

THE FLAME

**Semesterly Newsletter From
Wesley at Virginia Tech**

Volume No. 61 | Spring 2025



Wesley This Semester

This semester at Wesley has been nothing short of amazing! Through our normal events like family dinners and worship, and other bigger events like Youth Retreat, and Spring Break, we continue to Love Out Loud in many new and exciting ways. From all of us here at Wesley, we appreciate all of your support. We look forward to continuing the fun in the Fall Semester.

In This Issue

Campus Ministry Update

Updates from our Student Campus Minister and the rest of the Core Ministry Team, and a few other areas in Wesley.

Stories Of Impact

Features from students involved and around Wesley. This section looks into how Wesley has impacted our students this semester.

Development Update

A look into progress we have made with our development goals as well as information about giving.

Alumni Announcements

Events happening in the lives of our alumni and their families.

A Word From Bret

Insight from our Campus Minister, Bret Gresham, on what has been happening at Wesley this semester.

A Note from Your Board Chair

It has been another great year at Wesley. The board is fully supportive of all of the ongoing student ministries and really appreciates the extra effort put forth by the students for Giving Day. The student leadership team is faith-based, energetic and responsible, which are not common qualities in our society today. Bret and Kelly lead the students as role models, directors and building repairmen as they spread God's grace within Wesley, on campus and in the community. The board would like to give special thanks to Paige Swaim-Presley for her development efforts — we wouldn't be where we are today in the development campaign or the operating budget without the time and effort that she has put in.

The Wesley building continues to show its age. Our capital campaign is underway to raise desperately needed funds to reconfigure and rehabilitate the building for the next 50 years of ministry. Please be in prayer for this campaign and for how you can be a part of it.

-Fred Gibson, Class of 1978, Wesley at VT Board Chair



Hello! from Wesley's Newest Student Campus Minister

Hello everyone, my name is Mady Mitchell and I am the new Student Campus Minister (SCM) at Wesley! This semester has been one full of growth and positivity. Every single one of the ministry areas has been busy planning events, serving with the local community, and as always sharing time in fellowship with one another. I want to take a second to send out a huge thank you to the previous Core Ministry Team (CMT). They have made such an incredible impact on the Wesley community and have left huge shoes to fill which is always something incredible to see. They set a standard for how CMT should act and function in order to better serve Wesley all together.

Of course, Wesley is still in great hands with the new CMT! Each member is deeply committed to this place and the people in it, and are filled with so much love that is inspiring. I am so excited to work with this team as their Student Campus Minister and continue to make Wesley the place that it deserves to be for all people. Over these past couple of weeks I have already enjoyed my time and have found a new sense of commitment to this community. I am so excited to continue to grow in my leadership abilities, my faith, with my relationships, and continue to grow closer to God and the students at Wesley. And have so much fun as I do!



Meet Our 2025-2026 Campus Ministry Team!



Mady Mitchell, SCM
Junior
Major: Computer Science
"I strive to foster an inclusive and open community through fellowship and consistent communication."



Tiffany Bash, Discipleship
Minister
Junior
Major: Building Construction
"I love Wesley's variety of CoGs and how we all share a big moment of individual prayer during our end-of-Semester Prayer Vigil."



Tyler Allen, Fellowship Minister
Sophomore
Major: Accounting
"I love bringing our community together with fellowship!"



Emma Anderson, Mission Minister
Junior
Major: Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in English and Education
"I love Missions at Wesley because it allows us as students to truly love out loud to our Virginia Tech community as well as the greater Blacksburg community!"



Luke Henshaw, Outreach Minister
Sophomore
Major: Building Construction
"I am so excited to help Wesley's community continue to grow this coming year!"



Nate Birchfield, Worship Minister
Junior
Major: Forestry
"Worship at Wesley has become a consistent part of my weekly routine and I am very excited to serve another year as Worship Minister!"

Student Impact: Freshman Spotlight

My name is Hannah Blake, and I am a freshman majoring in Computer Science with a minor in Human-Computer Interaction. I'm from Knoxville, Tennessee. At home, I went to Church Street United Methodist Church. In my free time, I like to hang out with friends, hike, or play Pokemon.

I had known about the Wesley Foundation at UTK, so I knew to look for Tech's once I committed here. Over the summer, I got a swag box in the mail with a note and a Wesley waterbottle. I still use that water bottle everyday! The first time I went to Wesley was the cookout, which was the day after I moved in. I knew absolutely nobody, but everyone was so kind and welcoming. This welcoming community was the reason I kept showing up and is my favorite part of Wesley.

One night at worship, I met another freshman named Amanda, and we became fast friends! The night after we met, we went to a football game together and have been close ever since. Wesley has a way of bringing people together.

I spend a lot of time at Wesley. I attend the self-care and FAC (Freshman Affinity Cog) cogs and regularly go to worship and family dinner. I also sometimes spend time doing homework and hanging out with people in the lobby. Next year, I'll be even more involved with Wesley! I will be a part of the Discipleship Team and FiG (Friends in Grace) star. I'll also be co-leading FAC!



Our Seniors





Youth Retreat

Hey guys! My name is Dori Mitchell, and I am a junior majoring in Animal Sciences and Biochemistry with a love for ice cream, big horses, and the outdoors (on a sunny day, of course). I also have a love for connection, and, for those who don't know, Wesley's Youth Retreat is a great way the Wesley students connect with and serve the local youth in our district. This year, we worshipped, discussed, collaborated, and grew together through our theme of "Can't Stop the Feeling". This theme was inspired in part by the deep, insightful emotional characters of the Inside Out movies. The Youth Retreat Planning Team (myself, Bret, and seven great, diverse, and creatively minded team members) believed it was important to shed light on complex emotional themes such navigating many emotions at once, emotions through different phases of life, anxiety, anger, envy, and more for our youth. Over the weekend we spent three worships and small group sessions together at Wesley, and then we spent a culminating worship together at Camp Alta Mons. Throughout the weekend, over 60 youth from our local district laughed, danced, sang, and experienced faith development alongside over 30 Wesley students. All of our dedicated Wesley students helped to facilitate the weekend by providing supportive ears to listen, energy for the vibrance of the weekend, and music for worship to list a few. Some of the highlights of the weekend were campus tours, deep small group conversations, dances during worship, lip sync battle (a Wesley student classic) and the new addition... silent disco! (You've never had so much fun surrounded by so many off key voices- it's awesome!). In summary, Wesley continues to Love out Loud through community and faith development within its walls, in VT and Blacksburg area, AND extending into the lives of our local youth- an influential time for all involved and what a weekend to remember!

-By Dori Mitchell





Fellowship

Hi everyone, I'm Tyler Allen and I'm Wesley's new Fellowship Minister! We've had a semester full of really cool fellowship opportunities for our students, and I'm excited to share it with you.

To start off, our themed family dinners have been a Wesley favorite. We rolled out the red carpet for Oscar Night, invited friends for Wesley + 1, dressed up as friends from Wesley for Dress Wesley Night, and we're having a hoedown for our Wesley Rodeo! We've also played a ton of different intramural sports. At the beginning of the semester, we played 4v4 Wallyball and 7v7 innertube water polo. We made the water polo playoffs, and even won our first playoff game! We hope to win even more next semester.

For the second part of the semester, we are playing 7v7 ultimate frisbee, which has been a ton of fun so far. Additionally, we have had a ton of fun events, such as two trivia Tuesdays, hosted by our SCM Mady Mitchell! We also hosted Loud and Proud Trivia Night at the end of April, which will be a ton of fun. Fellowship hosted a Four Square tournament after spring break, had a cleaning day before Wesley Weekend, a Super Bowl potluck and watch party, and a laser tag outing!

For the rest of the semester, we have a group running/walking the Run for Remembrance 5k, a hike in May, and our Cracker Barrel breakfast on Reading Day! As you can see, we've had a jam-packed semester, and I'm excited to carry this momentum into the fall!

-By Tyler Allen





Outreach

Hello there, I am Luke Henshaw and I am the new Outreach Minister!! Wesley's Outreach Ministry has been nothing short of amazing this past semester. We have held a wide variety of events, on campus and at the building, that have helped grow this amazing community.

To kick off the semester, we held 12 unique events over the first two weeks of the Spring semester. We introduced a few new events, including Mario Kart Night, Silent Disco, and Trivia Night. All of these events were so much fun to plan and host. Some of these events were so much fun, we have already done them multiple times this semester or are planning to in the near future!

Then in February, Outreach Team helped plan and lead Wesley's strategy for Giving Day at Virginia Tech. We raised \$30,000, with over 400 unique donors, in 24 hours of giving!

Outreach team then turned the focus to the last big event of the year, Loud & Proud Trivia Night!! Unfortunately, for all of the remaining weekends of the semester, Wesley already had plans and we couldn't host Pride Picnic as per usual.

As a result, our Outreach team pivoted and created the idea of a more lowkey event based around a Trivia Night!! This event was nothing short of amazing and we are so thankful for everyone who helped!!

We are now looking at the start of next semester, specifically Weeks of Welcome! This is a big opportunity for Wesley to get a lot of new people involved with the amazing community here at Wesley. We are planning some really awesome events that we are so excited for!!

Lastly, I just want to say, this community is so incredibly special! We have so many amazing people who care about this place and want to see it grow! Wesley wouldn't be the same without the hard work of so many dedicated and caring people. I can't wait to see what comes from next year, thank you! Follow us on instagram: @vtwesley and Facebook: @Wesley at Virginia Tech to hear about all of our events and news.

-By Luke Henshaw

Missions

Hello! My name is Emma Anderson, and I am the new Missions Minister! Our Missions team has worked hard this Spring semester Loving out Loud in our VT and greater Blacksburg community.

We started our semester by joining BUMC for Rise Against Hunger. Between church members and students, we packaged around 15,000 meals.

Shortly after that event, we hosted a Ministry Collaboration event where we packaged bags for To Our House (a shelter program being held at BUMC), wrote positive affirmations and posted them around campus, spent time in fellowship, and had a few band members lead us in worship. There was also some impromptu Al stand-up comedy which made for a lot of laughs.

April was a busy month for our Missions team. We started the month by participating in Virginia Tech's Big Event. 18 of our students were able to Love out Loud by removing brush, working on building a deck, and more. The week after the Big Event, Wesley spent an evening packaging food bag for local MCPS students that face food insecurity at Micah's Backpack.

Fun 143

This Spring semester, we have continued to serve 5 kids on a weekly basis. Our tutoring group consists of four 6th graders and one 9th grader along with about 8 total tutors covering the two sessions per week. It has been so exciting to see a large group of tutors passionate about FUN143 this year, and these mentors have done great work mentoring and tutoring this energetic bunch! During the fall, we collectively set unique, academic goals for each kid to work towards. Thankfully, with hard work and dedication from both kids and tutors, the kids were able to meet (or make significant progress towards) their goals.



We will close out the semester by having a 209 Tabling Drive on the last day of classes to help stock our in-house pantry before summer begins.

I am so thankful for the amazing work this community and the Missions team have done this semester, and I can't wait to see what we will do in the Fall!

-By Emma Anderson



To celebrate this hard work, we took them to play laser tag, and everyone had so much fun. All the kids were overfilled with joy during their first laser tag experience! I have absolutely loved my time serving and leading this program, and I am so hopeful and excited for the growth of FUN143 moving forward!

-By Emma Anderson



209 Marketplace

Hello, I'm Josh Hansell, and I am currently a senior studying Materials Science and Engineering on the 4+1 BS/MS track. Since joining the Wesley community last fall, I've been an active member of the community with special involvements in the Fellowship and Missions Teams. This year, I've been the "star"/ Wesley leader responsible for Wesley's in-house food pantry, 209 Marketplace. 209 Marketplace serves to help a wide, diverse demographic of Virginia Tech students with food insecurities. This semester, I have continued to work to increase the quantity and variety of food in the pantry by working with current and new donors and continuing to guide and participate in tabling/donation drive events.

This semester we have continued to grow dramatically in numbers even since just last semester. Across the two days of operation, (NLCF on Mondays and Wesley serving Thursdays) we serve about 35-50 people a week. In addition, this service really encompasses even more individuals as some of the guests are also feeding other family members. Keeping the pantry stocked has continued to be a challenge this semester with this influx of visitors. Sources of dry good donations continue to be graciously provided on a consistent basis by BUMC's "Us+ One" mission on the first Sunday of the month.

In addition, tabling events are held outside local grocery stores for donations by community members.

These have been led by Wesley students, Greek life organizations, Seek Christian Community, and others. For each of these types of events and unique donors, an updated list of the high-demand items is provided to assume for a diversity of items and that most needs are met. Over this semester in particular, the increased prices of milk and eggs have also been a topic of discussion for the Wesley/NLCF leadership. Currently, this combined leadership group is working with VT and other outside resources to help supplement the funds currently allocated to these needs. The goal of course being to still provide quality, nutritional goods while balancing the greater sustainability of the pantry.

This leadership position over the past year, as 209 Marketplace "star", has given me the opportunity to serve a sub-community in need within the greater VT and Blacksburg community. This opportunity has been a challenging and thought provoking one, but I've enjoyed being able to actively engage in Wesley's Mission's team in such a valuable position. I am glad I have been able to serve in a time of growth and need for 209, and I hope support for the pantry will continue to growth in the future and under the next era of leadership. Thank you to all who continue to support 209 Marketplace and related efforts where Wesley continues to Love out Loud.

-By Josh Hansell



Worship

Worship this semester has been wonderful! Each and every Wednesday at 7:30 (except for snow days) we gathered in the auditorium to worship. Our Worship Team, A/V team, and Band has put in many hours of thought, planning and practice throughout the school year and have done a fantastic job of making our services happen!

Since January, we have had three different sermon series. Brought back by popular demand, Wesley Wrapped focused on a different Wesley-favorite worship song each week, paired with a message from Bret as well as a student testimony. Our next series, Unsung Heroes, touched on characters from the bible who are rarely mentioned in addition to well known characters, but from a different perspective. Our most recent series, Pillars, took a deep dive into Prayer, Scripture, and Worship- the pillars of our faith and how they can look different for different people.

One of Worship Team's goals for the semester was to increase student leadership and engagement during worship. Many Wednesdays, students were given the opportunity to speak through testimonies, full sermons, or discussion prompts. These opportunities provided a wide range of perspectives from students that deepened each message and gave new excitement to each week!

One of the community's favorite aspects of Worship is music! Our student praise band, Faith Unshaken, plays five songs each week. Outgoing band leader, Jacob Henshaw, has made an effort to choose songs based on the message of the week, which has taken our music to the next level! In addition, Jacob has done a fantastic job of mixing community favorites with new music to keep things fresh and exciting!

Overall worship this semester has been a blast! Each Wednesday we provide a space for students within our Wesley community as well as the surrounding Virginia Tech community to experience God in new and exciting ways. We are all excited to continue into the 2025-26 school year!

-By Nate Birchfield





Discipleship

As we reflect on the spring semester, we are filled with gratitude for the growth and vibrant connections within our ministry. This season has been a time of renewal, not just in nature but within our community as well. From meaningful events and engaging activities to moments of deep reflection and personal growth, we've witnessed the power of coming together in faith.

One of the highlights of this semester is going to be our 24-hour Prayer Vigil Event on May 8th, where Wesley Students and folks of the community come together for worship, a time of prayer, and reflect on their semester as it comes to a close. It is a reminder of the strength and support we find in each other, in our faith, and in ourselves.

Throughout the semester, we've also embraced opportunities to serve and connect with others. Through our Communities of Grace (CoGs), we are able to spend time with fellow Wesley Students and enjoy time of community, bible study, self-care, mindfulness, or just meeting others who may become some of your best friends.

Our Friends in Grace (FiGs) have also been continuing this semester. This program connects two students who are intentionally paired together depending on what they're looking for. This could be anything from having someone to grow in faith with or simply a friend to check in with over lunch.

As we approach the end of the semester, we look forward to the continued growth and transformation that spring symbolizes. We are excited about the upcoming opportunities to gather and support one another as the semester comes to a close and a new one begins.

-By Tiffaney Bash

How Can You Help?

Do you love the incredible ministry that Wesley students are doing? You can help directly support Wesley's ministry by becoming a Wesley 23 donor! Wesley 23 donors also receive a special monthly email from Bret highlighting Wesley news, students, and prayer requests for the ministry. To find out more about becoming part of Wesley 23, scan the QR code to the right!





Wesley Weekend

More than 80 students, parents, alumni and friends had a great time at Wesley Weekend 2025! The weekend began when over 25 people gathered for a Friday night social hour at Eastern Divide. On Saturday, Wesley hosted an afternoon open house with snacks and, of course, a volleyball game! Saturday night, Wesley Weekend attendees had a fantastic time reconnecting and reminiscing over dinner at Blacksburg UMC. After dinner staff, students, and alumni shared what Wesley has meant to them over the years. The Rev. Leigh Anne Taylor directed a Wesley Singers reunion choir to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wesley Singers this year. The joint student-alumni choir, along with the Wesley praise band and Wesley student liturgists, led worship at BUMC on Sunday morning. Alumnus Brian Henshaw and current student Ella Fitzgerald preached during the 8:30am service. Brian and student Nathan Michaelson preached during the 11:00am service. They each reflected on the ways God has transformed their lives and faith through the ministry of Wesley, and what that means for them today. The weekend inspired and uplifted all who attended, and we already can't wait to see everyone again next year!

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Finance Report

Through the end of March 2025, Wesley has a net deficit of \$12,393.63. We are anticipating receiving a large lump sum to support programming from the Tyndall and Calhoun endowments in the coming days. In the coming weeks, we also anticipate receiving all of the generous support that was given to Wesley through the Virginia Tech February Giving Day. When these monies are added in, we anticipate Wesley to be running a surplus. As of March 31, 2025, Wesley had received \$20,497.59 in Development fundraising which is a good start toward our annual goal of \$102,588.30. Thanks to everyone for their generous support of Wesley! -By Matt Beeken

Donors: December 1, 2024 - March 31, 2025

Thank you for your generosity!

Aaron Rhyne	Brittlea K. Brown	Davis Roberson
Aaron S. Blake	Candace L. Baracat-Donovan	Debbie Baldwin
Aaron W. Gresham	Caroline Harvey	Debra Stoudt
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Donors: December 1, 2024 - March 31, 2025

Thank you for your generosity!

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John L. Mitchell	Marie David	Rev. and Dr. Brad Dulaney
John Tinsley	Mark P. Hansell	Rev. Kathleen Overby-Webster
Jonas Collins	Mark W. Sumner	Richard A. Gillespie
Jonathan Page	Martin T. Mitchell	Richard J. and Phyllis W. Geoghegan
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Joseph Mullen	Mary Kay Jackson	Rick and Alexis Lewis
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Joshua D. Walters	Matthew and Melinda Borrie	Rick and Anne Ellis
Joshua M. Hansell	Matthew D. Shealy	Rick and Natalie Miller
Joshua McCauley	Matthew and Kelly Beeken	Riley Araujo
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Julia W. Boles	Meredith Petty	Robert C. Clancy

Donors: December 1, 2024 - March 31, 2025

Thank you for your generosity!

Robert D. Rhyne	Stephen and Katelyn Rossi	Tyler J. Allen
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Thank You to Reverend Paige Swaim-Presley

We would like to thank Rev. Paige Swaim-Presley for her work as our Director of Development over the past year. As of May 1, 2025, Paige has decided to step down from this position and our Personnel Team is currently working to find someone to step into this role.

Paige worked to increase our Development (Annual Fund Giving) and we had our best year ever raising over \$90,000! We wish her nothing but the best as she continues her ministry at Blacksburg UMC and Camp Alta Mons.

Any correspondence to her should be directed to Bret or Kelly at this time.



A United Methodist Campus Ministry

Alumni Announcements

Jonathan Reynolds (class of 2019) married Destinee (McComack) Reynolds September 27, 2024, in Princeton, Texas.



Samantha Torgersen McElwee (class of 2010) is being ordained as an Elder on May 10, 2025.



A Word from Bret

Prior to Wesley Weekend, an alumnus spoke to me about a song that was very special to the Wesley Singers during Glenn's 35 years of ministry called "Love Grows Here." When I was appointed to Wesley at Virginia Tech, I was very cognizant of the incredible ministry of the Wesley Singers over the years. I was also very aware of the closing benediction, "A Closing Prayer," and its significance (still today) in our beloved ministry. I was, however, unaware of the "Love Grows Here" significance when I, and our student leadership, decided to use the mission statement, "Love Out Loud," to identify Wesley's purpose in ministry over my tenure as the campus minister.

As I reflected on these two statements, "Love Grows Here" and "Love Out Loud," I realized how both of them state so succinctly who we are at Wesley over the many years of ministry on Virginia Tech's campus. Love has grown at Wesley throughout its history! Not only have there been many relationships forged (both in marriage and in friendships), but, more importantly, that the love that has been grown at Wesley is a love rooted in the grace and love of our Triune God and it has been shared significantly with so many people.

That love has grown so immensely that we can't keep it to ourselves and, therefore, we love out loud in a community and world that so desperately needs the big, abundant love of God.

Testimony after testimony on Wesley Weekend spoke about this incredible love that has been grown and shared at Wesley over the years! This unconditional, grace-filled love is a hallmark of our ministry. The many students that have stepped through the doors of Wesley, on the intramural field, by our tabling, gone on a Spring Break Mission Trip or Tour, sung in the Wesley Singers, sat at dinner in the MPR, gone to a bible study or small group, been at a youth retreat, lived in the basement, or one of the many other ministries Wesley provides have experienced this life-changing (and life-saving) love because of each of you! This is true for the years gone by, now, and the years to come!

Love has (and continues) to grow here calling us to "Love Out Loud" to students who yearn and crave God's love each and every day. Thank you for being a vital part of this amazing ministry!
