

South of the Garden

The Newsletter for the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South

Volume 46, Number 3

September 2025

Fall

by Jeanette Stokes

Happy 48th anniversary to RCWMS! No one expected us to go on this long, least of all me. When we started RCWMS in the summer of 1977, we thought it might be a good project (to support women in and entering ministry) for four or five years. And here we are all these years later, with this great mission of weaving feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world.

I tell people I've stuck with RCWMS because it keeps changing: new issues in the world, new projects, new colleagues at work, new participants in our programs. In the beginning, I never imagined we would be making films and publishing books.

Speaking of which, we'll release Angie Wright's *Loving My Enemies* in November. You can look forward to following her journey as an organizer and minister as she tries to emulate MLK and the Dalai Lama and to develop some compassion for people she has struggled against.

The Jereann King Johnson film project is rolling along. This summer we've filmed Jereann at the Kindred Spirits quilt conference and exhibition and at the Cassilhaus quilt exhibition, all wonderful events. Over 600 people visited the Kindred Spirits exhibition on a Friday night in June. By the way, we are tentatively talking about hosting another Kindred Spirits in 2027. Stay tuned.

Fall is upon us. In Durham we had a nice break in the weather in early August, which made us think the heat of summer was over. It wasn't, but it was a lovely break; one day the temperature only got up to 75 degrees. Now our local farmers' market is full of sweet peppers, herbs, and winter squash. The wheel of the year is turning as we enter the season of harvest and transition.

Here at RCWMS, we are experiencing lots of changes. Lara Struckman, Gi Chun, and Oliver Henderson are leaving us. You can read Lara's piece in these pages. Gi, our film intern, has graduated from Duke and moved to Virginia, and Oliver is headed to college in New England. We will miss these beloved colleagues and hope that none of them become strangers.

We welcome intern Margie Peeler to our team. Read more about what Margie's up to in the piece you will find on this page. We feel fortunate to have her presence and assistance for the next year.

We have lots of wonderful programs coming up: on writing, on art, on preaching, and more. See the Calendar for all the details. And many thanks to you for years and years of love and support! RCWMS wouldn't be the same without you.



Margie

by Margie Peeler

Hello all,

For those I haven't met yet, I'm Margie Peeler—a recent Duke Divinity School graduate and someone whose sense of the Divine has been meaningfully shaped by time spent tending to plants on small-scale farms and gardens. I've spent the last several years exploring how faith can take root in all kinds of places—from college campuses to farm fields to hospital rooms.

I'm thrilled to share some exciting news about the next chapter in my ministry journey. Beginning August 1, I stepped into a full-time Pastoral Residency—a unique, yearlong position shaped through a creative Spirit-filled partnership between Presbyterian Campus Ministry at UNC-Chapel Hill (PCM), the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South (RCWMS), and Farm Church in Durham.

This role is designed to support vibrant ministry across multiple communities while also helping me continue to grow as a pastor. I'll split my time working about 20 hours a week with PCM, walking alongside UNC students in their journeys of faith, doubt, and discovery, and about 20 hours a week shared between Farm Church and RCWMS, blending hands-on ministry in the garden, worship leadership, and community engagement with work that supports creative, inclusive, justice-seeking ministry.

The residency is as much about mentorship and formation as it is about the work itself. Leaders from all three organizations will help me reflect on my pastoral identity, hone my leadership skills, and integrate my passions for food, faith, and justice into every aspect of my ministry.

During my seminary years (like much of my life thus far) it has felt difficult to “pick a lane.” My interests pulled me into a wide range of work and study including work in campus ministry, environmental justice, and hospital chaplaincy. I've accompanied students as they healed from harmful theologies and rediscovered their belovedness. I've partnered with faith communities to address climate resilience in rural North Carolina. During my CPE internship, I was invited into some of life's most vulnerable moments—learning to listen deeply, hold space without judgment, and trust in the Spirit's presence in the midst of uncertainty.

This residency feels like the perfect convergence of my experiences and hopes for ministry. It brings together three communities that I love and that already know me well:

Calendar

* = RCWMS events. More info: rcwms.org/events.

*September 5, 2025, choose 6–7:30 or 7:45–9:15
CLOSING RECEPTIONS: *STITCHING OUR STORIES: Community, Imagination, & Spirit*.
Cassilhaus, Chapel Hill, NC
Last chance to see this remarkable exhibition which includes works by Kimberley Pierce Cartwright, Jereann King Johnson, and Sauda Zahra.
Free with registration: www.rcwms.org/events

*September 9, 2025, 11:30 am–1:30 pm (2nd & 4th Tues.)
ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING: A Group for Women
Newcomers welcome. No fee to attend. No need to register. (Via Zoom.) More info at: info@rcwms.org.

*September 11, 2025, Thurs., 7:00–8:00 pm (via Zoom)
BOOK LAUNCH: *Becoming Trustworthy White Allies* by Melanie Morrison
This collection of essays, lectures, and real-life stories, outlines the actions white people must take to become trustworthy partners in the work of racial justice.
Sponsors: RCWMS and the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture at Duke Libraries
Free with registration: www.rcwms.org/events

*September 17, 2025, 7:00–8:30 pm (each 3rd Wed.)
THE MINISTRY OF BLACK WOMEN'S SELF-CARE with Kim McCrae (via Zoom)
Self-care is a multi-generational, multicultural work of self-love, communal love, and Womanist ethicism. We offer practical tools for Black women doing all forms of ministry, personally, in church and community.
Leader: Kimberly McCrae is an lover of humanity and actively lives the self-care life.
Register: www.rcwms.org/events

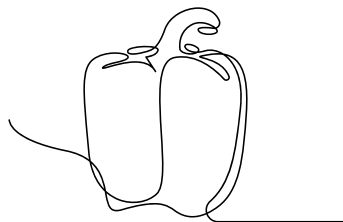
September 17, 2025, 7:00 pm (each 3rd Thursday)
TARA PRACTICE: Practicing the Sadhanas of the Twenty-One Taras with Rachael Wooten (via Zoom)
Drawing from her book, *Tara: The Liberating Power of the Female Buddha*, Wooten will offer teachings about Tara and lead a guided meditation.
Leader: Rachael Wooten, PhD, Jungian analyst, writer, and Tibetan Buddhist dharma teacher.
Free. Join: rachaelwootenauthor.com/practices

September 18, 2025, Thursday, 7:00 pm
BOOK TALK & SIGNING: *Becoming Trustworthy White Allies* by Melanie Morrison
United Church of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.
Free. (See Sept. 11 for description.)

*September 19–26, 2025, or January 2–9, 2026
WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING for Women
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
Spend a week of quiet and writing with a supportive group of women at beautiful Trinity Ctr.
Leader: Jeanette Stokes
Cost: about \$1,000. Single room & meals included.
Contact: jeanette@rcwms.org

*October 2–3, 2025, Thursday & Friday
HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival
Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC
This year's theme, "Digging Deep and Rising Up," will guide us as we enjoy a festival of sermons,

(Continued next column.)



worship, learning, and fellowship. We'll explore how to dig deep into faith, community, and love to rise up against violence, injustice, and prejudice.
Cost: \$25–125
Info: www.ncwomenpreaching.com/

October 9, 2025, Thursday, 7:00 pm
BOOK TALK & SIGNING: *Becoming Trustworthy White Allies* by Melanie Morrison
Durham Friends Meetinghouse, Durham, NC
Free. (See Sept. 11 for description.)

October 9–12, 2025, 1:00 pm–2:30 pm
MENOPAUSE CONFERENCE FOR THE GLOBAL MAJORITY: *Iranti ẹjẹ: Remembering Blood*
Aria Center, Durham, NC
Iranti Ẹjẹ is a groundbreaking convening rooted in sacred remembering, cultural resistance, and collective liberation. It is a portal, a return, a radical act of reclamation and reimagination of the menopausal journey. Centering Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and LGBTQIA+ wisdom, this gathering brings together formerly incarcerated people, healers, artists, researchers, cultural workers, and organizers from across the globe. Through ritual, panels, storytelling, workshops, and art, we will co-create a space of ancestral knowing, joy, and embodied justice.
Cost: \$75–\$321. Info: www.irantieje.com

October 15, 2025, 7:00pm
LECTURE & BOOK SIGNING with Melanie Morrison: *Why We Must Remember: A Descendant's Reckoning with Her Enslaving Ancestors*
Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, 1801 Hillsborough St., Raleigh, NC
Free. No need to register.

October 24–26, 2025, Friday–Sunday
WEATHERING THE STORM: A Contemplative Retreat in the Manner of Friends
Avila Center, Durham, NC
Together we'll reflect upon the storms we encounter in our nation, community, and lives by using the distinctly Quaker manner of contemplation in community. There will be time for solitude and for sharing, prayer, reflection, walks, contemplative of scripture, and worship.
Sponsors: Peace Hill Avila and School of the Spirit
Cost: \$560, includes lodging, meals, and program.
Info: www.peacehillavila.org/event

October 25, 2025, Saturday, 9:00 am–4:00 pm
UNDER THE ORANGE STICKS OF THE SUN:
Art and Writing Retreat
The Stable, a private retreat in Durham, NC
Wander among fall leaves at this outdoor retreat inspired by Mary Oliver's "Morning Poem." All artistic and writing skills welcome!
Leaders: Claudia Fulshaw and Mandy Mizelle
Cost: \$165, all inclusive. claudia@artwanders.com.
Register: artwanders.com/retreats/

*October 29, 2025, Wednesday, 6:30–8:00 pm
QUARTERLY HEALTH & WELLBEING SERIES with Solita Denard, 3rd session in the 2025 series (Zoom)
A series for those who can benefit from learning in community and will commit to moving toward their own vision for improved health and wellbeing.
Leader: Solita Denard, Health Integration 629, LLC,
Cost: \$229, includes a total of 8 coaching sessions
Register: rcwms.org/events, contact: info@rcwms.org

(Continued next column.)

Calendar...

*October 30, 2025, Thurs., 7:00 pm (via Zoom)

READING: *Writing with Research: A Practical Guide* by Kristen Neuschel and Ann Marie Rasmussen
Join a reading and conversation with the authors. Neuschel is Professor of History Emerita and former Director of the Thompson Writing Program at Duke University. Ann Marie Rasmussen is Professor of German Emerita, Duke University. Free. Registration required. www.rcwms/events

*October 30, 2025, 4 Thursday nights, 6:30–8:30 pm
EXHIBITION AS TEXTBOOK: A History of Photography Inspired by the Nasher's Collection
Photographer MJ Sharp and Art Historian Elizabeth Howie will lead a four-part seminar inspired by the work on view at Duke's Nasher Museum, *Coming into Focus: A Snapshot of Photography at the Nasher*.
Leaders: MJ Sharp is a photographic artist and educator based in North Carolina and is the RCWMS Artist in Residence for 2025. Dr. Elizabeth Howie is a Professor of Art History at Coastal Carolina University in South Carolina.
Cost: \$80 for the four Zoom sessions in the series
Register: www.rcwms/events

November 5, 2025, Wednesday, 8:30 am–2:30 pm
CALM IN THE CHAOS: Lessons and Practices from the Works of Barbara Holmes, a retreat for clergy
Avila Retreat Center, Durham, NC
Sponsors: Peace Hill, RCWMS, & Duke Univ. Chapel
Cost: TBA. Info/register: elaina@peacehillavila.org

*November 16, 2025, 2:00–4:00 pm (via Zoom)
REMEMBERING THOSE WE MISS
Writing letters can be a way to express our love and celebrate the relationships we've shared. They can help us preserve memories and stories, confront unfinished business, and expose ourselves to things we may be avoiding. We'll honor our grief and write letters to those we have lost.
Leader: Shawna Ayoub, a brown, queer, writer and teacher in Durham who engages difficult topics.
Cost: \$35, \$50
Register: rcwms.org/events

ONGOING

RCWMS's sister organization, Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), offers several free monthly gatherings via Zoom. All are welcome. No charge, but you must register to receive a link. Info: www.waterwomensalliance.org

SOLO & SOCIAL WANDERINGS: Self-Guided Creative Retreats (ongoing, day or overnight)
The Stable, a private retreat in Durham, NC
Leader: Claudia Fulshaw, graphic designer, artist, and wanderer who leads creative retreats.
Cost: \$130 solo / \$90 additional person plus housing
Register: claudia@artwanders.com.

*WEEKS OF QUIET & WRITING for Women
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
September 19–26, 2025, led by Jeanette Stokes
January 2–8, 2026, led by Jeanette Stokes
May 3–10, 2026, led by Carol Henderson
May 10–17, 2026, led by Jeanette Stokes

Life Cycles

by Lara Struckman, RCWMS intern

Take a walk in a forest. Close your eyes and imagine the sounds of the birds and the crickets, the feel of the air against your skin, the green and brown of trees, and the carpet of last year's leaves. Smell the scent of decay and growth. Notice the sun peeking through branches and dancing across canopies.

A forest is a rich tapestry of community, strong and resilient. There are established trees, wise elders, as well as baby saplings. Families of oaks may be interspersed with maples and groves of tulip poplars, hickories mingled with sweet gums and pines. Innumerable birds, insects, and fungi make life among the branches, roots, and trunks. New growth paves the way for hardwoods, mycelia carry messages, and songbirds tell stories of what's all around. The dead in the forest are venerated for years to come; a fallen tree becomes food for infinite beings. The dead are woven back into the living. We have much to learn from the forest about life, death, and community. Life and death go hand in hand. Fostering a relationship with death invites us to savor the preciousness of life. Living more fully prepares us for death. Community is the thread that winds through. We weren't meant to do this alone.

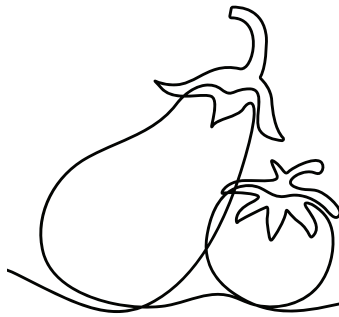
In 2021 I was at a threshold, so I took a risk and moved from Pennsylvania to a barn on a farm called **Common Ground Ecovillage**, an agrarian intentional community in Mebane. This came on the heels of my grandfather's death, which offered the possibility of death as a healing, an invitation into deeper connection rather than isolation that so many experience when grieving.

What I found while living and working at the farm at Common Ground was a rich intergenerational community centered around the fields, creeks, and forests on 112 gorgeous acres. I learned the stories of human and non-human kin and got to taste the fruits of many plants and relationships. I companioned countless plants from seed to sprout to fruit to decay. Tending them through their life cycles, I came to value each phase for its unique gifts. Humans are not so different, with gifts tangible and intangible, that we can offer and receive in every stage of our lives.

Marking time together through changing weather, crop cycles, and seasonal rituals connected me to the larger clock of life. Not just hours in a day, but moments of beauty and mystery in a life.

Connections I made at Common Ground led me to **Bluestem**, a conservation cemetery, just as they found land and began to imagine turning corn and tobacco fields into native wildflower meadows and a sanctuary for green burial. Again I found myself in a community building relationships with land and with the cycles of life, quite literally immersing themselves back into the soil and clay of the landscape. It has become a place for the living and the dead to be in community; those who are buried there are often referred to as the "residents" of Bluestem, valuable neighbors and community members. For Bluestem a cemetery is not just as a place of mourning, but also a place of life, joy, and community.

(Continued on back.)



Margie...

• PCM, where I previously served as a seminary intern, fostering relationships with students who remind me daily that faith and doubt can dance together.

• Farm Church, where I've served on the council and in the garden, experiencing firsthand how growing and sharing food can be a form of worship and justice. If you'd like to join us for gardening and/or worship, we gather 9-11am on Sundays in the garden on the corner of Watts and Green street in Trinity Park, or feel free to wander the garden anytime.

• RCWMS, where I've participated in cohorts that celebrate and equip women and gender-expansive people for leadership in the church and beyond.

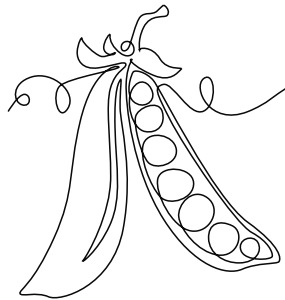
What excites me most is the cross-pollination this role makes possible. The stories and gifts from one community can enrich the others. The theological curiosity of students can energize Farm Church's garden ministry. The creative vision of RCWMS can inspire new ways of engaging justice on campus. The rooted, embodied spirituality of the garden can speak to those in the midst of academic or vocational discernment.

I'm deeply grateful for the collaboration and generosity that made this position possible. Each organization is contributing financially and committing to the shared work of mentoring me during this year. It's a model that I hope can inspire other ministries to think creatively about supporting emerging pastors.

This residency is not just about my growth—it's about strengthening the communities I serve and helping them flourish together. My hope is that, a year from now, we'll be able to say we tended something beautiful together: relationships deepened, ministries strengthened, and God's love made visible in fresh, abundant ways.

Thank you for your encouragement, prayers, and partnership in this journey. I can't wait to see what grows.

With gratitude,
Margie Peeler



One Time/Shutterstock.com

Life Cycles...

Recently, I've been part of another community, **Heartward Sanctuary** in Siler City. They offer green burial for folks in their community, ecstatic dance, seasonal rituals, and a "Field to Shroud" project. Inspired by the work of Death Midwife Katherine Savage, a group of us have been tending to flax as it grows from golden seeds to maturity and eventually a communally woven linen burial shroud.

Community can enliven us to think intentionally about our dying and about what we may offer back to the earth through our life, and our death. Earth teaches us to tend life with death, and to tend death with our aliveness. The best way we can honor our beloved dead, whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, is to continue to live on their behalf. Earth honoring and land-based communities feel like a way to do that. To live in such a way that our deaths can nourish what's next and offer up something better to the future generations than what we've been given.

If you feel a call to root more deeply into community and the land, you might explore the gifts of these three communities that have brought me strength, beauty, and togetherness in fragile times. Like the wise trees of the forest, by rooting deep, we rise up.



RCWMS is a 48-year-old nonprofit dedicated to weaving feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world. RCWMS sponsors workshops, conferences, and retreats on women, religion, creativity, spirituality, and social justice. We mentor and encourage young women, religious leaders, writers, and activists.

RCWMS appreciates contributions of time, energy, money, and stock. To contribute, contact RCWMS or visit www.rcwms.org. We are especially grateful for support from E. Rhodes & Leona B. Carpenter Fnd., Emerald Isle Realty, Inavale Fnd., Paul Green Fnd., Triangle Community Fnd., and Durham Arts Council.

TRUSTEES: Liddy Grantland, Cris Rivera, Marion Thullbery, Angie Wright, and Chelsea Yarborough

STAFF: Jeanette Stokes, Executive Director; Chloe Griffin, Programming; Bacarri Byrd, Communications & Development; Beth Weiss, Data; MJ Sharp, Artist in Residence; Racquel Gill, Theologian in Residence; Anita McLeod interns: Anna Holmes Blair, Claire Hambrick, and Margie Peeler.



SUBSCRIPTIONS to South of the Garden cost \$20 and run for 12 months from the time placed. Foreign or First Class is \$25. A subscription is free to anyone for whom the subscription fee is a burden. Tax-deductible contributions over and above the subscription fee are appreciated. Please send a check to our office at: RCWMS, 1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC 27701, or go to www.rcwms.org.

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