

## Friends Remember Gulfside, Bishops Repair House

by Woody Woodrick

A refuge. A place of inspiration. A place for fellowship. Holy ground.

All those descriptions were applied to Gulfside United Methodist Assembly when an estimated 150 people gathered Jan. 7 for a service of remembrance for the historic facility that was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

"When the Mississippi tsunami came in on Aug. 29, this place was transformed in a way that has broken our hearts," Mississippi Bishop Hope Morgan Ward said in her opening remarks. "Yet we gather today to give thanks for all the ways that the experiences we have shared at Gulfside live among us and rebound over and over to the glory of God."

Gulfside sits across U.S. 90 from the Gulf of Mexico. After Katrina roared ashore, not a single building remained standing.

The event drew participants from around the denomination, including bishops and lay work teams from Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, Illinois, California and New York.

The service was the first stop on the 2006 Journey Toward the Light: Conversations On Race tour sponsored by the Mississippi Annual Conference Commission on Religion and Race. The tour includes visits to civil rights sites in Mississippi, and it aims to build and strengthen relationships across races and cultures.

For many years, Gulfside was the only place along the Gulf Coast where African Americans could spend the night while traveling or hold large worship services and other meetings. Established by Bishop Robert E. Jones, it was opened in 1923 as a retreat and recreation center for African Americans who were not permitted to use most resorts in the segregated South.

"It is truly devastating - even though I've seen pictures - to come to Gulfside and not see the buildings I have seen all across the years," said Juanita Franklin of Foxworth, Miss., who was among those who shared what the camp and retreat facility had meant to them.

"It seems like to me just about all the pines are gone," Franklin said. "But when we used to have annual conference down here, in the mornings the musicians would go to the chapel and play the chimes that were on the organ. They (the chimes) would ring through the tall pine trees, and you felt surely, surely I'm in the presence of God."

Chelsea Harvey, a student at Gulfport High, told how she has met many friends at Gulfside. She and her grandmother visited the site soon after the storm and were dismayed by the damage.

"I want Gulfside to come back," she said. "I want my children to be able to attend Gulfside as I have and learn the history and have as much fun as I did here."

The facility's board of trustees hopes to make that dream a reality. Mollie Stewart, board chairperson from Hayesville, N.C., told the gathering that the board has voted to rebuild and that funds received from insurance settlements on the property have been used to make Gulfside debt free.

Executive Director Marian Martin, who now lives in Atlanta, was pleased with the large turnout. "When I saw everybody, I was so overwhelmed.

Perhaps the next time you come back, you will see more signs of life," she said. The office is on the campus of United Methodist-related Gammon Theological Seminary.

Virginia Adolph of Gulfport shared more news. A social worker in the Mississippi Department of Health, she told how an Oshkosh, Wis., businessman had been directed to her about building homes for storm victims. She told him about Gulfside and Seashore Assembly in Biloxi, Miss., another United Methodist center devastated by Katrina. He has agreed to build a home at Gulfside for the executive director.

The Rev. Alonzo Campbell, a United Methodist pastor from Louisiana, recalled how Gulfside was often the place where young pastors heard the call to ministry.

"Before Hurricane Camille (in 1969), there was a chapel" near the front of the property, Campbell said. "At that chapel, many pastors in the Louisiana Conference were called by God. People would be excited walking down that road. Who is God going to call to preach tonight? Almost always there was at least one individual whom God called to preach as a result of that service."

Bishop Mary Ann Swenson, a Jackson, Miss., native and leader of the church in Los Angeles, also participated in the service, along with Bishop Jeremiah Park of the New York Area and retired Bishop Roy Sano of Washington.

During the weekend, several United Methodist bishops spent time working on a home damaged by the storm. The team of about eight bishops, some family members and episcopal staffers installed insulation and hung Sheetrock in a D'Iberville home. Those helping out included Park, Sano, Swenson and her husband, Jeff; Bishop Michael Watson of the South Georgia Area; and Rebecca Schol, Kristin Schol and Bishop John Schol of the Washington Area.

Details about the Gulfside recovery fund are available by contacting its Atlanta office at 80 Walnut St. SW, P.O. Box 92364, Atlanta, GA 30314; telephone: (404) 529-9715.

Gulfside receives funding in part through the denomination's Advance for Christ and His Church. Donations can be designated for "Gulfside Assembly Program," Advance

Special #761337-2, or "Gulfside Assembly Capital Fund," Advance Special #760235-1, and sent to the UMCOR address.

\*Woodrick is editor of the Mississippi Advocate, the newspaper of the United Methodist Church's Mississippi Annual Conference.