

Pastor's Report for December 17, 2024 Church Council Meeting

I am happy to be returning to monthly reporting after being away on a three-month sabbatical. As I have tried to say in many forums since my return on December 1, thank you Mount Cross for the provision of a sabbatical for your pastor, and thank you to the staff and volunteers who worked extra hard to make sure things went smoothly in my absence!

Pastor Scott Maxwell-Doherty was unanimously voted the “best sabbatical pastor ever” by the congregation, and I concur. He and I met on November 22 so he could fill me in on what I needed to know before my return. He also prepared a document of his observations for me, Bill Stoll, and Bishop Bos. Bill and I shared the document in its entirety with the Executive Committee at our December 5 meeting. Among other observations, Pastor Scott noted, *“Mount Cross is blessed with an ALL-IN staff. These are committed, even overcommitted people. These are very talented people. Each of them are trying to balance four things: 1. Meeting the multiple needs of a caring community. 2. Bridging leadership styles in a post-COVID church. 3. Constantly having a ‘catchers’ mitt’ on, grabbing stuff as it bubbles up, even when it is not in their area or lane. 4. Serving Jesus, the Church, and trying to care for themselves. Sadly this level of engagement is not sustainable. There is simply too, too much, all the time.”* With the Executive Committee, I will continue to review and consider Pastor Scott’s observations and recommendations.

Thanks be to God, I was not disappointed in my hope for a sabbatical experience of being more deeply rooted in God’s grace. I am grateful for the gift of time to savor the graces of marriage, family relationships, friendships, the beauty of the earth, the Church in many places, walking, prayer, plant-based nutrition, reading, and learning. I trust all of what I experienced on sabbatical, including deep rest, will bear fruit in my ministry at Mount Cross, but what will be most immediately applicable is my coursework in transitional ministry through the Interim Ministry Network, an organization that provides support and training for leaders who lead during a time of transition. The assumption in the wider church now is that all leadership is taking place in a time of multiple, significant transitions. I took two of their classes: *The Work of the Leader* and *The Work of the Congregation*. A third part to this transitional leadership training is for me to implement a project at Mount Cross. I will focus this project on our immediate need to develop a process for discerning pathways for Mount Cross as we predict the need to re-envision our structure and ministries to align with financial realities by the end of 2025. I look forward to working with the Church Council and other Mount Cross leaders on this process development.

It has been good to jump back into Mount Cross with both feet in this busy time of Advent.

*It was a joy for us all to celebrate the marriage of Joe and Emily Zimmerly on December 6.

*Carol Browning produced an exceptional Advent/Christmas music program on December 8, showcasing the abundant musical gifts in our congregation.

*As our hearts continue to hold the sorrow of those impacted by the Mountain Fire, Mount Cross is joining with St. Columba’s Episcopal and Camarillo United Methodist to offer a “Blue Christmas” service. Hosted at Mount Cross on December 22 at 4 p.m., it will be a

healing, compassionate service where people can bring their grief and sadness over any kind of loss.

*We will have one service at 4:30 p.m. on Christmas Eve, with overflow seating in the warmed pavilion (with TV monitor), and a service of Christmas Lessons and Carols on Sunday, December 29, at 9:30 a.m.

*Please save the dates for our Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 26, and our Leadership Retreat on Saturday, February 8.

*Annual Reports from all Committees are due by January 10.

Thank you, Church Council, for your service to our congregation this year. I pray we all have a deep experience of Jesus, who is God-with-us, this Christmas season.