

Pastor's Report for January 2024 Council Meeting

For the last meeting of this Mount Cross Congregational Council, I want to lead with my thanks to each of you for serving this year! You are excellent and generous leaders who have helped our church move through the year with grace, faith, careful stewardship, and responsible oversight. God bless you.

Sadly, long-time Mount Cross member, Jo Holler, passed away on December 20. Her funeral and celebration of life will be Saturday, January 20 at 2 p.m.

Christmas Eve 2024 at Mount Cross was a joy. We held one worship service at 4 p.m. Over 230 people attended in-person. It was wonderful to have a full-to-the-brim sanctuary and lots of children to populate our live nativity scene during the Children's Message. The music was beautiful. Carol Browning continues to inspire us by bringing out the musical talents of our congregation and directing it all towards prayer and praise. Thank you also to Joe Zimmerly, Deacon Cecelia, Bill Dawson, Justin Thai, the Altar Guild, and all worship assistants and musicians for making the Fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve worship happen on the same day! FYI: The next time that will happen is in 2028.

I had a very relaxing and restorative vacation December 25-January 3. Thank you to Carol Browning for holding everything together and coordinating a beautiful service of Christmas Lessons and Carols on Dec. 31, thank you to Pastor Scott Maxwell-Doherty for presiding at the service, and thank you to Deacon Cecelia for doing the Children's Message and being on-call for pastoral emergencies.

Paul and I were happy to host an Epiphany party at our house on January 6. People were generous in their donations of diapers and wipes for the Redimidos/Our Saviour Lutheran Graceful Diaper Pantry in Oxnard. Mount Cross will serve at Graceful Diapers on Saturday, March 2.

Regular faith formation programs resumed the week of January 8, as did my service to the Diocese of Los Angeles on the committee to organize the annual "Diocesan Information Gathering" on March 16 and my coaching and mentoring work with Thriving in Ministry.

The Discipleship Experience met on January 14. Mid-way through the 9-month pilot program, I can say it has been successful in helping people to deepen their connections with God, one another, and the community of Mount Cross.

We have been promoting the book *Love Without Limits* by Jacqueline Bussie as an "All Church Reads" event. Allison Johnson is leading a well-attended weekly study of the book on Wednesday evenings, and all are invited to discuss the book on Sunday, Feb. 18 at 11 a.m.

The Mount Cross Annual Meeting will be Sunday, January 28. We will worship together at 9:30 a.m., followed by the pot-luck and annual meeting.

Plans for the 2024 Leadership Retreat are in the works. All church members are encouraged to attend. It will be on Saturday, February 3rd from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. (Council members meet at 8 a.m.)

Save the Date for Ash Wednesday/Valentine's Day on Feb. 14. Mount Cross will host the service with the Three Churches (Mount Cross, Cam UMC, and St. Columba's) at 7 p.m. and help with the noon service at St. Columba's for those who prefer a day-time service.

Pastor's Report for March 2024 Council Meeting

I am sensing the Holy Spirit at work in our congregation through our strong caring ministries, the bonds being formed in the Discipleship Experience, the sounds and presence of children and young families in our worship, our ecumenical collaborations, the next stage of our RIC journey, our vitalized liturgies, our shared work of trying to gracefully accommodate one another in worship, and the excellent leadership on the CDC board. I am eager for this 2024 Church Council to help us live into our identified focus for the year: welcome and witness.

Please consider attending the 6-session study on the draft ELCA social statement on civic life and faith. As the national presidential election heats up, it is important for us to consider what faithful Christian discipleship looks like in relation to our civic responsibilities. You can read a draft of the statement at <https://bit.ly/CivicLifeFaithDraft>. We will meet Sundays April 28, May 5, May 26, June 2, June 9, and June 30 from 11 am-Noon in the PLC.

Lent has been a deep and fruitful season at Mount Cross and I am looking forward to our Holy Week services and the joyful "Alleluias" of Easter.

Lent Highlights

- The Seven Last Words study on Wednesday evenings with St. Columba's
- Soup Suppers sponsored by different ministries – the donations will be split between Many Meals and the St. Columba's Food Pantry
- Holden Evening Prayer with messages related to Love.Without.Limits (thank you to our speakers – Allison Johnson, Carina McVeigh, Vicky Edell, Lyndsay Mountour, and Bill Stoll.)
- Amanda Berg's ordination on March 16 at Ascension Lutheran

Holy Week and Easter Plans

Again, it has been encouraging to work with our full communion partners in planning for the Great Three Days.

- Maundy Thursday (3/28) will be at 7 p.m. St. Columba's. I will be the preacher.
- The Good Friday (3/29) cross procession will start from Mount Cross at 5 p.m. and end at Camarillo UMC in time for the service there at 7 p.m.
- The Easter Vigil (3/30) will be at Mount Cross at 7 p.m. Claire Johnson will be baptized. (Action needed to approve the membership of Claire Johnson by Baptism and David Dupuis by Affirmation of Baptism).
- Easter Sunday Worship at Mount Cross is at 9:30 a.m. See Joe's notes for details about the Easter Breakfast and Egg Hunt.

Regular Rhythms of Worship, Preaching, Pastoral Care and Meetings

Although it feels like there are always things left undone, I am generally finding the regular rhythms of ministry to be sustainable, thanks to great lay leadership at Mount Cross and an excellent staff. The Men's and Women's Bible Studies are solid and grace-filled for those who attend. Pre-school chapel time makes my heart sing. I attend as many committee meetings as possible, respond to urgent pastoral needs as they arise, and try to schedule at least a few in-office appointments or in-home visits each week. I want to make sure I'm not missing anyone who needs pastoral care. Please be quick to make needs known to me and support a culture at Mount Cross where people can express their needs to others.

Sabbatical Planning and Time Away

- I will be away August 26 – Nov. 30 (1 week vacation, 13 weeks sabbatical), returning for the first Sunday of Advent, Dec. 1. We are beyond fortunate that Pastor Scott Maxwell-Doherty will be able to fill-in for that entire time. I am working with the Executive Committee to finalize that agreement. We are looking at an arrangement where he is here every Sunday, on call throughout the week for pastoral emergencies, in touch with the staff and leadership during the week, and serving as needed for ½ a day each week. \$6,000 has been accrued to cover this expense, but we will need an additional \$6,000. The Treasurer suggests it come from unallocated Endowment grants.
- For Continuing Education, I will attend a conference called CREDO April 16 -22 in Oakhurst, California for Episcopal Clergy. Pastor Scott Maxwell-Doherty will be the supply pastor April 21.
- I will be on vacation June 13-27. Pastor Scott Maxwell-Doherty will be the supply pastor June 16-23.

Pastor's Report for June 2024 Church Council Meeting

(May 21 – June 18)

I am currently on vacation, returning June 28. God bless your meeting.

I am thankful to Pastor Scott Maxwell-Doherty for serving as our Sunday supply pastor for June 16 and 23. In the case of a pastoral emergency, Joe Zimmerly and Susan Prosser's cell phone numbers are on my voicemail greeting. They, as well as Carol Browning, have a list of local pastors willing to respond to urgent Mount Cross needs.

In addition to my regular preaching and pastoral responsibilities, here are some highlights from the past month:

- June 9 was a glorious Sunday where we baptized 6 people and welcomed an additional 7 new members!
- The Sunday study of the ELCA Draft Statement on Civic Life and Faith had lively participation by about 10-16 attendees each session (May 26, June 2, June 9). The final session will be June 30.
- I attended Synod Assembly May 31-June 1, along with Mount Cross representatives Gayle Johnson, Fred Antrim, and Allison Johnson.
- I gathered with ELCA clergy in the Channel Islands Conference on May 22 at Holy Trinity in Thousand Oaks and Episcopal clergy in Deanery 1 on June 11 at St. Columba's in Camarillo.
- The Mount Cross RIC team, accompanied by other Mount Cross members and myself, had a meaningful presence at Camarillo Pride on June 2.
- Joe, Carol, and I did some "spring cleaning" in the front office.

I am looking forward to the **Mount Cross July Blue Zone Challenge**, which is a collaboration with the Child Development Center.

Blue Zones are the places in the world with the healthiest, longest-living populations. We hope many CDC families and church members will accept the challenge in July to live more like those in the Blue Zones:

1. Eat more fruits and vegetables
2. Move more
3. Have a healthy breakfast every day
4. Spend less time in front of a screen
5. Cut down on sweetened beverages (e.g. soda, juice, etc.)
6. Build community
7. Nurture your spirituality

Every Wednesday in July, our Community Time at 5 p.m. will feature a Blue Zone Pot-Luck!

Pastor's Report for July 2024 Council Meeting (June 18-July 22)

Ministry Activities and Engagement: Although I was away from June 13-27, this reporting period has been filled with meaningful ministry engagements. Pastoral care, preaching, and worship continued, and I had the joy of meeting with newcomers and those exploring baptism and membership at Mount Cross. I facilitated Women's Bible Study at Mission Oaks Park on July 9, Men's Bible Study at Marie Callender's on July 18, and attended the first "Stories Around the Campfire" on July 17 at St. Columba's. Our six-session study on the Civic Life and Faith Draft Social Statement concluded on June 30. I was pleased with the attendance and participation and hope Mount Cross will continue studies and discussions on these important topics in the future.

Blue Zone Challenge Success: Congratulations to all those who engaged any part of the Blue Zone Challenge in the month of July! We promoted these seven healthful practices throughout our congregation and preschool: eat more fruits and veggies; eat a healthy breakfast daily; cut back on sweet beverages; move more; less screen time; build community; and nurture your spirituality. Promoting health in our homes, congregation and community is one way we express gratitude to God for the gift of life. For more information about Blue Zones, go to www.bluezones.com

Retirement of Organist Guy Ervin: Our beloved organist, Guy Ervin, is retiring after 22 years of dedicated service. His last Sunday will be August 18. We will have a festive reception after the worship service and hope to send him off with a generous gift. Contributions to Guy's gift can be made online at www.mountcross.com/give or by sending a check to the church office, noting that the contribution is for "Guy's gift."

Three Congregations Collaboration: I recently met again with Pastor Elbert Kim from Camarillo United Methodist Church and Father Michael Anderson from St. Columba's Episcopal Church to discuss ongoing and future collaboration. The enthusiasm for collaboration remains high across all three congregations. Upcoming Events: Monthly Taize Prayer at Mount Cross beginning Sept. 13 Service project together Sept. 22, 2024; Blue Christmas at Mount Cross December 22, 2024; Ash Wednesday March 5, 2025 at St. Columba's; Maundy Thursday at Camarillo UMC April 17, 2025; Good Friday at Mount Cross April 18, 2025; and the Easter Vigil at St. Columba's April 19, 2025.

Investing in Faith Event: Thank you to our "Investing in Faith" team for organizing a wonderful spaghetti dinner on July 14 to launch our 2025 pledge drive!

Care Gathering Lunch: On the same day as the spaghetti dinner, the Care Team organized a very positive Care Gathering over lunch following Sunday worship. Over 30 people attended, which is a testament to the strength of our caring ministries. Special thanks to Susan Prosser for her dedicated, consistent, and productive leadership of the Care Team.

Sabbatical Planning: I continue to work with staff and the Executive Committee to finalize plans for my upcoming sabbatical. I appreciate everyone's cooperation in filling the gaps during

my absence and ensuring a smooth transition. Although my last Sunday is August 18, I will attend the August 20 Council Meeting and work in the office that week.

August 18: Just a note that August 18 will be a very full and festive Sunday and I hope all Council members can attend: we will celebrate baptism, affirmation of baptism and welcome new members; it is also Health and Healing Sunday, Guy's retirement reception, and my last Sunday before sabbatical.