

PEACE Center



The Beginning

In the summer of 2021, an ecumenical gathering of University of Delaware campus ministers and supporters met to discuss the “why” of campus ministry, especially in post-COVID times. The central answer this community returned to was “Jesus,” with layers of hospitality, beloved community, connection, advocacy, health and wholeness, and more. One of the supporters shared, “Campus ministry felt more important than ever, and yet, as we named that day, many of our denominations were struggling to fund and equip our ministries to live out this calling.” The Holy Spirit continued to move through this group of Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Methodist ministries who held conversations over Zoom to pray, converse, and dream of different collaborative models of ministry over the next few years. Mission and Vision statements were crafted, and by the start of 2024, it was clear that the group needed to legally organize its collaboration in order to hire a leader to carry out its mission. The Methodists discerned a call in a different direction, but encouraged the group to continue forward with their blessing.

In November 2024, the PEACE Center (Presbyterian Episcopal Alliance for Campus Engagement) at the University of Delaware was established as an initiative of the Episcopal Church in Delaware and the Presbytery of New Castle. The PEACE Center was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) in early 2025, a job description drafted, a search committee formed, and the job posted through both Episcopal and Presbyterian outlets.

The Search

I was living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, having recently walked away from a congregational job, and discerning where I felt God calling me to next. During that summer in discernment of 2025, I attended the ecumenical campus ministers conference for Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Lutheran campus ministers in St. Louis, Missouri, entitled “Justice and Joy.” The conference revealed to me both how alive campus ministry is across our denominations and how much stronger we are when denominations come together to listen, learn, and work together rather than remain siloed. The conference affirmed for me a desire to engage in full-time campus ministry, not as a component of a congregational position as I’d been engaged with since 2015

when I was ordained in the PCUSA, but as someone who could co-journey with 18- to 22-year-old students and be a bridge builder to larger worshipping communities.

The position of director and campus minister of the PEACE Center crossed my radar, and I was deeply intrigued. Every conversation and interview I had with members of the search committee and board left me feeling energized with tangible ripples of the Spirit at work. This was a community of people who knew campus ministry and felt that same sense of aliveness in campus ministry today, and their energy was contagious and something I wanted to join and help lead. I am beyond blessed that the board of directors offered the position to me, so my husband and I packed up and moved to Delaware in the span of three weeks.

The First Steps

I came to Delaware with the knowledge that starting up a Registered Student Organization (RSO) at the University of Delaware would be difficult and potentially unlikely in the span of a semester (most startups take at least a year), but the board of directors had collected names of students across the state from various congregations and empowered me to start contacting them. My hope had been to meet up with students over coffee and slowly begin to gather them together to see if we could become an RSO. What I found during my multitude of coffee conversations with students during the first two weeks of the spring semester was a heartfelt desire to not wait, but to act: “We need a Bible study, and we needed it yesterday” was the message I heard from students. So by the end of February, we had a Bible study going and a game plan to become an RSO. Students worked diligently together on the RSO application, nominating leaders, and going through training, and on Good Friday (April 3), we became an official RSO of the University of Delaware.

I have regularly seen five or six students at Bible study each week, and another two or three with whom I get coffee once a month as they are unable to make Bible study. I hold “office hours” at the local coffee shop, Brew Haha!, once a week, a time when students know I’m onsite and there for them should they need food or a beverage and a listening ear. Perhaps other students will be in attendance, or perhaps it will just be one-on-one time with me. Regardless, these students are active and engaged in the ministry. I asked students to anonymously share what they had most appreciated about the PEACE Center ministry at the end of April:

“I appreciate being able to have ecumenical dialogue, receive answers to my many questions from my peers, and tackle theological and discernment questions with Pastor Hebert in creative ways.”

“I appreciate being able to exercise my faith and be able to show Christ’s love and hospitality to my peers while seeing the ministry grow.”

“I appreciate being able to share my views and opinions on faith and Christianity while growing my understanding of it and how others view it.”

“I love the feeling of being part of a growing community where we can talk about our backgrounds and our faith life in an open, honest, and judgement-free way.”

The Future

Much of the future of the PEACE Center and our initiatives are student-driven. The game plan at this juncture is to shift from Tuesday Bible Study to Dinner + Study on Wednesday evenings from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. We’ll cook dinner together out of the kitchen in St. Thomas’s Episcopal Church in the afternoon, cart the food over to the University of Delaware campus (contingent upon being allotted a room which we will not find out until classes begin August 25th), eat dinner together, then engage in study together. We will take a Fall Retreat in mid-October to Rehoboth Beach (using the Presbytery of New Castle’s beach house) and a Spring Mission Endeavor in the springtime, based out of Camp Arrowhead and doing volunteer work around the camp as well as the Lewes, Delaware area. I will continue to offer “office hours” both at Brew Haha! and out of my office in St. Thomas’s.

Perhaps what I am most familiar with regarding The Episcopal Church is the reverence surrounding the Eucharist. In a conversation with my clergy coach, an idea was sparked to start up a once a month practice I’m calling “the Listening Table.” My hope/idea is to bring a table to campus, equipped with individual baggies of crackers and boxes of grape juice with a small blessing inside, and to create a sign that conveys to students/University of Delaware community members that I am there simply to provide a listening ear and a snack for their daily journey. People might desire to sit and have a listening ear, or they might just need a quick snack with blessing inside for their daily trek to class, library, or home. It is a way of making the Table, with Christ as our host, present among the community, and reminding everyone that they are worthy of nourishment in body and soul.

There are certainly additional ideas that the students, the board, and I have shared, but I have learned in my many years of campus ministry that our ideas need to be held loosely, that the working of the Spirit needs to be at the forefront, so even the best of ideas need to be released and transformed into how the Spirit — and those the Spirit is serving — most needs those ideas to be utilized. It is truly an honor to be the campus

minister who represents both Presbyterian and Episcopal denominations to students, to continue to be supported by a board, diocese, and presbytery who are enthusiastic about the work being done, and to be involved in the lives of these young people who are having some of the most honest and authentic conversations about life, faith, and everything in-between. Should you wish to learn more about the PEACE Center, to invite me into your worshiping community, or simply to grab a cup of coffee, please do not ever hesitate to reach out to me at peacecenter.ud@gmail.com

Rev. Dr. Rachel C. Hébert (Pastor Rachel) is originally from the Dallas area of Texas, but has lived and studied in an array of places. She has been ordained in the PCUSA since 2015 and served congregations in Williamsburg, VA and Pittsburgh, PA. Her previous ministry experience centered around being an associate pastor in congregations with a focus on mission and campus ministry. Sensing a call away from congregational ministry and into full-time campus ministry, Rachel began to pursue other avenues and was drawn to the PEACE Center ministry and initiative in Delaware. Rachel's heart for campus ministry centers around the belief that young people between the ages of 18-22 are having some of the most honest and authentic conversations about life, faith, God, and everything in-between, and so it is an honor to be invited into their lives and spaces to listen and engage in these conversations. When not engaging in campus ministry, Rachel can be found going on adventures around the DE/MD/East Coast with her husband, James, trying out new recipes in the kitchen, or enjoying being at home engaging in art or a good book.