



SMPC YOUTH
MONTREAT
HIGH SCHOOL
CONFERENCE

Reflections

JULY 12-JULY 18, 2026

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Rev. Lindsey Odom

Associate Pastor of Youth and Missions/Outreach

There is something profoundly sacred about watching high school students encounter Christ in a special place like Montreat. This past week, I had the incredible joy and privilege of attending the Montreat Youth Conference alongside 22 amazing students and an incredible team of adult chaperone leaders from South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church. Every year, I return from Montreat reminded of why the work of youth ministry is so important and get to witness the incredible work that God is doing in the lives of our young people. It also reminds me that youth are not the future of the church, they are the church right now and they are embodying what it means to be the church as they live out their faith in powerful ways.

There is something special about stepping away from the routines of everyday life and creating space to worship, learn, grow, laugh, ask difficult questions, hike mountains, build friendships, and simply be present with one another in a spirit of community. Throughout the week, I was reminded that some of the most meaningful moments of faith formation happen not only in worship or keynote sessions, but around dinner tables, on van rides, during late-night runs and conversations to Cookout, and in the quiet moments where God meets us in unexpected ways.

This year's conference theme, *Wonder & Wander*, invited us to explore what it means to wonder boldly with their questions of faith and wander on their spiritual journey's, knowing they can never wander outside the realm of God's love, grace, and mercy for them. As the week unfolded through stories of Jonah, Hagar, Mary, and the disciples on the road to Emmaus, I realized that the conference theme, *Wonder & Wander*, was not simply something we were studying; rather, it was something we were living and embodying. Throughout the week we journeyed alongside Jonah, Hagar, Mary, and the disciples on the road to Emmaus, who were ordinary people who found themselves wandering into storms, wildernesses, uncertainty, unanswered questions, and unexpected encounters with God. Jonah tried to run, but God met him in the storm. Hagar wandered into the wilderness carrying pain, oppression, and loneliness, yet discovered that she was fully seen by the God who sees. Mary asked honest questions, not out of disbelief, but out of wonder, and responded not with certainty, but with availability and commitment through saying, "Here I am." The disciples on the road to Emmaus unknowingly walked beside the risen Christ until their eyes were finally opened. Again and again, we were reminded that God meets us long before we recognize God's presence, and that truth became visible not only in Scripture but in the lives of our youth throughout the week.

Although each story was different, they all pointed toward the same beautiful truth that God is always present before we recognize God's presence. Whether running from God like Jonah,

feeling unseen like Hagar, responding with courageous faith like Mary, or walking unknowingly beside the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus, we discovered that God faithfully accompanies us wherever life leads, and that God meets us long before we recognize God's presence.

One of the most meaningful reminders for me during worship was that our identity always comes before our achievement. Before Jonah fulfilled his calling, before Mary lived out the call of Christ, before the disciples understood the resurrection and witnessed the resurrected Christ among them on their way to Emmaus, God had already spoken over them. We heard throughout the week that we are beloved children of God, before we accomplish anything, that storms do not create anxiety as much as they reveal what already anchors us, and that curiosity is not the opposite of faith but often where faith begins. Back home time was probably some of the most powerful moments for me to watch as a pastor as our SMPC youth joined together to ask thoughtful questions, wrestle with Scripture, share their stories, and create space for one another to do the same. Watching them discover that healing begins with honesty, that it is encouraged to wonder and wander in their faith, and that God meets us even in our wildernesses was one of the greatest moments in ministry.

Montreat is also simply a joyful place to be together and experience life in community with one another. Whether we were whitewater rafting, cheering one another on during the variety show, hiking up Lookout mountain, sharing meals together, laughing late into the evening, or simply sitting on rocking chairs talking long after the day's programming had ended, every moment strengthened relationships within our youth group. One of my favorite parts of the week is always watching different grade levels grow closer together. Older students naturally mentor younger students, younger students look up to the seniors, and by the end of the week it feels less like a youth group and more like a family. It is a beautiful thing to witness.

What moved me most, however, was not simply what happened during keynotes, small groups, or worship. It was what happened between those moments. I watched our youth become the very community we pray as a church community that they would become. I watched them celebrate each other's gifts. I watched Luke courageously offer his God-given gifts during the variety show playing the organ, reminding all of us that God calls each person to use their unique gifts for the good of the community. I watched younger students seek out older students for encouragement and friendship. I watched conversations continue long after worship into the next day because no one wanted the day to be over and we just enjoyed each other's company. Throughout the week, I found myself thinking about something we heard repeatedly in our sermons that what we worship shapes who we become. Our youth are becoming people who worship Christ by loving one another well.

Nothing, however, compared to our final evening together. Following the candlelight service, which is a beautiful Vespers-style worship service held around Lake Susan, where every church

attending Montreat gathers to sing, pray, and receive God's blessing, we participated in one of the conference's most meaningful traditions. As each youth held a lit candle, the blessing was shared over the entire community before the candles were extinguished by grade level, beginning with the youngest high school youth and ending with the graduating seniors, whose candles are the last to be blown out. It is a powerful and deeply symbolic moment, marking both the close of the week and, for our seniors, the conclusion of their Montreat journey as high school students.

This candlelight service was a service that felt especially emotional this year because I knew I was preparing to say goodbye to such an extraordinary senior class. After the service, we gathered together one last time in a back home group at the girl's house before heading home. For nearly two hours our youth simply shared their hearts and testimonies of faith of how much our church and youth group have impacted them, changed them, and transformed them. They reflected on where they encountered God throughout the week, encouraged one another, laughed, cried, and we thanked our graduating seniors for the ways they had shaped this ministry. There were very few dry eyes in the room, including myself. Most of us were a puddle of tears. The younger youth cried because they loved the graduating seniors. The graduating seniors cried because they realized the impact they had made. I cried because it was one of those particularly special and holy moments in youth ministry that cannot be planned or created. It was simply the Holy Spirit at work. As I looked around the circle, I realized I was witnessing the body of Christ lived out in one another's lives.

These relationships amongst our youth in our youth group are genuine, grounded, and spiritual. They are a family. They carry one another's burdens, celebrate one another's joys, and remind one another that they are never alone. Our SMPC youth this past year truly inspired me, not only in the way they grew in their relationship with God, but in the way they loved and cared for one another. That kind of community does not just happen, especially in most youth group settings. In all my time of doing youth ministry (10 plus years), I have never witnessed a youth group that was as close to each other as this year's youth group at Montreat. It made me proud, happy, and joyful seeing the way they bond with each other. It is a beautiful glimpse of the body of Christ at work and the community that Christ calls us to build together.

Perhaps the most sacred moment for me personally came when I gathered our graduated seniors into a circle and prayed over each one of them as they prepare to leave for college and begin a new chapter in their life. As I looked around that circle, I realized these were not simply graduating seniors, they were also my first Confirmation class when I arrived at SMPC. They were the very first group of youth I had the privilege of teaching when I arrived at South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church. In many ways, my ministry at SMPC has grown alongside them. We began together in Confirmation, and now, just a few years later, I found myself

praying over them as they prepare to step into a new chapter. What an incredible gift it has been to walk beside them through these formative years of high school. I told this group of seniors that thank you hardly feels like enough for allowing me to be part of their story. Being able to teach them, laugh with them, worship with them, challenge them, celebrate them, and ultimately pray over them as they begin this next chapter is one of the greatest honors and privileges of my life and calling to ministry.

As I left Montreat, I found myself carrying immense gratitude that includes gratitude for parents who have faithfully nurtured the faith of these youth long before I entered their lives, gratitude for chaperones who gave so generously of themselves all week, gratitude for a church that believes our youth matter and make them a priority. Most of all, I have gratitude for these incredible youth who continually inspire me. They remind me that the Church is alive, that the Holy Spirit is still at work, and that God is still calling ordinary people into extraordinary lives of faith.

Through our worship, keynote time, and small groups at Montreat, this week reminded me that wonder always leads somewhere. Wonder always leads somewhere. It leads us deeper into Christ, deeper into community, and deeper into the people God is calling us to become. And for this part of the journey, I am endlessly grateful that God allowed me to wander alongside these incredible young people. It is our wonder that leads us into a deeper relationship with God, deeper into authentic community, and deeper into God's calling for our lives. As I watched our youth leave the mountain, I knew they were not leaving God's presence behind. Like Jonah, Hagar, Mary, and the disciples on the road to Emmaus, they now continue the journey carrying the assurance that wherever they wander, God has already gone before them, and in their wandering, they have been given the opportunity to witness God's kingdom at work.

As I drove away from Montreat, I realized that while the conference had officially ended, the mountaintop experience had not. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, our youth now return home with hearts that have been set ablaze by the presence of Christ. They leave carrying new questions, deeper friendships, greater confidence in who God says they are, and a renewed sense of God's call on their lives. I leave carrying something too, which is overwhelming gratitude and abundant love for these youth, adults, and our church family. If you are ever considering helping with youth ministry and being a part of it, I would highly encourage you to do so as it will give you an opportunity to witness God transform the lives of our youth and allow you to experience those sacred moments alongside them, like I did this past week at Montreat. Thank you again to all of our amazing youth parents, our chaperones and cooks at Montreat (Aarik Eberhardt, Belinda Hull, Hasmig Holder, Valerie Glover, Curtis Guy, Kara Guy, Denise Davis, Susan Hicks, and Collin Cushman) for giving up half a week or a full week to love, encourage, and invest in our SMPC youth, and to our church family for helping make

experiences like Montreat possible. If you have ever considered chaperoning or volunteering with youth events or retreats, you should take that next step. Your presence matters more than you know and our youth are changed and transformed because of your presence.

Belinda Hull

Adult Chaperone

"Where have you come from? Where are you going?" The energizing song Cotton-eyed Joe asks this. So does the Lord, of Hagar. So did the sailors, of Jonah. So did King Herod, of the Wise Men. And the wonderful teaching we heard in the auditorium led me to ponder these questions for myself.

I'd wondered how helpful I could really be, with a large group of young people and adults I barely knew, and who didn't know me. All I could bring was authenticity and an open heart. And the Spirit showed us God's love for each of us. We heard that we are God's beloved. We felt that truth in our shared community, in the belonging and mutual support that was so evident. Just the willingness to be more what Christ wants me to be, at any given time, freed me from worry about what to be doing.

A special blessing came with some unexpected free time to spend with the other adults. As we initially shared about our best pets ever, the laughter flowed, and so did some tears. The new bonds let us continue sharing our thoughts at worship, and on walks, with deeper questions and experiences. We come home with gratitude for our wider church family, with fresh understanding of God's working in His people in history and with us, and with visions for more opportunities to spend time together and grow together in the future. The Lord has more to give us!

Hasmig Holder

Adult Chaperone

My time chaperoning Montreat 2026 left me filled with joy and a renewed awareness that God's love is all around us. His love, care, and guidance shone brightly through our high schoolers' authentic smiles as they engaged in meaningful morning and evening worship, energizer dances and songs, shared stories about their experiences in small groups, enjoyed meals, prayed and reflected together, made bracelets, played Uno in the girls' house, met other youth, participated in evening events, and enjoyed SMPC's late-night dessert trips.

Witnessing our SMPC's genuine laughter, thoughtfulness, and desire to connect with God, learn

more about their faith journeys, and build friendships with one another was incredibly powerful. Their openness and enthusiasm were inspiring and a beautiful reminder of the importance of our church community. Connecting with and sharing personal celebrations and challenges among the chaperones—many of whom I had never met before—was equally meaningful. I hope to continue building those relationships and will always remember one of the evening worship messages: "You become who you surround yourself with." I truly felt like I became a better person simply by being surrounded by our wonderful youth, Lindsey, and fellow chaperones.

Aarik Eberhardt

Adult Chaperone and Cook

A Chaperone's Reflection on the Wonder and Wander of Father, Son, Holy Ghost, and God's Children

Each year, amazing things happen at the Montreat Youth Conference. And this year, thousands of youth from across the United States will visit Montreat for a week to "Wonder and Wander." Were it not for Lindsey Odom's persistence, encouragement, and determination, I would not have experienced the amazing things that occur in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Thank you, Lindsey, for inviting me into this sacred space.

This was my first time as a Youth Chaperone and the first time our son, Aaron, attended a Youth Retreat. I cannot say how glad I am that I agreed to chaperone and help prepare meals for the youth and adults. Coincidentally, chaperoning provided me with an opportunity to catch up with former SMPC Congregational Care Minister Lynne Keel, who serves as the Director of Programs at Montreat. My life, my faith, my appreciation for ministry, and my hope for the future are fuller and richer for having done this.

There are so many joys and deeply spiritual moments from Montreat that I'd like to share and reflect on. For me, the most poignant moments came during evening Worship Services. Daniel Heath, a Chaplain from Davidson College, delivered insightful, meaningful, heartfelt sermons every night. Throughout each service, I was amazed at the intense engagement of all the youth and adult participants. It's one thing to witness your own child actively listening to each word but when that is multiplied by 500-600 other youth, it is profound!

Additionally, it is a privilege to meet and learn about each of SMPC's 22 youth participants. From the type of sandwich they prefer, the activities and hobbies they enjoy, or finding out where their next academic pursuit takes them. Each night, Lindsey would lead a group activity, and I would hear about the memorable parts of their day and the takeaways from the morning

Keynote, Small Group sessions, and Sermon. These were some of the most special moments to hear how God shaped their life that day. Forming deeper connections and closer relationships with Lindsey as well as co-chaperones Belinda Hull, Collin Cushman, Valerie Glover, and Hasmig Holder is another benefit of this trip I will hold onto.

On my last day chaperoning, the entire group went whitewater rafting on a five-mile section of the French Broad River. Having spent the previous three nights listening to God's call during Worship, it was a true gift to immerse ourselves in God's Creation. Since I was leaving for home after the rafting trip, I wanted to tell the youth how incredible my experience had been and to thank them for being kind, wonderful, inquisitive Children of God. I rehearsed what I was going to say in my mind but when it was time to say it, I was overcome with emotion.

I don't know why the moment was so emotional. Maybe it's because I didn't grow up going to Church or have an experience growing up that was remotely close to what I experienced at Montreat. I was baptized as an adult by Dr. Brown in Mecklenburg Hall back in 2009 when my wife Amy and I joined SMPC.

When I look back, I truly think that the emotion stems from what I imagine lies ahead for each of these youth and the solid spiritual foundation each youth has underneath them. Whether that is going to be returning to the familiar halls and friends at their high schools or finding new paths and friendships on college campuses, I pray that each will be ambitious and continue to wonder about God and wander through God's magnificent Creation. Perhaps all that emotion poured over me from the Baptism we share at South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church. God knows. The Son knows. The Holy Spirit knows.

We are all beautiful Children of God. When I find myself in a predicament, a painful situation, a time of doubt, or just feeling a bit melancholy, I will be able to look back on these moments and pray knowing that "You are wonderful, When I am wandering" and that I am a beloved Child of God.

Youth Reflections

Natalie Guy

My experience here at Montreat has definitely changed me, as they mentioned in the sermon "No one truly encounters Jesus and leaves the same way they came" this stuck with me because the first day I already felt more connected. It had changed my perspective on a vast majority of

opinions and subjects I might not have previously understood. Coming to Montreat was like a hike, first time stepping foot on the path/trail was scary and a bit intimidating. But then as I get to the top it's beautiful. This is how I felt about my experience and faith.

Katherine Kuszmar

This week at Montreat was very eye-opening for me. Spending time in our small groups and talking with people from other churches really helped me grow because it forced me to step out of my comfort zone. It was amazing to hear that other people my age have the same exact questions and struggles that I do, which made me feel a lot less alone. One thing that really challenged me and made me think was learning how to trust God even when things in life feel confusing or don't go as planned. I definitely experienced God's love this week through the new friendships I made and being able to express myself freely. Finally, I would like to thank my back home leader Lindsey and all of the adult chaperones for making this trip possible. I will never forget this year at Montreat and can't wait for many more to come.

Logan Elliot

Hi, my name is Logan Elliott, and my experience this week at Montreat has been more impactful than I could've ever imagined. I want to start by thanking all of the adult chaperones that made this possible, such as Aarik Eberhardt, Kara Guy, Hasmig Holder, Belinda Hull, and Collin Cushman. I want to also extend a special thanks to the other chaperones who really helped me out throughout the week, such as Valerie Glover for offering to drive me home when I needed to leave early, Denise Davis for going to grab groceries from target to allow me to be successful at my leadership conference next week, and Susan Hicks for bringing me some extra supplies from Charlotte for this week and the next week as well.

This week's theme was wonder and wander, and I was invited to question my faith in a variety of places. Throughout my time in Keynote, Small Group, Worship, and Back home time, I was asked to engage with difficult scriptures, thought provoking questions, and statements of faith that forced me to really dive into my beliefs to absorb the most out of this week. One thing that really helped me with this was that I was being constantly reassured that having questions is not an absence of faith, but part of the journey. This really helped me to feel more comfortable throughout the week because after reading some of the scriptures or listening to the speakers, I would have questions that I was apprehensive to ask about because I thought that it would come across as not believing in what was being said. I've used this time at Montreat to grow in my faith and become more comfortable asking the questions that I have when they come up. Some of the scriptures that really stuck out to me were Genesis 16 and Micah 6:8. These pieces of scripture really taught me that God is with you through everything, no matter what. You

could be going through times of uncertainty or adversity and God will never leave your side.

One thing that really stuck with me from this week came from Friday Mornings Keynote, when our speaker Erin said “some think what is behind us will define what is before us.” I will be going into college next year, and I kept thinking about what I would be leaving behind and not what is in store for my future. After hearing this, I now know that I am able to create a new image for myself and that God will be with me no matter what.

I would like to thank the entire SMPC Youth for making this such a great experience for me and being so inclusive and kind to me, even if I wasn’t super involved in the church and Youth Group over the past couple of years. Due to a multitude of reasons such as family, work, and other involvements, I almost never came to youth events. Despite that, every time I would be able to come I would be accepted with open arms and treated like I hadn’t missed a single gathering. This is the most tightly knit group that I have ever been around, and I was still treated like I belong, which means the world to me. I wanted to especially thank the class of 2026, who I went through confirmation with, who welcomed and included me, and who helped me find God in every interaction with them. These people are all angels on earth, and they have helped me to become the person I am today, and I am so grateful that I can call these people my friends. To Caroline, Haley, Lily Claire, Elizabeth, Addison, Jilly, and Judah, thank you for everything you have done for me.

I also wanted to thank Lindsey Odom for everything that she has done this week. Being able to have a youth pastor who can relate to me while still having meaningful conversations about God means the absolute world to me. She is truly the glue that helps to bind this group together, and she shines her light on all of us. She allows everyone to be their authentic selves with no judgement and makes ordinary gathering feel like extraordinary experiences. Lindsey is also an angel here on earth, and without her I don’t think that I would have the relationships that I have with God and with the other youth at this church. I am forever in debt to her for all of these things that she has done for me, and I couldn’t be happier that she is my youth pastor.

If I gathered nothing else from this week, the one thing to remember is that God will be there no matter what. At the highest of highs, the lowest of lows, after wins, after losses, and anywhere in between. God will meet you where you are. This experience has left a lasting impact on my life, and I’ve been so blessed to be able to do it with the best group of people. The only regret that I have this week is that I wasn’t more involved in the Church, in youth group, and only being able to spend two years at Montreat. So for any youth that may be reading this, take that next step in your faith, go to youth group, ask those tough questions, love everyone unconditionally, and go show the world your gifts, for God will be by your side no matter what.

Will Glover

My week at Montreat was an incredible experience. We participated in numerous events, including keynote sessions, small groups, and evening worship services. Through these experiences, I feel that my relationship with God grew significantly stronger. I also became much more confident in my ability to talk to new people.

Throughout the week, we explored the theme of wonder and wander. The sermons truly spoke to me, especially the message about how, no matter where you are in life, even if you are not actively looking for God, He will meet you where you are and walk beside you.

In addition to the services, I feel that my friendships grew stronger as well. On the first day of small groups, I was very uncomfortable and felt completely out of place. However, as the week went on, I built a meaningful friendship with someone in my group. That experience taught me that when you step outside of your comfort zone, amazing things can happen.

I am beyond grateful for this experience and would not change it for anything. I would like to thank all of the parents, leaders, and staff who made this week possible.

If I had to take one lesson from this week with me for the rest of my life, it would be to embrace every moment. Sometimes, you have to be uncomfortable before you can become comfortable, and the greatest growth often comes from stepping into the unknown.

Siena Carr

I am so fortunate to have been able to come to Montreat this year. Every time I come, it is such an incredible experience. I learned so much through my small group, keynote sessions, and worship. I was able to grow in my faith and build a stronger connection with God. Not only was I able to strengthen my relationship with God, but I also built meaningful connections with the people around me.

I really connected with this year's theme, "Wonder and Wander." I learned that no matter how far we go or how lost we may feel, God is always there to guide us. I also discovered that no one who encounters God ever leaves the same way.

My first year, I was hesitant about coming to Montreat because I wasn't sure if I would make friends, and I was scared of what people would think of me. But after that first year, I knew Montreat was a special place. I've never felt more welcomed than I do here not just because of the place, but because of the people. Montreat truly feels like a second home.

I would like to thank Lindsey for creating this amazing SMPC family and welcoming me into it. I know that no matter what I'm going through, she will always be there to support me and make me feel welcome.

I've had an amazing week at Montreat, and I can't wait to come back next year.

Elizabeth Glover

My last summer at Montreat was nothing short of transformational. From spending time with my church family, to meeting new friends from all over the country in my small group, to the impactful evening sermons, every last second of the trip was glowing with God's light.

There were two moments in particular that God's presence felt stronger than ever. The first time I experienced this was during the sermon on Wednesday night. This sermon explored the story of Hagar, and the idea that we cannot wander out of God's presence. As a graduated senior, I have been struggling with the idea of moving away from the wonderful life I have built in Charlotte. Hearing the pastor speak about carrying invisible burdens and God being there to help regardless had a profound effect on my feelings towards college. I left worship that night feeling a definite change within myself and my mindset.

The second time I felt God's presence was through the love our youth group shared on the final night. After returning from worship and lighting candles around Lake Susan, our youth group had a very heartfelt conversation at the house. Hearing the impact Montreat and the SMPC youth group has had on my friends was a very special moment. Following this conversation we prayed and listened to music all together. God's love shines so brightly through all these individuals, and it was beautiful to see everyone bonding during that moment.

While I am sad that I do not have any more summers I'll be able to spend at Montreat with my friends, I am incredibly thankful for the time I did have. I am thankful for my wonderful friends, the chaperones who gave their time to make sure we were looked after, Lindsey for caring so deeply for each and every one of us, and for time spent together wandering further in our faith journeys.

Camdyn Sheeler

Hi my name is Camdyn Sheeler and I am a rising senior at Ardrey Kell High School. Montreat is my favorite week of the entire year, I get to grow in my faith so much. I will forever cherish this week, especially with my best friends that are seniors for their last year before college. Laughing too hard, staying up late, and having amazing meals together will forever stay close to my heart. I'm so excited to watch you all go off in your own paths and see where God brings you.

The theme “Wonder and Wander” has especially taught me that God is always with me in the wilderness. Even through lonely and dark times, God meets us where we are no matter what. Each sermon preached during our evening Worship by Pastor Daniel allowed me to see how God is working his plan even when it might not seem like it. One story that specifically stuck out to me was Genesis 16: 1-11, 13 with Hagar. Hagar was lost and lonely, but God listened and saw Hagar. Grace finds people in wilderness places. And even before Hagar knew what would happen, God already knew. Hagar named God “El Roi” meaning the God who sees. This story helped me understand I am seen by God no matter who I am or what I do.

Montreat is a place anyone can go and find people who love them! I have met amazing people from across the country that I wouldn’t have been able to if not for this week. I know I will apply what I learned in keynote, small group, and worship to my own life and share to the people around me. Sharing how God’s love is always present in every situation will help me grow closer to my faith.

I want to thank all the youth that came on this trip for the fellowship and memories that will last a lifetime. I see God’s light and love in each and every one of you. Next, I want to thank all of the chaperones that dedicated their time and energy into our group for us to have a great time. Lastly, I want to give a special thank you to our Youth Pastor, Lindsey Odom. None of this would have been possible without you. You have impacted every single youth here, and each of us can say so many amazing things that you have done for us. Thank you for putting immense effort into each of us, it never goes unappreciated.

Lily Claire Jacobus

My experiences at Montreat have always been very formative and have changed my view on life but this year as a graduated senior it was extra special. During the sermons, keynotes, songs, and discussions I was able to learn how there is nowhere we can go that is out of God’s reach. Going to college so far away and leaving my youth group I have been in my whole life, that message hits a little differently.

This youth group has truly meant everything and more to me. Every year as people graduate and leave Montreat and as people are just coming for the first time I am able to see how deep of an impact this place and our group has on everyone. This youth group is truly a second family to me and Lindsey is truly like my second mom. Everywhere from discussing sermons and having deep conversations about faith to us playing Uno and hiking together I am more and more grateful for them every day.

Lindsey Odom is truly the mastermind behind it all. She works tirelessly day and night by making us (extremely detailed) schedules for every day, making sure we are fed and healthy and also

just checking up on us to make sure we are ok. Without Lindsey, our youth group would not be half of what it is today and I would not have had the courage to join and become involved. It is because of her that I am taking the risk of going to college so far away and without her unwavering love and support I would not be able to do that.

I would also like to thank Collin Cushman. As one of my brother's best friends, Collin has grown up with me and been truly such a role model in my life. His humor and wise insights always make such a positive impact on me and my childhood and time at SMPC would not have been the same without him. Watching him come back as a chaperone this year was so inspiring and I'm so grateful that I have him in my life.

Thank you to Cara and Curtis Guy, Denise Davis, Susan Hicks, Valerie Glover, Hasmig Holder, Belinda Hull and Aarik Eberhardt for being such amazing chaperones. They volunteered their time to spend time with us, make us food, and drive us around, we truly are spoiled because of them.

Montreat has changed my life and while I am so sad my time there has come to an end, I know that God will be by my side in my next chapter. I know I will always have my youth group and the best youth pastor ever that I can always call and go back to. Even though we go to Montreat every year, in the word of Collin Cushman, it's not the place it's the people. Thank you SMPC for giving me my family. ❤️

Haley Davis

Montreat is a place like heaven on earth. Filled with endless laughter, deep conversations, family-like fellowship, love, joy, and even sadness. This was my fourth year coming to Montreat and my last. But every time I show up here, God changes my life in so many ways for the better. I truly cannot believe it's over.

This week at Montreat, we dove deeper into our theme, "Wondering and Wandering," and spent hours talking about our faith and what the theme meant to us with our small groups and each other. We talked about Who God Is? We learned that God is a wonder-filled wanderer and builds us up and is always here for us even if we don't feel it. We also had to figure out who we are. We are children of God. We are created by God to shape each other to be better. I learned that no matter how far I went, God is always there for me. God knows who I am. I also learned it's perfectly okay to still be confused about God's presence and the whole point of Christianity is to continue growing, and God will love you always as you are. We are called to share God's love with the world.

The preacher Paul talked about no one who encounters God, comes back the same. This is so true. I see God in so many ways, but mainly around my amazing youth group at SMPC. I am always laughing around you guys, and I always feel comfortable to be emotional around you guys. To Camdyn, Elizabeth, Olivia, Caroline, and Lily Claire: I see God so much in every single one of you. You always have my back and I'm each of you all's biggest fans. You make me laugh in so many ways and I pray we never fall apart. I can't imagine a life without you guys. I will miss getting ice cream at the huck, going on late-night runs, singing during keynote and worship, dancing till our feet hurt, crying during candlelight worship, and I will miss waiting all year to come back here.

As I come back home from this very special place. I take with me what God has taught me and I plan to share his love with my community around me, and I will also use it to help me as I transition to a new life in college.

I want to thank each chaperone such as, Hasmig Holder, Denise Davis, Valerie Glover, Aarik Eberhardt, Kara and Curtis Guy, Susan Hicks, Belinda Hull and Collin Cushman, for taking time out of their daily lives to be here and share their gifts with us. I want to thank Lindsey for being such an amazing role model and always having our backs, and I want to thank all the youth who went to Montreat for making this an unforgettable week and allowing me to share my gifts with everyone here, and thank you for doing the same!

Aaron Eberhardt

My first year at camp was full of nervousness and I was scared that it was going to be boring and not fun and after the first day I was convinced it was going to be like that the whole time. It turned out to be quite the opposite for me and I'm sure everyone else although I cannot speak for them. I know everyone was blessed to be a part of this group. It was really special. By the end of the week, I found my self tearing up alongside everyone else. I've never really been the guy to express or show my emotions, but at Montreat, it felt different; everyone was just there. Just a bunch of young adults living in the moment with God, something I'd never really experienced before. And I feel as if my experience at Montreat not only made me a better Christian but a better kid in general. I feel a newfound sense of responsibility and joy for little things. And just like our sermons said, and I wish I knew earlier, is to live life by the day and be grateful to wonder and wander through life. I really enjoyed the sermons and how they talked about a storm in your life doesn't define you it's what you do and how you act that shows who you are. The biggest lesson I learned is to cherish life to the fullest and not live with regrets because you don't have time for it. I would like to thank my dad, Aarik Eberhardt, for coming to Montreat, as I know his faith was also touched in the short while he was here. I would like to personally thank Lindsey for being the best youth pastor ever and always being there not only

for me but for everyone in our youth. She really is special and does more than she is required, no matter what. I hope I can grow up to be a person like that but for now I'll keep admiring her as she helps guide all of the youth to God. They talked about who's your prophet this week, and I think all of us can agree that Lindsey has been a prophet to us. I would also like to extend thanks to all of our chaperones for coming and supporting us. We seriously couldn't do it without you guys, so thank you! And the one thing I will never forget about Montreat this year is God's Grace. I pray that in my future I can learn to become more faithful and spend more time at youth groups. I also pray for a healthy year for not just me but for everyone, and that you Lord, bless me with the means to make the right choices.

Dylan Davis

My week at Montreat was filled with kindness and wonder as I got to meet new people and grow my relationship with God. I loved that even though we spent time with small groups and in large crowds, I was still able to connect with the people in my church, and also be able to dive deeper into the Scriptures with others. I have learned that God is always following and supporting us in our wondering and won't put pressure on anybody. Montreat has taught me that if I ever feel lonely or sad, my church community and God will always be with me and support me through everything. The story about Hagar felt connected to me because whenever I feel lonely or disrespected, I tend to move away from the situation, but God is always there to bring me back and keep me on my feet. I also felt connected to was Jonah's story but as a connection to the sailors, because whenever there is a negative person in my life, and I stop talking to them, I feel a weight off my shoulders, and my world seems happier and brighter. A moment I felt very close to God was my parents separation and how, even though I had to go through house switches and arguments on the other side of the wall, I had my Bible to read and focus on as well as my sister to talk to about anything I needed. My small group helped me connect closer to Scripture and, during journey groups, be able to express my feelings more and listen to others' experiences with God, which ultimately grew my connection. Whenever we would talk about experiences with our small group, I always had to think about how to explain mine so that others could understand more. I experienced God's love during my wandering in rafting as I got closer to others in my church and my wondering in worship and keynote by allowing me to have answers for my questions. I still wonder why God always kept pushing the story characters to do things they were going away from instead of letting them choose their story for themselves. My favorite memories were doing just dance in upper anderson with Emery during the foam party and connecting more with each other, the last afternoon recreation while jumping on the bounce house with Emery, Hayes, and Micheal and laughing about the week, and finally the candlelight ceremony as I got to pray and listen to God's words while sobbing my heart out with my seniors friends and sister moving away for the years. Because of Montreat, I want to become more connected to the church and involved with things

like speaking during worship and youth group or bringing new children of God to the church. Someone who supported and challenged me this week was my sister for convincing me to go to Montreat and talk to new people and Lily Claire for always saying hello or making sure I feel included in everything.

As I head home from my mountaintop experience at Montreat, I want to continue wondering about God, wandering faithfully wherever God leads me, and remembering that God can always do more than I can ask or imagine. One way I hope to live differently or treat others differently because of this week is by making sure everyone is happy and feels supported and knows that I can be there for them if they need someone to talk to. One thing I don't want to forget as I leave Montreat is that no matter how much someone is upset or insecure about themselves they can always be themselves at a PCUSA camp as everyone is so accepting towards new people no matter what. My prayer for myself or my life after Montreat is to remember the people of the Bible and their stories they had to live through and to be thankful for what I have and who I have by my side. Finally, I would like to thank the chaperones for making this trip happen and helping with anything someone needed, especially Erik - and Kara Guy for being our cooks for the week. I would like to thank all youth in my church and small groups for making sure I felt involved and everybody else. And lastly, I would like to thank Lindsey Odom for planning this event and for helping us stay connected to God and each other.

Caroline Guy

Each year, I am constantly counting down the days until Montreat is here. My friends and I are always blowing up our group chat with a countdown that starts from "six more months until Montreat," to "one more month," "one week," and "one day." It is crazy that the best week of the whole year is already over—and for me, over for good.

Recently, there have been many "lasts" in my life since graduating from high school, and Montreat was one of them. Although it was sad, I see this "last" as also a happy one. The whole week, I was filled with joy, uncontrollable laughter, gratitude, and God's grace and presence. My friends and I made more memories we will remember forever: going to the Huck, screaming random inside jokes we have every 20 seconds, complaining about hiking Lookout, taking in the scenic view while whitewater rafting, and lighting our last candles around Lake Susan. All of these memories are ones that I look back on and can't help but catch myself smiling.

Other than unforgettable memories, I also got some pretty good advice before I leave for college. The theme "wondering and wandering" taught me a few valuable pieces of wisdom. First, it taught me that no matter how far I run from God, He will always find me. As we dove into the story of Jonah and the fish, Jonah tries to hide from God and run away to a place he thinks God won't be able to find him. However, Jonah quickly learns that you cannot run from

God, no matter how hard you try. Second, I learned that God knows exactly how to reach you. This was valuable to me when God feels silent in my life. Instead of trying to force hearing or seeing God, it taught me to slow down and remember that if God needs me, He knows exactly how to get to me.

Coming back home from Montreat, I probably have more questions than I had going up, but if there's one thing I do know, it's that I have some pretty good people in my life. Montreat is a beautiful place with mountains, a lake, bears, and views (even though we complained so much about hiking Lookout, the view was amazing), but what makes Montreat the most beautiful is the people—my friends, new and old; my family who was up there with me; and the whole environment that will accept anyone and everyone.

My four years of Montreat went by way too fast, and although I'm sad, I am filled with overflowing joy for the future and gratitude for how SMPC has made an impact on my life. I get to look back on my years at Montreat and feel warmth and happiness, knowing that because of my time there, I am who I am. I am so grateful I got to spend it with the best people and encourage all youth to go to Montreat, even if you've never been.

If there's any advice I could give, it's this: interact with anyone and everyone because you don't know how much of an impact you can have on someone, even if it's as little as "What did you have for lunch?" God has a plan for everyone and works in mysterious and amazing ways beyond our understanding. So don't be afraid to show the light that God has put in you, because God will use that light to help light others.

Also, I would like to thank Valerie Glover, Hasmig Holder, Belinda Hull, Denise Davis, Aarik Eberhardt, Susan Hicks, Collin Cushman, Lindsey, and of course my parents, Kara and Curtis Guy, for helping chaperone this week.

Lastly, one thing that was encouraged this week was wondering and asking questions. So, I am wondering: who are the people you have in your life who can make any place special?

Olivia Smith

Montreat is always the most special week of the year, but this week was even more special than the past. I was lucky enough to spend the week with my best friends who are graduated seniors, they have made church so special for me. I can confidently say I would not be as strong nor confident in my Faith without the seniors of SMPC to guide me in my journey. I cherished every moment with these seniors, whether it was during our sleepovers, retreats, youth groups, worship services or even just texting every day in our Shalom 2.0 group chat. I want to thank Lily Claire Jacobus for always listening to me and giving the best advice, Caroline Guy for always

hanging out with me and talking about anything and everything, and Haley Davis and Elizabeth Glover for being two of the funniest people I know. I truly do not know what I would do without these girls. This week, the theme was wondering and wandering. I learned that even in our wondering and wandering, God is with us. We read scripture about the story of Hagar. Although this story is a difficult one to read, I learned how no matter what, God will be there for us. One of my favorite ideas from this week is that God meets us where we are at, in the "river." He does not wait for us to be "perfect" to love us, he takes us as we are. God's love is unconditional and his grace is eternal. I always feel especially close to God during Friday night worship, when we sing "Sanctuary." Everyone wraps their arms around each other and sings, radiating God and His love. This week, my friend Wyatt Anthony taught me a lot about our Faith. We have been in small group together for the past 2 years and have become close friends. On Friday, after small group, we sat outside the Huck on the balcony and just talked about our Faith. We talked about how God loves all, no matter what, no matter our differences. One of the best ways I grow in my Faith is talking about it with others, and this did just that. This week, a challenging topic that came up was, "Why does God let bad things happen to good people?" This idea is a very challenging one, however I believe that God does not purposely put these storms in our lives. He would never do anything to harm His beloved children, He just promises to be with us every step of the storm. Because of Montreat and talking about our own storms in small group, I learned how important it is to just be kind to everyone as you never know what someone is going through. As I head home from my Mountaintop experience, I leave knowing God and His love, along with the family I will always have at SMPC. Finally, I would like to thank Lindsey Odom for everything she does for us and how much she loves us, church would not be the same without her. I would also like to thank my small group leader, John and journey group leader, Ken for helping me grow in my understanding this week. Finally, I would like to thank Hasmig Holder, Valerie Glover, Steve Williams, Belinda Hull, Curtis and Kara Guy, Aarik Eberhart, Susan Hicks, and Denise Davis for all they did for us this week, from cooking, cleaning and so much more.

Brynn Holder

Because of Montreat, I want to continue to learn in my faith and be kind to everyone. I want to try to come to church and youth group more often when I don't have cheer and encourage my friends to help me do all of these things. One thing that encouraged me this week was when me and a couple of friends went to the pipes and I was super nervous to jump off a big group of kids were cheering me on, telling me I got this and it really made me feel safe and at home knowing people were by my side through it. As I head home from my mountaintop experience at Montreat, I want to always remember that my normal everyday life is someone else's dream and to be forever grateful for friendships that truly do last forever. One thing I don't want to forget as I leave Montreat that we talked a lot about in my small group was how God gave

everyone a different gift and he wants everyone to help each other by sharing our own special gifts around. I enjoyed my small group very much this year and grew so much closer to people I have never met. My favorite part of small group was being able to show my real self and personality and getting to write and read our affirmations.

My prayer for myself or my life after Montreat is to always stay in touch with the people that make the place. And to always remember the place I felt most included and inspired- Montreat. Finally, I would like to thank. Valerie Glover, Hasmig Holder, Belinda Hull, Denise Davis, Susan Hicks, Curtis and Kara Guy, Collin Cushman and Aarik Eberhardt. Most of all I want to thank Lindsay Odom for making every moment so special, whether we are climbing a mountain, driving 3 hours or sitting talking at the table, she is always the light in the room. None of this would be possible with out her!!

Nolan King

Before this week I was not looking forward to going to Montreat, I didn't know many people and thought I wouldn't have fun. I was completely wrong. Collin and Davis and the other guys showed me that it is what you make of it. I had so much fun playing Uno even though I didn't get any punishments. I loved playing poker late at night with all the guys. And I was especially happy to see how much closer I got to God through Montreat. My small group helped all of us to push ourselves out of our comfort zones and really talk about God. As I leave Montreat, I'm very curious to see what God will continue to do in my life. My experience there has pushed me to be more involved in church, go to more youth groups, and be more open to new experiences. I never expected the outcome I had on this week but I'm more than glad that I went and will continue to for years to come. Finally I want to thank my parents for letting me go to Montreat, all of the chaperones and other adults in the trip. But most of all, I would like to thank Lindsey Odom. None of that would have been possible without her.

Natalie Guy

My experience here at Montreat has definitely changed me, as they mentioned in the sermon "No one truly encounters Jesus and leaves the same way they came." This stuck with me because the first day I already felt more connected. It had changed my perspective on a vast majority of opinions and subjects I might not have previously understood. Coming to Montreat was like a hike, first time stepping foot on the path/trail was scary and a bit intimidating. But

then as I get to the top it's beautiful. This is how I felt about my experience and faith. I found God's presence in the midst of my life, whether is feeling joyful, or if it means I have to come face to face with reality, in other words my future. My planned future reflects off of the person I am, this leads to an ongoing struggle to be great and perfect. God reveals to me in many ways what he thinks is right, even if I try to steer elsewhere. God tells me to slow down. And I believe Montreat was a great way to shine the light to me. Montreat taught me that "nothing matters as much as we think," that really stuck out to me. I find myself overthinking everything more than an average person would. I could never find myself having the feeling of relaxation and relief of "it's going to be okay" as people say. I tend to question that quote a lot. Is it really going to be okay? God answered that question with blessing me with a supportive group of friends and family, along with my church and new connections at Montreat. I wanted to thank everyone on supporting me on my journey, which thankfully is just the beginning. Thank you Lindsay, my family, our chaperones, our church.

Luke Estes

While at Montreat for the past week, I have learned how to wonder, and wander, which helped to strengthen my faith. One of the most impactful lessons that I learned was, no matter how far we wander, God is always hearing you and listening to you. Even when we try to run away from God, he will always bring you back. I learned these lessons when we focused on the story of Hagar and Jonah.

After Abram told his wife, Sarai, that they will have as many offspring as there are stars, Sarai was scared and thought to herself she was too old to have children. Therefore, Sarai tells Abram that one of her maids will bear the child. Hagar, therefore, runs away to the desert, and an angel finds her. The angel tells Hagar that the child will be named Ismael, for God heard her story. Sarai then names God "Lahai-Roi", meaning "Living One who sees me". This was impactful for me because, I know even if I wander into wilderness, God will find and hear and see me, as well as guide me.

When God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh, Jonah decides to flee from God. In response, God sends a storm upon the ship Jonah is on. The other sailors on the boat throw Jonah overboard. God orders a great fish to swallow Jonah, and keep him safe. This is important for my life and faith journey because I know that even when I get scared and try to run away, God will always be with me and keep me safe. This story also reveals that when storms and dark times arise, identity is revealed, not created.

Even further, sometimes we feel that, if we wonder or fear about what God is doing for us, that means we have no faith. However, questioning God's plan for us is where faith journeys can start and strengthen. This questioning can come from multiple places. One of these places is when God only provides enough for one day, and we fear that God will not provide the next day. We learned this through Exodus 16:1-36, which is the story of the Israelites feeling that God is neglecting them by letting them starve in the desert. God, therefore, tells Moses that he will rain bread down from heaven, and that none shall be left until morning. When God rains down bread, all of the Israelites receive an equal amount, no matter how much they collected. However, even though they were warned not to, some of them did try to keep the bread until morning. The bread that was kept turned moldy. This story tells us how God will provide for us day by day.

Beyond these Bible stories, the past week made me realize the largest factor that makes Montreat a special time is not the place, but the people you spend the week with. Whether that is our small groups that we are assigned, or predominantly, the youth group at SMPC. I feel very blessed to have such a loving youth group, not only from Lindsay, but also the youth of the group that make you feel welcome no matter who you are. Even if you only attend once a year, when you do, the youth group welcomes you like you were there last time. So I would like to say thank you to our youth group at SMPC.

I would also like to say thank you to my brother, Judah. Judah has been an inspiration to me, both at church, and outside of church. He has helped me in many situations where I have felt lost, or needed someone to be with me. Thank you to the chaperones that went on this trip with us. The time you give up to spend time at Montreat truly cannot be repaid, and what you do is part of what makes Montreat such a fun experience. Lastly, I would like to thank Lindsay Odom, who has been an amazing youth pastor that has fostered the loving youth group at SMPC. Lindsay is one of the biggest reasons Montreat is what it is. She can laugh and cry with us and she can help us understand a scripture passage if we don't quite understand it. I feel very blessed to have Lindsay as my youth pastor, so thank you, Lindsay.

Addison Fraser

Hi, my name is Addison Fraser. For those who don't know me, I just graduated from Marvin Ridge High School and am heading off to NC State. I still can't believe it's actually all over.

I wanted to start off by saying how amazing my very first experience at Montreat was as a freshman because of the upperclassmen boys and girls. You guys made such a huge impact on me and gave me the desire to keep coming to church and youth group. Looking back now from a senior's perspective, I can honestly say you helped shape my high school youth group experience. It truly shows that it's the people, not the place.

Every year at Montreat has been a different kind of special for me, with some people no longer being here and new freshmen that I get to know. Coming into this year, I honestly wasn't sure if I wanted to attend because it was my senior year. I knew it would fly by, and I wanted to spend as much time as I could at home before leaving for college in August. But obviously I chose to come, and let me just say, I'm so happy I did.

I feel like this week's experience definitely flew by. This week was filled with new friendships, lots of laughter, and worship every night, which made me feel closer to God. This year's theme was Wonder and Wander. I learned that it's completely okay to wonder and have questions about God or his plan, but to always remember that he will be by your side no matter what the situation is.

I feel like this theme was especially relevant this year with all the stress of college and everything that has happened over the past year. It's so hard to trust the process, but once you put your trust in God's hands, everything works out the way it's supposed to. It has made me realize how grateful I am. Something that really stood out to me was learning that God's grace will always be with us and that there's no way we can wander too far away from it, even when we feel lost or like we've made mistakes.

I think this theme came at the perfect time as I get ready to head off to college. I want to continue trusting God's plan, spending more time praying, and continuing to ask questions so my faith can keep growing.

This experience is always so eye opening and reminds me how thankful I am for SMPC Youth and all of the chaperones who gave up their time to come with us and make this week possible. Thank you to Aarik Eberhardt, Kara Guy, Valerie Glover, Hasmig Holder, Belinda Hull, Denise Davis, Susan Hicks, Curtis Guy, and Collin Cushman. This week wouldn't have been possible without all of you.

I also want to give a huge thank you to Lindsey Odom. I hope you know how much of an impact you have on people. You create such a welcoming environment for all of us at SMPC, and I couldn't imagine my high school youth group experience any differently. You have such a gift for connecting with all of us through God and making it so much easier to understand and grow in our faith. I don't know what we would do without you. Love you so much, and I can't thank you enough.

Lastly, my prayer after Montreat is that I will continue to grow in my faith, remember what I learned this week, and trust God wherever He leads me.

I also wanted to say to any youth who is reading this trust the process. It might feel overwhelming at times, but every experience you have is there for a reason and has something

to teach you. I 100% recommend coming to Montreat. It's such an amazing experience, and it's a place where you can truly be yourself without worrying about being judged.

Emery Hicks

This week at Montreat has been so fun and has taught me so many new things about my faith and I've created so many more friendships. Montreat creates such a safe space for me to fully ask questions that I have in my faith/God and it creates such a wonderful space to meet new people. I love hearing what other people have to say in my small group and it helps me deeper understand more about God and my faith some of the few things that stuck with me during scripture this week was that God always sees you and that you're never invisible to God, no matter how far you wander even if you wander through wilderness God is there and he hears you and sees all of you even if you can't find the words to say it he hears you. Also God's path might not be what you had planned for your life that's just God's way of building you up and building your life. One of my favorite memories at Montreat this week was holding snakes and hanging out with some of my small group friends because it's something I've never done before and I didn't even do last year. This year I got even closer with my small group and it was so fun because of Montreat I've realized more things that God does in my life because sometimes I don't even realize it, but this week has really helped me with that. The theme was wonder and wander and I love the theme this year because it really helped explain that if you have questions about God/ faith that's okay because questions and doubt comes with trusting in God because not everything always makes sense and that's also okay. To wander is okay cause God is still with you at the end of the day. Overall, Montreat is just such an overall fun experience not only meeting new people but also with our back home group it's such a safe place and lastly I can't wait for Montreat next year!!!

Judah Estes

Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by his power at work within us;" Ephesians 3:20 CEB. This scripture given to us exemplifies Montreat for me and the SMPC youth as a whole.

The week's theme was wonder and wander, we studied how God is wonderful and blesses all of us who wander. This speaks to my life and faith journey. One particular part of the week that stood out for me was Thursday, when we focused on the idea that God is able to do more than we ask or imagine.

This reminded me of 2 years ago when I first came to Montreat. I could not have imagined the feeling of belonging that I would experience. I was not very familiar with anyone going into my

first Montreat. However, the youth group instantly accepted me, displaying the extension of God's unconditional love that we learned of this past week.

Before my first Montreat, I could have never imagined the people God was going to place in my path. I am so very blessed to be a part of the SMPC youth family.

That first Montreat was only the beginning. Since then I have grown closer to the youth group than I could have ever imagined 4 years ago. Each Montreat has built our bonds to unbreakable levels.

Montreat and the resulting community built within the youth group alongside my relationship with God has given me unshakable confidence in wandering through my later high school years. I leaned into leadership within my school, serving as student Vice President for my band program among other positions. In the community I volunteered and coached baseball. In the church I sang solos and served on the worship committee. As a freshman, I could never have seen myself doing these things I have stepped into. I truly attribute this massive personal growth to the love shown to me and the confidence given to me by God and our youth group. I have become who I am today in very large part because of the relationships I have built through Montreat and SMPC. God has blessed me immeasurably by guiding my family to wander into SMPC 4 years ago.

This week at Montreat we were also given another piece of scripture: "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." Isaiah 43:19 NIV. This especially spoke to me this week as I head to college this fall. Not only will I carry the love of SMPC and our youth group with me, I will have God to guide me. He will provide me with ways in the wilderness and streams in the wastelands. He will provide for me more than I could ever ask or imagine. He will guide me through college and into whatever he has on my path for me in my life.

I would firstly like to thank the chaperones of Montreat this year: Aarik Eberhardt, Kara Guy, Valerie Glover, Hasmig Holder, Belinda Hull, Denise Davis, Susan Hicks, Curtis Guy, and Collin Cushman. Without you, none of these experiences that the youth have had would be possible. Thank you.

I would also like to thank the youth group as a whole for being loving, accepting, and guiding me to become the person I am today.

I would especially like to thank my fellow class of 26', Logan, Caroline, Lilly Claire, Addison, Jilly, Haley, and Elizabeth. Thank you for giving me a place to truly be myself, thank you for the acceptance and community you have shown me and all those in our youth group. I will never forget the blessing it has been to share Montreat with you. I know that you will go on to do

great things in college and beyond, and I wish you the best of luck in each of your journeys.

And to our youth pastor, Rev. Lindsey Odom. Thank you for being the center of what makes this youth group so special. Thank you for actively seeking out relationships with each and every youth. Thank you for fostering the family we have in our youth group. Thank you for loving us unconditionally just as God does. None of this would be possible without the effort you put into our youth group.

This week has been the most transformative and impactful of my life. I will never forget it. It helped me look back on my life and realize the blessings that God has given me through SMPC and Montreat. It helped me have confidence that I will be successful in college and life because of God and the entire SMPC community.

Charleston Bates

I was able to connect with God through the small group and my church group. Firstly, my small group allowed me to interact with individuals I had never met before, allowing for new faith based conversations to spark. Moreover, this group allowed me to share my faith with a previously foreign community. This experience transformed my ability to interact with unfamiliar faces, and strengthened my confidence in discussing my faith. On the other hand, my church group acted as a familiar middle ground with inputs from various small groups that allowed me to discuss the impact other groups had on our faith. Additionally, it felt comforting and safe to discuss faith topics with familiar faces. Overall, the Montreat experience had a profound impact on my faith, allowing me to interact with both known and new individuals on a deep level

Colin Lee

During my time at Montreat Youth Conference, I have grown closer to God through keynotes, small groups, and worship. My favorite memories were whitewater rafting during free time on Wednesday, and everyone reflecting on their experience on Friday night once we got back to the house. Last week, we followed the theme wondering and wandering. The most impactful passage that we read this week was Genesis 16. This passage was about an Egyptian slave named Hagar, who fled her home, met God, and gained the courage to go back. This taught me that God can reach you, even in your darkest times. I experienced God's grace this week during small group discussions, because it was a space that everyone was able to openly share without judgement. One person who encouraged me this week was my small group leader, Matthew, because of his willingness to help when I didn't fully understand the passages. One thing that I don't want to forget as I leave Montreat is that no matter where you wander, God will always be

with you.