

Pastor's Report for April 19, 2022 Church Council Meeting

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!



Holy Week was a graced time. We celebrated the Great Three Days (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil) with St. Columba's Episcopal Church. On Easter Sunday at Mount Cross we had a **full sanctuary** for the first time since the pandemic began. 181 people attended our in-person Easter worship service and we had 35 "Peak Live Viewers" on Facebook. Thank you to all who helped us offer reverent and Spirit-filled Holy Week and Easter services, including the choir, musicians, Carol Browning, many, many worship assistants, the Altar Guild, Jim and Susan Prosser for the flower cross, Todd Ebright for hanging the banners, Bill Dawson and his Tech Team, Deacon Cecelia, Joe Zimmerly and the youth for a wonderful Easter Breakfast, and the Learning Committee for a fun Egg Hunt.



Pastor's Report for March 22, 2022 Council Meeting

It has been a very busy month. In times like this the challenge is not to lose sight of what church is all about: experiencing and sharing the grace of Christ. One thing that keeps me going is the real experience here at Mount Cross of being a community sharing in God's work *together*. Thank you for being present, engaged, creative, and willing to roll up your sleeves and get things done.

Our combined Ash Wednesday service at 7 p.m. on March 2 with St. Columba's was well-attended. A good number of Mount Cross people also attended the noon Ash Wednesday service at St. Columba's indicating, I think, the need to offer daytime services on our holy days for those who do not drive at night. We are partnering with St. Columba's for Holy Week services and have made sure there are daytime options. See the schedule below.

We had three memorial services in eight days. We commended Howard Wullschleger, Mary O'Donnell, and Don Stevenson to the mercy of God. Many thanks to our musicians, worship assistants, altar guild, and Helping Hands for their caring ministries during times of grief.

Wednesday night Lenten programs are off to a good start. About 20 people are attending the "Embracing an Adult Faith" class on Wednesdays at 5p.m. We cancelled the Thursday Zoom repeat of the class because too few were attending. The soup suppers are delicious and it's nice to eat together before Holden Evening Prayer. The theme of the Holden messages is "Word of God, Word of Life." We are hearing from different people about their favorite Bible passages. Thank you to the Saner family, Miriam Hoffman, Allison Johnson, Matt Fisher, and Jim and Susan Prosser for sharing with us.

Joe Zimmerly and I have been asked to serve on the Synod Assembly planning team.

I'm looking forward to our Leadership Retreat on Sunday, March 27 from Noon-5p.m. Thank you for attending.

Holy Week and Easter Schedule

Palm Sunday, April 10

9:30 a.m. worship at Mount Cross with a palm procession and the reading of the Passion. (Also livestreamed)

Maundy Thursday, April 14

Noon at St. Columba's for those who need a daytime service.

*7 p.m. Maundy Thursday Worship at Mount Cross. We remember the last supper, hear Christ's commandment to love one another, celebrate the gift of Holy Communion, and strip the altar in preparation for Good Friday. (Also livestreamed)

Good Friday, April 15

Noon Stations of the Cross outdoors at St. Columba's Episcopal Church.

*7 p.m. Service of Tenebrae (Latin for "darkness") at Mount Cross. Candles are gradually extinguished as we read the Passion, interspersed with hymns and musical interludes to aid our

contemplation of the suffering and death of Christ. There will be an opportunity to reverence the cross. (Also livestreamed)

The Great Vigil of Easter, Saturday April 16

7 p.m. at St. Columba's Episcopal Church. Meet at the outdoor fire pit for the lighting of the new fire of Easter. We will process into the church to hear the foundational stories of our faith, proclaim the Easter Gospel, and celebrate Holy Communion on this night when Jesus passed over from death into life.

Easter Sunday, April 17

9:30 a.m. Easter Sunday worship at Mount Cross followed by an Easter breakfast. (Also livestreamed).

Pastor's Report for February 2022 January 18, 2022 – February 13, 2022

Welcome 2022 Church Council! Thank you for offering yourselves to share in the leadership of the congregation. Congratulations and thanks to all, including our staff, for a good annual meeting.

Mount Cross Story Corps

As I announced at the annual meeting, I would like to gather stories under the title *Mount Cross Story Corps*. In your spheres of ministry, please be on the look out for stories that help gauge the vitality of our congregation, especially related to stories of God's presence and provision; stories of caring, welcoming, and connecting within the congregation; and stories of members giving, serving, and faith-sharing with people outside the congregation. When you hear of or witness a story, please send it my way.

Worship

- Sunday Worship continues at 9:30 a.m. - in the sanctuary, outside, and livestreaming - with wonderful musicians and worship assistants.
- The Worship and Music Committee met January 19 and will meet again Feb. 23.
- The Council was installed on Sunday, February 6 at our 9:30 a.m. service. Joy!
- Sermons: January 23 ("What Are We Doing Here?"), January 30 ("Some Love for Our Amygdala"), February 6 ("Here I am!"), February 13 ("A New Kind of Community")

Pastoral Care

- Beginning with a class of 10, we prepared 6 children for Holy Communion in January and 3 came to the Lord's Table with us on January 23. We hope to officially welcome the other 3 to the Lord's Table very soon.
- Following the "Exploring Membership" class, I have been meeting with newcomers and those interested in joining Mount Cross. Pending Council approval, at our Sunday worship service on Feb. 27 we will receive through transfer from another Lutheran

congregation Lyndsay, Amanda, and Owen Montour and Dave and Becky Gilbertson (as Associate Members). We will baptize Brendan Jr. and Jordan Garrett and receive their parents, Brendan Sr. and Jennifer Garrett, as members. Patricia Lewis and Cheryl Wolfe will join the congregation by affirming their baptism, and Jeanne Kuchera Sikoff will renew her membership through the affirmation of baptism. Jeanne Eby will be baptized at one of the Easter services and Doug Wilde will be received by transfer.

- Howard Wullschleger entered into eternal life on February 1. His service will be Saturday, February 26 at 2 p.m.
- Don Stevenson entered into eternal life on January 5. His service will be Saturday, March 5 at 2 p.m.
- I continue, along with Deacon Cecelia, the Care Team, and other caring volunteers, to visit, call, text and be available as much as possible to those who need pastoral care in the congregation or preschool. If you are aware of any need, please let me know so I can offer spiritual support.

Christian Formation

This month, I facilitated Men's Bible study on January 20; Women's Bible Study on 1/18, 1/25, 2/1, and 2/18; Wednesday Evening Bible Study on 2/2 and 2/9. The Rev. Susan Klein has been assisting with the Wednesday evening Bible study. I was glad to attend Mary Circle on 2/1. Also, Joe and I alternate weeks leading chapel for the preschool and teaching the Confirmation lesson.

Hybrid Ministry

I completed a 6-hour mini course (2 hours each on 1/6, 1/13, and 1/20) on "Hybrid Ministry in the Post-Pandemic Church" through Luther Seminary's Faith+Lead Learning Hub for Christian Leaders. I presented on "Upper Room Zoom at Noon" and our experience with virtual choirs. The consensus is that digital ministry is here to stay. Going forward, it is up to us to decide what is most appropriate for our context. We will need to ask ourselves which format (in-person only, virtual only, or both) we want to use for each of our programs and services, keeping in mind stewardship of our human, financial, and technological resources. For most churches, online services will not grow the church in numbers but can increase accessibility for those who are already members and offer a way to be present to those who will likely never come to our church.

Re-Opening

The Re-Opening Committee met on Thursday, February 3 and decided to keep current guidance in place but remind people that there is no longer a requirement to serve food in individually packaged servings. As the County indoor mask mandate for vaccinated people expires on February 16, we need to decide how to implement that at Mount Cross. We are looking for guidance on indoor singing at this stage of the pandemic. The next Re-Opening Committee meeting is Thursday, March 3.

Administration

I meet weekly with the staff as a whole (Tuesdays at 1 p.m.) and individually with each staff member for check-ins (typically with Deacon Cecelia on Tuesdays at 2:30 p.m., with Joe on Wednesdays at 11:45 a.m., with Carina on Thursdays at 1 p.m., and with Carol on Thursdays at 4 p.m.).

Tracy Blois (Learning Committee Chair) and I completed Joe Zimmerly's annual ministry review on February 10. The review will be sent to the Personnel Committee and put in his personnel file. **Summary:** Joe is an agent of growth - children, interns, congregation (new members), and community. He far exceeds expectations. He is a servant leader, and we are blessed to have him on our staff.

Looking Ahead to Lent, Holy Week, and Easter

- Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday, March 2**. We are hosting the combined service with St. Columba's at Mount Cross at 7 p.m. The service will also be livestreamed. St. Columba's will also offer Ash Wednesday services at 7:00 a.m. and Noon for those who are not able to attend the evening service. I will participate in the noon service, as well.
- On the **Wednesdays in Lent** (March 9, 16, 23, 30, and April 6), we'll host St. Columba's for a Lenten Class at 5 p.m. (taught by me, Fr. Greg, and Rev. Susan), Soup Supper at 6 p.m., and Holden Evening Prayer at 7 p.m. The Lenten Class is called *Embracing an Adult Faith* where we will explore a richer understanding of issues in contemporary Christian practice and theology, featuring theologian Marcus Borg. (The class will also be repeated on Zoom on Thursdays at 11:00 a.m. each week.)
- **Holy Week services**
Maundy Thursday, April 14 Noon at St. Columba's, 7 p.m. at Mount Cross (and livestreamed)
Good Friday, April 15, Noon Stations of the Cross at St. Columba's, 7 p.m. liturgy at Mount Cross (and livestreamed)
Easter Vigil, April 16, 7 p.m. at St. Columba's
Easter Sunday, April 17, at Mount Cross, service times TBA

Help Needed

1. **Interfaith Friendship:** Mount Cross has been asked to participate in a county-wide Interfaith Friendship Project. We need to identify a Mount Cross lay representative or two who would be willing to help facilitate a friendship group in their home. The program begins with an interfaith mixer on May 15th at 4:00pm. The friendship groups will meet weekly for 4-5 weeks, and then there will be a celebration dinner on June 26 at 4 p.m.

2. **Holden Messages:** I am looking for 5 people, couples, or families to give the short messages at our Wednesday Holden Evening Prayer services in Lent. The theme is: “Word of God, Word of Life.” The invitation is to share one of your favorite Bible passages or Bible stories and tell why it is meaningful to you. 5 minutes is a good length of time. It doesn’t have to be brilliant, just real. I am available to help.

Vacation and Continuing Education Plans for 2022

- I will be away on vacation for one week Feb. 14-21. On Sunday, Feb. 20 Deacon Cecelia will preach and Rev. Susan Klein will preside.
- According to my contract, in addition to my vacation, I can be away up to 4 more Sundays each year for children’s activities, college move-ins, college family weekends, etc. if I pay for the supply clergy. I am taking one of those Sundays on March 6 for my daughter’s musical performance out of town, Pastor Ron Cox will preach and preside.
- I will use one week of continuing education May 2-7. May 2-4 is the Episcopal Clergy Conference in Riverside, and I will take a short course (Topic TBD) May 5-7. I will be at Mount Cross on May 8, but there will be a guest preacher (TBA).
- I will be away on vacation for two weeks July 15-29. Pastor Ron Cox will cover July 17, Deacon Cecelia will cover July 24, possibly assisted by a minister of Word and Sacrament.
- Yet to be scheduled: 2 weeks’ vacation, 1 week continuing education, and up to 3 family Sundays, if needed.

A Prayer for the Mission of the Church

Draw your church together, O God, into one great company of disciples, together following our teacher Jesus Christ into every walk of life, together serving in Christ’s mission to the world, and together witnessing to your love wherever you will send us; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (ELW, 75).

Pastor’s Report for January 2022 Council Meeting December 21-January 18, 2022

The Christmas Season

Despite the on-going stresses of the pandemic and the recent surge in COVID cases, Mount Cross celebrated the Christmas season with joy. Remembering that worship was completely virtual last Christmas Eve, in-person worship at our 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. Christmas Eve services this year was especially heart-warming. The first Sunday after Christmas arrived quickly (Dec. 26) and Carol Browning, along with Guy Ervin and several volunteer musicians, helped us continue to dwell in the wonder of Christmas through a service of *Lessons and Carols with Holy Communion*. As a way of bringing the season into our homes, I included an article in the January newsletter encouraging church members to honor the Epiphany tradition of blessing their homes on or around January 6. I’ve heard from some people who choose to do so that it

was a simple yet meaningful spiritual moment in the season. Thank you to all who donated poinsettias to make the church festive and beautiful, and thank you to all who helped set up, maintain, and take down the Christmas decorations! A special thank you to all the members of the Altar Guild, guided by Carol Broderick, for their extra service during this busy time of year

Worship

Worship continues to happen in three spaces simultaneously each Sunday morning at 9:30: in the sanctuary, streamed into the outdoor pavilion, and livestreamed on Facebook. We are utterly and gratefully dependent on Bill Dawson and his tech team for helping us do this. We hope to get new Moorpark College interns again for their spring semester, but they would not start until early February. The hours have changed for *Come to the Table* drive-through/walk in Holy Communion. Communion is now distributed to our livestream viewers from 11-11:30 a.m. Sunday mornings.

Christian Formation

All Christian formation programs resumed the week of January 9. I am facilitating the Tuesday morning Women's Bible study this month, following the *Gather* study. The Rev. Susan Klein is the guest leader of the Wednesday evening Bible study. I am alternating leadership of the Men's Bible study (the first Thursday one of the group members leads it; the third Thursday I lead it). I am teaching an Introduction to Holy Communion class for ten children January 12 and 19, and sharing pre-school chapels and Confirmation classes with Joe Zimmerly.

Exploring Membership at Mount Cross

Four people attended our exploring membership class and several others expressed interest but were unable to attend. Many thanks to Karen Cherry and the Welcome Team for assisting. I have received applications for membership from the Mantour family, Jeanne Sikoff-Kuchera, Cheryl Wolfe, and Patricia Lewis. We will joyfully welcome them (and possibly others) as official Mount Cross members at our Sunday worship on February 27.

Pastoral Care

I, along with Deacon Cecelia and members of the Care Team, continue to serve the pastoral needs of the congregation. We take initiative in reaching out to people and are responsive to requests and referrals. We commended Lois Watts, a long-time Mount Cross member, to God's eternal care at her funeral service on December 30 and buried her at Conejo Mount Cemetery on January 9. We were saddened by the death of Don Stevenson on January 5, and continue to hold his family in our prayers. In life and in death, we belong to the Lord (Romans 14:8).

Good work, 2021 Church Council

As we prepare for our Annual Meeting and some transition in congregational leadership, please know how grateful I am for the excellent service of the 2021 Church Council, the extraordinary leadership of Becky Riley and the Executive Committee, and the constant, reasoned guidance

from our Re-Opening Committee. Keith Selbrede will soon conclude his many years of service as our Treasurer. I thank him for his conscientious care for the finances of the church, his faithful and spiritual approach to budgeting, and his patience in on-boarding me to the financial processes of the congregation. Well done, Keith. Thank you and God bless you!