

Pastor's Report for June 2025 Council Meeting

Council Input Needed

We need to set a date for the Church Picnic – how about September 7?

Information

Carol Browning will be at jury duty on Friday, July 27. The office will be closed and there will be a sign on the door directing people to call the office number in case of an emergency to be connected to an on-call pastor.

Notes

1. Pathways 2026: The Pathfinders met Thursday, June 12 to discuss feedback received at the two open discernment forums in May and next steps for exploring pathways for Mount Cross in the next decade and beyond. There was consensus that the forums were good because people clearly needed to talk and be heard, and we recognized that it is a sign of vibrancy in our community that so many people wanted to share about their experiences of and hopes for the church. The Pathfinders support Council in regularly scheduling open forums. They concluded from the forums that there is openness to change and a desire for "something more" in terms of going out into the community and wanting to find our "one thing," but we are not yet clear on what that is. The question was asked: are we going to do this on our own or with other churches? Also, it was noted that nothing negative was said about doing more collaboration with the Three Congregations. The next step is that Craig Blois and Becky Riley will be meeting with lay leaders from St. Columba's Episcopal and Camarillo United Methodist at 7 p.m. on June 19. Please continue praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance as we all seek to listen for God's call to Mount Cross.

2. Confirmation: What a joy to celebrate the confirmation of three youth on June 1: Dane Jackson, Kierstyn Seay, and Jenna Berariu (confirmed at St. Columba's on May 31).

3. Pride: Mount Cross had a table at Camarillo Pride on June 7. There was a steady stream of visitors to hear us share about Mount Cross. Five people asked to be included on our email list. Two people that we met attended worship the next day. I sent out follow-up emails to all.

4. Joe's Farewell: Mount Cross gave Joe and Emily Zimmerly two lovely farewell celebrations on June 11 and June 15. Thank you to all who helped make those very special events. We will miss Joe and all his gifts of leadership and community building.

5. Children, Youth, and Family Ministry: Katie Robinson was hired to do some part-time children, youth, and family ministry through August 10, according to her limited availability.

She spent time with Joe and me last week and has already started connecting with families. She will be at Community Time on June 16 and most Wednesdays through July, and Sundays June 29, July 13, July 27, August 3, and August 10. She is putting together a calendar of events and is working with Amanda Honda to support Sunday School.

6. Vacation Bible School: I am assembling a team to coordinate VBS. Morgan Fanner, who has helped with VBS administration in the past, is interested in working with us in this capacity. Melissa Henry will be working with the teachers on the curriculum.

7. Sunday Coverage: Thank God for Pastor Ralph Midtlyng who was able to fill in for me last minute on June 15 when I was too ill to lead Sunday worship, and to Ken Riley, Carol Browning, and several others who scrambled to make sure things ran smoothly!

8. Upcoming Absence: I will be away June 18 – July 2. Pastor Ralph will be the supply pastor on June 22 and 29. Ken Riley will be the emergency contact number. He has a list of on-call pastors to connect people with, if needed.

Pastor's Report for April 2025 Council Meeting

March 26 – April 14, 2025

Family Camp: One of the highlights of my month was attending Family Camp at El Camino Pines with nine of our young families from Friday, April 11 to Saturday, April 12. The weather was beautiful, and it was a joy to be out in God's beautiful creation with the children (all ages 6 and under) and their parents who are truly embracing parenthood as a Christian vocation. We hiked to a place where you can actually see the San Andreas fault, and we celebrated Palm Sunday with a palm procession across camp and Holy Communion in the campfire gathering area. I hope and pray Mount Cross Family Camp will be an annual tradition!

Out in the Community: I attended an immigration rally in Oxnard on Cesar Chavez Day, March 31, and said a few words and gave a blessing at the end of the rally. Pastor Elbert from Cam UMC, Fr. Michael from St. Columba's Episcopal, and I sent a Letter to the Editor that was published in both the Camarillo Acorn on April 12 and the Ventura County Star on April 13. Here are the links:

<https://www.thecamarilloacorn.com/articles/where-there-is-hate-let-us-sow-love/> and <https://www.vcstar.com/story/opinion/2025/04/13/letters-gops-secret-to-success-halt-pipeline-restart-sowing-love/83033037007/>

Pathways: The Pathways team met March 30 from 6-8 p.m. at Mount Cross. Each Pathfinder reported back on the fruits of his or her three weeks of prayer, reflection, and listening for what God might be calling Mount Cross to be or to do in the next decade. The conversation felt Spirit-filled, open, and creative. There was a sense of shared energy and interest in exploring a deeper partnership among the Three Congregations (Mount Cross, St. Columba's, and Camarillo United Methodist) in order to be a more effective witness for our Christian expression in Camarillo and more faithful to Christ's call for unity. Craig Blois and Becky Riley volunteered to coordinate a lay leaders' task force with representatives of the three congregations. In order to honor our commitment to transparency to the Council, Craig Blois will report on Pathways to Council this month. We are also committed to working closely with the congregation. To that end, Pathways will host two open forums for the congregation, asking them to do what we did: pray, reflect and listen for what God might be calling Mount Cross to be or do in the next decade and then share it either Sunday, May 18 from 11-Noon or Wednesday, May 21 from 6-7 p.m. I will focus my May newsletter column on this invitation to the congregation to participate in the Pathways process. The next Pathways meeting will be Thursday, June 12 at 7 p.m. at Mount Cross.

Talking Points about Pathways: At the April Council meeting, Council tasked me with creating talking points about Pathways so Council members could easily explain to other church members what it is about and why we are doing it. Below are five talking points. Please let me know if you would like more information or clarification on any of them.

1. BACKGROUND Pathways 2026 emerged from Pastor Julie's sabbatical reflection in fall 2024. Through prayer, meditation on Mount Cross, and study of ministry in transitional times, she recognized our congregation's need to clarify our mission and vision. This initiative asks the essential question: What is God calling Mount Cross to be and do in the next season of our church's life?

2. URGENCY Several factors create a timely opportunity for this discernment process:

- Despite our congregation's vitality and momentum, we are unclear about our specific mission and face challenges recruiting lay leaders for Council and committees
- Our financial sustainability requires attention as annual pledged income hasn't met expenses for several years, leading to increased reliance on dedicated funds (contrary to generally accepted best practices for congregations)
- Our 60th anniversary in October 2026 presents a meaningful milestone to celebrate our past while committing to God's vision for our future

3. COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT Pastor Julie has assembled a "Pathways 2026" team of nine "Pathfinders" (Pastor Julie and eight members)—Craig Blois, Becky Riley, Bill Stoll, Susan Prosser, Gayle Johnson, Kevin O'Farrell, Tim McDonell, and Maria McDonell—to facilitate this discernment journey. This process intentionally involves:

- Ongoing prayer and spiritual listening practices
- Regular meetings of the Pathfinders
- Regular reporting to Council
- Congregation-wide participation beginning with open forums on Sunday, May 18 (11am-noon) and Wednesday, May 21 (6-7pm)

4. TRANSPARENCY We are committed to keeping the congregation informed and involved through:

- Monthly Council reports from Pastor Julie or a Pathfinder representative
- Regular updates in newsletters and church-wide communications
- Multiple open forums for congregational input and dialogue
- Clear documentation of our progress and findings

5. GOAL By the 2026 budgeting cycle (October/November 2025), Pathways 2026 will present Spirit-led, mission-centered options for our congregation's consideration. This process aims to cultivate a renewed sense of vision, mission, and commitment as we approach our 60th anniversary milestone.

Lent: Our Wednesdays in Lent concluded April 9. We gathered on five Wednesdays for faith formation (Fun with Faith for children and Rooted for adults), Soup Suppers, and Holden Evening Prayer featuring faith stories from our members. Thank you to all soup providers, musicians, and Claire Johnson, Bill Greason, Judy Winters, Elliott Ripley, and Joe Zimmerly for sharing their very well-received faith stories! The Rooted sessions continue to be particularly meaningful for me. I appreciate the growing sense of faith and community among those who attend Rooted. The Decades' Table at Sunday hospitality was fun and seemed to encourage some people to stay after worship and connect across generations. The Sunday Lent Adult Education Class on the seven teachings of *A Living Catechism* went well, although I hoped for more extensive resources from Church Anew. The class participants were engaging and thoughtful. Sunday Children's Messages were centered on the theme of mercy, using the five senses to help children explore the concept of mercy.

Holy Week: Holy Week got off to a good start with our Palm Sunday service on April 13. Heartfelt thanks to Carol Browning for coordinating all the music and various moving parts of the liturgy, Bill Dawson for sound and video, Carol Broderick and Gordon and Melissa Henry for the palm decorations, Dane and Gavin Jackson for serving as acolytes, Jeffrey Saner and Deacon Cecelia for sharing in the reading of the Passion, and to all the musicians and many others who served and participated in the worship and are planning to help with our Holy Week Services. Here is the Holy Week schedule:

Holy Week



Palm Sunday, April 13th 9:30 a.m.
Mount Cross Lutheran Church

Maundy Thursday, April 17th at Noon and 7:00 p.m.
Camarillo United Methodist Church (291 Anacapa Dr.)

Maundy Thursday, April 17th at 2:00 p.m.
Afternoon Chapel at Mount Cross Lutheran Church

Good Friday Stations of the Cross, April 18th at Noon
St. Columba's Episcopal Church (1251 Las Posas Rd.)

Good Friday Prayer Walk with the Cross, April 18th
Meet at Camarillo UMC at 5:00 p.m. We will walk two miles to Mount Cross Lutheran Church, carrying the cross and the prayers of the community.

Good Friday Service, April 18th at 7:00 p.m.
Mount Cross Lutheran Church

The Easter Vigil, Saturday, April 19th at 7:00 p.m.
St. Columba's Episcopal Church

Easter Sunday Worship, April 20th 9:30 a.m.
Mount Cross Lutheran Church

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Bring a flower to add to the cross.
Breakfast begins at 8:00 a.m. and continues after worship. Children are invited to the playground for an Easter Egg Hunt at 11:00 a.m.

Upcoming Away Days: April 22-May 2, I will be on vacation. Pastor Ralph will preach and preside on Sunday, April 27. I will preside at worship on May 4, but Pastor Scott Maxwell-Doherty will be the guest preacher that day. I will be at the Episcopal Clergy Conference in Riverside May 12-14. I will be away Sunday, May 25 and TBD some days on either side of that Sunday. Pastor Ralph will be the supply pastor. Our eldest daughter is getting married June 21. I will be away June 16-30 with Pastor Ralph again covering Sundays June 22 and 29.

Thank you for your faithful service, Mount Cross Church Council! God bless you and all those you love.

Pastor's Report for March 2025 Council Meeting

(Feb. 18-March 24, 2025)

Website

There has long been the need and desire to re-design our website. Chrissy O'Farrell led a team in creating a site-map of our current website. We received a bid to re-design our website from Nate Maxwell-Doherty for \$2,000. <https://www.natemaxwelldoherty.design/> There appears to be \$4,790.00 in account # 35368 Website Refresh from MBC 2019 Funds. How would Council like to proceed?

Goals and Priorities

After listening to the discussions at our February Leadership Retreat and having conversations with the Executive Committee, Tracy Blois and I drafted the following 2025 Council Priorities and Goals for Council consideration:

Guiding Priorities

- * Keeping Alert to Mission: Keep asking what is "the one thing" we are called to do? (see Luke 10:38-42)
- * Fostering Deeper Relationships within the Congregation
- * Promoting Intergenerational Connections
- * Growing as Disciples through Service in the Community
- * Collaborating with Partner Congregations

Council Goals

1. Increase our functioning as a high-performing leadership team through the adoption of and adherence to a Leadership Covenant; focused work as Committee Liaisons (help each committee set and implement one goal, identify the "One Thing"); and transparent yet efficient financial processes (e.g. quarterly reports that track spending from designated funds)
2. Improve our communication within the congregation and to the community through a re-designed website
3. Deepen relationships within the congregation by encouraging a revitalized Welcome and Fellowship Committee
4. Promote and participate in at least two "Discipleship through Service" cross-congregation events (e.g. Rise Against Hunger in February; Diaper Pantry in June)

Pastor Goals

1. Shepherd the Pathways 2026 Team in discerning mission-centered directions for Mount Cross in the next decade of our congregation's life, including producing guidance and recommendations for Council in time for the 2026 budgeting process
2. Promote and encourage intergenerational connections and opportunities within current programs
3. Increase opportunities for people to share their faith stories
4. Continue to foster collaboration with partner churches

Sorrow and Celebration

With gratitude and faith, but also with tears, we said goodbye to Kevin Phipps, Randy Churchill, and Arlene Proctor. Kevin's service was at Soule Park Golf Course in Ojai on Feb. 21. Randy's burial was at Conejo Mountain on Feb. 21 and his service was Feb. 22 – we are grateful to Padre Serra Catholic Church for allowing us to hold his service in their sanctuary. Arlene's service at Mount Cross and burial at Conejo Mountain were on March 13. Arlene was the last active charter member of Mount Cross. I am thankful for all the ways Mount Cross members support those who are grieving, including by sending sympathy cards, reaching out with caring calls and meals, and attending and serving at funerals.

Lent

Lent is going well at Mount Cross, beginning with a good and well-attended Ash Wednesday service at St. Columba's with the three congregations. I am grateful to Carol Browning for her careful planning of music that supports the tone and themes of Lent. Joe Zimmerly has done a fantastic job integrating age-appropriate Lenten themes into preschool chapel, and throughout the CYF ministries. The theme "Unbroken: A Living Faith" from Church Anew has encouraged us to focus on the seven teachings of *A Living Catechism*. We are doing that through sermons and the Sunday Adult Education class. Picking up on their explanation of the theme as "faith is passed on from generation to generation connecting us all the way back to Jesus," we have highlighted intergenerational connections through the Decades' Table at Sunday hospitality and the sharing of faith stories at Holden Evening Prayer from people in their 20s, 30s and 80s. Rooted on Wednesday evenings is exploring different ways to listen to God, including through scripture, music, art, silence, and caring conversations. Sunday Children's Messages are centered on the theme of mercy. I am using the five senses to help the children understand what God's mercy is like.

Altar Guild

It was a joy to be with the Altar Guild for their meeting and training on Saturday, March 1. Carol Broderick and Emily Zimmerly hosted a lovely tea!

Holy Week and Easter

I encourage Council members to attend our Holy Week and Easter services:

Palm Sunday, April 13th 9:30 a.m. at Mount Cross Lutheran Church

Maundy Thursday, April 17th at Noon and 7:00 p.m. at Camarillo United Methodist Church (291 Anacapa Dr.)

Good Friday Stations of the Cross, April 18th at Noon at St. Columba's Episcopal Church ((1251 Las Posas Rd.)

Good Friday Prayer Walk with the Cross, April 18th meet at Camarillo UMC at 5:00 p.m. We will walk two miles to Mount Cross Lutheran Church, carrying the cross and the prayers of the community.

Good Friday Service, April 18th at 7:00 p.m. Mount Cross Lutheran Church

The Easter Vigil, Saturday, April 19th 7:00 p.m. at St. Columba's Episcopal Church (1251 Las Posas Rd.)

Easter Sunday Worship, April 20th 9:30 a.m. at Mount Cross **Alleluia! Christ is Risen!** Bring a flower to add to the cross.

Pathways

The first Pathways 2026 meeting was Sunday at 3 p.m. Pathfinders are Craig Blois, Becky Riley, Bill Stoll, Susan Prosser, Gayle Johnson, Kevin O'Farrell, and Tim and Maria McDonell. At this first meeting, we heard a bit of each other's stories (when and why did you join Mount Cross?), shared some hopes, wishes, ideas, and possibilities. We talked about why we are doing this now (external urgency around budget and space issues and internal urgency around lack of a clear vision for the congregation). We realized how easy it is to think solutions will be found in finding the right programs to meet the needs of people, but we sensed God's invitation to reach first for vision. "Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." We prayerfully read together the story of Mary and Martha again (as at the Leadership Retreat). We heard a call to commitment and prayer (like Mary), while seeing ourselves in Martha (worried and distracted by many things). Our next meeting will be Sunday, March 30 at 6 p.m. at Mount Cross. Our focus at the next meeting will be in sharing anything and everything that has come to us in our praying and thinking and imagining about what God's vision is for Mount Cross. Council members and all Mount Cross members are welcome to share input or ask questions of me or any of the Pathfinders.

Pastor Ralph Midtlyng

I am thankful to Pastor Ralph for teaching the first 5-week session of *The Jesus Driven Life* and for preaching on March 9.

Out in the Community

On March 8, I presided at the Celebration of Life for long-time Oxnard resident, Bill Lennox at the Lennox Ranch on Sturgis Rd.

On March 9, I gave the opening blessing for the Crop Walk at Pitts Ranch Park and walked with some of the Mount Cross walkers.

On March 22, I will offer a blessing at the expansion of Zander's Game House on Ventura Blvd. (Jeanne Kuchera-Sikoff, Founder and Owner).

Upcoming Away Days

Thursday, March 27 and Friday, March 28, I will be in Salinas to help with services for my friend's father.

Saturday, April 12, I will be with our Mount Cross Family Camp at El Camino Pines.

April 22-May 2, I will be on vacation. Pastor Ralph will preach and preside on Sunday, April 27. I will preside at worship on May 4. Pastor Scott Maxwell-Doherty will be the guest preacher that day.

Pastor's Report for February 2025 Church Council Meeting
January 14-February 14, 2025

Dear Church Council Members,

I want to extend a special welcome to our new Council and recognize our newly elected officers: Ken Riley, President; Tom Neuhaus, Vice-President; Tracy Blois, Secretary, and Jim Prosser, Appointed Treasurer. Thank you for your generosity in serving in Mount Cross leadership roles! I am looking forward to working with you all this year.

January and early February have been filled with community building events that have helped us deepen our relationships with each other and begin to focus the congregation on our mission for 2025. Our Annual Meeting Sunday on January 26 included a wonderful pot-luck brunch and a celebration of our RIC (Reconciling in Christ) status. This was followed by our Leadership Retreat on February 8 and installation of our Council on Feb. 9

I am happy to report that 20 Mount Cross members participated in the Rise Against Hunger service project at Camarillo United Methodist Church following our Leadership Retreat. According to Kristi VanKeersblick at Cam UMC: *"179 people gathered at Camarillo UMC to assemble meal packages. In just 65 minutes, we packed 12,528 meals and raised over \$5,000 to help children and families in impoverished communities around the world. Praise God! It was an energizing and uplifting event and was touching to see people from 5 years old to 90 years old, working together to help others in need, even though they live on the other side of the world from us."* The success of this event has led us to plan make it an annual tradition! Please mark your calendars for February 8, 2026, when we will join Cam UMC for another Rise Against Hunger service project.

Our Leadership Retreat focused on the theme "Only One Thing," drawing from Jesus' words to Martha when she was worried and distracted by many things. He reminded her that "only one thing is needed." During our time together, we began listening to God and one another to discern the "one thing" we sense we are being called to across different areas of congregational life and ministry. **It is vital for the Church Council to consider the input we received from retreat participants and articulate concrete goals and priorities for 2025 by the end of our March meeting.** (see retreat notes here [Leadership 2025](#)).

At the retreat, I expanded on the Pathways 2026 initiative that I first announced at the Annual Meeting. The Pathways Team, inspired by my sabbatical studies on leading congregations in changing times, will work with me to pray, listen to the congregation, discern, and explore possible faithful, mission-centered pathways for Mount Cross to take into the future. My hope is that the Pathways Team will be able to help the Council make informed decisions for the 2026 budget cycle and suggest a plan for celebrating the congregation's 60th anniversary in October 2026. I will be meeting with the Pathways Team for the first time in late February or early March. The Pathfinders are Bill Stoll, Becky Riley, Gayle Johnson, Susan Prosser, Kevin O'Farrell, Tim McDonell, Maria McDonell, and possibly one additional person TBA. I will provide monthly updates to the Council about Pathways 2026.

We tried something new on Sunday, February 2nd - a "Gift of Years" Sunday, coinciding with the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Recognizing that Simeon and Anna were two elders in the Temple who recognized Jesus' identity, we celebrated the elders among us, featuring inspiring faith stories from Mike McClary and Arlene Kochans. We will continue to hear more faith stories from Mount Cross members during our Wednesday Holden Evening Prayer services in Lent.

We are blessed to have Pastor Ralph Midtlyng offering a new class, "The Jesus Driven Life," which has been extremely well-received with at least 20 people attending each week. While the first set of five sessions concludes February 23, we anticipate offering more sessions throughout the year.

In addition to these special events and initiatives, I continue with the core tasks of ministry, including preaching, pastoral care, and supporting our many faith formation programs. I also serve the wider church as a clergy mentor and coach in the "Thriving in Ministry" program through Virginia Theological Seminary, working with clergy who, like me, are serving cross-denominationally.

Looking Ahead:

- March 5: Three Congregations' Ash Wednesday Service at St. Columba's Episcopal Church at 7 p.m. I will be preaching, and there will be a combined choir. An abbreviated service will also be offered at noon for those who don't drive at night.
- March 12: Lenten Wednesday Soup Suppers and Holden Evening Prayer begin.
- March 9: Pastor Ralph will preach while I preside at worship.
- Pastor Ralph will serve as supply pastor during my Sunday absences on April 27, May 25, June 22, and June 29.

God bless you, Mount Cross Council. Your wisdom and service are gifts to our congregation!

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Julie

Pastor's Report for January 2025 Council Meeting
December 17, 2024 – January 14, 2025

Worship: Thank you to our Music Ministry, Altar Guild, decorators, and worship assistants who helped Mount Cross offer a beautiful Christmas Eve service! 235 attended the service in person and we estimate at least 36 watched online. It was wonderful to have a full church and to see folks we haven't seen in a while, as well as visitors and friends. Thank you to Carol Browning for putting together a lovely Lessons and Carols service for Sunday, December 29, and thank you to Pastor Ralph Midtlyng for preaching on January 5.

Pastoral Care: Since our last Council meeting, it was a particularly busy time with pastoral visits -17 in total. That is partly because I was away on sabbatical during the fall but also because needs tend to be higher around major holidays. The Three Congregations Blue Christmas service helped support people experiencing grief and loss. It was well-received by the 55 people in attendance. Thank you to our Care Team for providing help during and after the service.

Adult Education: I facilitated Men's Bible Study on December 19 and January 2. In January we will return to the schedule where I facilitate once study each month and a lay leader facilitates the other. Women's Bible Study resumed January 7. I will continue to facilitate that weekly, as my availability allows. ROOTED will resume January 15. Pastor Ralph will teach "The Jesus Driven Life" on Sundays (January 19 and February 2, 9, 16, and 23) from 11 a.m.-12 p.m. in the PLC.

Annual Meeting: The Annual Meeting is Sunday, January 26 at 11:45 a.m. Our Treasurer, Rick Gardner, will offer a budget information meeting on Sunday, January 19 at noon in the sanctuary. The notices were sent out Monday, January 13. Reports will be available this Sunday. We will have a pot-luck after worship, before the meeting begins. Thank you to Council members for helping with that. Our Treasurer, Rick Gardner, will offer a budget information meeting on Sunday, January 19 at noon in the sanctuary. At the Annual Meeting, I plan to announce a new initiative that was inspired by the leadership work I did on my sabbatical. "Pathways 2026" will be a process to help the congregation center ourselves in God's mission for Mount Cross and discern faithful responses to our budget challenges.

Leadership Retreat: Please plan to attend the all-church Leadership Retreat Saturday, Feb. 8. The Council will meet at 9 a.m. to elect officers. The retreat will be from 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m. (lunch and childcare are included), and we will conclude the day with a Rise Against Hunger service project from 3-4:30 p.m. at Camarillo United Methodist Church.

THANK YOU 2024 Church Council for a great year! Your generous and prayerful leadership made a positive difference in our congregation, and I am personally grateful to each of you for your guidance, encouragement, and support. God bless the officers and council members who are rotating off this year, and God bless those who are staying on for another year!