

## **St Carthage's, Parkville 2026 AGM: Annual Report**

**Sunday 22 March 11.00am-12.15pm**

I begin by acknowledging that we meet as a parish on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri and Woi-Wurrung People of the Kulin nation, and their leaders, past, present, and emerging. Since we met on 23 March 2025 our parish, so well served by our pastor, Fr Tony Kerin, has gone through a number of profound changes and developments that I think you can see hinted at on the agenda for today's meeting. If I may offer my own sense of what is happening, it is that there is a buzz, a sense of renewal in our community. We have seen many beloved animators and leaders in one field or another step down for various reasons, often after many decades of service to the parish. We acknowledge their profound contribution to the parish over many years, indeed decades. Some have moved on from this life to join their maker. We have been through a period of transition during which we all have all been learning to work out how to grow. But we also have new people coming into our Parish, sometimes just visiting occasionally, sometimes becoming regular parishioners whom we are delighted to see every week or fortnight or so. Together we are growing as a community, developing slowly (and sometimes quickly) into new directions.

Let me recap some of the most important of these changes and developments. I am immensely grateful to Michael Pirotta for chairing the Finance Council for some six years and managing our slender finances so carefully, and thank Jim Barber for taking over this role, as to others in that group, including Ronald Frisone, whom we also welcome. Similarly, I am grateful to all those Pastoral Council members, including its secretary Sean McManus. I thank Anthony Cavanagh for his services. Because he has stepped down, there is a vacancy on the Council. We are an aging parish. We really would like to have this vacancy permanently reserved for someone from the under 50 generation if at all possible. The duties are not onerous. We would love to have the voices of newcomers to the parish.

Last year, the Pastoral Council established a Future Developments Working Group, involving Roger Rassool, Peter Ryan, Mark Dohrmann and Penny McCann, who with others consulted widely in the parish to produce a questionnaire that produced a very high response rate (97 out of 130 active parishioners). I thank all of them for the work they put into in this, generating a detailed report, with more granular detail than I can cover here. I also record my thanks to David Sutton, as outside analyst for helping the Pastoral Council digest its conclusions, which related to many issues, including governance, communications, and the importance of identifying the various groups active in the parish and representatives whom people can contact. One of the strong messages that came out from the questionnaire was the importance of collaboration in decision making and of communications, as well as of making people aware what was going on and encouraging further involvement. Some indication of our progress in this respect may be evident from listing these various groups on the agenda for today's meeting. One consequence of this process of us becoming involved in a broader process of renewal was to hold a number of Parish Forums over the last year, permitting everyone to have their say in matters relating to our community. In this we were following a process of interaction and discernment employed in the broader

synodal process that Pope Francis and now Pope Leo encourages us to develop, including at a synod of the Melbourne archdiocese in December this year.

I must here register my thanks to two key individuals: our Pastor, **Fr Tony Kerin**, who has to manage a demanding full-time job as Vicar-General of the Archdiocese, as well as looking after this Parish in his spare time. He devotes much attention among other things to providing sermons that we value, developing the screen in a way from which we can all benefit. The fact that he was taken ill with heart issues late last year made us value his contribution all the more, when he returned.

I also single out for special thanks **Leanne Pereira**, the Parish Secretary, who combines this position with other commitments, as well as looking after her family. She has to deal with numerous inquiries to the Parish, and is also responsible for managing the website and the weekly newsletter. Through the efforts of **Mark Dohrmann** there is a parish Facebook that I encourage everyone to explore. There are always improvements that can be made on the communications front, and they can be improved only with the assistance of each of you, sharing news of what is going on, certainly by the Thursday (preferably earlier) of each week, prior to the newsletter going out on Fridays. I must also thank Mark for being the fixer of so many small practical issues when things go awry.

One of the new developments that took a lot of time was a review by the archdiocese of how our parish was implementing safeguarding measures. This is relevant to everyone volunteering in a regular capacity coming into contact with children on a regular basis, as well as those more generally in a vulnerable situation. Claire Renkin has become our safeguarding officer, responsible for explaining how we can live up to our statutory obligations in this respect, particularly in regard to Working with Children and Police Checks, something that teachers already are very familiar with.

We are not a large parish, and do not have our own school or hall through which the community can animate itself. 80% of respondents to that questionnaire were over 60. We have to work doubly hard to secure renewal in our community. On the issue of our survival, and the spectre of being forced to amalgamate, I am delighted to report that Fr Tony has secured a longer-term arrangement by which St Carthage's Parish is attached to the post of Vicar-General. This means we can avoid merger with any other parish. Nonetheless we need to rescue our Pastor from being swallowed up by administrative responsibilities. The Finance and Pastoral Councils, chaired by Jim Barber and myself respectively, thus have to assume close involvement in both financial/practical administration and pastoral care, broadly conceived. Some items are necessarily expensive, like a defibrillator, the use of which Brigid Walker will demonstrate in a 5 min. video at the end of this meeting. Another major long-term commitment is to establishing a Columbarium, a place of repose and commemoration for the ashes of those in our community. We encourage everyone to think about this as a long-term investment in the parish.

There are an amazing number of groups actively working in the Parish. Further on in this meeting, I shall ask each contact person present here to say something briefly about the work they and their immediate collaborators engage in.

### **Liturgy and upkeep of our church**

Liturgy and worship are central to the life of any parish. I am indebted to **Helen Scorgie** for the enormous effort she has put into this, and the various musicians she has assembled (no easy task). She has taken reigns after two other music groups in our parish stepped down, one led by Anne and Roger Rassool, with a devoted group of musicians, another by Morag Fraser working with Juliette Hughes and Rick Norwood. We are indebted to them for many decades of service to the parish. We can only be grateful to Helen for her assiduous attention to finding liturgically appropriate hymns and pieces relevant to each Sunday, as well as respecting matters of copyright. Just preparing texts and images for the screen is a big weekly job. She (with her daughter's help) choose beautiful art works, relevant to the Gospel of the day. I am also grateful to our various keyboardists. We are still looking for a pipe organist able to play our heritage organ, to replace an organ scholar who played the pipe organ for us for a short time last year. All suggestions about liturgy are always welcome.

I also thank **Maree Rabach** for the sterling quiet and regular work she does with her helpers, Mary Barber and Mary Galea, also Liz Dohrmann in relation to setting up the church for Sat 6pm and Sun 10am services as well as when needed during the week. With Easter, there is a lot of preparation needed. There is a roster that people are encouraged to sign up for at the back of the church. Besides recruiting readers each week, they also recruit parishioners (children in particular) to take up the offertory. I can also mention here Robert Mandile for his work not just in welcoming parishioners at 10am mass, but in taking up the collection, in particular now including a tap and go facility (when it is working properly).

Other quiet work that takes place every week relates to flowers, brilliantly arranged by our very own **Brigid Walker**. She has also taken charge in initiating a number of working bees, which turn out to be brilliantly effective not just in sprucing up the church interior and exterior, but also in team building. The process is also great fun. A significant new development that started last year is that Josephone Plazzer of the Melbourne Catholic Youth group have started monthly Mercy Nights (involving meditation on the Eucharist and benediction) at St Carthages during the university termtime. We have also been delighted that they have participated in these working bees. We are most grateful that members of her group also joined into the working bee process. Important work is also done by John Drennan in looking after regular waste, a job that tends to be little noticed, but is vital to our well being. We thank him for his work in this respect.

### **Hospitality and Pastoral Outreach**

Our parish is nothing if we are not concerned for others. **John Drennan** organizes the hospitality group that offers tea, coffee and biscuits after 10am mass. In the wetter and cooler months, the chance of offering refreshments inside the church has been a great development. But all members of the parish need to be on the lookout for visitors and newcomers to the church, to make them feel at home. John also plays a quiet but vital role in waste management, looking after the bins outside the church. We value his attention to the environment and to animal creation more generally. Another part of our role as a

community, is to look after the wider community. As a parish, we support the St Vincent de Paul Conference that Maree Rabach helps co-ordinate. She is always looking out for others to assist in this work. We have also decided to participate in a project run by Caritas whereby donations made on Wednesday, 25 March will be doubled by an offer from a generous supporter, to maximise their campaign. Further information in the newsletter and website.

### **Education and Spiritual Formation**

Under the category of education and spiritual development, there have been several new developments over the last year. Thus, **Robert Mandile** organized a most successful trip to the Islamic Museum in late January, with some 25 parishioners listening to a wonderful guide that he arranged, something on which we may build further. Also in this category we have a feminist theology network involving various people, including Margaret Rush and **Claire Renkin**. There is a Morning Reading Group run by **Mary Roberts**, as well as a weekly meditation group conducted by **Liz Dohrmann**. She has also become responsible over the last year for identifying parishioners willing to offer short reflections after communion in Lent, Advent, also Mothers' Day and Father's Day. **Peter Flint** is thinking of establishing a men's reading group, that he may speak briefly about at this meeting. We also need to develop provision for sacramental education, for children preparing for sacraments of first communion and confirmation. **Leanne**, our Parish secretary, is the contact person. A couple of volunteers have expressed an interest in this; if we had a third volunteer for this group, that would be wonderful.

Finally, I should mention a fortnightly zoom group run by Annie Cantwell-Bartl. I myself am part of that group. In fortnight at 5pm, one of us volunteers to present the Gospel reading that Sunday while someone else offers a poem or visual image for a brief 10 minute discussion, that they find spiritually powerful in some way or other. If you are interested in taking part, just shoot an email to Anne Cantwell-Bartl at the email address on the agenda;

### **Future Developments**

There are other projects that I would like to see develop. As a historian I would like to celebrate St Carthage/Mochuda, our patron saint (his feast-day being 14 May), much concerned with lepers and outsiders in his native Ireland). With the demise of the *Spirituality in the Pub* movement, I would like to see us contribute as a parish to some educational program involving spirituality and public life. It would be good to collaborate with other faith communities in our neighbourhood, such as the Ukrainian catholic church, not far away. We could also think about how we might get involved the synodal process leading up to the Melbourne Archdiocese and beyond, part of a largely process of consultation that Pope Leo is seeking to promote. Personally, I am keen to see us develop both theologically and practically in this process of consultation as to how we might implement Christ's teaching in our lives. There is no limit to the ways in which our parish could develop. But I am interested to hear all suggestions about how we might grow and move forward as a community. Thank you for listening.

Respectfully submitted, Constant Mews, PC St Carthage's Parkville 22 March 2026