

Pastor's Report for September 2023 Council Meeting (August 15-September 13, 2023)

We begin our new program year with heavy hearts, still aching with the Moraga family over their loss of baby Celia and Pastor John Soyster's family over their loss of Jason. Mount Cross has truly lived up to our calling to weep with those who weep and to help bear one another's burdens. Thank you for your prayers, support and generosity towards these families. Celia's Celebration of Life will be Saturday, September 16 at 2 p.m.

I met with Pastor Jade Ortiz of Redimidos/Our Saviour's Lutheran, Oxnard. They are the hosts of the monthly Graceful Diaper pantry. Mount Cross will sponsor the February 2024 distribution. More details are forthcoming.

It's a challenge to report on, let alone attend, all the Mount Cross committee meetings, but this month I have been working most closely with Stewardship, Re-imagining, and RIC. I am always thankful for the skills and gifts of wisdom and leadership we are blessed with in our congregation.

This past month, we hosted Lincoln Mayorga's memorial service (August 19) and celebrated Michael Honda's baptism (September 3). I was able to have a few meetings reconnecting with members I haven't been able to sit down with in awhile, but never as many as I would like.

I attended chapel at CLU on Thursday, October 7 and met with Pastor Elbert Kim and Dr. Bill Garlington of Camarillo UMC and Mark Asman of St. Columba's Episcopal along with The Rev. Dr. Colleen Dr. Windham-Hughes, Associate Vice-President for Mission and Identity. She will be the speaker at our tri-church forum on Reformation Sunday. I have committed Mount Cross to bringing at least 20 people to that forum (see below). **especially hope Church Council members will register**, as I think this will help us understand the context in which we are doing ministry and connect with our full-communion partners.

Is Religion Dying? The Future of Christianity and the Church. Concerns about the decline of mainline Christianity have intensified since the COVID-19 pandemic. Locally, we are observing signs of hope and signs of decline. In an effort to foster faithful conversations within and among our congregations, three churches are joining together to present a forum this Reformation Sunday, October 29, 2023 at 4 p.m. at Camarillo United Methodist Church. Join Camarillo United Methodist, St. Columba's Episcopal and Mount Cross Lutheran as we share a meal together, hear from Dr. Colleen Windham-Hughes, Associate Vice-President of Mission and Identity at California Lutheran University, and discuss our experiences and questions. The cost is \$20. Online registration will soon be available.

I will be speaking at an interfaith forum Tuesday, September 26 at 7 p.m. The theme is "Wedding Rituals in Various Faith Traditions." It will be held at the Islamic Center of Conejo Valley (2700 Borchard Road, Newbury Park, CA 91320) on Tuesday, September 26 at 7 p.m. I will speak on Christian weddings, Imam Muhammed Shoayb will speak about Muslim weddings, and Venerable Thepo Rinpoche will speak about weddings in the Buddhist tradition.

With several other members of Mount Cross, I will be attending the Via De Cristo retreat in Frazier Park September 28-October 1. For more information about the retreat, see <https://www.californiavdc.org/>. Rev. Sara Wilson will be the supply pastor October 1. I am taking this as one of my "buy out Sundays" and hopeful that it will be a source of personal and congregational renewal.

Looking Ahead

Guest preachers: Although I will preside at worship on October 8 and October 29, I'm looking forward to welcoming guest preachers those Sundays. Sunday, October 8, David Kitch will be our tent service preacher. (Animals who play well with others are welcome that day, too, as it is blessing of the animals day). Our own Dr. Kevin O'Farrell will be our guest preacher on Reformation Sunday, October 29.

I will be on vacation November 23-30 and December 25-January 3. Rev. Scott Maxwell-Doherty will be the supply pastor for both those Sundays. I am eligible for a three-month sabbatical as of Aug. 1, 2024. I will work with the Executive Committee to determine the dates and plan for that.

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Pastor's Report for August 15, 2023 Church Council Meeting
July 19 - August 15, 2023

I was away the first week of this reporting period, enjoying good time with family and friends, including birthdays for two of our daughters. Paul and I have entered a new era of parenting. It's hard to believe we are now officially parents of three young adults, as our youngest daughter turned eighteen at the end of July. Many thanks to The Rev. Dr. Colleen Windham-Hughes from CLU for presiding at worship and preaching on Sunday, July 23.

The second week was a wonderful VBS whirlwind (see Joe's report). Mount Cross VBS is a real gift that we offer the community, and it is a blessing for me to be part of it. Thank you to the many, many helpers and to Joe Zimmerly for his leadership.

The rest of the month has consisted of worship planning, preaching preparation, visits, committee and team meetings, and planning for the fall.

I am especially looking forward to the Discipleship Experience I am co-leading with Chrissy and Kevin O'Farrell. Fifteen parents of young children in our congregation are joining together to grow closer to Christ and each other. They are committing to daily prayer, weekly worship, monthly gatherings, and service. Some of them (along with me and others in the congregation) will be attending a Via de Cristo retreat Sept. 28- October 1 in Frazier Park. See <https://www.californiavdc.org/> for more information about this three-day retreat. I will need to take Sunday, October 1 as one of my "buy out" Sundays. I hope this Discipleship Experience experiment, lasting from September 2023-May 2024, will become an annual offering at Mount Cross as a pathway for those seeking spiritual growth and increased connection and leadership in the congregation. Please pray for the Discipleship Experience.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the RIC (Reconciling in Christ) Team for their wisdom and care as they have been guiding the congregation through the process of discernment, and I want to thank the congregation for their thoughtful and faithful work in exploring becoming an RIC congregation. The RIC Team offered two excellent programs this summer helping people to understand what the Bible says and doesn't say about LGBTQ+ issues. On July 30, they screened the Matthew Vines video and facilitated discussion about it. On August 14, they welcomed Roman Catholic priest and biblical scholar, Fr. Patrick Mullen, for an in-person presentation. Both forums were well-attended. I am heartened by the sincerity, prayerfulness, and genuine love with which people are engaging this important matter. I am reminded of the saying the Christian Church has always tried to live up to: "Unity in things essential; liberty in things non-essential; charity in all things."

As always, thank you to our Executive Committee, Church Council, Staff, Committee Chairs, and members for being generous in giving and serving Mount Cross and the wider community.

Glory to God whose power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:2-21).

Pastor's Report for June 2023 Council Meeting
May 17 - June 20, 2023

Thanks be to God for all the ministry we do together at Mount Cross. This past month has been full of the mixed emotions of grief and gratitude as we said goodbye to Nancy Jaeger, Jay Mason (son of Keith and Jan Mason), and Bob Winters. I consider it a sacred privilege to offer pastoral care to people at the end of their lives and to accompany families as they release their loved ones into God's care. In addition to the ministry of pastoral care and the regular weekly and monthly rhythms of worship and committee meetings at Mount Cross, here are some notes on the past month:

- Daphne Lewis and Miera Stouch were confirmed on May 21. It was a joyful day!
- I concluded my supervision of Jade Ortiz (Our Saviour's/Redimidos, Oxnard) and she is now approved for ordination in the ELCA.
- Pastor Elbert (Camarillo UMC) and Mark Asman (St. Columba's Episcopal) met again to continue planning for our future collaborations, including a symposium on "The Future of the Church" at 4 p.m. on Reformation Sunday, October 29 at Camarillo UMC; all three churches gathering at Mount Cross on Nov. 23 for Thanksgiving Eve Holden Evening Prayer and Pie Social; and joining together for a "Blue Christmas" service on December 17 at 4 p.m. at St. Columba's.
- Along with Gordon and Melissa Henry, I attended the groundbreaking ceremony for Many Mansions' low-income senior housing project on Lewis Rd.
- I enjoyed Synod Assembly June 2-3 at CLU with a focus on ministry among people with disabilities. Mount Cross was well-represented by delegates Allison Johnson, Vicky Edell, and Kevin O'Farrell. Allison presented a summary of the Assembly as an announcement at worship on June 4.
- It was fun to work alongside the Property Committee and others at the work day on Saturday, June 10. Thank you to all those who do so much unseen service to make our property functional and beautiful!
- I am working with Chrissy and Kevin O'Farrell to design a one-year intentional Christian formation and discipleship experience. We will pilot the program with Faith Formation families from September 2023 – May 2024 in the hope that it will become an annual offering at Mount Cross.
- I was at Virginia Theological School in Alexandria, Virginia for a *Thriving in Ministry* training June 12-18. I was trained to serve as a mentor/coach to clergy using a model that focuses on 8 areas of clergy growth: building internal connections; growing collaborative leadership; connecting gospel to culture and context; increasing conflict adeptness; strengthening spiritual practices; setting and managing clear goals; increasing community engagement; and advocating and bridging gaps with those on the margins. I was inspired by the content and the people at the conference and hope to implement a lot of what I learned into my ministry at Mount Cross while I also help newer clergy grow in their practice of ministry. Many thanks to Rev. Sara Wilson for preaching and presiding at Mount Cross on June 18, and to the church staff for always making sure things run smoothly in my absence.
- I will be away on vacation June 29-July 6 and July 19-26. The Rev. Susan Klein will preach and preside on July 2. The Rev. Dr. Colleen Windham-Hughes, CLU Professor, will preach and preside on July 23.

God bless each of us and all of us together!

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Pastor's Report for May Church Council Meeting

April 18 - May 15, 2023

In addition to regular ministry, including worship planning, preaching, pastoral care, Bible studies, preschool chapel, staff supervision, and committee meetings, here are some things that come to mind as I reflect on the past month and look towards the summer.

Sincere thanks to Marilyn Gardner!

Marilyn Gardner recently retired from her role as Coordinator of the Helping Hands Ministry. She has served in that role for as long as I have been at Mount Cross, and I'm sure for many years prior! Countless families have been comforted by her and her team's efforts to coordinate receptions following funeral services at Mount Cross. Thank you and God bless you, Marilyn! As we look for a replacement for Marilyn, I am grateful to those who are willing to help at the upcoming service for Nancy Jaeger (May 18).

Clergy Conference

I attended the Episcopal Clergy Conference in Riverside May 1-3. The theme was "Moving forward as Beloved Community: Lament, Hope, Communion." It was a good opportunity to connect with my Episcopal colleagues. I was able to share about our recent collaborations for Lent and Holy Week with our full communion partner churches. Many large and small group discussions during the conference focused on the need for all congregations to be creative in addressing declining membership, insufficient staffing, and limited financial resources.

Diaper Pantry

Redimidos is an ELCA worshipping community that meets at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Oxnard. Redimidos sponsors Graceful Diapers, a monthly diaper pantry for low-income neighbors. I volunteered there on May 6 and was moved to see the extreme need of families, many of whom began lining up nearly two hours before the distribution began, for a pack of 25 diapers. God bless the Pastor of Redimidos, Jade Ortiz, and their youth group and other volunteers who serve the community this way each month. They are in need of additional sponsors for the diaper pantry. I hope Mount Cross can commit diapers and volunteers for 2-3 months each year.

Future Collaboration with Full Communion Partners

In meetings this month with Pastors Elbert Kim (Camarillo UMC) and Mark Asman (St. Columba's Episcopal) we celebrated the grace-filled Holy Week services we were able to do together and discussed ideas for future collaboration, including: a symposium on "The Future of the Church" at 4 p.m. on Reformation Sunday, October 29; all three churches coming to Mount Cross on Nov. 23 for Thanksgiving Eve Holden Evening Prayer and Pie Social; joining together for a "Blue Christmas" service on December 17 at 4 p.m.; joining together for a community service day some Sunday, following a brief worship service; and definitely sharing Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil again next year.

Child Development Center

Now that the CDC is a separate organizational entity from the church, I serve as a voting member on their Board of Directors. Their May 6 silent auction and mocktail party was successful – thank you to all who supported it! I am on the working group (along with other CDC board members and members of the Executive Committee) to draft a document celebrating the CDC-Church relationship and delineating responsibilities of each entity. The mission statement of the CDC states: *Our mission at Mount Cross Child Development Center strives to educate young children in a safe and nurturing environment that will help prepare them to enjoy learning, care for the earth, serve others, and spread God's love in the community.*

Looking Ahead

- God bless Miera Stouch and Daphne Lewis who will be confirmed May 21.
- Synod Assembly is June 2-3 at CLU.

- Continuing Education Week: I was selected to be a Mentor-Coach for a program called *Thriving in Ministry* out of Virginia Theological Seminary. I will be in Virginia for training June 12-18. The Rev. Sara Wilson, Director of Seminary Relations for PLTS will preach and preside on June 18.
- I will be on vacation June 29-July 6 and July 19-26. The Rev. Susan Klein will preach and preside on July 2. The Rev. Dr. Colleen Windham-Hughes, CLU Professor, will preach and preside on July 23.

Thank you, Church Council, for your service to our congregation!

Pastor's Report for April Church Council Meeting

March 21-April 17, 2023

In addition to regular meetings, preaching, and pastoral care, my focus for the past month has been on Holy Week and Easter. It was a grace-filled time. The opportunity to worship with our full communion partners on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil was especially meaningful for me and others. I hope we planted seeds for future collaboration. Easter Sunday at Mount Cross was festive and full of joy. Thank you to the staff, musicians, worship assistants, and many, many volunteers who contributed to these sacred days.

April 2, Palm Sunday. It was an honor to have Bishop Brenda Bos with us, presiding and preaching for Palm Sunday and sharing at the RIC forum following worship.

April 6, Maundy Thursday at Camarillo United Methodist Church (291 Anacapa Dr.) Dan Nelson and I portrayed two of the twelve apostles in the dramatization of the Last Supper.

April 7, Good Friday, about 40 people participated in the Prayer Walk with the Cross of Christ for Peace and Healing. We met at Camarillo UMC and walked two miles to Mount Cross for the Tenebrae service, attended by 124.

April 8, about 60 people attended the Easter Vigil at St. Columba's Episcopal Church.

Alleluias resounded at the Easter Sunday Worship (211 people), and people enjoyed connecting over the Easter breakfast (thank you to Joe Zimmerly and the CYFM team!)

I will be away April 30. Pastor Ron Cox will be the supply pastor.

Pastor's Report for March Church Council Meeting

February 11, 2023 – March 20, 2023

- The new Church Council and other interested members met on Saturday, February 12 for the annual Leadership Retreat. I think the gathering was productive and energizing. We are blessed with skilled and engaged leaders. We focused on Reconciling in Christ, re-imagining our committee structure, how to communicate the energy centers we are experiencing at Mount Cross, and the gift policy. Thank you to all who helped plan the day, those who attended, and those who provided the lunch.
- I hosted Collegium (clergy from the ELCA Channel Islands Conference) at Mount Cross in the sanctuary on Feb. 16.
- February 19 was a joyful worship service. It was Transfiguration Sunday. We had baptisms and welcomed new members.
- Ash Wednesday on Feb. 26 at St. Columba's Episcopal Church was a combined service with three churches – Mount Cross, St. Columba's, and Camarillo United Methodist. 160 people attended the service and all three churches appreciated the opportunity to gather together for the start of this holy season.
- On Feb.28, I conducted Joe Zimmerly's Annual Ministry Review, along with the in-coming and out-going chairs of Family Faith Formation. We celebrated Joe's contributions to ministry at Mount Cross and discussed ways we could increase collaboration to further the ministry.



seeking:
honest questions
for deeper faith

• LENT: Our Lenten theme and programs were off to a good start with Wednesday programs including *Life Transformed: The Way of Love in Lent* for adults and Fun with Faith for kids at 5 p.m. Soup Supper at 6 p.m. and Holden Evening Prayer at 7 p.m. The messages at Holden are focusing on the “energy centers” at Mount Cross. Jeffrey Saner gave the message on March 1, focusing on his involvement with Music Ministry. The focus on March 8 was Service and Missions and Peace and Justice, with a representative from Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services speaking. We had a COVID hiatus March 15, but are looking forward to hearing from Cy Johnson about Property on March 22 and Evonne Kuchera about Senior Ministry on March 29. Family Faith Formation will produce a video message sometime in the next few months.

- Sundays in Lent, I have been weaving the theme of SEEKING and asking honest questions into my sermons. Kevin O'Farrell and I are team-teaching an adult forum class on Sundays from 11-Noon called “Christianity Through a Lutheran Lens.” We are using Daniel Erlander's *Baptized We Live* booklet. The class is well-attended and people are reporting that they are finding it meaningful.
- For the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, I helped plan our first ever Diocesan Information Gathering for people considering God's call in their lives. Over 80 people attended the event in Echo Park on March 4. As part of the program, I led a group discernment exercise.
- With sadness and grief, as well as hope and gratitude, we said goodbye to beloved Mount Cross member, Pat Dawson, on March 4.
- I was interviewed by Tim McDonell March 8 about my experience with the *Interfaith Friendship Project*. He and Tim Helton will be presenting about it at the World Parliament of Religions this summer.

- Staff COVID infections, including my own, cancelled on-site programs, meetings, and worship from March 13-March 19, but Joe, Carol, and I have been able to work from home. I am thankful for the care and prayers extended to all of us, and for the wise leadership of our President, Bill Stoll.
- I met on Zoom March 14 with the pastors from Camarillo UMC and St. Columba's to finalize plans for combined Holy Week services. See below for our Holy Week plans. I hope Council members will attend as many services as possible.

With Christ through Death into Life

Palm Sunday, April 2nd 9:30 a.m. at Mount Cross, Bishop Brenda Bos, Presiding and Preaching

Maundy Thursday, April 6th 7:00 p.m. at Camarillo United Methodist Church (291 Anacapa Dr.) A dramatization of the Last Supper with Holy Communion

Good Friday Prayer Walk with the Cross of Christ for Peace and Healing, April 7th, meet at Camarillo UMC at 5:30 p.m. We will walk two miles to Mount Cross Lutheran Church, carrying the cross and the prayers of the community. Email prayers to CamarilloCross@gmail.com

Good Friday Worship Service, April 7th at 7:00 p.m. Mount Cross Lutheran Church (102 Camino Esplendido) The Passion of Christ with musical interludes

The Easter Vigil, Saturday, April 8th 7:00 p.m. at St. Columba's Episcopal Church (1251 Las Posas Rd.) The new fire of Easter, the story of salvation, the Easter Gospel, and Holy Communion. Meet at the fire pit in the back of the parking lot.

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

Time Away:

- 10 hours Sick Time taken for March 13-19
- 2 days vacation, including 1 Sunday, for time away March 24-28. Pastor Ron Cox will be the supply pastor on March 26.
- I am taking a "buy out" Sunday on April 30. Pastor Ron Cox will be the supply pastor that day, as well.

Pastor's Report for February Church Council Meeting
January 18 - Feb. 10, 2023

Thank you to all who contributed to a wonderful Annual Meeting on January 29. Here is a link to our "Year in Review" slideshow <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bU0HFD800Y>. In my spoken report at the meeting, I shared two of my goals for the year: first, to work with a team to create an intentional process for welcoming newcomers and preparing them for baptism/affirmation of baptism and church membership. Second, to work with the Care Team to make sure the whole congregation understands itself as part of the Mount Cross caring ministries.

Thank you to all who have committed to leadership positions this year, whether on the Council or as committee chairs or members. I hope people who need to take a break from service or want to change to different avenues of service will feel free to do so. It's important that we all honor our own and each other's limits and approach our ministries with a positive and prayerful spirit.

It was a joy to celebrate the installation of the 2023 Council at our Sunday worship service on February 5 and I am looking forward to the Leadership Retreat on February 11.

I will be hosting clergy from the Channel Islands Conference at Mount Cross on Thursday, February 16 from 10-12 in the sanctuary narthex.

I request Council approval to receive the application for membership for Diana Martinez and Robert Mejia who plan to affirm their baptism on Feb. 19 and bring their son, Luke, to Holy Baptism. Audrey Smith will also be baptized Feb. 19, and Dan and Karen Nelson plan to affirm their baptism.

Ash Wednesday is Feb. 22. We will join with St. Columba's Episcopal and Camarillo United Methodist for services at noon and 7 p.m., both at St. Columba's. I will be preaching. We will also join with both churches for the Holy Week services of Maundy Thursday (at Camarillo UMC), Good Friday (at Mount Cross), and the Saturday Easter Vigil (at St. Columba's). **Bishop Bos will be with us on Palm Sunday, April 2!**



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Lent: Using resources from *A Sanctified Art*, our theme for Lent this year is "Seeking." What are you seeking? What are we seeking together? What is God seeking? In addition to our regular worship services, there are several opportunities for people to grow in their faith this Lent.

- Wednesday Evening Program. 5 p.m. Faith Formation for all; 6 p.m. Soup Supper; 7 p.m. Holden Evening Prayer. The adult faith formation component will be in the PLC and we may be joined by members of St. Columba's for a program called, "Life Transformed: The Way of Love in Lent." Together, we will reflect anew on the loving actions of God as recounted in the Easter Vigil readings.
- I encourage people to explore "The University Series", especially Father Patrick Mullen's "Deep Dive into Matthew" on Mondays in Lent at Padre Serra. Here is a link: https://ventura.theuniversityseries.org/classes/?fbclid=IwAR1jgkObRPiIXXvyhcs8QTVsEoySLGGxQKK5Q uaPQkeKJWH_pewa9gzDDZw
- Labyrinth Walk at St. Columba's on Saturday, March 11 at 10 a.m.
- Sunday adult education class reading together and discussing Daniel Erlander's booklet, "Baptized we Live: Lutheranism as a Way of Life."

I will be away Sunday, March 26. Pastor Ron Cox will serve as the supply pastor that day.

Pastor's Report for January 2023 Council Meeting
December 21, 2022 – January 17, 2023

- Thank you to all who helped make our Christmas season beautiful, special, and hospitable! We celebrated the Nativity of our Lord at 5 p.m. on Saturday, December 24; Christmas Sunday worship on December 25 at 9:30 a.m., Lessons and Carols with Holy Communion at 9:30 a.m. on the first Sunday of Christmas (Jan. 1), and Epiphany at 7 p.m. on Friday, January 6. It is always a joy to hear that people are touched by the grace of God through the Word and Sacrament, the music, and the welcoming community that they encounter at Mount Cross.
- Thank you to those who filled in for me while I was away Dec. 26 – January 4. Evonne Kuchera and Susan Prosser were first responders for urgent care needs. Pastor Lynn Enloe and The Rev. Kate Lewis were on call for pastoral emergencies. Carol Browning ensured smooth office operations.
- For the week of January 9 – 14, my time was dedicated to serving the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles as the pre-ordination retreat leader for new priests and as the preacher at their ordinations on January 14. You can see the festive occasion here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbiMq7IT1Lc> Many thanks to Carol, Joe, and Deacon Cecelia for making sure Mount Cross was well-served in my absence, including Deacon Cecelia's willingness to preach on January 15, knowing I would not have time to prepare a sermon.
- Since tonight is the last meeting of the 2022 Congregational Council, I want to sincerely thank each of you for your generous service to Mount Cross this year. We are blessed by your labor and grateful for your gifts! Special thanks to our Executive Committee, under the excellent leadership of President Becky Riley, for the many additional meetings and tasks they assumed over the year.
- There is much to look forward to in 2023, including our **Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 29**, the **Leadership Retreat on Saturday, February 11**, and **Baptisms** and the welcoming of new members on **Sunday, February 19**. Thank you for making a strong effort to be present at all these special events, as well as our weekly Sunday worship.

God bless you.