Directions Working Group to speak
7. Administrator's Report (Fr Tony Kerin)
8. Questions and discussion
9. AOB; close of meeting

2025 AGM Pastoral Council Chair's

This parish of St Carthage's is a vibrant community that is held together by the good will, commitment and hard work of a wide range of people, whose efforts over the last twelve months, I would like to acknowledge. We live to implement God's message of love, justice and forgiveness taught by Jesus. In practice, that message is being continually retold and renewed, not just by institutional structures, but by each other in the here and now. I'd like to begin my report by thanking them.

First I will thank Leanne Pereira, who is employed by the parish two days a week, looks after the website, and prepares the newsletter each week. She depends on others, however, to give her information, as well as emails of those who would like to keep up with what is happening in the parish. There are also many others, working in a voluntary capacity, such as John Drennan, who regularly sweeps the path around the church and co-ordinates the hospitality group (with Liz & Mark Dohrmann, Robert and Angela Mandile and Brigid Walker), which provides tea and coffee after mass. Brigid also prepares the flowers and greenery that we see in church. Maree Rabach and her fellow sacristans, who quietly get the church ready each Saturday evening and Sunday morning, and arrange readers. Quite separately Maree is the Convenor of the St Vincent de Paul Parkville Conference. She will speak to us this morning, about two aspects of her work. There are two music groups who plan and prepare music at serve the 10am mass. Thus Anne Rassool works with her group of musicians (Roger Rassool, Peter Ryan and others) on the last and first Sundays of the month, while on the other weeks, Morag Fraser works with Rick and Juliette, Sean McManus and others, in planning for the liturgy. I am personally delighted that we can draw on the services of a young organ scholar, Yesie Lin Viota, on the 2nd and 3rd weeks of the month. Another group involves those, like Mary Udovich, Craig Martini and others, who offer the sacramental program to those preparing for first communion and confirmation. Some tasks, like that of counting the collection, are very much behind the scenes, but still important. During Advent, Lent and on Mother's and Father's Day, we have reflections from members of the parish. My goal is to get people who have not spoken before. We had a very successful working bee in December 2024, just cleaning up the church before Christmas. I know that there

are many other helpers whom I have not singled out by name, but they have my gratitude.

In particular, I want to single out Michael Pirotta for his leadership of the Finance Council, a small dedicated group that manages the finances and physical infrastructure of this community. As he has explained, Michael is helped by Mark Dohrmann, but unfortunately two long standing members (David Menzies and Michael Lewis) have had to step down, as has Andy Jeffrey. Anyone with financial expertise who might offer their services is particularly welcome. Michael sits as well on the Pastoral Council, as I sit on the Finance Council. I must also thank my fellow members of the Pastoral Council, namely (in alphabetical sequence) Anthony Cavanagh, Penny McCann, Sean McManus, Claire Renkin and Brigid Walker. Because Anthony has signalled his decision to move out of state next year, there will be a vacancy on the Pastoral Council. If anyone is interested in such service, do let me know. Terms are three years, renewable once. My term was renewed in 2024, lasting for a second three year term.

As a parish in the catholic tradition we have deep roots in the past, but stirred and stimulated by periodic rediscovery of the message of the Gospel. In our own day, Pope Francis has been driving commitment to synodality, a process of consultation, listening and collective action, in which our own parish has been involved. The way forward for our own parish must be part of these broader developments.

In our own parish things are changing. Many older regulars are passing on. Yet most weeks we also have visitors and potential parishioners dropping by. We have to find new of developing as a community, involving both children and those who are students. While we don't face challenges quite as dramatic as those of Carthage in the seventh century, we have our own issues to face. Our much loved pastor Fr Joe Caddy, who succeeded to Fr Michael Elligate in June 2021 (when we were still in Covid paranoia), was with us until 1 July 2025, when he was called to serve as bishop of Cairns. In his place, we have been delighted to welcome Fr Tony Kerin, who (like Fr Joe Caddy) has a full-time job as Vicar General of the Melbourne archdiocese. We are grateful for the energy he is able to put into this community. His official title given by the Archdiocese is the rather cold term of Administrator. I prefer that of pastor, and I think he is happy with that. There are many practices, traditions

and stories within our parish, that after just nine months he is still learning, just as we benefit from his thoughtfulness about the Gospel. My commitment to ensuring that the parish draws on the extraordinary human and educational resources within our community and that we continue to grow as a community as a presence in the University and Parkville area. We need to do more to cater to families with young children, as well as for younger adult groups. Little gestures, like an offertory procession, can help engender a sense of community identity.

The strategic plan

At our last AGM in March 2024, I presented a draft strategic plan (circulated with the agenda). That document was itself the fruit of a long process of consultation with the parish, also with an external consultant (Marlene Eberjeer). Drafting such a document forced us to identify our core values. I do not want to repeat what you have available in front of you, but its core message is that our community involves a cluster of different networks, engaged in one aspect or other of the parish. One mode of involvement is an economic one, that of making a regular financial contribution through planned giving, or in a more incidental way, putting money on the plate. But there are other ways in which people can serve the community, namely through voluntary engagement—whether through helping out one or both of the singing groups, helping with the sacramental programs, or social engagement through groups like the St Vincent de Paul Conference. I urge everyone to think of one way or other in which you can become engaged.

While some of us are actively engaged in welcoming people to the church, this is a role that I would love to see develop. We can be proud of our three core values as summarized on the St Carthage's bookmark (a welcoming and caring community; an inclusive and inspiring liturgy; social justice and Gospel values), but I think we can do better in welcoming newcomers, visitors (or returners) to the parish. Not everyone is on the parish email list, or realises how to engage in the planned giving program. One of the most invigorating experiences I find is simply of meeting people that I do not know, and learning about them. We are an international community, and we must develop in that way.

The strategic plan is always in need of being updated. Perhaps one of the most important new developments will be introduced shortly. Through the energy and commitment of a number of parishioners concerned for the future of the parish, a proposal was made to the Pastoral Council to establish what we have collectively decided to call a Future Development Working Group, involving representatives from the Pastoral and Finance Councils, but charged with exploring new initiatives and answerable to the Pastoral Council. I leave it to representatives of that group to explain this working group in more detail. I hope that it can provide more detailed proposals and even an Action plan for us to consider as a parish. If the strategic plan can be improved in the process, so much the better.

One of the major innovations Fr Tony Kerin has helped us introduce are Parish Forums, the first on Friday 27 Sept 2024, followed by shared lunch in the parish house, the second on 16 Feb 2025, on a Sunday morning, again followed by lunch in the parish house. He has introduced us to the practice of spiritual conversation, where we learn to share and thoughts in small groups, and learn to listen to what each is saying. This is still a craft we have to learn, but it is an opportunity for us all to develop. The parish house is an important collective asset, and it is good to use it.

There are a number of small scale groups active in the parish, some indicated on the last page of the strategic plan, meditation circles (as led by Liz Dohrmann), feminist theology networks by Mary Roberts), also a fortnightly Zoom group (convened by Annie Cantwell-Bartl), reflecting on the Sunday gospel, for those not able to get physically to the church. I would be very grateful for all corrections and news of any new groups that parishioners would like to develop.

Respectfully submitted, Constant Mews