



Fall 2025 PCM Newsletter



MISSION STATEMENT

Presbyterian Campus Ministry of Chapel Hill is an affirming Christian community for UNC-Chapel Hill students to be fully known and loved. We invite Carolina students to:

Belong: engage authentically in our intentionally nurtured community,
Believe: expand and deepen their belief and understanding of the Triune God,
Become: foster life-giving spiritual practices and invest their gifts in the world.

We aim to set the foundation for a healthy, authentic, and life-long relationship with God.

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Berry French

CAMPUS MINISTER

As the fall semester ends and we celebrate another fantastic semester of PCM's ministry to, for, and by Carolina students, I begin with gratitude! Thanks be to God for:

- The more than 60 alumni, dozens of parents, current, and previous Board members who donate monthly to support our ministry;
- Our two Pastoral Residents, and their creativity, energy, commitment, theological training, and love for our students and programming;
- The 44 students signed up for Montreat College Conference in January;
- Our 9 student leaders who pour countless hours into shepherding our flock of about 70 PCM students to make our ministry thrive:
 - planning and cooking our Thursday evening meals,
 - leading our Music Team so that we can sing our worship each week,
 - crafting our weekly emails to keep us in order,
 - managing our social media presence,
 - preparing and leading our retreat and worship-specific Thursday programs,
 - organizing our finances and retreat logistics,
 - serving as PCM's interfaith group leader, communing with our Muslim, Jewish, and Christian siblings and arranging service and outreach opportunities for PCM,
 - Moderating us all by staying weeks ahead of any potential issue or possibility and offering encouraging words and solid leadership!

I pray there is much in your own life to give thanks for and encourage you to practice that gratitude. In the face of today's worldly despair, I find leaning on gratitude can be a helpful response—though I recognize that I am privileged to work alongside these gifted and dedicated college students, and that hope is easier to notice in a healthy campus ministry that has curated a culture of acceptance, welcome, and trust.

My prayer is that the hope, joy, and vibrancy of PCM bleeds through these pages and into your hearts and spirits. Seeking joy and hope in the midst of our personal weariness and collective disappointment in

many of the leaders around us is not new. The Israelites are failed again and again by their leaders; the Israelites fail again and again to uphold their end of the covenant; and YET...God continues to covenant with us, seeking after us and promising renewal and forgiveness. As we prepare for Advent, we celebrate God becoming human in Jesus Christ to show us how to live abundantly and care for our neighbors. God is chasing after us with joy and hope and calling us to spread that joy and hope into a world that desperately needs both.

Among all the hopes I have for our ministry, my primary hope for every student—whether they come for one Thursday night or go on every retreat we offer over their four years—is that each is assured they are a BELOVED child of God. In an era ruled by selfishness, greed, and rampant consumerism, a reminder that our primary identity is as God's beloved child is freeing! God loves us because of who God is, not because we can earn God's love. In the security of this realization, we are called to show God's love to others, especially the most vulnerable.

In light of our gratitude for God's work at PCM and our hope for each student touched by our ministry, I invite you to join me, our Board members, and more than 60 of our alumni in making a donation to invest in PCM's ministry so we can invest in the spiritual lives of college students at UNC-CH. If you're not yet personally donating to PCM, please do! If you're able to increase your monthly donation to PCM, we would welcome that.

My hope for you is that you are also assured that you are a beloved child of God. That is your primary identity, and it will always be enough. You are claimed by Almighty God and that identity cannot be taken away; it will endure through the trials of this life and the next.

May the Triune God who has claimed you bless you in these days before us,
Rev. Berry French



PCM Happenings





Evie Georgoulias

CLASS OF 2029

One of the beauties about summer in North Carolina is that it spills into the first month (or sometimes more) of the fall semester. As a student at UNC, this means that for the first bit of school we're able to enjoy the warm long nights of summer as we embark on a fresh start to the school year. For PCM students, this means we get a little extra time to hold onto summer and celebrate being together for a new year with our annual Beach Retreat. It provides space during an early weekend of the semester to enjoy the warm breeze, the ocean, the eight o'clock sunsets, and a weekend away from school and stress before the semester goes into full swing. As a freshman, this year was my first time attending Beach Retreat which gave me an incredible opportunity to laugh, talk, and get to know my fellow PCM students.

My freshman fall semester has been challenging: adjusting to a college schedule, living away from home, finding community and hobbies, and getting situated in a new environment. Needless to say, signing up for Beach Retreat after only going to two Thursday night programs felt a little daunting—would spending three nights at the beach with a big group of strangers be a huge mistake? After all, I barely knew these people and only had a small taste of what PCM at UNC was like. Embracing the idea that college is a time to try out lots of new things, I went ahead and signed up for

the weekend. I was a little worried, but after spending the ride to the beach with songs on full blast and being welcomed into a big beach house with a beautiful view, I felt much more at peace.

The coming days felt like a time warp of rest, laughter, playing board games, and setting down my Canvas app for a little bit. I found myself taking long walks on the beach at night, laughing with new friends while stargazing, playing board games, frolicking in the marsh, and spending hours journaling on rocking chairs overlooking the ocean. It was a beautiful reminder to rest and take moments to admire God's creation.

During Beach Retreat, I also had the opportunity to discuss some of my difficult theological questions in a group setting—something I'd never experienced before in a faith group. Brieology, a PCM Beach Retreat tradition, gives students space to ask our peers and faith leaders about hard questions on our minds. The round table conversations accompanied by fancy appetizers and baked brie cheese were eye-opening, and I especially appreciated the emphasis on curiosity and questioning as opposed to binary answers of right and wrong. As a freshman, attending Beach Retreat was one of the highlights of my fall semester. I came out of the weekend rested, renewed, and with a new community of people at PCM.



Jack Herr

CLASS OF 2028

When most people think of PCM, they picture Thursday night program—college students sharing a meal and learning about faith and God. But I think about the time I spend cooking and cleaning with my friends—whether I’m chopping vegetables on Wednesday, or cleaning dishes after program.

Through PCM, I have discovered how much fun these less popular tasks can be.

At PCM, we often stay late after events. This has led to great social time—and a running joke: if you stay past a certain point in time, Berry starts assigning you tasks. Although we joke about this, I love it. My best memories have come from spending time cooking pancakes at Beach Retreat or experiencing The Great PCM Kitchen Flood of 2025. I could talk all day about the great times I’ve had in and around PCM kitchens, but one in particular stands out: the infamous Mountain Retreat bacon situation (for legal reasons, it was not a fire).

Picture this: a sleepy college kid wakes up at about 9 a.m. in a jammed-packed mountain house from a short night’s rest. Some students woke up a bit earlier to make breakfast. One of those people would be my partner in crime—I mean, cleaning—Jack Weinard. As I walk into the kitchen, I notice some smoke—but anyone who has been around PCM kitchens would know that’s not too uncommon. But there was, like...a lot of smoke. So, my sleepy self looked at Jack and asked how the bacon was going. He reported that it was getting smoky because there was a lot of extra grease collecting on

the built-in griddle. I looked at the griddle. The way this griddle was designed allowed for the bacon grease to overflow into a cavity below where the burners sit. As you’d expect, bacon grease smokes a lot, but it also makes cool-looking orange wispy things if it gets too hot—and needless to say, it was looking kind of orange underneath the cooking surface. Once our brains processed this information, we put the orange wisps of light out without setting off the smoke alarms and waking the house up. Even though this experience was on the oh-no side of the kitchen spectrum, it’s still one of my fondest moments at PCM.

A more recent kitchen memory occurred a few weeks ago, when PCM took on Ethiopian food. As usual, I had been happily roped into cooking. Katie Murray and I were assigned to stir a pot of cabbage, potatoes, and other assorted vegetables. Now this wasn’t just any pot...this was an 80-quart industrial-sized soup pot. As you can imagine, stirring dense vegetables wasn’t easy. Katie and I took turns bear-hugging the pot while the other tried to get the wooden spoon to move through the cabbage. I was convinced that the spoon was not going to survive this ordeal, but somehow, the spoon survived and we had a great time.

Looking back, these PCM kitchen experiences have taught me more than kitchen skills; they’ve shown me the value of teamwork and the satisfaction that comes with it. Most importantly, they’ve given me a group of people I can call family.



Mil Laursen

CLASS OF 2027

One of the gifts of PCM is building community beyond UNC. This summer, I connected with Bill Buchanan from Youth Mission Co, which partners with nonprofits serving the unhoused and those facing extreme material poverty. I then spent the summer in Asheville as a Youth Mission Co intern alongside PCMer Violet McLamb, following in the footsteps of PCM alum Daniel Caudill. My summer was unforgettable and beautiful in so many ways.

My favorite routine came from an intern who suggested using Ruth Chapter 1 as a Bible study. In Ruth 1, Naomi experiences unimaginable tragedy when her husband and sons die. Left without property, income, or rights, she heads to Bethlehem with her daughters-in-law. Naomi urges them to leave her to her grief, but Ruth refuses, choosing to stay no matter what. Though Naomi believes God's hand has turned against her, Ruth promises to remain with her as long as they live.

I've never believed God's hand had turned against me, but many people I met this summer might have said that; many had problems so complex that there wasn't a single, quick answer—and some might never be "fixed."

Ruth is a true friend—she doesn't deny Naomi's pain, promise brighter days, or downplay her despair. She simply sits with her, sharing the weight of it. On the other hand, I'm someone who tries to stay optimistic and "fix it" no matter what. When something goes wrong, I say, "It okay!" before I even think about it. As a white person with a supportive family, resources, and a college education, things usually will be okay for me.

But for people living on the margins, whose lives and futures aren't prioritized by our culture, things won't always be okay. I had to resist the instinct to offer hollow reassurance and instead learn to be more

like Ruth—to sit with people in their despair. It's uncomfortable, especially when you never want anyone to be sad or hurting, but it's real.

I can never know what it is like to lose my four-year-old child and be struggling with addiction. I will never know what it is like for my home to get swept away in a hurricane. I will never know what it is like to have to sleep on concrete and protect myself from violence with nothing but a baseball bat. But I do know what it's like to feel alone, and I know how to give hugs and how to ask meaningful questions like "What are you most proud of about your daughter?" and "What brings you joy?" and "How are you coping with your hip replacement surgery?". I know how to sit in silence with a friend that isn't in the same mental reality as me. I know how to read poetry to Ms. Ethel who can't see real well and lost her reading glasses. I know how to give big hugs to Eva and make sure I say hey to her every time I see her on the streets. I know how to sit and listen to Chris tell me the same story he's told a thousand times about hiking the Appalachian Trail. I know how to hold an adult leader that can't stop crying because they've finally been hit with the hurt of the world.

Sometimes staying in these heavy spaces was hard. It would have been easy to leave, to escape the exhaustion, anger, and sadness. But staying—being a Ruth—reminded us that we are worth more than our bad days. If these folks only had fair-weather friends, it's likely that many would have no friends at all. AYM taught me that Jesus was never a fair-weather friend either, and He sacrificed His life for us, just as Ruth gave up her future for Naomi, reminding us we are worthy of love even in our darkest moments.



Grace Davidson

CLASS OF 2026

Scarcity.

It's not a word one might readily associate with UNC—or college in general. The best four years of your life should be full: full of opportunities, full of connection, full of life. And in many ways, they are. Take it from a wizened old senior: you can do a lot in college. UNC is home to roughly 800 student organizations, \$1.55 billion in research, and countless other ways to get involved. Statistically speaking, the average student should be drowning in chances to connect, find their niche, and flourish. But when the breadth of your opportunities is measured in transactional relationships, unanswered emails, and rejected achievements, imagining a full college life can start to feel like a Sisyphus-sized task.

This is why PCM is so important to me.

PCM offers an incomparable and refreshing model of joyful abundance in a world dominated by scarcity thinking. Having had the privilege of serving on PCM's Leadership Team for the past two years, I've witnessed the way this abundance mindset permeates everything we do. If I had to capture PCM's approach in two words, they'd be: faithful hospitality—because, as I've come to learn, hospitality is merely abundance made tangible.

So, what does faithful hospitality look like? It's an invitation from Berry to join PCM before a student has even set foot on UNC's campus. It's eight full-time college students preparing a three-course meal each week for 40 hungry peers—and still taking the time to provide dietary-restriction-friendly options. It's belting

Hamilton with three other PCmers at the top of your lungs on the drive back from Beach Retreat. It's napping off a failed exam in the program space. It's frolicking in a spring mountain meadow. It's late-night riff-offs and early morning hikes and everything in between.

More than a way to embody the Great Commission or sustain campus ministry, faithful hospitality—to me—represents something rarer: a genuine effort to meet people where they are, to seek them out, and to make them feel truly known—not for what they do, believe, or offer, but simply because they, too, are a beloved child of God. Through this simple yet holy principle, PCM has nurtured my growth both personally and spiritually over the past four years, providing a community of peers and mentors who have shaped me, supported me, and revealed the many ways God's goodness works in and through the world around us. It has granted me countless opportunities to laugh, to learn, to lead, and to serve—but perhaps most importantly, it has given me hope.

As I look toward my final semester at UNC and beyond, I strive to let this hope guide me—shaping how I engage with others, the choices I make, and the ways I carry the lessons of PCM into the world beyond campus. It is a hope rooted in abundance rather than scarcity, in connection rather than competition, and in grace rather than performance. With that hope, I enter the next chapter ready to seek out community, serve with intention, and extend the faithful hospitality that has given me so much.



PCM Fall Trips

Beach Retreat and Backpacking





Kim Rubish

PASTORAL RESIDENT (2021-2023)

Hello hello, PCM! If we haven't met, in 2023 I wrapped up five years of work with PCM. PCM has meant a LOT to me over the years: it was the first space I ever served as a divinity intern, the space I got to help dream about what the pastoral residency could be, and ultimately, the space where I was ordained.

After my five years at PCM, I spent one year getting very little sleep as a chaplain at UNC Hospital, then moved to Atlanta with my fiancée, Alex—she's now the one getting very little sleep in her four-year OBGYN residency. Moving to Atlanta felt a little like graduating from college for me: suddenly, every possibility was open in a way I hadn't experienced in a long time. Would I magically become very good at ceramics and crafting? Would I move into the nonprofit world, or land with youth, or would I spend time as a server, or a barista, or a bookseller? In starting PCM's Senior Small Group, I watched so many final-year students struggle with the unknowns of what comes next—will the dream job be there? Will there be friendship, faith, joy, and community after PCM? What if I don't even know what I want to do?

It was humbling, painful, and a little magical for me to find myself right back in that boat. I certainly ate my own words a few times, realizing how easy they are to say and how hard they are to believe. But I was also reminded of what PCM continually returns to: a deep trust in goodness, love, and grace—those things are real and true. Even in the dark. Especially in the dark.

Of course, it's easier to be reporting from the "other side"—a year and a half into my Atlanta life, I am happily serving as Morningside Presbyterian's Associate Pastor for Families and Engagement alongside an all-female

pastoral team, and with an expansive, queer-inclusive staff. I'm planning a wedding, playing with my local women's rugby team, and am a trivia regular at a brewery that I walk to every Monday. Alex and I, even in the throes of residency (which, at this moment, looks like six straight weeks on nights), really are good. Fulfilled, happy, glad it all worked out this way. This week, I taught the Manna in the Desert story at preschool chapel (yes, my job is very different now), and I was smacked in the face with the reminder that both things are real: the pain of wondering when goodness will come again, and the comfortable pleasure of noticing that suddenly there is manna all around.

So I guess, PCM, what I'm trying to say is: thank you. Thanks for being the first place to truly make me believe that we are always moving toward more goodness, more grace, more love than we can even imagine. Even when life feels more empty than full, and even when the way ahead has more questions than answers. I hope you see all the manna that's around you in PCM, and that you keep noticing where more growth is possible.

And PCM, I miss y'all! You gave me friendships that will be with me forever, and you gave me the confidence, creativity, and flexibility I needed to step into this fascinating and truly unexpected role working with children from age 2 through 5th grade. I hope whatever comes next for you is surprising, and loving, and exactly the manna you need.

Love, always,
Kim



Dan Mason

PCM BOARD MEMBER

Howdy, y'all! As we near the halfway point of the school year and I begin my second year as a PCM Board member, I continue to be amazed by the enthusiasm and love I see in everyone I meet who's involved with this extraordinary organization.

Growing up in a rural Baptist church in Virginia, I discovered my musical abilities early on and was always welcomed to share my talents in the church. Along the way in my youth, I became aware of my "queerness," which of course, I felt the need to hide. During my formative years in the fifties and sixties, the word "queer" was a condemnation that I tried to avoid. But, being a spirited boy, I was always determined to express myself, which often made me a victim of ridicule and exclusion for being queer. These early experiences of expressing myself through music—and of navigating a world that often rejected my identity—followed me into adulthood.

In 1969, during the Vietnam War, I joined the U.S. Air Force, where I had to hide my true self or risk being court-martialed. The one place I did feel safe, however, was sharing my musical talents in religious settings, either at the base chapel or in local churches, and I would often knock on a church music director's door and offer to join their choir. After my discharge, I used the GI Bill to attend Brigham Young University, though I left after a year upon finding it to be a very anti-queer setting. After a marriage I entered despite knowing my "truth," I eventually enrolled at Appalachian State University, where I was finally able to "come out." After college, I moved to Raleigh and immersed myself in the theatre scene, but in 1984, I became the victim of a police sting operation that wrongfully targeted men exiting a known gay bar and was convicted for "soliciting a crime against nature." Around the same time, during the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, I helped found a holistic healing retreat at my home

in the foothills of North Carolina, though it was later destroyed by arson when the community learned about our mission.

Through all these experiences—serving in the military, navigating college and early adulthood, and building community even in the face of adversity—I carried with me a love of music, a commitment to connection, and a resilience that would guide the next chapters of my life. And, after many challenges, I finally discovered a church and a community where I could truly belong. In 2007, I met my future husband, John, who—with his parents—was a longtime member of The Church of Reconciliation in Chapel Hill. John introduced me to his church by inviting me to sing with their choir and in 2019, I became the choir director and a pastoral musician at The Church of Reconciliation. I am overjoyed and proud to be a part of a church that uses the word "queer" so freely and lovingly.

Now, I'm fortunate enough to find myself representing "The Rec" as a Board member here at PCM. Just this fall, I was thrilled—as a Durham Extension Master Gardener—to share another one of my passions with members of PCM when we organized and installed the new PCM herb garden. This garden will enhance all the wonderful meals prepared by the students. Working along with those students and staff who were eager to know more about planting and what it takes to maintain even a small garden, I was honored to share my gardening skills (and opinions) with them.

In our Board meetings when I hear the students sharing their exuberance and demonstrating their organizational skills so openly and joyously, I feel great PRIDE for the journey and challenges that we all have experienced. I feel certain these young leaders will successfully guide the next generation by the example they set in walking the path of Jesus.

Thank you for welcoming me into your fold.

PCM

BY THE NUMBERS

2025

70+

ACTIVE COLLEGE
STUDENTS; 40-50
STUDENTS SHOWING
UP EACH THURSDAY

12

PCM BOARD
MEMBERS

9

STUDENTS ON
LEADERSHIP TEAM

2

PASTORAL RESIDENTS, MARGIE
PEELER AND PAUL BURGESS

\$1,500+

IN MONTHLY DONATIONS FROM INDIVIDUALS

338

ALUMNI
NEWSLETTER
RECIPIENTS

30%

PORTION OF PCM'S
ANNUAL INCOME FROM
INDIVIDUAL DONORS

6
RETREATS

AUGUST L-TEAM RETREAT, FALL
BEACH RETREAT, FALL BREAK
BACKPACKING, MONTREAT
COLLEGE CONFERENCE, SPRING
MOUNTAIN RETREAT, SPRING
BACKPACKING



68

MONTHLY
DONORS



Paul Burgess

PASTORAL RESIDENT

In early November, we were blessed to welcome a number of PCM alumni back to Chapel Hill for Homecoming weekend. It was an overwhelming tidal wave of chaotic joy, as so many holy generations of beloved community that have graced this place in years past collided beautifully with the version of PCM that exists today. Friendships were re-kindled, old stories and jokes were revived, tears were shared, and the Spirit moved in the thin space woven from the weekend's laughter and love.

It is a rare and lovely thing to get to meet an old friend again, as though for the first time—they are familiar enough that the relationship you once shared is palpable, but they are different enough that there is room in each for holy astonishment at how the other has grown and changed. What a privilege it was to see that delight experienced, over and over again throughout the weekend!

I say this not only as a Pastoral Resident who has quickly grown to love this ministry, but also on behalf of our current students. Through the ways they share everyday life together during their time at UNC, they are building networks of support and care that are sometimes hard to appreciate in the moment. By being a part of gatherings like this one, they're able to see the fruits that will someday grow out of the seeds they're planting today. I can't help but think that this is the work of God: giving a foretaste of the goodness that is both "now" and "not yet."

That work is really only possible at PCM thanks to the great cloud of witnesses surrounding this ministry: not just alumni, but also parents and congregations and all who have supported or will support PCM at some point. For some, this support looks like cooking a meal for hungry college students. For others, it looks like generosity that allows us to welcome all who desire a taste of beloved community without erecting a financial barrier to entry. For still others, it's engaging in individual mentorship, or serving as a Board member, or encouraging high school seniors to find campus ministries of their own. And, of course, it can look like coming back to share memories, wisdom, and joy at a PCM alumni event. What is this labor, if not the work of the Church...if not the work of Christ?

For those of you who made it in early November, I can't tell you how thankful I am that you shared the goodness of who you are with this community. For those who weren't able to join us, know that you were missed—and that I hope you'll be able to share in this experience yourself in the future. Truly, the gathering inspired me to see, with renewed gratitude, the love and connection that God has put into my life. I hope you are similarly inspired.

Thanks be to God—and thanks be to you—that it is so.

Shalom,
Paul



Margie Peeler

PASTORAL RESIDENT

Looking back over the semester, I'm reminded that PCM is a space of exploration—exploration of faith, identity, and the many ways God meets us in the world. The students I get to know and walk alongside continually remind me that faith is not static: it grows, stretches, and surprises us when we walk attentively and stay open to discovery.

This fall, that spirit of exploration at PCM took many forms. One of the most meaningful to me has been Queer People Exploring Faith (QPEF), a small group I help lead with PCM alum Barrett Bolton ('24). Each week, Queer-identifying students gather for conversation, reflection, and laughter as we hold questions about how Queerness and Christianity speak to one another. The group is tender and brave, rooted in curiosity and personal experience. It's a space where students can bring their full selves, where theological imagination and lived experience meet and create something holy.

As a staff person, I feel deeply blessed to witness that. These students are doing the sacred work of building a Church that is wider and kinder than many of us grew up knowing. They are modeling the kind of exploration that invites us all to see the Divine with new eyes.

Exploration also showed up this fall when a group of PCM students set out on a backpacking trip to Grayson Highlands State Park over fall break. Surrounded by bright fall leaves, wild ponies, and the occasional longhorn cow, our group spent the weekend

hiking, laughing, cooking together, and learning to share life outdoors. For some students, it was their first time sleeping under the stars. For others, it was a return to the familiar rhythm of campfires and weighted down backpacks.

Out there in the mountains, exploration meant more than reaching a destination—it meant learning to rely on one another, to meet challenges with grace, and to notice beauty all around us even when we didn't have our everyday comforts. The same posture that guides the students' spiritual life (namely openness, attentiveness, a willingness to be surprised) guided their steps on the trail. It was a reminder that the work of faith often looks like putting one foot in front of the other, trusting that God is present in the journey itself, and leaning on community along the way.

Through all of this, I am reminded that PCM is a living community of exploration. It's a place where students can bring their whole selves, ask real questions, and find trusted companions along the way. The exploration that happens here—exploration of identity, belief, and belonging—is formative not only for the students who gather each week, but for all of us who are blessed to witness it.

To our alumni, partner congregations, and friends: thank you for making this ministry possible. Your prayers, support, and love sustain a space where we practice exploring our faith and orienting our lives towards the Divine together.