



# WORDS FROM WESLEY

## Why Do We Exist?

This past year has seen incredible growth and vitality for our young campus ministry. In order to grow in the healthiest way possible, our student leaders and board of directors spent intentional time asking big questions. At the heart of this work lies the question “Why?” Why do we exist? Why should a student be involved with Belmont Wesley Fellowship? Why should churches and individuals support us? We realized that we had much in common with other campus ministries and groups. And yet, our identity is shaped by a particular calling and purpose. The words that we kept hearing were “community, communion, and Christ’s love.” We feel that everyone needs a community, and yet some communities are simply not open to everyone. Perhaps those in these communities don’t even realize they are closed off, but for a new person, the inside jokes and jargon don’t make sense. We feel it is essential to offer a genuinely open community to all. We also see communion as central to what we do. We share communion together each week when we gather. Our sharing of communion focuses on strengthening the community of those gathered by remembering the grace, presence, and forgiveness of God. Finally, everything we do and all we are is focused on sharing Christ’s love. There is enough judgment and condemnation in this world. We are all broken by pain and grief. Christ’s love, freely shared and graciously received is what gets us through life together. Please pray for us as we live into our “why” and seek to meet new friends to share life with.



## Spring Break Immersion Trip

During the first week of March, I went with a group of students on a spring break immersion trip. Last year we headed to San Francisco on a similar trip. This year, six students journeyed to Mobile, AL to work with the L’Arche community there. L’Arche is French for “The Ark” – a place of refuge – and it is a worldwide organization where people with intellectual and developmental challenges live alongside friends in a mutually caring relationship.

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In Mobile, there are five homes where core members (those with recognized disabilities) live with team members. One night, we were eating in one of the homes when a team member asked if we were going to share music after the meal. Clearly, our reputation as being from Belmont had preceded us. We explained that we had left our instruments back on our van at the office a few blocks away. But if they insisted, we could fetch them. They insisted. And so we sang together after the meal.

One of the core members, David, had already gone to bed but wasn't yet asleep, and we asked if we could sing to him. We were told he would love that, and his favorite songs were "Happy Birthday to You" and "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." So we went into his room and sang those songs to him.

We found out the next day that David died that night, just a few hours after we sang with him. He was 74 years old, and although his mother had been told many years ago not to worry about his care because David would die before most of his family members, he actually outlived them all. As difficult as this experience was for our group, we were deeply thankful to witness something so amazing and powerful. And this was only one of the transformative experiences we enjoyed during our week in Mobile.



Because of the connectional giving of United Methodist Churches in the Tennessee Conference and others who support us with their gifts, all the students on the trip were able to attend free of any cost. As several of our students work to fund their education, the giving that supports these and other experiences enables students to encounter life-changing opportunities that they might miss otherwise. Thank you for giving in a way that makes such a difference in the lives of our students. I hope you'll enjoy hearing their words about what the trip meant to them.

**Lexi Buglio, Class of 2018** – "Mobile was a calling. It stood out to me for whatever reason, and I am so very glad I committed to the trip. Interacting with the L'Arche community opened my eyes to the capabilities of persons who are undermined greatly in modern society. A highlight for me from the trip was when we were able to contribute

musically to David's last day on this earth. Music became a huge contributor on our trip and being able to give the core members some good music fun made my heart full. Thank you to those who made it possible for our team to go to Mobile."

**Amy Burgholzer, Class of 2019** – "The Immersion trip to Mobile was such an eye opening experience. Not only was learning about L'Arche and what they do fascinating, but the way they interact with each other was something else. They are more than just a community; they are a family. Each person brings something different to the community, and everyone has a place within. As Belmont students, we brought our music with us, sang songs with the members, and I watched everyone get excited and sing along with us. They don't get experiences like that very often, and I'm grateful I could be a part of something that made a lasting impression on this great community."

**Oliviah Johnson, Class of 2018** – "Going to Mobile was honestly one of the best experiences of my life. Not only were the people on our team wonderful, but also the people that I got to meet at L'Arche were so loving. They accepted us right away. We played music, danced and ate together. I experienced God's love on this trip. If I could do it all again, I would."

## Sharing Love Through Service

This year we were engaged in many service opportunities. In addition to regular tutoring at Edgemoor UMC and Kirkpatrick Elementary School (through Project Transformation) we participated in the National Eating Disorders Association walk, joined with our board of directors to host an evening of Room in the Inn at Belmont UMC, and helped with Stop Hunger Now at Calvary UMC (where we ran into Belmont alum, Vince Gill!). Maddy Easdale, Class of 2018, came up with the idea of asking students to use leftover food points to purchase hygiene items for the Edgemoor UMC Free Store, and thus Points for a Purpose was born! We also helped lead worship at Andrew Price Memorial and Blakemore UMCs.



Sally Ann Jones, *Class of 2016* – “When I got home from spring break and my friends asked me how my week with L’Arche was, the best word I could come up with was only one word: beautiful. It’s a weird choice, but it is the best way to describe the way of life of the members of L’Arche. I have never felt a space with more unconditional love and compassion. Visiting Mobile gave me a reminder on how we should look on life with courage, kindness, and happiness no matter the situation”



Shelby Killoran, *Class of 2019* – “Going to Mobile was an amazing experience, not because of the place but because of the people. The way that the members of the L’Arche community love each other regardless of age,

race, gender, or ability level is inspiring. As Christians we are called to love each other, but that can be difficult sometimes. So I carry one of the key chains given to us by the community members as a reminder to love others unconditionally.”

Eva Sipic, *Class of 2018* – “Going to Mobile to spend time with the members of the L’Arche community was one of the most amazing experiences of my life, and I don’t think I will ever forget it. I loved getting to know all of the members there and learning from them about loving everyone and treating everyone with kindness. These people don’t care what you look like or where you come from, they just love you, which is something that I think everyone can do for one another. A piece of my heart will always be in Mobile with my new friends at L’Arche.”

## Fall Break Spiritual Life Retreat

Over fall break, six of us journeyed to Lake Junaluska in North Carolina for a time of Sabbath and discussion about healthy relationships. We used the book *Scary Close* by Donald Miller to shape our conversations. It was amazing to see this group bond deeply and get scary close over just a weekend. We also spent time visiting with The Rev.



Dr. Mark and Mary Allen Conforti who shared with us their experiences and wisdom about relationships as children, spouses, and parents. As you can see, it was a beautiful and rich time. Thank you for making opportunities like this available for our students.



Casey Enright, *Class of 2017*, has launched a new ministry to address the lack of age appropriate books for children in lower income homes. I hope you will enjoy learning about “The Word Wagon” and support Casey in this ministry.

The Word Wagon is a new program in the Middle Tennessee area. Casey Enright, the founder, has a huge passion for childhood literacy and thinking

of ways to improve the reading levels of children in low-income neighborhoods. This program is a book mobile that provides one-on-one reading opportunities between children and a Word Wagon volunteer. The children are invited to come and read while their parents receive food through One Generation Away’s food distribution.

The Word Wagon is also dedicated to build the library of the kids who come to read. After the children read with the volunteer, they are invited to pick either the book they read or a book to take home and enjoy from our word wagon. The Word Wagon is an organization that has been fueled by passion but only made possible by God.



## Congratulations To Our Recent Graduates

A massive congratulations to Angel Brothers, Elyse Croce, and Karin Haski who graduated this past year. Each has made such a powerful impact in our lives, and we will continue to pray for them as they begin a new chapter of their lives. We know God has great things ahead for them!





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## Thank You for Your Support!

All that we do at Belmont Wesley Fellowship is made possible by contributions from churches, groups, and individuals who share their support in many ways. We give thanks for this support and humbly ask that you continue to share our stories with others so that we can keep growing in healthy ways.

We continue to recognize the crucial need for committed lay and clergy leaders in our churches, and one way we are seeking to address this is by encouraging our students to attend conferences like the NEXT Conference in Atlanta (Nov 4-6). We had eight students attend this gathering where they joined with others in discovering and exploring the ways God is calling them to use their gifts in a life of service and witness. We are thankful for the giving that allowed these student to experience this life-changing trip.

Would you make a donation of \$50, \$100, or \$200 to help support our students in future gatherings like NEXT and many other opportunities for spiritual growth and discernment? To make a gift, please use the enclosed envelope or visit [www.belmontwesley.org](http://www.belmontwesley.org) and click on the "Give" tab. Thank you again for your prayers, financial support, and for sharing our stories with others – especially future students!

