



Spring 2025 PCM Newsletter



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Berry French

CAMPUS MINISTER

Hope and joy are central to our faith, yet both seem in short supply these days. My prayer is that PCM's vibrant ministry and the testimony found in the following pages can serve as a source of hope and joy. Above all though, I want to express my gratitude to you, the reader, for your commitment to sustaining PCM's ministry through prayer, partnership, and financial support! **THANK YOU!**

Over the spring semester, PCM engages in an intentional process to select next year's Leadership Team, nine students who will be trained in the day-to-day aspects of our ministry—forming community, welcoming students, caring for the most vulnerable—while being nurtured themselves in a faith space. It's a very Presbyterian process, with a Nominating Committee discerning God's Spirit in creating next year's L-Team.

In their interview, one of this year's applicants asked a good question to the four seniors and me: "What is the overall goal of Leadership Team and the task before 'Nom Com'?" It was a thoughtful question, and I loved hearing our seniors respond. I was also grateful that three years ago, then-Moderator Lillie Chilton Frelick, then-Pastoral Resident Kim Rubish, PCM Board President Scott Singleton, and I spent over a year crafting our current 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.

PCM is just that! Therefore, Nom Com's task is to assemble a team of college students who will make that happen each year. Thanks be to God for these students and their dedication to the ministry! When the news cycles get me down, I find myself reaching for the inspiring ways these student leaders creatively, energetically, and courageously pour themselves into their fellow students (and future PC-Mers). They are deeply invested in PCM's ministry, and that serves as an act of faithfulness to God's vision towards hope and joy.

Our growing ministry has also been blessed by two seminary-trained staff members. While our chief mission is to serve Carolina students, we also look ahead by preparing clergy to serve future students in other settings. Thanks to the health and vibrancy of PCM's program, leadership models, and alumni support, we are the premier training ground for the denomination's future campus ministers! In the past five years, we've had five staff members serve as Seminary Interns, Pastoral Residents, or Fellows in Campus Ministry—flip to "PCM Staff Updates" on page 10 to see what they're up to!

Currently, [Rev. Paul Burgess](#) serves as our [Pastoral Resident](#)—a three-year, full-time (in partnership with Cary Presbyterian Church), fully-benefited program designed for a recent seminary graduate. In August 2024, PCM launched a [Fellow in Campus Ministry](#) position—a 20-hour-per-week role that expands on our previous Seminary Intern position. This increase responds to our growing staffing needs as we support roughly 75 students each year and offer an expanding range of small group programs. [Dr. Jillian Marcantonio](#) is our current Fellow, and [Margie Peeler](#) will begin as our next Fellow in August 2025!

All of this is worth celebrating—and gives me great hope and joy! My prayer is that this newsletter not only brings you hope and joy, but also deepens and encourages you in your own faith journey in holy and life-giving ways.



PCM Happenings





Tobin Smith

CLASS OF 2028

Like over thirty other PCmers this year, I spent the last bit of my winter break up in the mountains to attend the Montreat College Conference. This was not my first time in Montreat; I participated in the youth conference four times in high school, but the college conference was a whole new experience full of community, reflection, fun, and snow!

The conference's programming revolved around the "unimaginable possibilities" that our journeys of faith might present in spite of a "weary world." I found that all the programming led to good, thoughtful discussions and reflection—both organized and spontaneous. The most impactful content for me revolved around Stan Wilson, Scotty Utz, and their organization RAWtools South, which repurposes firearms into garden tools and art as a practice of nonviolence.

Four other PCM freshmen and I attended their workshop during the first afternoon, and we discussed the issue of gun violence in America, the history and thought behind nonviolence, and RAWtools as an organization. I found their mission particularly effective because it makes us reconsider firearms' utility and cultural importance, which are both used to perpetuate their seemingly fixed place in our society. It's a great example of the many ways we are called to discipleship. We were also given the opportunity to help Scotty make a new tool, using a hammer and anvil to flatten a red-hot gun barrel.

While we were outside smithing, the snow that had been coming down for most of the day started to stick. It had been around three years since I had

seen a substantial amount of snow, so I got rightfully excited at seeing a few snowflakes—and others shared my excitement! The next part of our day appropriately contained snow angels, snowball fights, snowmen, and hot chocolate.

To me, the coolest part of the snow was that we were in Montreat. This place is very familiar to me, and yet I had never seen it blanketed in snow. The Montreat I knew was warm and green. The whole trip was like this for me: familiar, yet also excitingly brand-new. The groups I attended the youth conference with usually consisted of one to four other youth, so being there with thirty of my peers was unfamiliar, but also pretty great!

Among some of my other favorite moments from the trip were slipping and sliding down the icy roads on the way to worship; board games; waking up early to hike Lookout Mountain; late-night ultimate spoons; silent disco; and discussions at meals and at the end of the day. I'm probably forgetting some other moments, but the trip was full of them.

I found that the trip also reaffirmed my sense of belonging in PCM. PCM has been the best part of my freshman year at Carolina. I've been continually impressed by PCM's hospitality and the support it provides its students throughout the year, but I think Montreat might be the best example of the fruits of the ministry's mission. I'm excited not only to hopefully go back to Montreat next year, but also to continue to participate in all things PCM for the next few years.



Violet McLamb

CLASS OF 2027

This February, I traveled with four PCMs to Western North Carolina to join six other Carolina students and three UNC-CH clergy on an Interfaith Hurricane Helene relief trip. While I was nervous at the outset—or, as I would say, “nervescited”—I am so grateful to have been a part of this unique and memorable experience.

The trip began with the car ride out to the worksite for the weekend—which, for me, is always the best part of any PCM trip. When we arrived at our worksite, the leader of Lutheran Disaster Response briefed us on the severity of the damage caused by Hurricane Helene, estimating that full recovery would take eight to ten years. She then led us in a prayer honoring the holiness of the Indigenous land we stood on—a fitting way to begin our weekend of interfaith service. We then spent the rest of the day working in a mobile home community in Swannanoa, where the river had ravaged the area—eroding the banks, tearing through homes, and uprooting entire communities. There, we removed debris from inside homes and moved furniture into newly reconstructed homes.

What stood out to me most that day, however, was when a woman involved in the recovery effort asked us, ‘Are you here for a good reason, or just for the service hours?’ At first, I was taken aback; I felt like my character—and my friends’—had just been called into question. But as I reflected on her words, I began to understand. This community, simply trying to get back on their feet, had been taken advantage of time and time again. For them, accepting

help was hard. They had been promised so much by so many—contractors, insurance companies—and yet seen so little of it come to fruition. Why would a small group of ragtag students be any different?

At the end of the trip, our emotional and physical exhaustion was palpable, and we spent the car ride home reflecting on what we had seen and how it had affected each of us. We came to the consensus that witnessing such destruction made our work feel wholly inadequate. But through our conversation, we also realized that even the small contributions we had offered were helping to create a space for the community to begin healing—physically and emotionally. Although the tasks we engaged in might have seemed trivial, they empowered us to foster a holy space that welcomed others in and allowed us to sit with them in their grief. God had called us there for a reason: we were able to walk with the strength given to us to show this community that they were worthy of recovery, that their safety mattered to us, and that hope remained even amidst their present devastation.

I believe this was the biggest lesson I took away from the trip: when you enter a space burdened by heavy and seemingly insurmountable challenges, it’s important to remember that you still have the ability to contribute in meaningful and holy ways. You have been entrusted with a personal gift by God—be it physical, emotional, conversational, or spiritual. Use it to bless your community in whatever way you can. You may not always see it, but even the smallest actions can have the greatest impact.



Scott Groome

CLASS OF 2026

I didn't know PCM existed while I was attending UPC. For a while, I simply enjoyed coming to church on Sundays—expecting to hear the choir's usual uplifting hymns or listen to Jarrett or Meg deliver one of their powerful, thought-provoking sermons. But one Sunday morning, things were different. Instead of the familiar rhythm of the service, I was surprised to see students leading at the front—reading scripture, offering prayers, even delivering their own sermons. I had accidentally wandered into PCM Student Sunday.

Despite my initial surprise, I found myself captivated as I watched the service unfold before me. Seeing those students lead and collaborate with such authenticity, vulnerability, care, and holy intentionality made a deep impression on me. They weren't just going through the motions—they were clearly invested in what they were sharing and wanted to create something meaningful and engaging. I left that morning both curious and inspired, wanting to learn more about PCM and the people I had just seen.

So, the following Thursday, carrying a mix of excitement and nervousness, I took a leap of faith and showed up at PCM for the first time. I wasn't sure what to expect or whether I'd feel out of place. But from the moment I walked in, I was greeted with smiles, open arms, and an overwhelming sense of welcome. That night, even as I was still learning names and faces, I already felt like I belonged—there was just something so genuine and grounding in the way people listened, shared, and supported each other. We sang together, discussed topics root-

ed in both faith and lived experiences, and explored questions that didn't have easy answers. There was space for doubt and for joy. That night left a lasting impression on me and remains one of my most cherished memories.

So I kept coming back, week after week, drawn in not just by the discussions or the music, but by the community. PCM quickly became more than just a group I attended on Thursdays—it became a home away from home; a community that truly cared for one another; a space that welcomed me as I was; a support system that actively invested in my spiritual journey; a family.

Another defining experience in my PCM journey was last semester's beach retreat. Spending time away with fellow PCM students gave me the chance to nourish relationships and engage more fully in my faith. We weren't just learning about faith from the outside—we were living it, exploring it, and questioning it together. Through worship, shared meals, games, and heartfelt conversations, we forged deep and genuine connections. That retreat reinforced the sense of belonging and growth that PCM has given me from day one, and I left it with a stronger understanding of both my beliefs and the people around me.

Looking back, I can see how PCM has shaped my time in college in unexpected and beautiful ways. It has given me support when I needed it, friends who have become like family, and a deeper, more personal faith. I'm incredibly grateful for this community, its love, and all the ways it has helped me grow—spiritually, emotionally, and as a person.



Becca Turner

CLASS OF 2025

As a senior, I've always wondered what my college experience would have been like had I not stepped into the doors of 110 Henderson Street during my first week at UNC. I came in freshman year at UNC hardly knowing a soul because I was an out-of-state student and spent my first semester abroad through UNC's then-new Global Launch program. Needless to say, I was pretty desperate to find some friends and a community amidst the landscape of 200-person lectures, crowded dining halls, and a hall-style dorm that did not live up to the expectations set by movies and TV.

Having grown up in the PCUSA, when I heard about PCM, I thought "Hey, I'm a Presbyterian. Maybe I should look into that more!" At the risk of sounding like a denominationally-imposed nepo baby, I had a feeling I would find my place here by name alone. However, it honestly didn't matter what the label on the outside doors was—it was the people inside that made me want to stick around.

Over the years, I have participated in 11 retreats and trips with PCM; played broomball four times (and lost at least three of those times); served on L-Team three years; eaten countless meals and snacks; attended nearly 100 Thursday night programs; and led eight programs myself (but who's counting?). As such, it probably won't surprise you that I had a bit of trouble picking just one or two fond memories of my time at PCM.

However, this past year, I've had the chance to

be a part of Senior Vocational Small Group with other PCM seniors led by our Pastoral Resident, Paul Burgess. At the start of the year, I was so excited to be a part of it. In my mind, it was this exclusive club where Paul makes you question the meaning of life—a conclusion I drew based on things I'd heard from Audra Nelson (my former roommate and class of 2024). And while some of that may be true, SVSG has become so much more. It is a place for the PCM class of 2025—which is fairly small—to form a strong connection that we were lacking before. It is a place for us to share our hopes, fears, and proudest moments.

Tuesday evenings at 6 p.m. (when SVSG meets) have become nearly as central to the structure of my week as Thursday night programs. Some weeks, we just come in and vent about the state of the world; others, Paul asks us thought-provoking questions that get at the heart of our identities—not just as college students and future employees, but as human beings trying to navigate the never-ending maze of adulthood. And of course, we almost always run over time, but no one ever really seems to notice—or care.

Even though PCM has changed, and my role in it has changed over the last four years, the support, love, and connections I receive from it haven't. So while I may always wonder what college would have been like without it, I (thankfully) don't have to know—and I really don't want to!



PCM Spring Retreats

Montreat and Mountain Retreat





Brett Bolton

PCM MODERATOR, CLASS OF 2025

Hello, friends! For the past four years, I have had the joy of finding community at PCM, serving as Music Coordinator, Co-Kitchen Coordinator, and, most recently, Moderator. It is a privilege to lead and to give back to this spiritual home that has beaconed God's love and hope in the midst of a weary semester. I pray that current students, staff, alumni, parents, grandparents, and the host of other hands and voices that sow into this ministry embrace the privilege and honor in their gifts and generosity.

Funnily enough, this is not my first time writing a student article for PCM's newsletter. My freshman year at UNC, I had the opportunity to share my experience in PCM and how meaningful this ministry is in the lives of students. In preparation for this article, I revisited those thoughtfully curated reflections. Many things have changed since then: I now find myself at an ending rather than a beginning; I live in an apartment off campus instead of a cozy dorm room in Thomas Ruffin Jr.; and I do not have that music minor anymore. But some things have not changed: I still live with my twin brother Barrett; I still love music and playing bass on PCM Music Team; and I still feel like that same little plant I mentioned in that article.

See, in the article, I compare my transition into UNC to a plant rooted deep into the ground that is suddenly dug up and planted in unfamiliar soils—lonely vegetation with no sense of stability and no sense of connectedness. Out of its element and plucked away from comfortable surroundings, the plant (me) was ungrounded and unsteady until PCM

gave me stability, connectedness, and a community that I could dig my roots into—grounding me not only in friendships and community, but also faith.

Now, on the precipice of being uprooted from UNC and venturing into the real world, I cannot help but start to feel as I did before arriving freshman year—a little scared, uneasy about the future, and uncertain about what to do next. However, one thing is different this time around: this time, I do not feel ungrounded. Yes, I may be physically uprooted from my time as a student and from my apartment in Chapel Hill, but this time I feel grounded and rooted in who I am as a beloved child of God and my call to be God's love out in the world.

As much as I would like to say that this sense of growth and confidence is my own doing, I cannot do so without ignoring all that PCM has sowed into me these past four years. PCM has been and is an essential part of my spiritual life and faith formation. Between weekly programs, small groups, Bible study, and leadership team, PCM has helped me grow in faith and leadership while also fostering my growth as a person.

In these last couple of days before graduation, I am reminded of PCM's mission statement: Belong. Believe. Become. I have experienced the belonging of community; I have challenged my faith and wrestled with what I believe; and now, I look forward to the next step of becoming, taking with me the support and grounding PCM has given me as I enter my next chapter. Thank you, donors and alumni! Thank you PCM!



Sarah Thomson

PCM BOARD MEMBER

Friends, for the past two years I've had the honor to serve on the PCM Board as a partner church representative. In this role, I get to see PCM's thriving campus ministry firsthand, 20 years after my own time as a PCMer!

I want to highlight two things from the perspective of the PCM Board. 1) PCM is a flourishing, student-led ministry, and 2) PCM functions as a well-led and transparently governed non-profit organization. That second point isn't sexy, but it's true and it's important!

I have been incredibly impressed with the multiple layers of transparency, accountability, and PCUSA polity that are baked into PCM's governance in its current iteration. For example, PCM's Leadership Team members are thoughtfully and prayerfully invited to serve through a Nominating Committee made up of staff and students. Students regularly attend Board meetings, with the PCM Moderator as a voting member of the Board. There are even "support teams" for the two half-time PCM staff members, made up of students and Board members.

The Board members are passionate and committed adult volunteers who support our PCM staff and students in many ways. Beyond that, there are multiple partner churches that each feel invested (emotionally and financially!) in the students and this incredible ministry.

As an alum, I'm struck by the continuity of this place: Coffeehouse, trips to Montreat, Student Sunday at UPC, opportunities for play, a strong commitment to creating a Beloved Community for students on campus—it's all still here. PCM even smells the same! I half expect to see Bob Dunham pop down the hall to greet students near the kitchen every time I walk into PCM.

And there have been so many positive evolutions: a Senior Vocational Small Group, a Queer People of Faith Small Group, a welcoming and inclusive space adorned

with student art, and innovative program ideas, to name a few. In addition, PCM offers a strong model of what a vibrant faith community can look like—which hopefully our graduates will take with them into their own communities in their lives beyond college.

When I joined the Board, I did not expect to be so moved by our students. I did not expect PCM to continue to bring gifts to my life and to my family. These young adults are incredible! I've loved getting to know these folks, who share their gifts with all of us. Highlights include attending a beautiful community bagpipe recital; connecting with members of my own church community as we "church ladies" prepared 70 baked potatoes for a recent PCM Thursday night dinner; and getting to mentor and support recent Seminary graduates that are in their own discernment journeys.

There is a tenderness, a shared vulnerability, and a courageousness here at PCM that is holy. For those of us in middle age who are world-weary from the sandwiched realities of caring for both children and aging parents simultaneously, and wondering what the future holds, it is inspiring to see the Spirit at work among these young folks. It fills me up good.

After a recent Board meeting, I drove home thinking I could only hope that my own two children would find a space like this during their young adult years: a place where they feel a sense of belonging, where they can question their beliefs and their place in this world, where they can discern how they want to show up in this world of ours (an ongoing process of Becoming, as we all know!)—and to have so many caring adults invested in their growth and development. Wouldn't you want that for your children? For all young people?

In these times, I feel grateful for the small things—which perhaps, are not so small at all. Thank you for being a part of this community!

PCM Staff Updates



Jillian Marcantonio, Fellow in Campus Ministry

Dr. Jillian Marcantonio successfully defended her dissertation on March 27, 2025! She will graduate with her Ph.D. from Duke University in May and will be received as a candidate for ordination this July.



Paul Burgess, Pastoral Resident

Rev. Paul Burgess has been invited to continue serving as Pastoral Resident in conjunction with Cary Presbyterian Church for a third year, extending his residency from 2023 to the summer of 2026!



Margie Peeler, Seminary Intern (2023-2024)

Margie Peeler will graduate from Duke Divinity School this May and will join us as our 20-hour-per-week Fellow in Campus Ministry for the 2025–2026 year. She is also officially recognized as a candidate for ordination!



Alli Buikema Cooper, Seminary Intern (2021-2023)

Alli Buikema Cooper was received as a candidate for ordination by the Presbytery of New Hope on March 30, 2025. She is a member of and “under care” at University Presbyterian Church. Alli also currently serves on staff at Duke Divinity School!



Kim Rubish, Pastoral Resident (2021-2023)

Rev. Kim Rubish is the new Associate Pastor for Engagement and Family Ministries at Morningside Presbyterian Church in Atlanta! She also recently got engaged to Alex Stonehill in late March!



Paul Burgess

PASTORAL RESIDENT

If you're paying attention at all to news in the PCUSA world, you'll know that our denomination is collectively wrestling with how to faithfully engage two calls which can exist in tension. The first call is to offer Christ's welcome to the folks on the margins; the second is to live in gracious unity with our siblings in the faith who hold theological convictions that can grate against our own.

Put more directly, presbyteries across the country are voting on the "Olympia Overture," a set of amendments to the PCUSA's constitution that have implications for the way queer folks are welcomed into the pews and pulpits of our denomination. Like many of my colleagues, I've been doing some heavy discernment work around this, reading opinions on both sides of the debate from faithful and wise voices around the church. One of the pieces I read had this as a part of its closing: "Be a good Presbyterian. Cast a vote for moderation. Cast a vote for the status quo."

Now, I'll admit that the piece was more thoughtful than I am making it sound by cherry-picking a few sentences, and the counsel it gives isn't bad advice. But I have trouble imagining Jesus voting for moderation. You don't get executed by the state for advocating for the status quo.

So, as we consider these questions of our collective future together, I think it's essential that voices of restraint like the one above be set alongside the holy contrast posed by the radical hospitality and love that PCM students embody every day.

So, as you read the other accounts in this newsletter—particularly those written by students—I in-

vite you to consider the value of the holy contrast they provide to the faithful voice of moderation. Consider the enthusiasm, the passion, the courage, the trust, the freedom, the desire to recklessly run towards God's will. Consider how these students embody all these qualities, so often neglected in our denomination. Consider how their witness strengthens the witness of the Church.

As a young minister looking at the prospect of spending the next fifty years in the PCUSA, it gives me so much hope.

If you need a dose of that hope yourself, there is perhaps no better demonstration of those gifts than PCM Student Sunday—the one day out of the year when PCM students take over worship at University Presbyterian Church. It's a sort of holy clash, as deep tradition and liturgy grounded in the Church of the last two millennia smash into the reckless hope and boundless joy of what the Church is growing to be...and both PCM and UPC come away from it better. I could spill plenty more ink on PCM Sunday, but I'll point out that University Presbyterian Church has a [recording of the service](#), which happened on February 16, on their YouTube channel. It's something you should see for yourself.

And so, I commend the hope of this ministry to you as we continue to grapple—as a society, as a denomination, as distinct faith communities, and as individuals—with what it means to embrace God's will for our lives and the Church. The days have often seemed dark lately, but the future holds incredible hope.

May that hope be yours today.



Jillian Marcantonio

FELLOW IN CAMPUS MINISTRY

This year, in PCM's weekly Bible Study, we have been reading through Genesis. Genesis is a weird book, full of stories that bring about debate, laughter, confusion, and comfort. We have been wrestling with Genesis and what blessing God has for us in it, just as Jacob himself wrestles with God in Genesis 32 and refuses to let go until God blesses him. Each week, I try to present us with three questions: what stands out or confuses you? What do we learn about God? What do we learn about humanity (us)? Often, our conversations center on the first question, but when we think about the other two, we tend to notice that God is merciful and faithful in the midst of our foolishness as well as our wickedness.

If the narrative of Genesis were a song, the stanzas are full of our faithlessness and the refrain is God's consistent faithfulness. God creates a good world and fruitful garden, and the humans disobey. Mercifully, God sends them from the garden, and the world devolves into such wickedness that God nearly destroys it. Yet God finds a faithful person to build a big boat and restart the human story. Even then, however, humanity immediately falls short. On election day, we read about those in Babel, arrogant and seeking to attain the level of the gods. God's immediate response was to scatter the people and wreak havoc on their plans. The next week, we saw another response from God in choosing a guy named Abraham to leave his homeland and become the father of many nations—who will, over the course of Scripture, bless the whole world.

The rest of Genesis describes the big and small works of God in the lives of a few folks that follow God (sometimes). It is not a story of imperial conquest or widespread healing; it is not even the story of liberation from slavery found in Exodus. No, it is the story of one family that has all kinds of issues and how God brings about blessings through and in spite of them.

Over and over, we see that out of the wickedness of the world, God works through the few to bless the whole world. Do we not need that reminder in our world today? In fact, it's frustrating to realize that our world and the world of Genesis might not be all that different. Humanity continues to seek power over love, control over faithfulness, fear over joy, and we are witnessing the ways that furthers cycles of violence, oppression, and death.

PCM sits as a testament of God's beautiful and merciful work in the world. We are not unaware of the wickedness around us, and we seek God's help in how we can work for the Kingdom of God as individuals and as a community. Yet, our chief witness is in our joy and continued faithfulness to God. As with Noah, Abraham, and Jacob, God has called us to hope for more than what we can see in this time and place. And the Spirit works within and among us to give us the imagination for what God alone can make possible.

This spring, PCM has sought to cultivate faithful relationships with our material objects, daily habits that draw us closer to God, and practices around food that limit waste and care for others. Small groups have gathered to craft and grow together. Like other communities, we have concerns and issues, and sometimes we hurt one another, but we continue to eat, sing, and laugh together. The bread broken, relationships strengthened, and joy shared are all signs of hope in this weary world.

Like those before us, we live in a world full of chaos and wickedness. Genesis reminds us that this is not new in God's good creation. And yet like Abraham and his descendants, PCM remains one of the spaces where God is at work—reviving the world through the faithful following of a community that is, for many, family.