

## One Disciple's Journey

By Denise Haskins

Some experience a call to vocational ministry as a flash of insight or understanding (think Paul on the way to Damascus), but for some the path to their calling is more of a journey that brings them to the place they were always intended to be but never realized before they arrived.

God led Sondra Ely Wheeler on a path to her current position as a Christian ethicist that she never predicted would include serving as the Martha Ashby Carr Professor of Christian Ethics at Wesley nor participating in the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Human Genome, an initiative of the National Institutes of Health.

She converted to Christianity when she was 16 years old and fell in love with the Scriptures, but her career plans did not include vocational ministry. At the end of her junior year at Wesleyan University (Middletown, CT) studying for a degree in clinical psychology, she married and took a year off to work with autistic adolescents at a state psychiatric facility. This experience undermined her idea of the neutrality of psychiatry and proved to her that there were limits to the care institutions could provide for people and were more often used to keep "inconvenient" people out of the way.

After returning to school, she completed her degree and became certified to teach English and history. She taught emotionally disturbed adolescents at a private psychiatric facility, before eventually staying home in order to focus on caring for her growing family (two children and her father-in-law) while her husband continued his schooling, first at Union Theological Seminary and then at Yale.

While living in New Haven, she began taking classes at the divinity school as a special student. Wheeler's primary interest was what would life look like if people took faith and Scripture seriously. She eventually applied for the M.A. program to take advantage of financial aid and then for the doctoral program because she hadn't yet found the answers to her questions. Her experience at Yale brought her into a sphere of learning that included professors she still holds with great regard. With those professors as examples to which she would aspire, Wheeler moved to Pittsburgh where she taught Christian Ethics at Duquesne University. She had only been there for one year when her friend and former classmate Kendall Soulen reached out to her about an opening at Wesley. Having just moved, Wheeler was not particularly interested, but agreed to submit her CV to Dean Doug Meeks just to get him off the phone (she had only been at home to receive his call because her one-year-old was suffering from an ear infection).

There's nothing more fun than an interview for a job you don't want," Wheeler recalls. She made the trip to D.C. with no intention of taking the position if it was offered, but found the deciding factor in an interview before a panel of students. "It was the only time I had ever been asked, 'Who is Jesus to you?'"

Since coming to Wesley, she has been helping future leaders understand their role as functioning ethicists and the purpose of the church as a community for moral formation and discourse. As she puts it, "if you can't tell the difference between us and the Rotary Club, why come?" However, she also points out that ethics is not limited to formal education, and is

found in not only our preaching and teaching but also how we administer the church and the nature of our conversation. "It is what we do." Church is a place where we love God with our minds, and part of that is knowing how to discern what is of God. It's not just a baptism of our bodies but also a baptism of our minds - a vocation of all baptized people, not just those who go into professional ministry.

The future ahead is bright. She has plans to write or to collaborate on at least two more books. She has her continued work with the faculty and students here at Wesley. And once retired, she looks forward to traveling somewhere not related to work with her husband - the British Isles, Sienna, and somewhere in Spain. Then there will be more time to spend with her children and grandchildren and once more enjoy hobbies, like playing the clarinet and riding bike long-distance.

Wherever she goes and whatever she does, her journey with God will continue to take her exactly where she is meant to be.



### Monica Petty, Director of Housing

I love my hometown (Kansas City, MO) and will find ways to brag on it in conversation. I enjoy studying how pop culture intersects with social issues and reflects the time period.

My favorite museums are the Museum of American History (DC) and the National Museum of Toys and Miniatures (Kansas City).

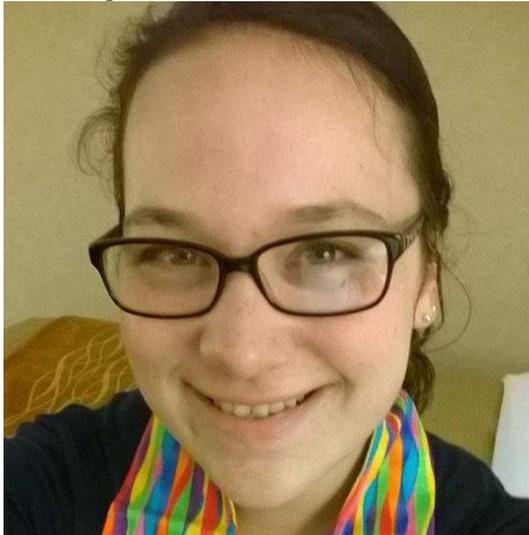
My favorite television show is Scandal.

I look forward to meeting the residents and staff here at Wesley!

## Disciples Overseas

Seminary classes can be tough enough all on their own, so why make them any more complicated or confusing? Imagine trying to read the assigned texts or to listen to the professor lecture in a foreign language. For some, the additional challenges of language and culture contribute another dynamic to their theological education.

### Ashley



Ashley Roth (M.Div., year 3) chose to spend this semester studying at Theologische Hochschule Reutlingen (Reutlingen School of Theology) in Germany after learning that she was not eligible to apply for the new exchange program being offered at Cambridge. Below she describes the journey that led her to board a plane for Europe earlier this month.

I was not eligible for the Cambridge program because I was going into my last year of seminary, and I remember feeling pretty disappointed about this. There was this nagging feeling in the pit of my stomach to keep asking questions about opportunities like this that might fit into my schedule as a third year student.

The Registrar's Office proved to be a great source of information about opportunities to study abroad, including the program at Reutlingen. I was reminded of the amazing students who join us in the Fall from Germany and was told that it is an exchange program not often taken by Wesley students because of the German language requirement.

I often found it hard to explain to people why I want to spend most of my last year in school overseas, especially while trying to relearn and master a language I have not touched since high school in preparation.

That nudge I mentioned earlier never left me. I came to acknowledge this as the pull of the Holy Spirit. So I go to encounter theology through the eyes of others; I go to grow and experience the world. But the main reason I go is because I know I am called to.

While at Reutlingen I will take a cultural immersion and language course for the first six weeks at their sister institution before starting a full course load in German at the seminary. I will take advantage of the opportunity to travel as much as time and funds allow.

I am blessed to have amazing support from many offices at Wesley as this is too large an endeavor to try to do alone. And though I will also be studying with a friend whom I met when he was a part of our community in fall of 2013 as an exchange student [Damian Caruthers], I know that no amount of planning or preparation will be sufficient for the journey ahead, so I trust God will grace me with an open heart and a renewed spirit.

### Suka



Suka Joshua (M.A., year 1) traveled solo from her home in India to study for a Master of Arts degree here at Wesley Theological Seminary with the encouragement of Dr. Sathinathan Clarke who had visited Lady Doak College where Suka teaches English and serves as college chaplain. Below she shares the experiences that brought her to us this year.

I don't have any formal theological education, and my college has been encouraging me to get that education. The online offerings in India were limited and would have taken a long time in order to complete a Master's degree.

In November 2013 Dr. Clarke visited our college as a resource person. Following a talk I gave during his visit, he asked me if I was theologically qualified, and when I had to admit that I was not, he encouraged me to come study at Wesley. It was not until I met him again in September 2014 at a chaplains conference in Seoul that he asked me about my application, and I finally took the steps to come to Wesley.

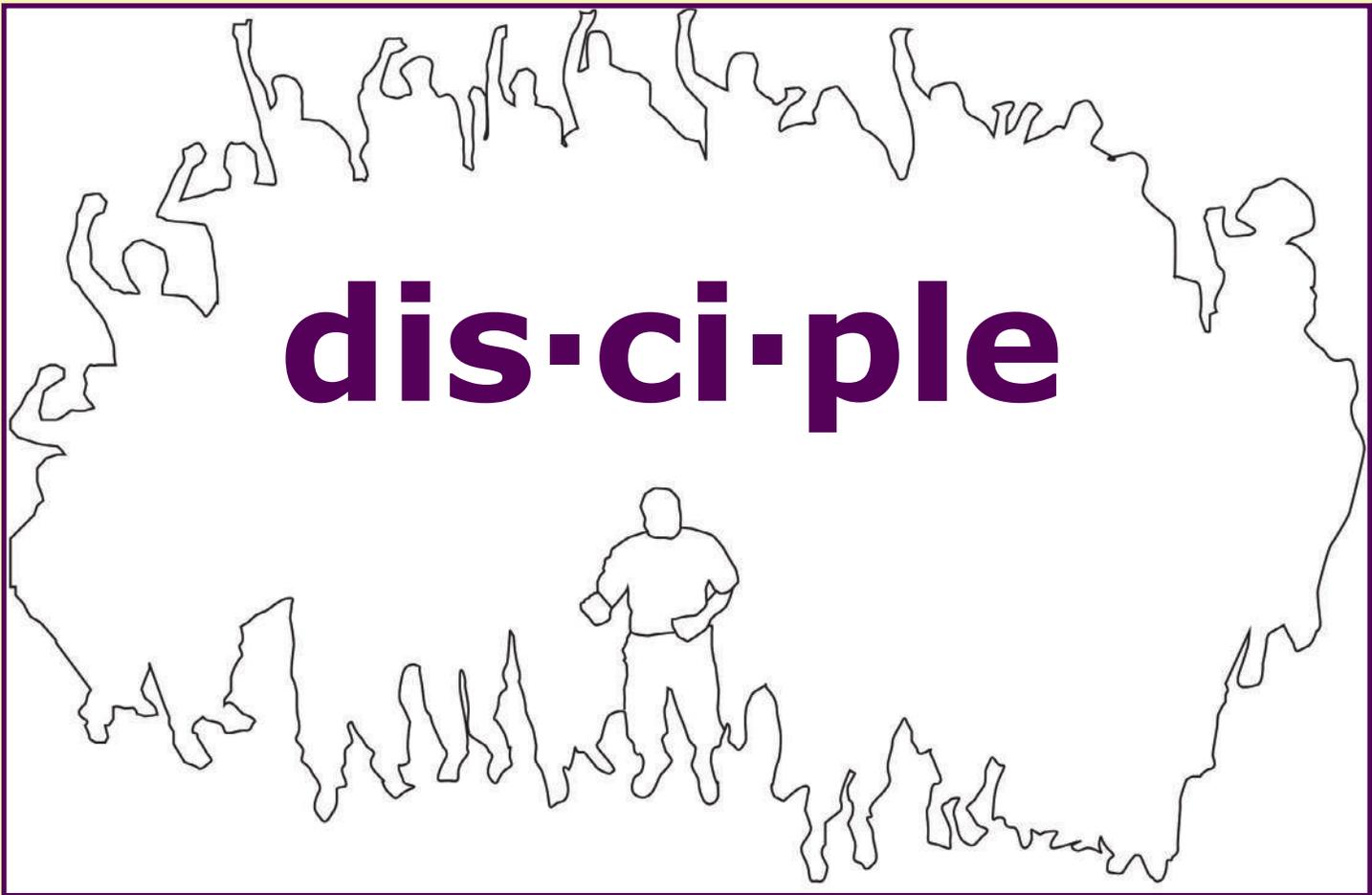
I started my education by taking two courses online. I realized during those classes that this degree would offer more than just book knowledge and would require me to think critically and analyze what I learn, which was a very practical application from most education in India.

For example, I found I could draw an analogy between what I was learning in Dr. Clarke's class about the Dalit caste and discrimination against African Americans as described in literature, which was a subject I was teaching my students. The best part was synthesizing how the church can help or propagate these social ills.

I also took a class on church and young adults. I found that while the text focused on the problems of children in Western societies, there was a lot of applicability to adolescents I know - my own children and my students - especially in this age of globalization. It was very helpful to me in how to use the Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ into their lives.

I look forward to making friends of other students here at Wesley, especially to help me learn how to navigate life in the US on my own.

The Registrar's Office can help you plan your own study abroad opportunity - whether it be to Reutlingen or Cambridge or another location around the globe! Their office, located in room 104 of the Trott Building, is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 12noon and again in the afternoon between 1pm and 4:30pm.



The noun disciple comes from the Latin word *discipulus*, which means “student, learner, or follower.” One of the earliest places disciple showed up was in the Bible, where it means “a follower of Jesus,” sometimes specifically one of the twelve apostles. It’s still used that way in religious speech and writing, but it can also describe a serious, dedicated follower or student of a teacher or leader. In this edition of the *Wesley Journal*, we explore what being a disciple means to the members of the Wesley community.