

2009 Annual Meeting: Southern Hospitality, History, and Canada Geese abound at Lake Junaluska



More than 100 United Methodists gathered at the Lake Junaluska Assembly, the Conference and Retreat Center for the Southeastern Jurisdiction, from June 29-July 2 to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church (HSUMC). The GCAH's First Historical Convocation, at which the HSUMC was founded, was held at Lake Junaluska the same week of 1989.

Before the formal program began, attendees visited the SEJ Heritage Center and enjoyed a boat tour narrated by Bill Lowry, Lake Junaluska's historian. He noted the large number of Canada Geese that reside at the Lake and invited everyone to take a goose home!

Dr. George Freeman, General Secretary of the World Methodist Council, gave the keynote address. He discussed some of the trends in 21st century world Methodism, including changes in dress and worship styles, the move from inclusive worship to indigenous worship, closer church-state relations in some areas, and the global migration of pastors. He worries that the church is being silenced by its need to compete with other community events in new ways. He also questioned what is happening to the "Methodist ethos." Following the plenary Art and Betty Swarthout graciously opened their lakeside home for an ice cream social.

After Dr. A. V. Huff led opening worship on Tuesday morning, Dr. Robert Sledge analyzed the 1844 schism that separated the Methodist Episcopal Church, South from the Methodist Episcopal Church. Participants then chose among workshops: The History of Gulfside Assembly by Mollie Stewart, The History of Hinton Rural Life Center by Lyle D. Shipley and "What Digital Records Shall We Keep?" by Dale Patterson.



After lunch, Bill Lowry spoke on the history of the Assembly, and the afternoon session closed with a tour of the World Methodist Museum conducted by its director, Dianne Mills. The day concluded with former SEJ Heritage Center Director Gerry Reiff's talk on the history and development of the Heritage Center.

Dr. Robert Williams, GCAH General Secretary, led Wednesday morning devotions, then Dr. Joe Hale, General Secretary Emeritus, discussed the life of lay evangelist Harry Denman. Annual conferences across the United States annually present a "Denman Evangelism Award" to one clergy person and one lay person who exhibit outstanding efforts for Christian Evangelism. Another round of workshops followed: The History of the Intentional Growth Center, How to Keep Digital Records by Dale Patterson, and Serving the Local Church History Community by Art Swarthout. That afternoon, the HSUMC and the SEJHS held their annual meetings.

At the Wednesday evening anniversary banquet, the SEJHS presented honorary life memberships to Ann Nelson Phillips, Thelma and Howard Crowder, and Art Swarthout. Pat Thompson and Jim Morris presented the HSUMC's annual Ministry of Memory Award to Lois Olson of Wisconsin.





Rob Sledge awarded the 2009 Saddlebag Selection to United Methodism at Forty: Looking Back, Looking Forward by Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., John G. McEllhenney, and Kenneth E. Rowe. Pat Thompson recognized the faithful service of Rob Sledge, the Society's first President, who has served on the HSUMC Board for 17 of its 20 years of existence.

Dr. Yrigoyen, who was General Secretary of the GCAH when the HSUMC was formed, offered the evening address, “‘And Are We Yet Alive?’: Celebrating the twentieth Anniversary of The Historical Society of the United Methodist Church.” Chuck noted that the Society was founded with more than 1000 charter members. Half did not renew their membership and the Society continues to lose membership. He challenged everyone to recruit new members.

The meeting ended with closing worship and Holy Communion, led by Bishop Larry Goodpaster of the Western North Carolina Conference. Many thanks go to the Rev. Arthur Warren, president of the SEJHS; the Rev. Arthur Swarhout, event coordinator; and the members of the SEJHS who served on the planning committee.

