

Summary of themes from St Carthage's Parish Forum 16 Feb 2025

Some 38 parishioners gathered for a spiritual conversation, meeting in different groups of about six people each, each person sharing with others their group what they felt the Holy Spirit was saying to them about how we as a parish could grow together. Fr Tony Kerin opened by sharing various ways in which the parish might develop and urging that the parish should consider both its identity and what might be distinctive about its contribution. It could explore connections with a variety of adjoining groups of parishes in the area or even with the cathedral. While small and economically vulnerable, compared to other parishes), it is endowed with a vibrant and articulate community. The St Carthage's community needs to consider in what way it should develop. Participants in the forum emphasized that the parish must be involved in making decisions about its future. This forum is part of a process of listening to each other, prior to holding an AGM (scheduled for 23 March 2025) or a Special General Meeting of the parish, where decisions can be made, following conventional procedure.

Strong support was expressed for the parish community as continuing to provide support and encouragement in living out the message of the Gospel. The advantage of being small is that it provides a sense of community, able to foster positive relationships. There was recognition of the need to overcome loneliness and isolation. The average age of parishioners is getting older. There is a certain amount of grieving going on about this process, but we have to decide how to move forward. People need to be consulted about what they need. Some might pass by a number of churches getting to St Carthage's. What is it that is special about our community?

A number of people in the forum spoke about the importance of renewing our connection both with families with children, and with younger people, including the student cohort and beyond. It was also important that there be consultation and transparency in how the parish was run, to avoid the impression that decisions were made in a purely top-down approach.

Some emphasized that the church was valued as a place for reflection and prayer, and for nourishment through good liturgy and music. Many voiced the importance of making connections in the parish. There are families and others who may be involved in the sacramental program, and others who occasionally drop in for mass, but do not necessarily engage further in the community. Ways need to be found of developing relationships with these visitors. While individual parishioners vary in their emphases, there was recognition of the need to listen to each other, as encouraged by the structure of the process of spiritual conversation.

Summary by Constant Mews, with help from Sean McManus.