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There's still work to be done.



From Jonathan Kleppinger, board chair of The Wesley Foundation at ECU:

The evening of Dec. 8, 2007, I attended a Christmas party at the Wesley Foundation on ECU's campus (above is a picture I took of a spoons game that night). We had a white-elephant gift exchange where we passed wrapped gifts to the left or the right as we heard Ken Southgate read the words "who" and "Grinch" in "The Grinch who Stole Christmas." I tore open the gift that ended in my lap: a mannequin leg, which is a whole other story and much less important than another gift I didn't end up with: a can of Big K root beer.

The root beer ended up with a girl named Courtney Tennill, who I knew and had met before but hadn't spent any time with. Later that evening, I happened to be chatting on AIM (if you know, you know; if you don't, it stands for AOL Instant Messenger) with Courtney, and she mentioned she didn't like root beer. I had some Diet Coke, which she did like, and I offered to come to her dorm and trade her a Diet Coke for the root beer. I went to her room in Sullivan Hall, and we talked for four hours.

It wasn't too many days after that when we both knew we were going to get married (but we waited more than a few days for that). Now we've been married for almost 14 years and have five kids (see photo at right), one of whom has the names Wesley and Sullivan.



When I was on campus, The Wesley was a "home base." It was a place people belonged -- a place where you could just "be," and a place where people formed relationships that would impact the rest of their lives. Now in my second year as a member of The Wesley's board of directors and my first as its chair, I can attest that this is still happening today (and it was happening long before I found out about it).

It's critical that you, as those who hold The Wesley close to your heart, understand that in the midst of any changes on ECU's campus and in our world and in the United Methodist Church, God is still using The Wesley as a ministry to ECU students, and we still need your support for this to continue.

Our board of directors has representation from six different decades at The Wesley (photos at right from very early decades) and from the tenures of all four different directors. You can read some testimonials from these folks further below. At a meeting this summer, we discussed what The Wesley has meant to us and to others over all these years, but the same words kept coming up for everyone of all ages: Hope. Belonging. Care. Safe. Kindness. These have been unchanging.



In that context, it's important to note one thing in our UMC landscape that has recently changed -- and four other things that haven't.

What has changed:

1. About half of the Kentucky Annual Conference's churches have disaffiliated and are no longer UMC as of June 2023. This is related to issues of human sexuality, and there is not enough room here to explain and discuss all the details and intricacies of the situation. (If you want accurate, specific details, I would encourage you not to "ask around" or listen to hearsay but rather to find the "Human Sexuality" section on the UMC website, and specifically the FAQ post "[What is the church's position on homosexuality?](#)")

What has not changed:

1. The Wesley at ECU is still an extension ministry of the Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.
2. The official UMC stances on homosexuality in the Book of Discipline (added first in 1972) have not changed.
3. The Wesley continues to be a safe, loving and welcoming place for students to gather together to experience Jesus, grow in their faith and serve others. The building at 401 University Drive in Richmond has been this specific kind of environment for longer than many of us have been alive, for longer than many churches have been UMC, for longer than there has even been a stance on homosexuality in the Book of Discipline.
4. There are still lonely, disconnected, hurting students at ECU who need to find hope, belonging and safety. And The Wesley still stands as a beacon of these things on ECU's campus -- a place committed to seeing every student loved, happy and whole in Jesus Christ.

Wherever you are now, whatever denomination or church you claim or don't claim, if you've been ministered to through The Wesley at any point, I hope you'll consider praying for and supporting our ongoing ministry. There is still work to be done.

- Jonathan Kleppinger (jonathan.kleppinger@gmail.com)

Board Member testimonial: Olivia Leonard

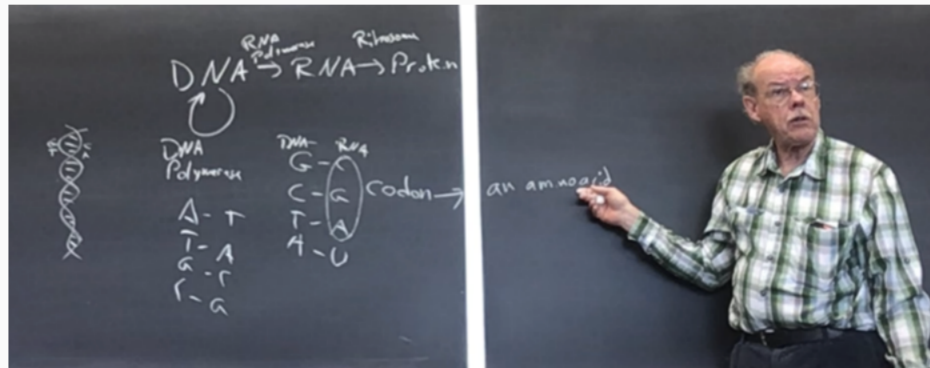
I was a student at ECU and involved with the Wesley Foundation from 2016-2020.

However, my connection to the Wesley began much sooner. My parents met and fell in love at ECU's Wesley Foundation in the early 90s. So it was never a question that I would become involved in this ministry when I decided to attend ECU as well. My own experience at the Wesley can be best described as "home." If I was not in class, I was there. I probably spent more time there than in my own dorm. And while it became my home, the people there became my family. The relationships that I built while a student there are still some of the closest and deepest relationships in my life. The atmosphere that the Wesley emulates so naturally is one that provides the environment for such relationships to flourish. It is through this kind of fellowship that my faith was able to grow and thrive through my time in college. As cliché as it sounds, I would not be where or who I am today without this ministry.



Board Member testimonial: Martin Brock

Martin Brock is now retired from the chemistry faculty at ECU, but is still an active part time instructor there. He has been associated with the ECU Wesley Foundation since the early 1990s, following in his father's footsteps who had been active in his college days at the UC Berkeley Wesley Foundation in the '40s. Dr. Brock's advising schedule put him into direct contact with numerous students.



That experience continues to give him insight on student perspectives, needs, and their changing understandings as to their own roles in the world. He has long felt that a continued presence of ECU faculty in the workings of the Wesley at ECU is a major component of its effectiveness.

Board Member testimonial: Whitley Henson

Hello, my name is Whitley Henson. I am the Director of Communications and the Director of Youth & Young Adult Ministries at Central Appalachian Missionary Conference. I graduated from ECU in 2021! The Wesley Foundation Campus Ministry has had a profound impact on my life. The joy and togetherness the ministry brings is mind blowing. There are multiple opportunities for college students to express their love for one another and to find themselves in Christ. As someone that grew up United Methodist, I loved having a place that I could call home away from home. I am thankful that I attended the WF and have so many beautiful memories from my college years. I hope to inspire and encourage those around me to help continue to support this wonderful ministry.



Give / Facilities Fundraiser

Due to the reduction in UMC congregations in Kentucky, we are anticipating a decline in the conference grant The Wesley receives, which is a substantial portion of the budget. If you ever want to contribute financially to The Wesley, you can click the button below to find information on our website's Support page. We have also been publicizing a facilities fundraiser; you can find that along with some details about this need on our website [here](#).

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