

NATIONAL UNITED METHODIST GATHERING 50 YEARS OF INCLUSIVENESS

The year 2006 marks the 50th anniversary of two significant events in the life of the United Methodist Church. It was in 1956 that the Methodist Church first granted full clergy rights to women, and it was in 1956 that the Methodist Church first permitted congregations to transfer from the racially segregated Central Jurisdiction into their otherwise appropriate geographic conference.

Just 11 days after the adjournment of the 1956 General Conference, Mrs. Maud Keister Jensen of the Central Pennsylvania Conference became the first woman to receive full clergy rights in an American Methodist Conference. Later that summer, following final approval of both Jurisdictional Conferences, Mitchell Memorial Methodist Church of Harrisburg became the first congregation in the denomination to transfer out of the Central Jurisdiction.

To properly celebrate this dual anniversary, a national United Methodist gathering will take place September 21-24, 2006, in Harrisburg PA. The Historical Society of the United Methodist Church, the General Commission on Archives and History and the Central Pennsylvania Conference Historical Society are combining to co-sponsor the celebration and to hold their annual meetings in conjunction with this event.

The program will be built around a chronological look at the dynamics leading to the creation and elimination of the racially segregated Central Jurisdiction. On Thursday evening, a concerned John Wesley (aka Rev. Greg Rapp) will talk about the evils of the slave trade. On Friday morning, Richard Allen (aka Rev. Anthony Alexander) will address segregation in the early Methodist Episcopal Church and his motivation for forming the AME denomination. Parishioners who were members of Mitchell Memorial Church in 1956 will discuss their feelings about moving from the Washington Conference of the Central Jurisdiction to the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Northeastern Jurisdiction. On Saturday morning, Dr. James M. Shopshire of Wesley Theological Seminary will summarize this aspect of the gathering and speak on “1956: Preparing to Leave the Central Jurisdiction.”

The struggle of women to achieve full clergy rights will be addressed in presentations by District Superintendent Deborah Heisley-Cato of the Harrisburg District and Bishop Jane Allen Middleton of the Central Pennsylvania Conference. On Saturday morning Rev. Patricia J. Thompson of the New England Conference, author of a new book on the subject, will summarize this aspect of the gathering and speak on “1956: Full Clergy Rights for Women.”

The program will also include presentations on the Susquehanna Valley in the United Methodist Hymnal, a tour of United Methodist ethnic and mission ministries, and an ethnic musical celebration. The Saturday afternoon keynote presentation by Dr. Laurence Stookey of Wesley Theological Seminary, “50

Years of Inclusiveness in Worship” will address manners in which inclusiveness pervades and impacts all of who we are as United Methodists.

The concluding day of the gathering will celebrate Harrisburg as the headquarters of the United Evangelical Church, a predecessor denomination which existed from 1894 to 1922 and entered United Methodism through the Evangelical and Evangelical United Brethren traditions. Included will be tours, historical displays, and presentations of grave markers for United Evangelical bishops buried in Harrisburg. The message at the closing Sunday worship will be delivered by Dr. G. Edwin Zeiders, President of United Theological Seminary and a native son of Harrisburg and the United Evangelical Church.

Society annual meetings since 1990.

<u>year</u>	<u>church</u>	<u>district</u>	<u>keynote speaker</u>
1990	Shepherdstown	New Cumberland	Frederick Maser historian, East PA Conf
1991	Bellefonte Faith	State College	Allen B. Clark curator, Barratt’s Chapel
1992	Williamsport Wesley	Williamsport	John Ness first general secretary, GCAH
1993	Saginaw Community	York	William Beall archivist, GCAH
1994	Philipsburg Trinity	State College	Milton Loyer archivist, Central PA Conf
1995	Lewisburg Beaver	Lewisburg	Don Yoder historian, University of Penna
1996	Uriah	Chambersburg	Jeane Williams historian, Philadelphia Conf AME
1997	Royalton Emmanuel	Harrisburg	Robert Hower archivist, ECC Seminary
1998	Wellsboro	Wellsboro	John Wesley (Milton Loyer) founder of Methodism
1999	Lemoyne Grace	New Cumberland	Charles Yrigoyen general secretary, GCAH
2000	King Street UB	Chambersburg	Patrick Jones, United Brethren John Ludwig, United Christian
2001	Bellefonte Trinity	State College	Don Yoder historian, University of Penna
2002	Mansfield First	Wellsboro	John Piper dean, Lycoming College
2003	Mechanicsburg Hope	New Cumberland	1776 chaplain (David Biser) early Methodist itinerant
2004	Williamsport First	Williamsport	Milton Loyer archivist, Central PA Conf
2005	Camp Greene Hills	Altoona	John Wesley (Greg Rapp) founder of Methodism
2006	Harrisburg Grace	Harrisburg	Laurence Stookey Wesley Theological Seminary