

The Wesley Foundation at Austin Peay State University

Rev. Mary Kate Myers, Wesley Foundation Director

As of August 2023, The Wesley Foundation at Austin Peay State University (APSU) is recognized as an active campus organization for the first time since 2020. It has been an academic year filled with much learning about the context of the university including the needs of the students, and there has been so much support and encouragement along the way. The Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The APSU Wesley Foundation Board, Hilldale United Methodist Church, and the APSU staff and administration have been vital in the endeavor to revitalize this ministry as God does what God does best: afford new life in ways that far surpass human expectations. The APSU Wesley Foundation would also like to acknowledge our deep appreciation for Mrs. Celena Spiva who oversees our financial business and has been invaluable in the process of learning the lay of the land; we would not be in our current era of existence if not for her tireless willingness to help us however she can. Additionally, The Wesley Foundation gives God thanks for the gift of Allison Harris who is not only a member of Hilldale UMC (the host church for APSU Wesley in the congregation-based model for campus ministries in the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference), but who enthusiastically agreed to serve as the student president for our organization as soon as she learned that The Wesley Foundation would be returning to campus. The diligence and persistence with which she has worked to ensure the Wesley was reinstated is a gift far greater than we could ever fully express to her, and we are eternally grateful—for all she has done and for all she *is* as our fearless leader.

One of the things we learned at the outset of the fall semester is that many students are lonely, have a difficult time making friends, and often retreat to their dorm room as soon as classes are finished. In response, we knew we needed to offer opportunities for students to engage in community with their peers. As the spring semester nears its end, The Wesley Foundation is gathering together at least three times a week: “The Connection” is a Sunday school class that meets at Hilldale UMC; “Wesley Wednesdays” is a two-hour tabling event in the University Center on campus where students are able to engage with our organization and take items they may need like snacks or feminine hygiene products; and “Wondering with Wesley” is a one-hour book study that takes place on campus. Through each of these weekly events, we have had the opportunity to engage with students in a number of different ways. From Bible study with “The Connection,” meeting and getting to know students and their needs on a deeper level with Wesley Wednesdays, and digging deeper into who we’re called to be as Christians and leaders through Wondering with Wesley, it has been amazing to watch the minds and hearts of students grow as they learn that The Wesley Foundation at APSU cares deeply about them as beloved children of God.

The Wesley Foundation currently has a core group of four students who attend the majority of weekly gatherings and are excited to return to the ministry this fall. Additionally, there are approximately fifteen students who engage with the Wesley community at least once a week and have begun to share their hearts and lives with our organization. We are prayerful that next semester we will see some of these students make a committed decision to join the Wesley community so that we can continue to learn about and grow in faith together. Along with finding a weekly routine that seems to meet students where they are both physically and spiritually, there are two additional events that The Wesley Foundation at APSU sponsored and organized this semester: “Pasta “Pak-ing” Party and THE HOUSE.” The PPP was the result of one of our students being a culinary major and the core group’s shared conviction that it is necessary to serve the community as part of our commitment to faith in Jesus Christ. Our students, Sarah and Danyelle, made a delicious pasta dinner and after we all ate together, we packed supplies for a local organization called YAIPak that seeks to support unhoused persons as well as children who find themselves in emergent situations. Thanks to the faithfulness of APSU Wesley Foundation supporters, we were able to pack bags for teens filled with small lego sets, fidget toys, and journals, clothes for infants to elementary aged children, along with diapers, wipes, soap, toothbrushes, and toothpaste. Tomorrow, our core group will travel to YAIPak headquarters to drop off supplies, tour their facility, and learn more about how Wesley can return ready to partner with the organization this fall.

THE HOUSE is a missional effort born out of the realization that many students on APSU’s campus are food insecure. As the semester comes to a close, funds on their required meal plans are dwindling if not already completely diminished and many of them do not have financial resources available to them for food beyond those meal plans. THE HOUSE will function as a free grocery store for students to take twelve food items of their choice, no questions asked. Additionally, feminine hygiene products will be made available for students who need them but do not have access to them via finances or transportation as we have learned this is a serious need on our campus.

The only thing that will be required of students to participate is their APSU student email address in order that we can share with them when THE HOUSE will be offered in the coming academic year.

God has been faithful and generous to our Wesley family in this season of revitalization. There have been several challenges and just as many (if not more) celebrations. Our hearts are full of gratitude, hope, and excitement as our first spring semester draws to a close, and we cannot wait to see where God will lead us next!