



ST. CARTHAGE'S UNIVERSITY PARISH
PARKVILLE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

26 March 2023

Dear Friends and Parishioners,

At the Parish Annual General Meeting this morning I announced that next Sunday, 2 April would be the final 5.00pm Sunday Mass at St Carthage's.

There is much sadness in this as it has been a long standing part of parish life but the decision reflects our current reality. From a thriving Mass going community of 940 just a few years ago our Mass counts over the past two years have hovered around 140.

This reality has an impact on all aspects of parish life. For example:

- We have struggled to form a safeguarding committee which is a requirement of all parishes and so the Parish Pastoral Council has taken on that role in addition to its overall governance role.
- We rely very heavily on just a couple of generous parishioners to set up for Mass.
- We are now paying church cleaners and have contracted a florist to provide flowers whereas these services were previously provided by volunteers.
- The fewer numbers have also taken a toll on parish finances and our annual income has dropped off significantly.

At its February meeting the Parish Council determined that as a parish with a Mass going population of 140 we can no longer justify having three Sunday Masses. In considering what number of participants might justify a third Sunday Mass the Council discerned that perhaps if we had attendances of 200 then we might manage to adequately resource three masses. In that case we would expect each Mass to carry at least 60 of that total.

As the smallest numbers were at the Sunday evening Mass it was announced to parishioners through the newsletter of 12 February that unless Mass numbers at the 5.00 pm Mass on Sunday increase to 60 each week then we would cease offering that service at Easter. Despite great efforts by the music group, numbers have not increased and remain around the mid 30s.

This evening we have distributed information about other Sunday evening Masses in the area but obviously our preference as a parish is to keep the community together and we would encourage you to find your way to one of our other Masses on Saturday evening at 6.00pm or Sunday morning at 10.00am.

I am aware of the great disappointment that this will be to you who have faithfully participated in this Mass, some of you for decades. No doubt you have also shared our concerns at the serious decline in numbers over recent years.

I do not believe that this reality is the fault of anyone in particular. No doubt factors such as a general decline in Mass numbers, the retirement after thirty four years of a much loved and highly regarded pastor

in Fr Michael and the after effects of COVID 19 with the extended periods of lockdown have all contributed to the current situation.

I would like to thank in particular Roger and Anne Rassool and the musicians who have worked tirelessly over the past years to help provide a prayerful, stimulating and participative liturgy. I would also like to acknowledge the wonderful service of Tony Anderson who faithfully opens up and prepares the church for Mass each Sunday evening. Since my arrival at the parish the Jesuit priests through Fr Frank Brennan and the Jesuit Theological College Community have also been a rich source of assistance.

Finally I would like to extend an invitation to you to join me at the parish house after the final Mass next Sunday for drinks and a time to share memories and some of the past glories of the Sunday evening Mass.

While the end of this era may seem a setback for our parish we need continually to seek new opportunities to be the outward focussed missionary parish imagined by Pope Francis in his teaching document *Evangelii Gaudium* where he says:

28. The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters”. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.

With every best wish and blessing for the coming Holy Season of Easter,



Fr Joe Caddy
Parish Priest

Neighbouring parishes offering Sunday evening mass (for information)

St Francis, 326 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne Victoria 3000 ·Sun. 5.30pm St. Francis' Church – Victoria's Oldest Catholic Church (stfrancismelbourne.com)

St Augustine's 631 Bourke St Melbourne VIC 3000 Sun 8pm.

St Joseph's 183 Hope St, West Brunswick Sun 5pm. Sunday Mass Times — Brunswick and Moreland Catholic Mission (bmcatholicmission.org.au)

St John the Baptist 61 Queens Parade Clifton Hill Sun 5pm, Parish of Our Lady of the Southern Cross