



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE
WESLEY FOUNDATION AT PENN STATE
September 2020

The involvement of St. Paul's church with the student population of the "college" began well before a church was established in State College. The origins of St. Paul's are in the church at Centre Furnace, just down the road from the college and a thriving community at one point. The story goes that students from the college would often attend church services, and while sitting in the rear, would sing songs of their own choosing as the congregation tried to sing the selected hymn.

Then, in the time leading up to 1888, the church at Centre Furnace faced important decisions about its future, should they carry out the extensive maintenance that the deteriorating structure required or should they move from a declining community to one of the newly flourishing villages in the area? Lemont, where the railroad had a station or perhaps up the road by the college, were both possibilities to be considered. The final decision was to move, not to one of those thriving communities but to split as a congregation and establish a new church home in each. Thus, in 1888 a church was established in State College, across Lemont Pike, also called Turnpike Road, from the college, where it is today. At that time there were 150 residents in the village and this new church was the first church building in the community.

Although there was no formal, fully-organized effort oriented toward students, the 1911 Annual Conference pledged to aid materially with the building of a new church building at State College to "accommodate the student work being carried on at this strategic center of education." This pledge occurred during the time when the stone edifice we still see today was already under construction. Ground had been broken on June 20, 1910, and the building was dedicated on March 3, 1912. To help the continuing work at State College, the 1915 Annual Conference formally petitioned the Board of Education of the Methodist Episcopal Church "to make a special and liberal contribution to the Methodist Episcopal Church at State College, Pa. to assist that church in its spiritual ministry to the five hundred Methodist students in the college of that place."

The Official Board of St. Paul's Church petitioned the 1920 Annual Conference, through the Conference Board of Education, requesting the organization of a Wesley Foundation. Approval was given "for the formation of a Wesley Foundation to provide for a ministry to Methodist and other students at the Pennsylvania State College." The Conference also requested that the Bishop form a five-member commission to seek support from the other conferences in the State and to complete the details of the proposed organization. Later the Conference approved a proposal that eight percent of the public educational collection of the Conference be paid to St. Paul's Church toward support of an assistant pastor to carry out the work amongst the students.



Wesley Foundation Annex to the left of St. Paul's Methodist Church and set back from College Ave. Wesley Foundation Parsonage on extreme left. Photo about 1952

With the Conference approving the funding for an assistant pastor, the work of the Wesley Foundation began, ministering to the needs of nearly seven hundred Methodist students on campus. The Wesley Foundation formally began in August 1920, with the arrival of Rev. Harry F. Babcock as the assistant for student ministries to Rev. John Long. This arrangement of the assistant for St. Paul's serving as pastor to students continued until 1949. As a side note, Rev Babcock served as assistant pastor for student ministries from 1920-1924. He would return to St. Paul's as its pastor and serve from 1935-1942.

Rev. Babcock had been the pastor at Half Moon before his appointment to minister to the students in State College. The roads from Half Moon to State College were not of high quality and the regular travel back and forth was not ideal for meeting the needs of the students. Thus, a house adjacent to the church building was purchased for a parsonage for the Foundation pastor and a headquarters for the Foundation. After receiving an official charter in 1921, plans were made for construction of a Wesley Foundation building. The Foundation Annex was erected as a three-story addition to St. Paul's church. It was dedicated on October 3, 1922 and is the space currently known as the gym, the Church office, and the Asbury Room/Library.

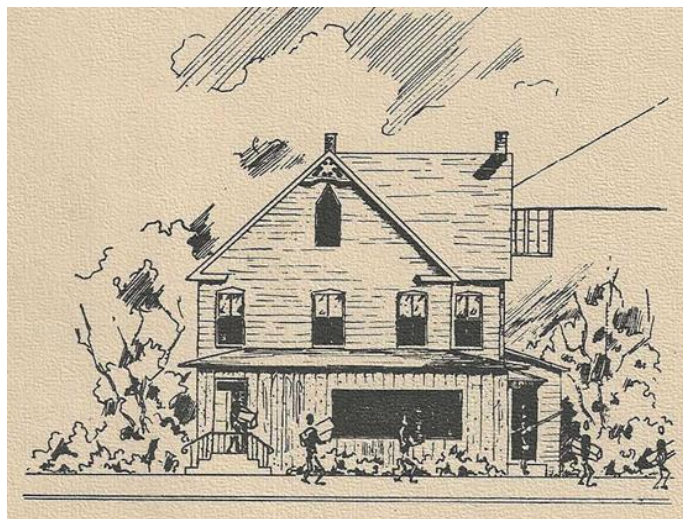
Rev. Babcock was succeeded by the following Wesley foundation pastors and program directors:

Rev. C.C. Cole	1924-1925	Rev. Alan Cleeton	1964-1968
Rev. E.H. Whitman	1925-1930	Rev. Mac Saddoris	1956-1975
Rev. W. Emory Hartman	1930-1932	Rev. Ned Weller	1968-1983
Rev. G. Cecil Weimer	1932-1936	Mr. Tom Deacon	
Rev. C. Gail Norris	1936-1942	Ms. Donna K. Smith	
Rev. Malcolm V Mussina.	1942-1947	Rev. Linda O. Eshelman	1997-1999
Rev. Bruce E. Gideon	1947-1949	Mr. Robert Johns	
Mrs. Dorothy Anderson	1949-1952	Rev. Tyson G. Ferguson	2004-2010
Miss Dorothy Blanchard	1952-1953	Rev. Karen B. Urbanski	2010-2013
Miss Eunice (Pat) Floyd	1953-1955	Ms. Jen Gruendler	2014-2019
Rev. Richard Nutt	1955-1963	Rev. Sarah Voigt	2019-
Rev. William Watson	1962-1964		

It should be noted that after 1949, the Wesley Foundation was led by lay persons and pastors, depending on the particular appointments and as Directors or Executive Secretaries.

From its inception, and through the post-World War II days, the Wesley Foundation was a busy place, its role being “pastoral and fellowship.” It was often described as the students’ “home away from home.” Activities included church school classes, an orchestra, socials, Sunday night suppers, and Thursday morning worship. There was also a yearbook, *The Wesley Way*, and a newspaper, *The Nittany Wesleyan*. Students participated in the choir, in drama groups and study clubs, and on athletic teams. Deputation teams carried the Foundation way of worship and fellowship to the Conference churches.

As St. Paul's congregation expanded, many rooms of the Foundation Annex were utilized by the church, and the Foundation parsonage came to be used as a student center. This encroached on the privacy of the Wesley pastors. The need for a separate Wesley Foundation building became apparent. St. Paul's purchased the Annex in April 1948, and the adjacent Foundation parsonage became the temporary student center.

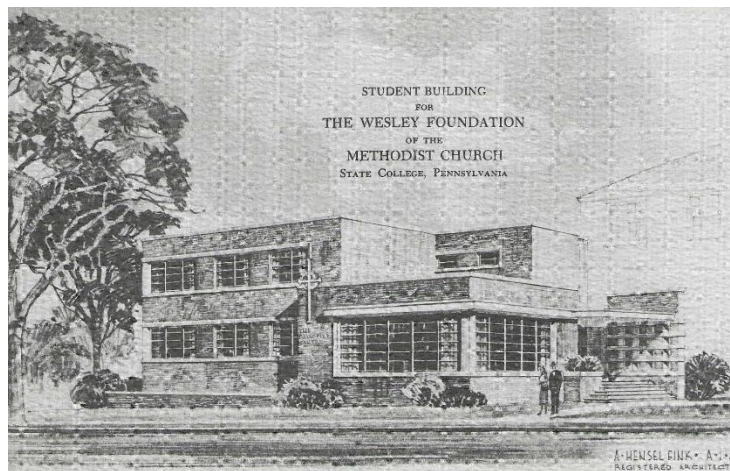


The Wesley Foundation was later housed in what had been the Foundation Parsonage

By 1953, Foundation activities included “outreach” projects, such as packing clothing for Church World Service and visiting the Centre County Home (now Centre Crest). July 1954 marked the beginning of the “University Christian Association” as the successor to the Penn State Christian Association. The Wesley Foundation Board voted to take part in the U.C.A. and elected two members to serve on the U.C.A. Board.

With the increasing number of Methodist students in State College, seventeen hundred in 1954, plans were being developed to build a new Foundation building. The cost of the building, estimated to be \$310,000 in the 1956 campaign booklet, would primarily be covered through financial campaigns in the Erie, Wyoming, and Central Pennsylvania Conferences. The Wyoming Conference was in the north eastern portion of Pennsylvania and southern New York. The Pennsylvania portion of that Conference is now a part of the Susquehanna Conference. Appeals were also made to the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia Conferences.

The new Wesley Foundation building, adjacent to the old Foundation Annex and incorporating the site of the director’s parsonage, was begun in 1956 and opened April 3, 1957. With the money coming from Methodist churches across the State, the Wesley Foundation became a separate entity from St. Paul’s. It was now directly responsible to the Methodist Church through the Annual Conference and the Wesley Foundation Board.



The architects rendering of the new Wesley Foundation building as depicted on the campaign brochure, 1956

The 1950's record a revival of religious faith on the campus, and the Wesley Foundation building was heavily used. As the decade progressed, a new approach to campus ministry evolved, with more emphasis on counseling, credit/non-credit courses in religion, and in working in small groups rather than "programmed activities". The Foundation's role became an attempt to interpret to students their roles as Christians in the University rather than an effort to withdraw them from it and involve them in an overly complex program. Wesley's main focus was on worship, study and discussion groups, and counseling. In 1956, the Rev. Richard Nutt, coming from the Wesley Foundation at the University of Nebraska, became the first full time Chaplain/Director.

By 1960, dormitories were becoming the center of student life on campus, so the Wesley Foundation Director began working there as well as at the Wesley Foundation Student Center, with the Chaplain/Director giving twenty hours a week on campus.

The '60's saw more involvement in human relations studies and social issues, i.e. trips to underprivileged areas, identity with the Civil Rights Movement, and the use of the building by rights related groups. An Ecumenical Student Council was formed. By 1965, separate worship at the Wesley Foundation was discontinued, with students attending St. Paul's and/or worship in Eisenhower Chapel. The Foundation staff shared in the responsibility for the services.

A "coffee house" ministry was instituted at the Foundation in an attempt to be a "mission in the midst of the ferment of the '60's," that mission being "to help the ferment be creative."

With more and more emphasis on campus centered activities, 1965 saw the creation on campus of the Office of Religious Affairs to coordinate various faith activities. The Wesley Foundation Board voted to terminate its relationship with the University Christian Association on July 1, 1967, and to work through the Office of Religious Affairs beginning July 1, 1966. A United Campus Ministry was in the offing.

During the late '60's and early '70's, the Wesley Foundation was best described as an "auxiliary student union" with 800-900 students a week using the building. It was a gathering place for the increasing number of international students. The pastoral and fellowship concept of the Wesley Foundation of the 1920's was disappearing; its function was becoming a "missionary enterprise" of the United Methodist Church on the Penn State campus through a residence hall ministry.

By 1971 the building was serving the State College community as well as the University students. It was a meeting place for groups such as the Ecumenical Institute, Black Awareness, American Friends, Opera Workshop, and many others. Student use was mainly as International House and Calder Street Station, a creativity center. An ecumenical ministry was stressed.

The 1970's saw life on campus becoming increasingly complex, and the campus ministry was also. It was a time of "questioning all authority ...a time when campus life always seemed to be in tension..." Traditional ways of expressing one's faith were being modified, or even disregarded. Working through the Office of Religious Affairs, the Wesley Foundation staff's role was often the "understanding listener for the confused student entering adulthood and being bombarded with new knowledge and ideas."

By 1975 all debt on the building was paid off and the Central Pennsylvania Conference, rather than all the Annual Conferences in the State, became the sole support for the work of the Wesley Foundation. The staff was reduced to the Director and two part-time students. Director Rev. Ned Weller's duties were many and diverse; supervising the use of the building which was heavy, serving as director of International Friendship House, serving as part of the staff of the Office of Religious Affairs, being a member of the International Hospitality Council, and serving as an advisor for Colloquy and various student organizations.

A major change for the Wesley Foundation came in 1977. A study of the Foundation and the United Campus Ministry at Penn State University had been authorized in October 1975 by the Committee on Higher Education and Campus Ministry of the Central Pennsylvania Conference, to explore goals and priorities for ministry and to evaluate professional staff. In February 1976, a five-person team came to campus and did a thorough study. On June 1, 1976 they recommended that the Central Pennsylvania Conference join the Pennsylvania Commission for United Ministries in Higher Education in funding a collective ministry at the University. The Annual Conference approved this recommendation and it was approved by the necessary groups: The Wesley Foundation Board, the United Campus Ministry Board, the Board of Education of the Central Pennsylvania Conference, and the Pennsylvania Commission for United Ministries in Higher Education.

The structure was to consist of a Director and three associates. In July 1978 the Pennsylvania Commission for United Ministries in Higher Education assumed responsibility for funding the new collective ministry. From that date, the primary function of the Wesley Foundation Board was to maintain the Student Center Building and the parsonage. The Board consisted of 25 members, approximately one-half clergy and one-half laity, representative of local United Methodists and the Conference at large.

The name for the new organization was United Ministry at Penn State, or "UMPS." Seven Protestant communions comprised the group: American Baptist Churches, Church of the Brethren, Mennonites, United Church of Christ, United Presbyterian, Friends and United Methodist.

In that arrangement, there were three United Ministry staff persons, one of whom was a United Methodist, Rev. Steve Engelhardt. Rev. Engelhardt was based at the Wesley Foundation. Rev. Don Davis, Director, and Rev. Anne Ard, both United Presbyterians, had offices at Eisenhower Chapel on the campus. Both the Wesley Foundation and Eisenhower Chapel were considered a locale for ministry. The Wesley Foundation Board elected a member to serve on the UMPS Board and vice versa, and the staff met regularly with local ministers of the supporting churches. Responsibility for programming rested with the UMPS staff and Board.

Financial support for maintaining the Wesley Foundation building and parsonage, and for hiring an Executive Secretary came from the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church. Ms. Nancy Robinson served as the first Executive Secretary (1979-1982).

During the 1980's, the Wesley Foundation Student Center was in constant demand. A soup/salad lunch, instituted in 1980 and known as "Stone Soup", was available every Tuesday and Thursday at noon for a nominal fee, and was open to both students and townspeople. Study rooms were available, and seminars and significant events of many kinds continued to be held at the Foundation. The policy for priority use of the Student Center gave student activities first priority, followed by church related functions, nonprofit charitable groups, and the public in general.

Notes from the 1985 Annual Conference report give some insight into the role of the Wesley Foundation at that time:

Seventy different organized groups used the building and fifty different kinds of activities were hosted. With so many students living in apartments, fraternities, rooms, etc., off-campus ministry is a prime need, so Rev. Steve Engelhardt has been assigned by UMPS to work principally in that area. "Stone Soup" and Study Space continue; a new lounge area for students was painted and furnished.

Then, on Friday November 13, 1987, fire destroyed the sanctuary portion of St. Paul's church. This had a major impact on the activities of both the church and the Foundation. With church facilities unavailable, the Wesley Student Center became home of many of the programs of the church. Worship was held in the assembly room on the upper floor and it was broadcast on closed circuit TV to the social room on the first floor. Student activities took place in a reduced state in the building and in other spaces on and off campus.

In January 1988, St. Paul's congregation voted to rebuild on this same site "to serve the students." The rebuilt building was dedicated in February 1990. The changes in the building that came about as a result of the fire had a major impact on the Wesley Foundation. To accommodate a common and more friendly entrance for both the sanctuary and the student center, what had been two buildings were now combined with one entrance off College Ave. Although physically combined with this common entrance, the buildings remained under separate "ownership."



The common entrance to St. Paul's UMC and the Wesley Foundation building

The University remained open to religious activities, but the pervading social climate was becoming more secular. Therefore, the role of Wesley Foundation become an outreaching, ecumenically and socially oriented ministry rather than a center for programmed "in group" activities.

Programming for students over the next ten years reflected the student culture of the time. The spaces were again used for student activities and the Wesley Foundation Board of Directors and the Wesley Foundation Director provided leadership. With the erosion of funding from the Central Pennsylvania Conference, it was determined that the best approach for the future of the Wesley

Foundation would be for full responsibility for both programming and building be transferred to St. Paul's Church.

In January 1999, the congregation of St. Paul's Church voted to accept the transfer of ownership of the Wesley Foundation Building and parsonage from the Central Pennsylvania Conference to the church. A week later the same congregation voted to change the Constitution and By-Laws of the church and thereby change its name to St. Paul's United Methodist Church and Wesley Foundation. What had started in 1920 as a program of the local church, transitioned to both a program and a facility of the Annual Conference, had been returned to the local church to provide for its leadership.

The next twenty years saw some significant changes in how the Wesley Foundation evolved to both understand and address the needs of the students of the 21st Century. St. Paul's Associate Pastor from 2002 to 2005, Rev. Pamela Ford, saw that evolution firsthand and describes well how the Wesley Foundation evolved to where it is in the year 2020.

ABBA JAVA AT ST. PAUL'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH & WESLEY FOUNDATION: The Back Story - by Rev. Pamela Ford

Those of us coming of age through the latter half of the 20th century were shaped by the all-pervasive Judeo-Christian culture that characterized the USA. The huge demographic called "Boomers" was raised in an orderly "Leave it to Beaver" culture. The Lord's Prayer was learned in public school. Christian scriptures were read daily. We assumed the unquestioned dominance of a Judeo-Christian worldview. Most Americans attended church for worship and study.

Since at least the early 1990s, there has been a sea change in the life of mainline Christian churches. More than 80% of Americans identified with church in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, now more than 80% of US Americans do not affiliate with a church or other worship place.

As a Pastor, schooled and ordained in the 1970s, I was blessed to help churches grow into the early 1990s. Heading into the new century, I realized that I could not continue in pastoral ministry unless I understood what was happening and how I would have to change if I were to be relevant for another decade. What I had learned about doing "church" in 1975 was irrelevant. On September 10, 2001, I headed back to seminary for 3 years of learning. The very next day, we were all shaken by the 9/11 event which would leave us forever changed. In July 2002, I was appointed to St. Paul's.

Journeying with a Lay Advisory Team of St. Paul's members, we acknowledged the congregation's formal commitment to remain on E. College Avenue for the sake of the students. We acknowledged our contradictory reality: Campus Ministry of the Wesley Foundation was on one side of a heavy metal door, and St. Paul's congregation lived on the other side. The two communities did not interact in an ongoing way. The number of students attending worship at St. Paul's slowly declined.

The sea change happening around us looked like this:

- A second generation of students not raised in church lived in our town. Church was an alien environment to many, cloaked in unfamiliar symbols, saying unknown prayers and creeds, and singing 200-year-old songs.

- Young people were existing in a multiverse of spiritualities: A student might play drums in a Christian Praise Band, sport tattoos and piercings, practice yoga, and be well-read in Buddhism.
- Adolescents yearned for rich and extreme experiences from skateboard parks to art museums to world travel. Church was a passive event.
- Youth who did “try” church found it to be the only place in their world that did not include a diverse community of people.
- Young people, coming to our community from a vast variety of biological families, were coming to understand “family” as the group of companions who shared their daily life. They mourned the cancellation of the TV show, “Friends.”

The over-arching question for me and the Lay Advisory Team was this: How will we share our faith in Jesus in a world that no longer comes to church? What will “evangelism” look like in the 21st century?

In brief, we needed to be about the task of reclaiming the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-- *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...*

As Christ-followers, we are called to go! This is a huge challenge for a church that has assumed that people will come to us!

Theologian Leonard Sweet advocated that our mission is to lead people to living water. He wrote, *Every generation needs a shape that fits its own hands, its own soul. Each generation, every person, needs a different handle from which to receive the living waters. Our task is to pour the living water into anything anyone will pick up.... We must be prepared to pour the living water of Jesus into containers out of which we ourselves would never be caught dead drinking.* [from Aqua Church, pp.28-30]

The birth of Abba Java as a coffee house was the result of our effort to find that container.



Abba Java Coffee House entrance of the Wesley Foundation building

The first version of Abba Java in 2002-2003 provided space for students to drop in for study and coffee during the week. Weekday traffic was light enough that the Administrative Assistant at Wesley, Lisa Voigt, handled much of the activity with help from a few others. A couple from the

congregation provided 2 new desktop computers for use in Abba Java and paid for the internet cost for a while.

A Sunday morning worship experience called “Open Door” was offered in the coffee house. The big activity, however, happened on Friday evenings when Abba Java would host Christian bands and singers from campus and beyond. It was not unusual for more than 200 students to cram into the space for these events. Open Mic night was also popular. A Campus Ministry team was formed that helped with these weekend evening events.

The weekday ministry of Abba Java has expanded thanks to the Directors of Campus Ministry, particularly Jenny Gruendler. It was during her ministry at St Paul’s UMC and Wesley Foundation that major growth was seen both in the number of students coming to Abba Java and the number of adult and student volunteers. Floor space has more than doubled. Diversity is extraordinary in terms of ethnicity, gender orientations, spiritual backgrounds, and economic status. Some students struggle with immigration status, others with food and housing insecurity. Sometimes we see students sharing Bible study, conversation, or prayer over coffee. Former Abba Java manager, Sue Justice, has found ways to partner with local agencies for sharing of services and donations of hundreds of pounds of food.

In addition to increased funding from the Susquehanna Conference, the Wesley Foundation has been successful in attaining significant grants from the Lilley Foundation. A team of student interns has served the ministry in many different ways thanks to this enhanced financial support.

Abba Java gives to the more than 80 volunteering servants (pre COVID-19), opportunities to listen, to share, to serve side-by-side with students, and to respond to the frequently asked question, “Why are you doing this?”

That’s the question for which we wait, and which makes our hearts happy! We come to Abba Java to share the love of Jesus!

CONCLUSION

In reading this sketch of the history of the Wesley Foundation, it is hoped that the reader will note the valuable service, and sense the positive influence the Foundation has had on the life of both the Penn State University students and the State College Community. No record has been kept of the number of young persons, participants in the Wesley Foundation program, who have entered the ministry and other church related vocations, but there are a great many. And undoubtedly many more participate as active laity in their local congregations.

The role and emphasis of the Wesley Foundation has changed with the times. But the Foundation continues to provide an important ministry to the University students, while acting as host to many University and State College service and community groups.

This brief history was originally researched by Dorothy Blanchard Wiggins and written by Vivian Doty Hench as a part of the celebration of the 65th anniversary of the Wesley Foundation at Penn State in 1985. It has been updated for the 2020 Centennial celebration by Louis Geschwindner and Rev. Pamela Ford. An important reference for this update was *Methodism in Central Pennsylvania 1771-1969* by Frederick E. Maser, a publication of the Editorial Board, Central Pennsylvania Annual Conference, The United Methodist Church, 1971.

A graphic timeline can be found on-line at <https://wesleypsu.org/100-years/>