

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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