I begin by acknowledging that we meet and worship and live on the traditional country of the Yalukit Wilum clan of the Boon Wurrung people, part of the greater Kulin Nation. We recognise them as the custodians of this land over countless generations, and we pay our respects to their elders, past and present. Let us pray that as followers of Jesus we may be people of reconciliation, and that with all the people of this land we may walk the difficult and costly path towards truth-telling and justice.

I particularly welcome those who are here for the first time at an Annual Meeting of this parish. Thank you for sharing in this formal process of our governance, and for entering into our life together in this way. We are the richer for your presence among us.

As we welcome new faces, we are reminded of beloved and familiar faces who are no longer with us, both members of the parish and people in the wider circle of parish life. We give thanks to God for the lives of Marjorie Sculley, Cheryl Smith, Waaka Paku, Ray Eudey, Audrey Said, Doug Grant, Ellie Doloughan, Archie Burt, Grace Burt, Prue Wickens and Pat O’Connor. May they rest in peace, and rise in glory.

The various reports presented to this meeting tell a story of much faithful work for the life of our parish. Some of that work is seen and known, some of it is largely unseen. Some of it takes place through recognised roles, some of it happens spontaneously as people step in to meet arising needs. To each one of you, I thank you for what you have brought to our life in this past year – we would be diminished without your contribution. I pray that we may all “stir up the gift of God within us” as we enrich and support each other.

Particular thanks to those who have held formal roles of leadership during this year: churchwardens, parish council members, lay ministers, and leaders of particular ministries and groups. These are all significant responsibilities and are part of a shared leadership which parish council has sought to encourage more intentionally.

This year we have been a clergy team of three, with the Rev’d Dave Thompson joining us in February as Assistant Curate. Dave brings a significant experience of ministry both past and present, and through his chaplaincy at Victoria Police is a bridge from the life of the parish right into some of the needs of our wider community. This is a beautiful model of the ministry of a deacon, and I look forward to Dave continuing and consolidating that ministry in the year ahead. The Rev’d Danny McRoberts completed his term as Assistant Curate in February, and was
licenced as both Assistant Priest and also Pastoral Minister in the Maori Community – this is an important recognition of his ministry which extends well beyond the boundaries of our parish. I am grateful to both Dave and Danny for their support, friendship and collegiality as clergy of this parish.

Also during the year my own Archbishop’s licence was renewed, moving from Priest-in-Charge to Incumbent of the parish. I am honoured and delighted that we can look forward to being together for some years to come, as we share the journey of being God’s people in this place.

Where we are now, and where we are heading
The report to this meeting from Parish Council focuses on two important documents. The National Church Life Survey results are a snapshot of where we are (or were) from one Sunday about a year ago. They provide valuable information and bring into focus some of the challenges and opportunities embedded in our demographics, our attitudes and priorities. There is more work for parish council to do with these results and indeed in communicating them more widely, but even the observations in parish council’s report give us plenty to consider. Not surprisingly, we find that our two centres have different strengths, and there is no doubt more that we can do to play to these distinctive strengths.

The second document is the Mission Action Plan, which was developed in the first half of this year not just as an action list but also as a process to shape the work of parish council. At the final meeting of this year’s council we acknowledged that both the action list and the process are works in progress!

However as we look to 2018 and beyond, I want to focus on the three mission areas into which that MAP is organised, and to explore how they can together point us to the future life of this parish. By way of example, I will also note new initiatives in the past year which fall under each heading – we could also add to those lists many of our ongoing ministries and activities.

1. GROWING in faith, prayer and learning
This aspect of our mission envisages and enables a parish future where:

- People of all ages expect to be learners in faith: together discovering new insights and challenges and applying them to their lives. We create opportunities for that learning: within our worship, in small groups, in individual reading and study.
- Each of us expects to be regularly reading the Bible and becoming more familiar with the scriptures.
- In our worship services we take care to offer our best to God, and we find deep joy in gathering as God’s people. Each of our congregations is clear on its particular charism (its unique gift or emphasis) in how it gathers, worships, and welcomes.
- We regularly baptise people who have come as adults to faith in Christ.
- We pray often and deeply: in large groups, in small groups, in twos and threes, on our own. We are comfortable and confident in the heart language of prayer, and expect to depend on prayer to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit. We expect our praying to carry both pain and joy, and to place us in fellowship with others.

In the past year we have:
- Started a monthly Sunday evening prayer service at St Eanswythe’s, with particular prayers each month for one of our mission giving partners.
- Completed two six-week modules of the Pilgrim course: The Lord’s Prayer in May-June and Baptism in October-November.
- Worked through the books of Philippians, Ruth and 1 Thessalonians during our weekday Eucharists in ordinary time, with opportunity for shared questions and discussion.
- Taken part in Thy Kingdom Come, an ecumenical campaign of prayer in the lead-up to Pentecost.
- Baptised three adults and seven children, confirmed four adults and received one into the Anglican Communion – all preceded by conversations and learning about faith and the life of the church.

2. SERVING others out of the justice and compassion of God

This aspect of our mission envisages and enables a parish future where:
- We seek to be, and are known for being, a blessing to our wider community.
- Serving others and standing alongside those in need is integral to our identity as a parish, and so most of our members are involved in some way in a ministry which looks beyond our own people.
- We take part in wider church and community campaigns for justice and compassion, speaking up and praying for the values of the kingdom of God.
- We have strong relationships with the mission and charitable agencies that we support financially: we keep informed about their work and hold them in prayer.

During the past year we have:
- Entered into a partnership with Laverton Community Integrated Services, through which emergency relief and crisis counselling is available at St Eanswythe’s each Friday morning.
- Seen Clementines playgroup at St Clement’s become well established as an important point of contact with the local community.
3. NURTURING our common life as the Body of Christ

This aspect of our mission envisages and enables a parish future where:

- We seek to know each other as family and to love each other across our many differences.
- We recognise and honour the gifts and insights that come from those of different generations, of those who have been in the parish for a long time and of those who have joined us recently.
- We have well-understood processes for newcomers to enter into and be included in the wider life of the parish.
- We recognise that we are part of a larger church and so look for opportunities to engage with other Christians in our area.
- We care for our properties and material resources so that they can be used effectively for the whole life of the church.

In the past year we have:

- Included baptised children in the sharing of Holy Communion.
- Collaborated with other churches in Altona for a Refugee Ration Meal, with story-telling and fund-raising.
- Held an informal Saturday eucharist and meal particularly for families and children.

Growing in faith, serving others, nurturing a common life – my prayer is that we may come to see our whole life together in Christ as being shaped in these three directions. I look forward to sharing that journey with you all as we move into a new year, trusting that God’s Holy Spirit will always be ahead of us.

The Rev’d Chris Lancaster
26 November 2017