

WESLEYAN PROFILES

Wesleyan Profile: New Chaplain Recounts Adversity He Faced as Undergrad

Rev. Edwin Ferguson is finishing his first year at NC Wesleyan after his predecessor, long-time chaplain Barry Drum, transitioned into a full-time teaching position.

As an occasional participant in Rev. Ferguson's online services, staff member Gail Fields has been impressed by the new chaplain. "I've found the services to be uplifting and encouraging," she said. "Each message has been enriching, thought provoking and reflective."

She added that Rev. Ferguson "presents himself as a man who truly loves the Lord and His people. We're blessed to have him."

Along with his Wesleyan responsibilities, Ferguson, 36, serves as a pastor at A.M.E. Zion Church in Snow Hill. He lives in Wilson.

A St. Louis native, he noted that he's the first male in his family to graduate from college, having earned a BA in history in the pre-seminary track at Concordia University (Seward, Nebraska). He holds a Master of Divinity degree with a concentration in church history from Hood Theological Seminary, Salisbury, where he's completed one semester in the Doctor of Ministry program.

The Decree conducted an email interview with Rev. Ferguson to talk about his life prior to coming to Wesleyan.

Q. What's a favorite memory from your childhood?

A. I would say it was the time spent with my late grandmother. She reared me in the Bible, she always had chocolate chip cookies and, in her later years, we liked to watch "Everybody Loves Raymond" together.

Q. What were your primary interests in high school?

A. Scouting was one (I became my troop's first Eagle Scout during my freshman year of high school). Others were youth choir, the church step team, and football (I played for three years. We won the state title my sophomore year and went to the state semi-finals my junior year).

Q. Describe the role religion played in the life of your family.

A. We went to Washington Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church in St. Louis. When I was growing up, my mother kept me in private Christian schools. Throughout the week, this served to reinforce the messages I heard on Sundays. Going to private schools forced me to wrestle with my faith as I tried to fit into the

surrounding culture. I had to make certain decisions, sometimes influenced by my faith and other times opposed to what I believed.

Q. When did you know you wanted to enter the ministry?

A. Long story short: When I went to college, I was preparing to become a teacher (middle school/high school math and history). During my freshman year, I was sitting in one of the evening Bible studies, and I felt a peace and knew that I was in the right place. I also sensed that God was calling me into ministry. It was as if God was saying, "This is what I want you to do." Earlier in my life I had felt God was calling me, but when I asked about it, my Sunday school teachers thought I was just being funny. In that college Bible study, in that moment, I knew.

Q. What's the most adversity you've faced in your life? How did you deal with it?

A. For the majority of my time in college I struggled with depression. There was an immense amount of pressure on me at the time. I was the first male in my family to go to college, and I had several younger male cousins looking to me as a role model. If I failed, I would be letting them all down. After my first year, I had to go home because I was too prideful and refused to drop a calculus class that I was failing, when that would have been the prudent move. I guess I didn't want to look like a failure. I went home for a semester, enrolled at one of the local community colleges, and improved my study and planning skills. I returned to Concordia, but I was still afraid of having to go back home again. Often I would stand in crowds and feel as if I was by myself. I smiled and laughed with the crowd, but many nights I cried myself to sleep.

In my senior year I finally shared my struggles with my roommates. We prayed together and they constantly checked on me. What helped me most was their transparency as they were dealing with their own problems. We used our private, yet shared, struggles as fuel. We wanted to walk across the stage and graduate the same year. Quite honestly, I don't know if I would be here today, if I hadn't confided in my roommates when I was at my breaking point. Here is what's most interesting about that part of my journey: At the time I was preaching during our nightly praise service, singing in the praise band, and helping our campus chaplain all while I was struggling in private. I don't know who will read this, but I pray that students will not suffer in silence. It was by the grace of God that my roommates were understanding and patient with me as I worked through my issues. It's vital that you find trustworthy classmates and friends and that you take your mask off in front of them.

Q. Describe your previous job experience.

A. I'll just mention my favorite experiences. For three summers between 2003 and 2007, I worked as a Webelos camp counselor. I lift up this experience because in my last year, we held a Bible study with over 400 campers and we led some of them to a relationship with God through Jesus.

Two times, I worked as a tutor, both at the elementary school I attended as a child, and as a part

of the Save-A-Youth program in Wilson. I loved both experiences because I was blessed to engage youths who were discovering their identities. I tutored them in math, but also helped them with conflict resolution, bullying, and personal issues.

I've been a pastor for 11 years. I've served churches in Blacksburg, SC; Fort Lawn, SC; Elizabethtown; and now in Snow Hill.

Q. What attracted you to the NCWC position?

A. Again, I'll try to do my best to share the Reader's Digest version. From my time in Nebraska, I've always felt a strong pull toward college campus ministry. At every church I've served, I've connected with the local schools. In one case it was with the local community college (Bladen CC) in a mentoring program for minority males. There the chairperson allowed me to come and talk about everything from faith to finances to family. The fire was re-kindled while I worked with this program.

I had been praying about an opportunity to serve in a similar capacity. When I saw the opening here at Wesleyan, I first reviewed the qualifications and thought that I wasn't a good fit because I was an A.M.E. Zion (not United Methodist) minister. I shared with God my concerns about the denominational affiliation, and I sensed Him saying to me, "Apply anyway..."

This is a critical time in the lives of young adults, and if my walk, my transparency, and my story help even one of them to become a productive citizen, I believe that will please God.

Q. List your job title and duties at NCWC.

A. I'm the chaplain here at the House of Hope (Russell Chapel) on Wesleyan's campus. Among my duties, I:

- Direct the campus ministries
- Provide programming (ministry opportunities) that engage, educate, and empower the student body
- Oversee the operations of the newly minted Bishop Cupboard (pantry) & Bishop Assistance programs
- Expand our connections and build relationships with community churches

Q. What are your immediate and long-term goals?

Short-term Goals:

- To have a time designated for members of the Wesleyan community who desire to worship on our campus. We need to find a time during the day when classes are not meeting.
- To offer a service on Sunday evenings for the demographic who may not wake up in time on Sunday morning.
- To develop a discipleship program that will help the students to grow in their faith

Long-term Goals:

- To help students who are discerning the call to ministry through participation in various opportunities and connections to various seminaries (to become a ministry training ground in line with their denominational standards).
- Q.** Let's shift to your life outside of work. What do you miss most about St. Louis?
- A.** Seeing family, attending my home church. I also miss Imo's Pizza, greasy Chinese food (without the vegetables), and White Castle burgers (with the cheese fries and a large chocolate shake).
- Q.** While we're on topic of hometowns, what do you prefer--North Carolina or St. Louis barbecue?
- A.** North Carolina or St. Louis barbecue? I don't want to have any problems, but it's St. Louis/Kansas City barbecue all day, every day. Based on conversations I've had with people in North Carolina, pulled pork is "barbecue." I know it's not one size fits all, but when I think about barbecue, I think about ribs (the Lord is good, LOL), brisket, pulled pork, pork steaks, burnt ends, and links.
- Q.** What are your hobbies and other interests?
- A.** Taking naps (again, the Lord is good, LOL), bowling, watching sports (college football and basketball in particular).
- Q.** Identify your favorites from the following list:
- Favorite TV Shows: "The Office" (kept me sane while going through seminary), "Everybody Loves Raymond" (a sentimental favorite because I always sense I'm sitting next to my late grandmother), "Fresh Prince of Bel-Air," WWE/AEW wrestling, "Chopped," "Beat Bobby Flay," "Doug" (a throwback Nick car-



Rev. Ferguson

toon), "Hey Arnold" and "Investigation-Discovery" (any of the shows--I try to help the detectives solve the crimes), "Family Feud" (with Steve Harvey) & "Wheel Of Fortune" (I have the game app on my phone right now).

- Favorite Movies: "Selma," "The Butler," "Welcome Home, Roscoe Jenkins," "300" (I'm still waiting for part three), the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, "The Meg," "All About the Benjamins," and "Coming to America" (1 & 2).
 - Favorite Music: smooth jazz, hip hop (between 1996 and 2010), gospel, and Afro-beats.
 - Favorite Foods: ribs, St. Louis Chinese, Imo's Pizza (all tied for 1st place).
 - Favorite Book: "He-Motions" or "Let It Go," both by TD Jakes.
 - Favorite Place: Driving through the mountains on I-40 East; a beach (either Myrtle Beach or near Los Angeles, especially during a sunset); or my late grandmother's living room.
 - Favorite Teams (besides the Bishops): College: Florida State for football; Duke for basketball. I will cheer for Missouri as well. Professional: Baseball-St. Louis Cardinals; Football-San Francisco 49ers; Basketball-whatever team LeBron is on/ the Golden State Warriors with Steph Curry, Klay Thompson and Draymond Green. I was a HUGE Chicago Bulls fan during the MJ years.
- Q.** Describe your social media usage.
- A.** I'm on Facebook (but mainly to post on my church's page) and YouTube (again, mostly to post for my church as well as House of Hope; I'll also get on YouTube to watch older football games and various comedians). I spend most of my social media time on Instagram. I follow several comedians, and I'll check out their clips to get a laugh.

Campus Declared Covid-Free since Early March

The college has not had a reported case of Covid on campus since March 5, Health Services Director Jessica Brys-Wilson said on March 18.

The Decree contacted Brys-Wilson for an update:

Q. What's been the total number of Covid cases on campus--broken down by students and faculty/staff--since the semester began? Let's say through March 15.

A. Fifty-one students and sixteen employees have been positive so far this semester. We have had zero cases on campus since March 5th.

Q. How would you characterize the cases in general and what symptoms have been displayed. Did anyone require hospitalization?

A. Very mild. The omicron variant has caused minimal symptoms in the majority of those infected. I'm not aware of any hospitalizations this semester.

Q. Remind us of the current mask requirements on campus.

A. Unvaccinated persons are asked to wear a mask indoors if

they cannot social-distance. If you're fully vaccinated or you've had Covid within the last 90 days, you're not required to mask indoors at this time.

Q. How fearful are you that members of the NCWC community will become complacent with respect to Covid? And what can we do to guard against this?

A. I'm not overly concerned about this. Our campus and community transmission are so low at this point, that I think exposure is limited. When possible, we all should continue to social-distance. We should also stay home if sick, avoid sick contacts, and wash hands often. The immunocompromised or higher risk groups may want to continue wearing a mask and avoiding crowds.

Q. What other recommendations do you have for the Wesleyan community?

A. As always, eat a healthy diet, get plenty of rest, wash your hands often.

Q. Do you recommend that the unvaccinated still get a shot?

A. Yes. The data seems to indicate that vaccinated individuals experience a milder disease course than the unvaccinated.

Q. What is the latest state/federal recommendation when it comes to a second booster shot?

A. Pfizer is just now asking for FDA approval of a fourth booster shot in a limited population. At this point, there is no formal recommendation for a fourth shot, though it is likely that that will come at some point.

Q. Europe is reporting a new wave of an omicron "subvariant?" How worried should the U.S. be about that coming here?

A. I expect that we will continue to develop new variants and sub-variants. At this point, the omicron subvariants seem to be more contagious but not necessarily more dangerous. I will be keeping my eye on the data from China and Europe, but I don't think we need to be concerned at this point. If that changes, we'll again adjust our policies to protect the wellbeing of our campus community.

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