Partnering for Mission

Dear Parishioners,

Hopefully you will have learnt from our earlier communications that the parishes of St Mary's Williamstown and St Joseph's Spotswood and Newport, encouraged by the Archdiocese, have taken the decision to explore options for working more closely in some form of collaborative partnership.

As a starting point, we now wish to establish a process of discussion with parishioners in both parishes, not only about the need for taking this step, but to also ensure that the needs and aspirations of our three Church communities - St Margaret Mary's Spotswood, Sacred Heart Newport and St Mary's Williamstown - are fully taken into account when any decisions are taken.

The purpose of this letter is to lay out, for your consideration, our understanding of the need for partnership, the opportunities it could present for enhancing our joint mission, and a process designed to guide the development of a model of partnership that will best suit us all.

A Joint Steering Committee.

Fr Samuel Kapani, Parish Priest of St Joseph's, and Fr Greg Trythall, Parish Priest of St Mary's, along with representatives from each Parish, and of the Archdiocese, have formed a small Partnership Steering Committee. Its purpose is to clarify guiding principles and objectives; research and propose options for initiatives we might take; co-ordinate consultations with parishioners at each stage; and ultimately guide the implementation of whatever decisions are taken.

Why Partner Now?

Two key factors contribute to the background to the proposal for our two parishes to enter into a partnership.

Firstly, in 2021 the Archdiocese commenced its transformation strategy, *Take the Way of the Gospel*: A framework for parish renewal, centred in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit and rooted in prayer and discernment, designed to help parishes become more **vibrant, vital, and viable** in a rapidly changing world. The challenges it seeks to address are ones we know well: our society is becoming increasingly secular, our parish communities are ageing, and while our Catholic schools continue to flourish, many families remain less connected to parish life.

Take the Way of the Gospel invites us to reimagine how we live as Church — together. It encourages parishes to collaborate more closely, sharing gifts, resources, and faith in ways that strengthen our mission and ensure a sustainable, life-giving future for our communities.

The second has to do with the reality of the increasing shortage of priests. Whilst this is a general phenomenon in the Western World, here in our Melbourne Archdiocese it is becoming particularly acute. Each year there are generally more than three times the number of priests who retire, than there are ordinations. This has become a particularly pertinent matter for our two parishes with Fr Greg retiring in June 2027, when he will be aged eighty years. The advice from the Archdiocese is that from that time St Mary's will not have a stand-alone Parish Priest. The foreshadowed arrangement is that St Mary's will share a priest with St Joseph's Parish. Rather than this being seen as a regretful situation, we see the next fourteen months as an opportunity to plan positively for the good of both our parishes.

Principles for Fostering Partnership

For your consideration we propose the following principles that will guide our efforts to establish a model of partnership that best suits us:

A Shared Vision. The overriding Vision for our partnership will be for both our parishes to become dynamic and growing Catholic Faith Communities. This should be the touchstone for all our decision making when considering partnership.

Equal Partners. We come together as equals, irrespective of the profile and history of our parishes. We see opportunities for learning from each other and for sharing our talents for the betterment of both parishes.

Distinctive Church Communities. We understand that our faith is deepened when, as parishioners, we experience a sense of belonging to our local Church Community where spiritual fellowship is nurtured. We value the distinctive identity of each of our three Church Communities.

Access to the sacraments and pastoral care remains a priority. Throughout this partnership process we will work out how this can be best structured, whilst acknowledging that this may eventually include some changes to practices, times and places.

Responsible and Efficient Stewardship. Acting as responsible stewards within this partnership means that we will seek to use available resources for the good of all. In particular ways of creating more efficient shared administrative policies and systems should be explored.

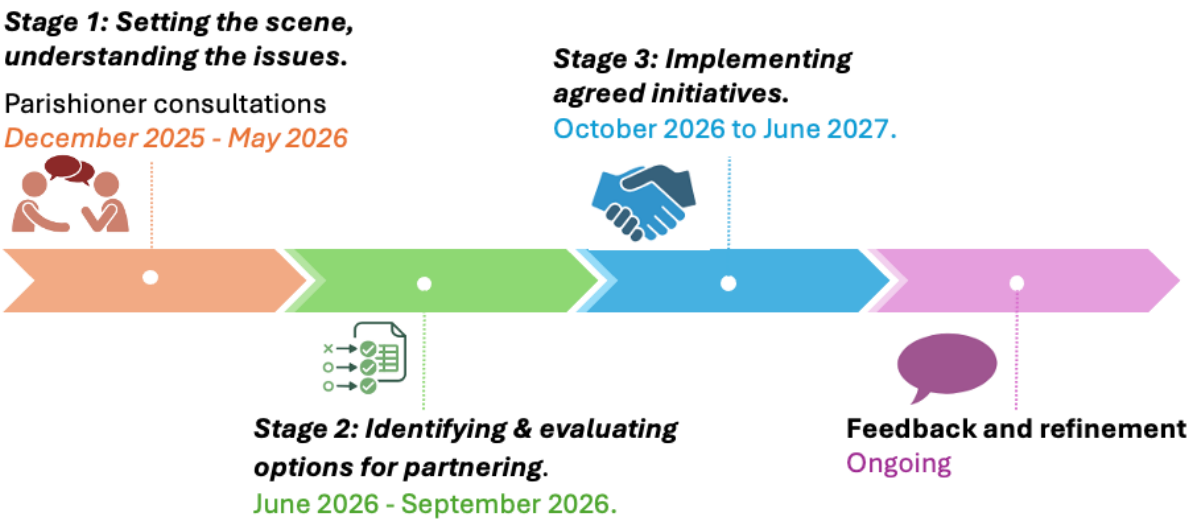
Communication and the engagement of parishioners. The health and effectiveness of any partnership will depend largely upon the extent to which parishioners understand the issues involved and are able to have their say about

them. Consequently, at each stage, every effort and multiple methods will be needed to provide information to parishioners in an open and honest way, and to listen to and to act on their feedback.

Partnership, not amalgamation. This is a proposal to partner in some way, not to amalgamate. Partnership will not affect the assets and boundaries of each parish, financial contributions from parishioners will continue to be allocated to the parish they have nominated, and each parish will maintain its own set of accounts.

A Staged Approach

Understanding that we have fourteen months in which to plan and implement our preferred way of partnering, the following broad schedule is proposed. We recognise that not all matters will necessarily strictly follow these stages. For example, if an idea is identified at an early stage, agreed to be a good one, and for which there appears to be nothing to stop it being immediately implemented, it should be.



Stage One: Setting the scene and understanding the issues. December 2025 to May 2026.

Involves:

- Building an awareness amongst parishioners of the need for partnering and the opportunities it may present.
- Receiving feedback from parishioners concerning the proposed principles to be followed, any issues they may have identified, and the schedule for partnership discussions.
- Learning from other parishes which have gone through, or are going through, a similar process.

Stage Two: Identifying and evaluating the options for partnering. June 2026 to September 2026.

Involves:

- Establishing a list of proposed initiatives and describing each.
- Assessing the feasibility of each, the benefits they may bring, and any risk they may involve.
- Prioritising the initiatives and making an implementation schedule.

Stage Three: Implementing agreed initiatives. October 2026 to June 2027.

Involves:

- Overseeing the implementation of initiatives and being prepared to make adjustments when necessary.

Hearing From You - Your Views

We now really want to hear from you about the pathway to partnering that we propose. We would like to hear your thoughts, ideas, queries, suggestions and any concerns you may have. As a first step, members of the Partnership Steering Committee will speak at all Masses across on the weekends of Saturday 2 and Sunday 3 May, and Saturday 9 and Sunday 10 May 2026. Committee members will be available to speak with parishioners after each Mass. There will be a further opportunity for St Joseph's parishioners to discuss these proposals on Wednesday 6 May at 7pm in the parish presbytery.

We also invite your written feedback prior to, or after the above discussions. Please do so by emailing: newport.spotswood-ppc@cam.org.au or williamstown@cam.org.au. Please head your email response 'Parish Partnership Feedback.'

Very best regards,

Partnership Steering Committee:

St Joseph's Parish, Newport and Spotswood

Fr Samuel Kapani, Marlene Monahan, Paul Sharkey and Tony Nicholson.

St Mary's Parish, Williamstown

Fr Greg Trythall, Karen Colla, Joe Covelli and Stephen Littleton