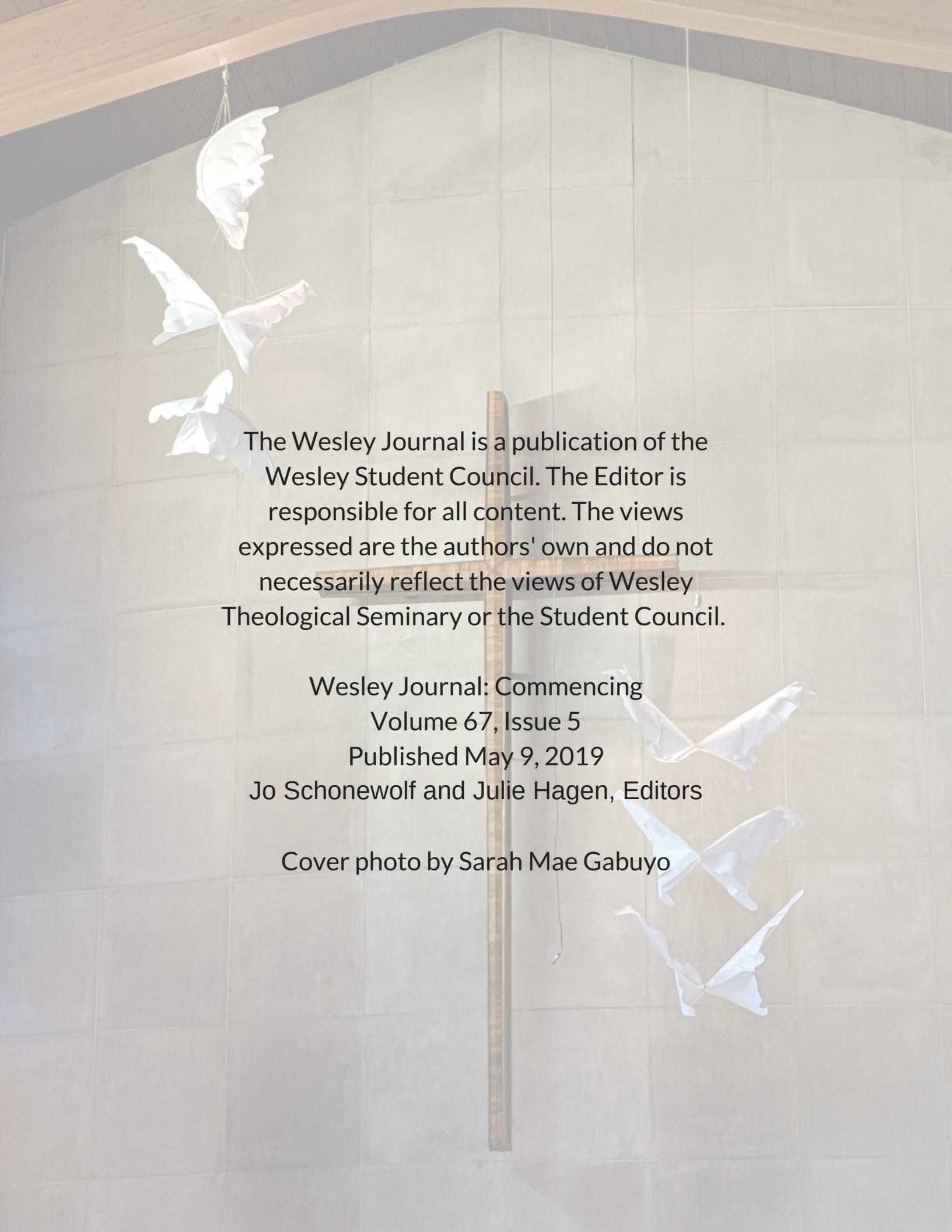


Wesley Journal

COMMENCING

REFLECTIONS FROM OUR GRADUATES



The Wesley Journal is a publication of the Wesley Student Council. The Editor is responsible for all content. The views expressed are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Wesley Theological Seminary or the Student Council.

Wesley Journal: Commencing
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The Journal is seeking writers, photographers, and graphic designers.



photo by Csomós János



EDITOR'S NOTE

It's the time of year for transitions. DC is finally transitioning into something like spring, which will hopefully hold for a week or two before summer hits, and for those of us who are graduating we are finally, *finally*, transitioning from being students to being something else.

Whether you have a ministry setting waiting for you after you cross the stage at the Cathedral or you are still seeking what happens next, congratulations are in order for all the graduates. Completing your time here, I'm sure, has been no small feat.

I know this issue is filled to the brim with words from graduates, but let me add a few more. As editor, I, Jo, have worked to establish the Journal as a place where the entire Wesley faculty, and students in particular, could share activities, events, and especially their reflections with one another. I wanted to showcase some of

the beauty that can be found in this seminary journey (whether you're seeking an MDiv or not), along with some of the struggles. Thank you, to those who have contributed and those who have read, for helping me create a space to hold these things.

This is a space for story and story matters. Your story, my story, our story together. It is a privilege to be a small part of the team that shepherds these stories to create the Journal. I, Julie, hope you enjoy this collection of reflections from the Wesley community. I am grateful to Jo and the Wesley Student Council for creating such a beautiful publication, and for each of you who have shared deeply in the following pages.

We hope this graduation issue of the Journal will give you space to celebrate and reflect on the year that's past.

Jo Schonewolf
Julie Hagen
Editors, Wesley Journal
May 9, 2019

CALENDAR

a collection of events put on by
Wesley's Student Organizations

COMMENCEMENT

5/9: Graduate Eucharist, 4:30pm in Oxnam Chapel. Class Photo and Graduate Orientation immediately following Eucharist.

5/9: Masters Graduate Reception, Awards Presentations, and Presentation of Class Gift in the Refectory immediately following Graduate Orientation.

Commencement Day: Monday, May 13th

8:30am Doctor of Ministry Breakfast in the Refectory

10:00am Doctor of Ministry Graduate Orientation

11:45am Commencement Volunteers at Washington National Cathedral

Volunteers are needed! Please contact student council if you are interested: studentcouncil@wesleyseminary.edu

1:00pm Graduates expected at Washington National Cathedral

2:00pm Commencement begins

For full commencement details, see

<https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/registrar/commencement/>

CALENDAR

a collection of events put on by
Wesley's Student Organizations

MAY & JUNE

5/10: Gente Latinx Seminarians Association (GLSA):

Farewell & Fellowship at 6:30-8:30pm in Elderdice

5/10: Commuter residents and NRH permanent residents spring move-out deadline

5/13: Commencement (see next page for details)

5/19: Graduate and Carroll permanent residents spring move-out deadline

5/28: Summer term begins

5/31: Birch permanent residents spring move-out deadline

6/30: Summer I move-out deadline

AUGUST

8/16-17: Fall move-in for all permanent residents

8/21: Academic Planning from 5:30 to 6:30pm

8/22: Academic Planning from 5:30 to 6:30pm

8/23: New Student Orientation from 8am to 6pm

8/26-30: First week of classes

Fall move-in for commuter residents

GLSA "What I wish I would have known" Coffee Hour

A MESSAGE FROM THE OUTGOING STUDENT COUNCIL

Kasongo Butler
2018-19 Student Council President

Wesley Community, it has been an honor serving as your President of Student Council. Thank you for allowing me to lead and learn with you. Through the course of this year, we have been able to cultivate enthusiasm and build collaboration among all members and organizations within the Wesley community. We have done this through engaging activities, fun and fellowship, and courageous conversations. Events sponsored by Student Council, like Free Hugs, Prayer and Brownies, the Civil Dialogue workshop, Implicit Bias workshops, the Book Donations Drive, Thanksgiving and Easter dinners, and the Spring Outing and Cherry Blossoms Photo Contest are a few examples.

Student Council also partnered with and supported other organizations to help provide our community with well-rounded programs

and activities. Plumpline spurred us toward love and justice with the *United to Love Rally* and *Motivational Mondays*. The Association of Black Seminarians embraced community with *Wakanda Family Day* and monthly worship services. Wesley Fellowship got us moving with a scavenger hunt and pumpkin picking, and the Korean Student Association tickled our taste buds with Korean delicacies. We were also able to bring a new student organization into the fold, Gente Latinx Seminarians Association, which aims to bear Latinx public witness through the promotion of public service and cultural awareness of the Latinx community. Lastly, I highlight Student Council's Wesley Journal. Our journal has been exceptional this year. The journal has offered stories, thoughtful reflection, and captivating art for us to gain more insight to what community is here at Wesley. Through our conversations and interactions, we have changed. We have grown. We have gained a deeper understanding of our community, our neighbor, God, and ourselves.

Our gains are not by accident. There has been purposeful collaboration with the entire community. The dedication and diligence of the Student Council Executive Board has been exceptional -- Nicole Poland, Vice President; Paola Lemus Bustillos, Secretary; Shelly Ballard, Treasurer; Jonathan Fuller, Parliamentarian; Teaira Parker and Jaleesa Hall, members at-large.



Special recognition is due to Dr. James Estes as the Student Council advisor and to the Office of Community/Campus Life, especially Dean Asa Lee and Ms. Octavia Young, for their unwavering guidance and support.

Many of you are graduating this month, Congratulations! We ask God for blessings upon your future endeavors. For those who will be continuing your studies at Wesley, also congratulations! You made it through one more semester. Keep going—the finish line is nearer than you think.

May we all continue to strive toward the goal of the *I See You* initiative we set forth at the beginning of the year. Let us continue to see one another, to acknowledge each other's value and worth as one of God's beautiful creations.

A MESSAGE FROM THE INCOMING STUDENT COUNCIL

Ellie Crain, Sean Gray, Sara Sadler, and Cassandra Lawrence
2019-20 Executive Board

Congratulations to us for finishing another year in our academic careers! The end of a semester can bring many emotions as some of us are saying goodbye to this

community for a while, some of us are starting internships, some of us are taking a long-awaited rest, and some of us are continuing life as usual through the summer. As we continue through this season of new beginnings, may we all be reminded of how lucky we are to be on this journey together at Wesley.

In preparing for next year, the 2019-20 Student Council Executive Board has done some dreaming about our plans for next year. First we want to express our gratitude for this year's student council for all of their hard work. By revising our constitution, they helped current and future Wesley students. We appreciate you! Next year, we want to continue this legacy of leadership by finding ways to better the Wesley community for us as current students and for the future students of Wesley Theological Seminary.

As the Student Council, it is our job to represent the wants and needs of the student body to the institution. We talk a lot about diversity here at Wesley and when we look at our student body, it's true. Demographically speaking, we are a diverse group of people. As the Executive Board, we recognize the limits of our perspective and truly need voices other than our own at this table. How can we as a community move from people being different from one another to being a community that celebrates our differences together?

The reality is, we, the larger Wesley community, are the only people who can make that happen, and it has to be together.

We have been equipped with excellent tools through implicit bias workshops and conversations about navigating conflict. Now we have to do the work to make it happen. We have to do it in a way that upholds the sacred worth of all persons so that all the “work” does not fall on one person or one group of people. We look forward to exploring this with you!

We have heard from Wesley students that sometimes the way we communicate falls short of the mark. There is a breakdown in communication happening somewhere. We hope to begin learning more about our communication at Wesley so that we can find ways to be more efficient. Time is an incredibly precious and valuable thing, and we only have a limited amount, so the more we can communicate effectively, the more we can accomplish.

We look forward to working with you during our time as your Executive Board of Student Council.

A SPACE FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS: INSIGHTS FROM MY FIRST YEAR AS DEAN

Philip Wingeier-Rayo, Dean

The cherry trees have blossomed, spring semester classes have come to a close, and graduating students have sent out invitations to friends and family. As we come to the close of our 2018-19 academic year, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on my first year as dean at Wesley Seminary.

We live in challenging times. We live in a nation and a world with polarizing forces. We can see this in our society and in our churches. While it was once believed that the world wide web would flatten the playing field and give us access to the



world's diversity, just the opposite has occurred. The internet has allowed us to receive the information that fits our narrow worldview and confirm previously held beliefs. Rather than exposing us to divergent positions and facts that would challenge our assumptions, it feeds us filtered data curated to reinforce our views. This allows us, as a nation and a world, to become siloed and isolated from those who believe and act differently than us. It is precisely for times like this that our nation and our world needs Wesley. In an increasingly polarized church and society, the seminary provides an open space

ULTIMATELY, GOD IS INVITING ALL OF US TOWARD A VISION OF THE REIGN OF GOD.

where people from diverse backgrounds can assemble to study, worship, and fellowship together. Wesley brings men and women together from many different ethnicities, theological positions and faith traditions to wrestle the meaning of sacred texts and scholarly interpretations for today's problems—all with a unified mission “to prepare persons for Christian ministry, to foster theological scholarship, and to provide leadership on issues facing the church and the world.”

It isn't easy to live into our core values of diversity and enter into conversation with someone who comes from a different background or holds a different view than our own. One's initial instinct is to withdraw or go to a place where we can be around like-minded people. We can identify with Jonah who tried to escape God's call by sailing away from Nineveh. However, that option avoids the issues and ultimately makes matters worse. Just as God is everywhere and confronted Jonah, God calls us to embrace difficult conversations through study, prayer and dialogue with those who are different from ourselves. Whether we are in tension over how to respond faithfully to questions around human sexuality, or other tense hot button issues, we cannot run away because it will only make matters worse. Ultimately, God is inviting all of us toward a vision of the Reign of God. Wesley is a place that keeps inviting us to not avoid difficult topics and to go deeper and grow in our faith. Our studies give us a vocabulary and skill set to lead others to do the same.

As dean of a very gifted and diverse seminary community, I can say that we don't always agree on matters of biblical interpretation, theology, or social issues, yet we appreciate the gifts and contributions that every person brings to the community. So as we take a welcome break from coursework, feel the warmth of summer, and celebrate the accomplishments of graduating students, we hope that you can appreciate the gifts of the Wesley community and share them wherever you go.

SPEAKING FOR THE SAINTS: THE ROLE OF WESLEY'S STUDENT COUNCIL

Dr. Sondra Wheeler

I suspect that for many students, who are scrambling trying to fit in classes and course preparation between some set of other tasks – jobs, church work, families, and so on – the work of the Student Council is largely invisible. Yes, if you stand in front of an electronic sign board long enough, you will see some upcoming event sponsored or coordinated by the Council, but if you are mostly running from one obligation to the next, you may never find time to attend one of those events. And you are likely not even to realize all the other things for which the Student Council has responsibility. Its official job description says “Wesley's Student Council seeks to promote the common welfare of the student body by acting as the voice of the student body through providing an open forum in which concerns can be raised, sponsoring various student organizations, and working with the administration, faculty, staff, and the community to ensure a supportive academic climate.” Concretely, this means three different kinds of things.

First, the Council supports every student organization on campus, including

overseeing the allocation of funds for routine operations as well as special requests. It acts to coordinate schedules and events so as to make best use of limited time and space, and offers help in organizing those events. It takes primary

WE DEPEND ON STUDENTS FOR THE CLARITY, AND CONSTANT RENEWAL, OF OUR VISION.

responsibility for communicating with staff, faculty, and administration so that the cooperation and resources needed for successful programs are in place, as well as sponsoring community events of its own. Without the work of the Student Council, it would not be possible for organizations like Plumbline or the Association of Black Seminarians to be as vital and effective a part of our life as they are. A shining example of this work of coordination and communication of student activities is the Wesley Journal, which shares information, insights, and inspiration for all corners of the community for the benefit of all.

Second, Student Council serves as the connective tissue between the student body as a whole and the other major

constituencies of the community. Student Council places representatives on important faculty committees, serves as liaison to various staff and administrative offices, and sends its president as a representative of student concerns to the Board of Governors, who are ultimately responsible to oversee the mission of the Seminary. In an especially crucial role, Student Council facilitates and coordinates student participation in some of the most critical decisions in the institution's life: appointments of faculty and senior administrators. This includes both serving on search and advisory committees, and organizing groups of students to interview and give feedback about candidates. This is an essential part of our appointment process – and something that I never experienced in so vigorous a way before coming to Wesley.

Finally, Student Council is the body in

which issues of concern to students can be brought forward, discussed, reflected on, and brought to the attention of the whole community for discernment and action. This makes it central to the identity and effectiveness of the institution itself. A theological school exists ultimately to serve God by equipping the church to serve the world. In its central task of "equipping the saint for the work of ministry," the Seminary relies upon the voices of its primary constituency, its students, to say what is needed for that task, what is missing in its current form, and what new resources are needed to address a changing world. All of us whose vocation is to this place, depend upon you for the clarity, and the constant renewal, of our vision.

I am happy for this opportunity to express the appreciation of the faculty, and my own personal gratitude, for all the work of the Student Council.



photo by Alfredo Santiago,
Student Council photo competition winner

A large, semi-transparent photograph of a graduation ceremony in a cathedral. The cathedral has tall, dark wooden walls with arched windows and hanging lights. In the foreground, many graduates wearing blue caps and gowns with red stoles are seated in rows. The text "commencing" is overlaid in the upper left of this image.

commencing

reflections from graduates
on what has been
and what comes next

JUSTICE CORNER: ORGANIZING THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

Paola Lemus Bustillos

I started my journey at Wesley in Fall 2016. This journey began with lots of questions like, "Why am I here?" or "What was I thinking going back to school?" I didn't know where to start or how to get adjusted to so many life changes happening so fast. I remember halfway through my first semester having doubts of whether I had made the right choice or if this was really where I felt led to. I decided to continue trying and see why I felt that I had to be at Wesley at a time like this. One of the reasons that I decided to come to Wesley was because of the Community Engagement Fellows. My second semester as a fellow, I was invited to be part of a non-profit and work with a community in Gaithersburg.

When I started my internship, I realized that this was something different, a type of ministry that I had never done before. I realized that there were many things in this field that would be applicable to ministry. As the semesters continued, the residents, non-profits, and interns were able to create a resident association. In the two years the resident association grew from one leader to eight, from ten people to more than one hundred and seventy people, got better lighting in the community, met with the new owners of the apartment complex, and successfully hosted a few meetings. The residents were able to build their leadership team. I was blessed to have the opportunity to see the resident association

formed.

As this season ends for me, I know that the residents will continue to work together to build something for their community and that one day the resident association will accomplish many more goals. As I concluded my time at the organization, residents shared how they were impacted by our work. One said that with the resident association she was able to learn

WITH THE FORMATION OF THE RESIDENT ASSOCIATION, I SAW WHY I WAS AT WESLEY.

that, although her personal circumstances didn't allow her to do much, she still had tenant's rights. She now is the main leader, organizing others to help them learn their rights. The parents of a family of five shared with us that since the resident association started, they felt safer and have seen improvements in security, lights, and the laundry rooms.

With the forming of the resident association I saw why I was at Wesley, why God had placed me in this community, and why I had to do community organizing. In this experience, I was able to work with a local community and create a diverse and ecumenical ministry for those in the community. Although my time as a community organizer in Gaithersburg is

coming to an end, I will forever be shaped by this experience. My ministry has been enriched through this community. Now, at the end of my journey at seminary, I can say that I have not only completed my academic requirements, but also have gained experience in the community that became one of my greatest lessons during my time in seminary.

Now, another season begins, one that is still uncertain and full of as many questions as I had in 2016 (if not more). As this season comes to an end and a new one begins, I believe that I have been transformed by many in the Wesley community. Professors have invested their time, patience and understanding in us; some of the staff have worked with me in creating possibilities for the Latinx community; and my peers have brought their stories, joys, stress, and tears to our conversations. Seminary is a journey, one that allows you to figure out many things but also leave you with many questions. I look forward to seeing what is next and what other things I will forever continue to wonder and question! I hope that every season and transition for all of us is full of peace and trust; that it is for a time like this that we have been at Wesley.

WHEN THE DAWN DELAYS: RIDING THE DISSONANCE OF POST-GRADUATION BLUES

Nila Y. Curry

If your vocational path is perfectly lit, straight, and paved, then this reflection may not be for you. This is for those who have found

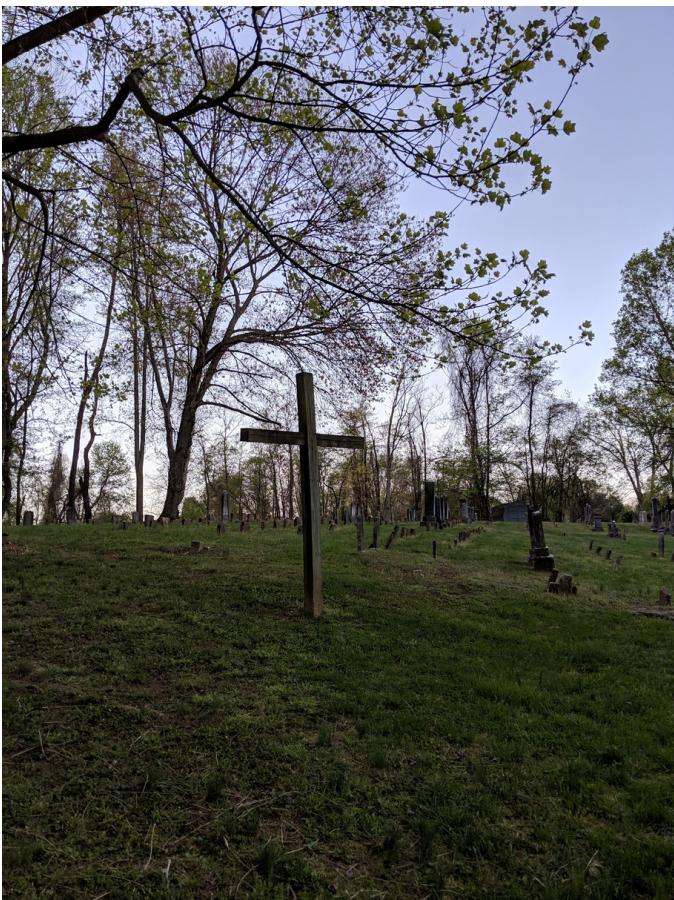
themselves wailing in the midnight hour, praying every prayer they knew and still not having the answers to “what was it all for?” This is for those who have yet to secure a sustainable job, for those whose theology is laid deconstructed before them on an altar of academic rigor with little energy or time for rebuilding. This is for those who find themselves stuck in the chokehold of the “now what?” and riding the dissonance of post-graduation blues. You are not alone. In addition to therapy, self-care, and support systems, all important components of maintaining good mental health, I offer you two strategies for exercising faith and preserving sanity while the unsureties of this season take you for a “joy” ride.

In seasons of feeling and being unsettled (e.g., post-graduation), we must first recall the stories of faith and strength. What is your call story? When was the last time you made it out of a funk and you knew it was nothing but God? What unction or gut-deep feeling

WHEN THE DUST SETTLES, WHO WILL YOU BE?

brought you to seminary in the first place? What are the stories of strength in your family lineage? As we ride the dissonance, we must keep these stories at the foreground of our consciences. I recall the stories of my ancestors which were passed down to me through the oral tradition. When I think of the stories of my grandmother standing up to white supremacists and how God's grace kept her, my soul cries out, “Surely! If God made a way for her, then how much more for her beloved granddaughter?” When we are

persistent and dedicated to recalling our stories, we open ourselves up to hope and resiliency.



We must also re-imagine. What do you look like on the other side of chaos? When the dust settles, who will you be? Will you have developed thick skin or a greater tolerance for riding the tensions of life? Taking focus off the situations that are out of our control and centering in on inner transformation and reinvention can provide relief from our anxieties. Re-imaging may require us to create a dream board or to journal on a daily basis. It may also entail exploring all the ways ministers and other leaders have been called in the past and then drawing inspiration to re-imagine ourselves. Re-imagining is an act of resistance. It is

proclamation that one refuses to be in the current state forever. It is a sacred shout on the drops and loop de loops of a ride that will not last always. So if you have to ride, ride with recollection, imagination, and the purpose-filled light that God has placed within you, my friends. This too shall pass!

EXCITED FOR MINISTRY, THANKFUL FOR THE JOURNEY

Daniel Chun

Graduation...the time has finally come. But to be honest, I've been having this same thought for the last two weeks:

"I am SO READY to get out of here and not touch a textbook for a LONG TIME."

As serious as I am, I have to also share that my time at Wesley has been a joyous one. It has been three years of constant learning, growing, and experiencing. What I am grateful for is that this learning and growing wasn't just in the areas of academia, but also in the areas of pastoral ministry. I can confidently say that one (of the many) things Wesley has taught me is learning how to be a servant of God in different ministry settings. For me, there is a lot of excitement as I think about graduation. My general personality is that I enjoy working. I am excited now that I can work in more of a full time ministry. However, I do give love to all those who have walked with me through my time here at Wesley that has allowed me to get extremely

excited about full-time ministry. Little things like breaking bread with classmates, friends, and mentors and big things like talking about theology and ethics allowed me to be excited about transitioning into ministry.

I definitely won't miss writing papers, but I am told that people who say that are likely to come back to school for their doctorate. But what I will definitely miss is the time I was able to share as a seminarian. Just like I always tell those in college to enjoy their time in college because they will never get another college experience, I see myself telling myself to enjoy the little time I have left now as a seminarian because I won't have another experience like this.

Although I tell this Wesley community that I am so ready to leave, transition, and work, there is so much excitement to move forward, taking the things I learned from Wesley and applying them to my current ministry setting. I tell this Wesley community how much I will miss Wesley, how much I will miss being a seminarian, how much I will miss breaking bread with other seminarians, and how much I will miss the community.

All in all, I also tell this Wesley community again how grateful I am for my three years here. Yes, there were definitely highs and lows. But I look back from day one to now, and all I can say is thank you. My prayers go out to all the other graduates and also to those who are on their track to graduating in the future.

CLOSING AND OPENING DOORS

Sammy Klipsch

Before coming to Wesley, I had this image of opening and closing doors in my mind. When doors close, I'm told that others open. Before I started at Wesley, I dropped out of candidacy because I was afraid of being ousted in my home conference at the time. A door had closed, yet there was Wesley. An open door, inviting me in.

Throughout my time at Wesley, I've been challenged and stretched. I've been invited to grow, and I've grown by necessity. I've learned a lot and I'm thankful. As my time here ends, I look for new doors. New adventures to explore, new challenges to overcome. The UMC's door is still closed, bolted shut even, but throughout seminary, I've had the privilege to experience a God greater than a denomination and the walls it builds. Wesley encourages me to think outside the box, to let God work how God works and not how I, or anyone else, thinks God should work.

I've learned through my classes and through relationships with the faculty, and I've learned through my peers. I've witnessed colleagues rise to challenges, discover, and create something new. They change the lives of everyone they encounter. The people I have been privileged to meet energize me. Seeing the work that my fellow students do

pushes me to be better, for my neighbor, for the world, and for myself.

When I graduated college, I had an image of the world painted on my graduation cap. I was excited. I was moving to DC--a new part of the country, a new world to me--and there was so much hope on the horizon. I was following my call and taking a step forward in following it. Approaching Wesley's graduation, the world seems different, smaller and more complacent than the last time around. Doors to follow my call to be a pastor in the UMC are closed, for now. Yet still I come to this graduation with excitement as I prepare to step out into this world once more and do something new.

I'm not sure what the future holds, but I'm learning what being open to new doors looks like. I'm reminded that life is precious and not to waste the doors that are open to me. I have learned a lot over these past few years and I can't wait to see what is next.

ADVICE FROM A SEMINARIAN: EMBRACE THE UNKNOWN

Elijah Ferebee

I began my seminary journey at Wesley in the spring semester of 2015. Upon pulling into the driveway, and unpacking my bags in room 205B of NRH, I laid my items out with a confident mindset fixated on me becoming a pastor upon completing my studies at Wesley. I was always a person who prided myself in knowing where my next steps in life were, and it wasn't until my journey at Wesley that I found comfort in that which I once feared, the unknown.

More often than not when people see you share ministerial gifts of any sort, they immediately think, "HEY YOU! Yeah, you, holding the Bible, praying, holding the bread and/or cup... you should be a pastor!"



Unfortunately, many of us tend to go along with the ideas that others possess on who we are and what we are called to be. Well, to make a long story short, allowing others to dictate my seminary journey at its start lead to my first year demise. I will not go into full detail, but know that my first year wasn't the easiest of my life's journey thus far. Not only was I certain in my heart during this season that I was not called to ordained ministry, but I also had a grandmother back home who, at that time, was dealing with serious health concerns. It seemed my once solid world was falling apart and I felt there wasn't any way that I could weld it back together. I spent many nights praying and lamenting, ridden with confusion and frustration. I often thought, "What am I doing here?", "What will I do next?", and, the most frequent of these questions, "What now?" All of my life up until seminary, I had an answer for what lay ahead. For once in my life, when it came to my call and my next steps, I had no clue.

As humans, we are inclined to lean toward fear of that which we cannot fully comprehend. In short, the unknown terrifies us. However, the not-knowing aspect of life is beautiful because it is filled with possibility and the opportunity to explore. If you're like me, you may feel the need to always know, and when you don't know you feel as if God has abandoned or forgotten about you (which feels dramatic, I know). To this I say: Embrace the unknown! Though you are in school with others, your seminary journey is your own. Embrace that. If your path isn't one hundred percent clear, take comfort in knowing that one day it will be, and take that time in the in-between space to reflect and learn more about yourself.

The beauty about seminary is that it isn't a race or a competition. You are a part of a collective body of people, who like yourself, came to this place to learn, grow, and gain more understanding. A huge percentage of that understanding and learning will be about yourself! When I decided to let go of who I felt I was supposed to be, who others wanted me to be, who I thought I should be, and embraced the in-between space that was/is my self-discovery, my world changed for the better.

When you feel unsure, uncertain, lost, and unclear, embrace that. Do not run from it. Seek God's face in the midst of your learning and take time to reflect on what you are experiencing. Let go of how you envisioned things to be and recognize them for what they are in your seminary journey. You will be frustrated, you will cry, you will moan and groan and maybe even ache from the inside out, but in the end you will rejoice in having learned what it was all for. Embrace the unknown component of the journey, for it is the space in which we will reach heights and understandings about God, ourselves, and one that we've never seen before. Though I've completed four years of study here at Wesley and I'm still wrestling with my call, one day, like you, I too will rejoice in knowing what it was all about!

A STUDENT PASTOR'S REFLECTION

Todd Christine

August 28, 2015 is a date I have written on a small sea shell I keep in my office. It was presented to me during the orientation for new students here at Wesley. This was the beginning of my journey holding a dual role, one being a student pursuing my Masters of Divinity degree and the other serving as a pastor to a congregation.

I remember the emotions and thoughts flowing through me then. The question of my ability to handle school and a congregation simultaneously loomed in my mind. The shell reminded me of my story, a reaffirmation of my baptismal calling to serve in ministry.

LOOKING BACK, I CAN PROCLAIM WITH BOLDNESS THAT GOD'S GRACE SAW ME THROUGH.

The shell reminded me that despite struggle, failure, and even success, I am sacred, treasured, loved, and called by God. It told me of the promise that God was going to be present and sustain me in amazing ways. Now, as I look back, I can proclaim with boldness that God's grace saw me through the journey. That grace was revealed in

many different ways through some very special people that understood what I was going through as a student pastor.

The days were long and the semesters longer. As a student pastor, I balanced care for a congregation, my studies, and my family; I was rarely able to take a Sabbath. When the chapters were read, the papers were written, and the exams were taken there still were phone calls, visits, meetings, and the sermon to prepare each week. I often felt guilty on those days that I finished my school work early and was exhausted or when I was ill because I knew that there was much more I needed to do. The pressure and stress were excruciating at times. It was difficult for many of my fellow students to fully understand the situation. The few who did were a means of grace that sustained this student pastor.

Wesley offers what is known as the Student Pastor Program, a cooperative effort between students, churches, and the Wesley faculty. This program was instrumental in my success. Why? I was not alone. The program connected me with other students who were working through the same pressures and heavy schedule as I was. Colloquy, where student pastors and faculty meet to talk through our learning and our ministry, became a place of still waters and green fields in the midst of turbulent waves and desert. I looked forward to my time to gather with this group. Several of these members I hold to be my dearest friends to this day. The faculty who led our time together took great efforts to make this a place of relationships. We came from many different backgrounds and ministry contexts but shared the dual role of pastor/student. We often took many

of the same classes and built each other up while we worked through the paper deadlines of our professors and the funeral preparations of our beloved church members.

Our professors and other Wesley faculty knew our responsibilities and often inquired how we were handling our schedules, genuinely expressing concerns for our self-care. Also, the Student Pastor program allowed us to incorporate immediately the knowledge shared in the classroom. The program offered an opportunity to execute assignments and receive immediate feedback from churchgoers and leadership. It was a functional system that incorporated real-time experience and strong relationships.

God calmed the waters and provided a way through the desert, affirming my call to ordination through my time at Wesley in the Student Pastor program. My experience at Wesley was life-changing and its faculty and its community will hold a special place in my heart forever.

THE SWEETEST THINGS I'LL EVER KNOW

Wasaba Sidibay

As I am concluding my journey as a Masters of Divinity student here at Wesley, I have entered into a reflective space. I think about my call story, my "Windows On Wesley" experience, orientation, the baptism service, and more. It's all coming back to me, largely

due to the fact that I am overwhelmed with figuring out the next steps of my life. I feel so many unpleasant emotions like doubt, fear, confusion, and anxiety. To be honest, when I am lost in my thoughts, I question why I've done all of this in the first place.

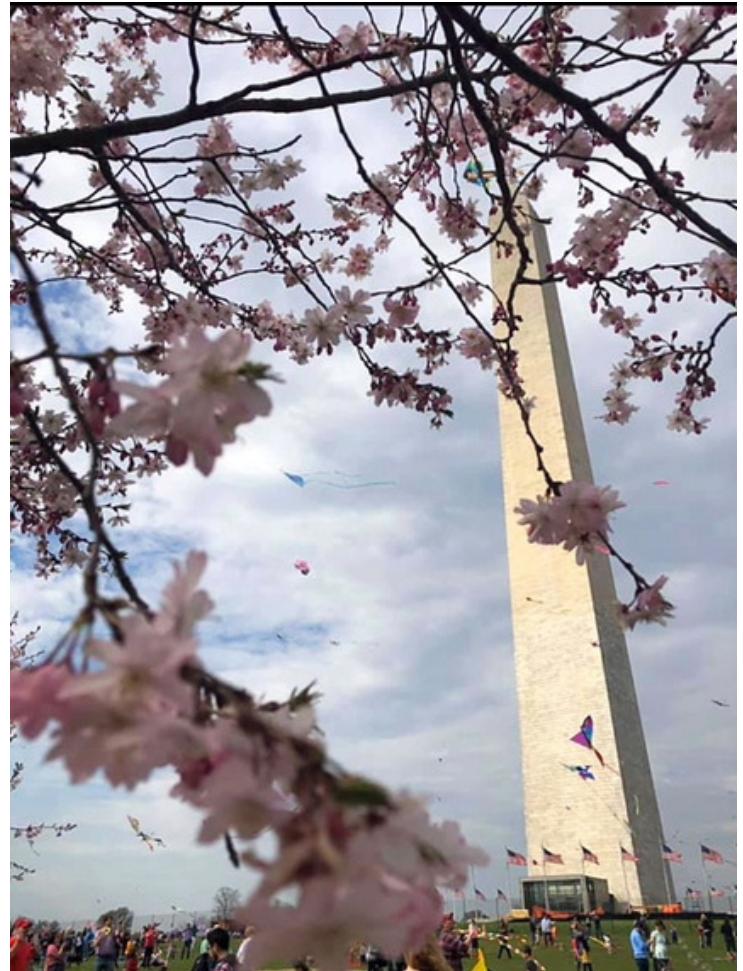


Photo by Nicole Poland

As my thoughts consumed me one evening, I diverted to my self-care and spiritual practice, journaling, which has been essential to my mental health throughout this journey. As I poured out my soul, lamentations, and anxieties on the pages of my journal I heard the sweet, sincere voice that never ceases to stop by to visit me for a little while, the voice of God. In the midst of the moment, I heard God say, "Remember what I told you."

As I began to reflect on what God told me, I remembered that God has told me so many things. Actually, all of the most important things, or better yet, the sweetest things I have ever come to know so far on this life's journey have come from God. I am well aware of the multifaceted aspects of this seminary journey. While I know my experience is unique, I also know that on a

GRACE IS A SUBTLE REMINDER THAT YOU ARE RIGHT WHERE YOU NEED TO BE.

human level there are many paths that we all will cross at some point. In effort to be a voice in solidarity, a means of encouragement, and a wounded healer, as we all are, I offer you some of the sweetest things I'll ever know. My prayer is that you find peace in what I share.

1. You are absolutely enough. The simple fact that you exist is a divine statement. THE SPACE YOU TAKE UP IN THIS WORLD MATTERS! You have the divine and human right to create, defend, nurture, advocate for, honor, and love this space. God calls us to tend after creation and you, my friend, are a part of that creation.

2. Hope is not something you have when circumstances align in your favor, nor is it a feeling. Hope is a decision and a constant

choice. No matter the circumstance, in spite of how you feel, hope is an option that is always available to you. You are not the first person to feel hopelessness and, unfortunately, you will not be the last. But, if you choose hope, know that you will not be the first person to do it and you will not be the last.

3. Pay attention to the grace along this journey. It is a subtle reminder that you are right where you need to be. The grace may come in the form of wisdom shared by a professor or a colleague. It may come in the form of someone asking "how goes it with your soul?" Grace may show in a deep, long inhale and exhale, the reminder that you are here and you matter.

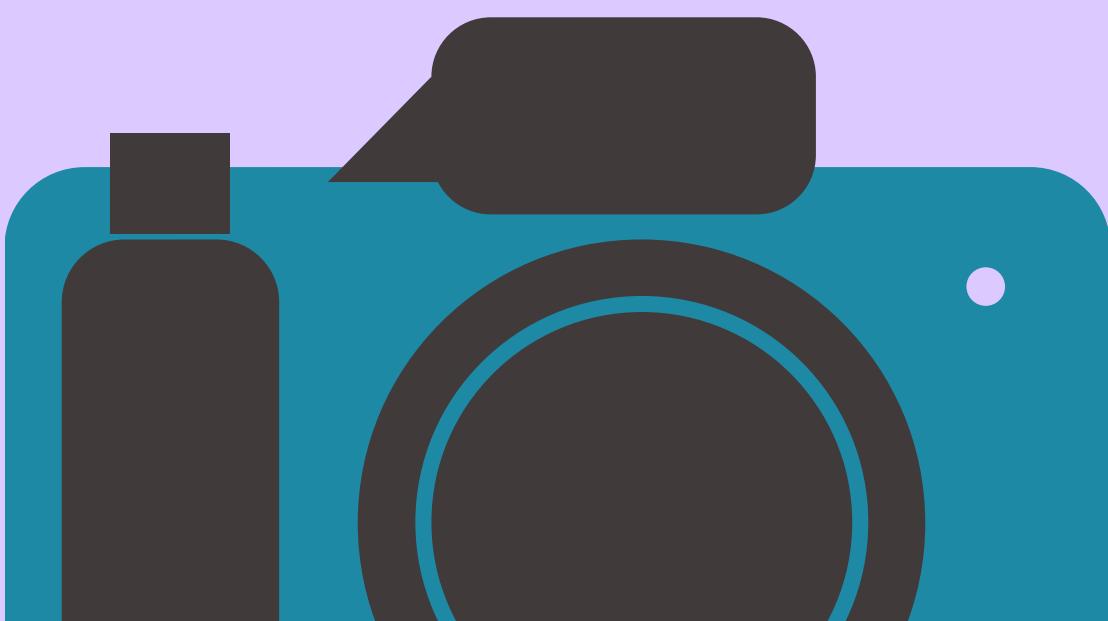
4. Finally, TRUST GOD. In this life, things don't always go as planned but they can still go well.

There's a possibility that I could write until my fingers fall off. Reflecting the sweet doses of wisdom reminds me of why I answered the call in the first place. I gave God my YES and in turn, God gave me so much MORE. From one part of creation to another, I pray that God provides you with peace that surpasses understanding.

SEEKING PHOTOGRAPHERS, CONTRIBUTORS, AND DESIGNERS

The 2019-20 Journal team will need content, pictures, and people to help put it together. There is funding for photographer and graphic designer positions.

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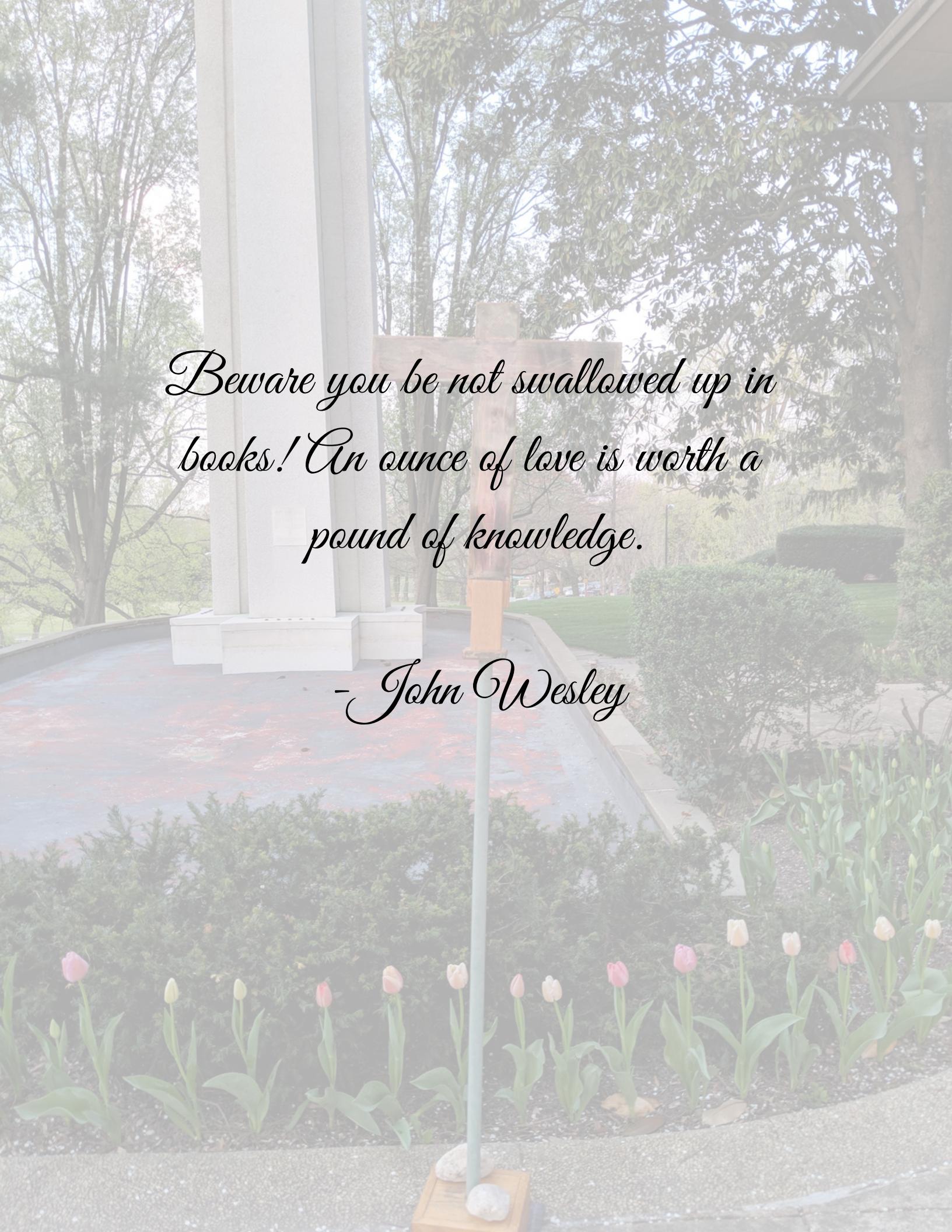
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Also featured in this issue of the Journal are the winners of the Student Council's Spring Photo Competition: Sarah Mae Gabuyo, Csomós János, Nicole Poland, and Alfredo Santiago.
"Commencing" photo by Ian C. Urriola. All unattributed photos by Jo Schonewolf.

The editorial staff would like to thank the members of the Communications Committee: Shelly Ballard, Ellie Crain, Nadia Fitzcharles, Vanessa Rodriguez, Wasaba Sidibay, and especially Nicole Poland, for their work producing the 2018-2019 issues of the Wesley Journal.

A photograph of a garden scene. In the foreground, there are several tulips in shades of pink, yellow, and orange. Behind them is a low hedge. Further back, there's a paved area with a white planter box and a tall, thin wooden post. A white building with large windows is visible in the background, surrounded by trees.

*Beware you be not swallowed up in
books! An ounce of love is worth a
pound of knowledge.*

- John Wesley