

# A Call To Act



BY REV. DR. SHANNAN R. VANCE-OCAMPO

The PW circles at Black Mountain Presbyterian Church in western North Carolina were just beginning the 2024–2025 PW/*Horizons* Bible study, *Let Justice Roll Down: God’s Call to Care for Neighbors and All Creation*, when Hurricane Helene arrived in their region, on September 26–28, 2024. Helene brought widespread destruction, the loss of thousands of homes, hundreds of lives, and whole communities—the harm and trauma continues today.

A year later, these same PW circles invited the author and suggestions for leaders writer of the study, Rev. Dr. Patricia Tull and Rev. Rebecca Barnes, respectively, to be leaders for a community event on the anniversary weekend. This included a Saturday afternoon forum on climate change moderated by local Warren Wilson College professor of Environmental Studies and Outdoor Leadership, Dr. Mallory McDuff, followed by fellowship, local music and dinner. The Saturday event was titled: “Climate Change & Social Justice in the Wake of Helene . . . a Call to Act.” On Sunday the PW Bible study authors assisted in worship and



Black Mountain Presbyterian Church, bmponc.org

co-led an adult education forum on faithful responses to climate change and the larger work of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). All of these opportunities were advertised throughout the wider community, inviting everyone who had been affected by Hurricane Helene to enter into conversation, memory-sharing and discussion of action steps for the present and the future.

Black Mountain Presbyterian Church hosts six PW circles, all of whom provided significant leadership for this event. When they began their study in 2024, they had no idea how important it would become to their community, providing them with a theological underpinning to consider the bigger picture while living

through a time of extreme trauma, tragedy and terror from a climate-change driven, inland hurricane.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, Black Mountain Presbyterian Church served more than 1,000 meals per day and received donations totaling \$4.3 million. The congregation channeled those gifts into direct impact in the community for housing, mental and physical health, and transportation. During the Sunday morning worship service, Black Mountain’s pastor, Rev. Mary Katherine Robertson, gave thanks for the opportunity the forum offered the community. She stressed that their work is not done, and they must be the hub for affordable housing in western North Carolina moving forward.

Rev. Dr. Shannan R. Vance-Ocampo serves as the general presbyter for the Presbytery of Southern New England.

Watch the forum and worship service from the anniversary weekend at [youtube.com/@blackmountainpresbyterianc5110](https://youtube.com/@blackmountainpresbyterianc5110) under the “Live” tab.