

North Georgia UMM rock at Rock Eagle

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With workshops titled “Guys Gone Wild” and “MAC Attack!” and music provided by Wild at Heart, it obviously was going to be a good time at Rock Eagle for the 46th Annual Spiritual Men’s Retreat, September 26-28, 2008. The retreat is sponsored annually by the North Georgia Conference United Methodist Men. The only year they did not meet since their first retreat in 1961 was 2005 because the campgrounds were being used to house evacuees from the Gulf Coast after hurricane Katrina. This year they were also celebrating the 100 year anniversary of UMM which began in 1907 as the Methodist Brotherhood in Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

According to Cary Loesing, Executive Director of the North Georgia United Methodist Men, 830 men had pre-registered for the retreat and they were hoping for enough walk-ins to get them over 900 for the weekend. They expected a number of people to come for Saturday only since many members would not be able to get off work on Friday.

Approximately one-third of those attending were first-timers, which is about normal each year. At the same time nearly another third had attended for over 10 years with Wayne Story being there the most. He has attended every year since the 1962.

L. W. Smith, President of the Southeast Jurisdiction

UMM said, “This is the largest group we have.” He went on to say there is still room for growth, however, “We need the support of the Bishops and conference leadership to grow.”

The keynote speaker for the weekend was the Rev. Steve Wood, Senior Pastor of Mt. Pisgah UMC in Alpharetta. He was introduced by the Rev. Ed Tomlinson, who said that many people coming from Atlanta were worried about running out of gas, but he wasn’t concerned because, “I never knew Steve to run out of gas or to lack energy.”

Wood used Romans 8 as his scripture for the weekend. He called on all those in attendance to be in authentic relationship with Jesus. “Jesus did not call believers, he called disciples. You are a son or a daughter of God – start acting like it.” When we say, “I am with him,” that implies being in relationship with someone, not just knowing him.

“People look at our lives to see does it work when they are considering Christianity,” he said. “They do not want to know if it is true, but does it work.”

“The Gospel,” Wood said, “cannot be boiled down as a slick recipe simply for prosperous living.”

At the conclusion of each worship service, Wood invited forward all who were hurting or in need to come forward, kneel before the altar and pray. A number of men would come forward each time, along with others who would come to lay hands on them and pray with and for them.

Jasper Russell, North Georgia UMM President said, “Communication is our biggest problem. We need to do better letting people know about our events.” He did feel they did a better job getting the word out for



Wild at Heart performs at the 46th Annual UMM Retreat at Rock Eagle.

this weekend. He also said he feels the new Bishop will be supportive of UMM which is essential for continued growth.

Bishop Mike Watson, Resident Bishop of the North Georgia Annual Conference, spoke to the gathering on Saturday morning. He talked about his father's involvement in UMM and particularly his work with the General Commission of UMM.

Watson mentioned he would be attending the football game between his alma mater, Alabama, and Georgia later that day, "Roll Tide." Therefore, he used a football metaphor to talk about the four quarters of a man's life which he broke down in 20 year increments. We need men in their second quarter, he said, for their energy. Those in the third quarter for their maturity and experience. And those in the fourth quarter for their mentorship.

At noon, Watson spoke to the 70 or so clergy who were in attendance. He said he was going to talk about politics and used Amos 5:4-15, 18 as his text.

He said, "I pray that the truth and values in the Declaration of Independence will be around for years."

He went on to say, "Divine election carries with it an awe-filled burden. Being called into ministry carries a burden and a responsibility."

He ended by reminding those pastors in attendance of John 15:16, "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

Some of us have been religious for years and the tendency is to reminisce. But those who are wrapped in authenticity are in Christ and are praying for Christ.

They live in the present, not the past, Watson said.

There was a tribute to two men who died this past year who had been very active members of UMM: William "Bill" Hargrove who died at 107, and was the oldest living WWII veteran, and John Ellis of Wesley Chapel UMC in McDonough who was a prayer advocate.



After the clergy lunch at the UMM Retreat at Rock Eagle, pictured from left, are: Margaret and Bishop Mike Watson; Bishop Raul Garcia de Ochoa of Monterrey, Mexico; Jasper Russell, N. Ga. UMM President; and Jim Nelson, editor of the Advocate.

Music for the weekend was provided by Wild at Heart, a band made up of United Methodist pastors all of whom had supported themselves as members of other groups prior to entering the ministry on Friday. Ralph Freeman sang during the Saturday morning worship service. Liberty Hill Praise Team provided the music Saturday evening. And a volunteer choir led by Glenn Parrish sang on Sunday morning.

The offering taken during each worship service went to the people on the Gulf Coast to help in the continuing process of rebuilding their homes and their lives.

Work as already begun on the 47th Annual Retreat which will be September 25-27, 2009. The Rev. Bill Glass, author of Champions for Life will be the keynote speaker.