

THE FRANCIS MARION WESLEY FOUNDATION

I once preached a sermon entitled, "Expect the Expected," essentially encouraging my congregation to approach prayer (and life in general) with unwavering faith and a positive attitude. In God's Word God promises to love, care, support, and provide for us- hence how we pray and how we live should reflect expectations of God to make good on God's promises. The Fall, 2011 semester at The Francis Marion Wesley Foundation has shown me that I still need to work at practicing what I preach.

This school year at FMU Wesley has been one of surprising, explosive growth and subsequent adaptation. The average attendance at our weekly meetings has more than doubled (sometimes tripled), and the number of students served by this ministry has increased dramatically. Our students are excited about what God is doing in and through the group and they regularly invite others to share the blessings. Such an influx of new students has required an unexpected adjustment to our "small group" format, but has also opened the door for the reintroduction of Worship into the program for the first time in years. Through the generosity of local churches and the know-how of student volunteers, we have introduced new technology that has greatly increased the quality of our Bible study and group discussion components. While the sudden boom in attendance initially caught us off guard, FMU Wesley continues to provide a safe, comfortable environment for students to encounter God in powerful ways and to grow in faith together.

Although our growth in the Fall has necessitated a shift in focus to more group-building and fellowship activities, FMU Wesley still provides opportunities for students to live out the love of Christ through mission and service projects. The group continued its annual traditions of Trick-or-Treating for food items (to support Florence's Harvest Hope Food Bank) and volunteering at FMU's Bike MS event (to raise awareness and money for the fight against Multiple Sclerosis), and also sponsored a new campus-wide event called "Dunk-A-Palooza." Brave professors volunteered to sit in a dunk tank, affording students (and a few faculty and staff members) the opportunity to dunk the professors for the price of a small donation to McLeod Regional Medical Center's branch of the Children's Miracle Network. Plans for the Spring, 2012 semester include hosting a campus-wide Christian concert, partnering with other groups on campus to raise awareness for social justice issues, and once again serving the surrounding community through our annual Week of Service over Spring Break.

If there is anything I have learned this school year as Director of the Francis Marion Wesley Foundation it is that when we ask God to provide growth we need to be prepared for God's answer. God has undoubtedly blessed FMU Wesley, but an increase in students served has also meant an increase in necessary expenses. We are sincerely grateful to all of the churches, groups, and individuals who have supported this ministry, but we are also greatly in need of new partners and additional financial support. Please continue to pray for the future of our program and for the students who are affected by its ministry, and please consider becoming a part of this vital ministry as God leads you.

Blessings and Peace,

Rev. Ricky Howell, Campus Minister