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# Gulfside: Seventy Years of Service

by Raymond R. Breaux



*Bishop Robert E. Jones, founder of Gulfside Assembly.*

Gulfside United Methodist Assembly evolved directly from the needs of Black Methodists. In 1923, at the time of its founding, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was strictly segregated along racial lines, mirroring American society. Until Gulfside, there were no accommodations of any kind for any person of color on the entire Gulf Coast.

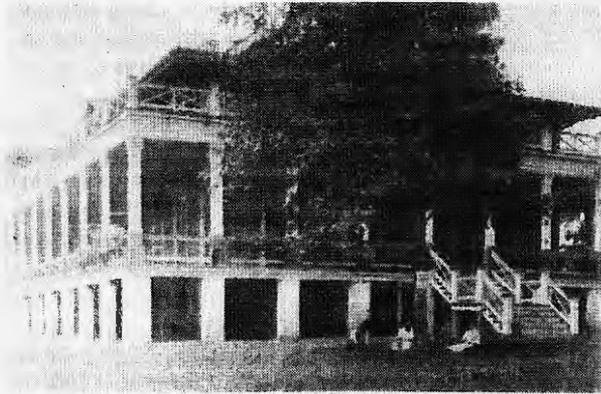
In its seventieth year, Gulfside is looking back and gathering insights for a more expansive future focus. What follows is a very brief study of the history and mission of Gulfside Assembly.

### The Early Years

The Gulfside Chautauqua<sup>1</sup> and camp-meeting ground was physically realized on April 16, 1923. Its founder, Bishop Robert E. Jones, was the first Black to be a general superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Gulfside was incorporated on January 28, 1924. The incorporators were some of the most prestigious Black leaders in Methodism at that time.<sup>2</sup>

As Rometta Roberts—one of Gulfside's former directors and wife to one of the ministers who helped found it—tells it, Bishop Jones was speaking at Lakeside Assembly, a White Methodist campground in Ohio, when he got the idea for Gulfside. Why not have a meeting place for Black Methodists in his own district? His district encompassed West Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

Waveland, Mississippi, was a resort town, centrally located on the Gulf Coast, 55 miles from Bishop Jones' main office in New Orleans. Through the aid of churches and individuals, Bishop Jones raised approximately \$4,000 to purchase land in Waveland. He bought 300 acres and leased 316 acres from the state.



*Above: Robert E. Jones Hall at Gulfside today. Left: The Jackson House before it burned.*

through August. Some of the activities included the Young Men's Christian Association Conference, Summer School for Town and Country Pastors, Summer School of Theology for aspiring ministers, Boys' Camp and Girls' Reserves, 4-H and Scouting events, and picnics sponsored by groups throughout the region. The summer events were culminated by Bishop Jones' Area Council Meeting.

The only activity that spanned the entire year during Gulfside's early years was the Poor Boys' school. This was probably the first and most significant program that Bishop Jones instituted at Gulfside. As Dr. J. H. Graham puts it in his book *Black United Methodists Retrospect and Prospect*: "This school enabled deprived functional illiterates to develop salable skills. Several have gone on...and prepared themselves for the Christian ministry."

James Bryant, a resident of New Orleans, was a participant in both the Poor Boys' School and the Summer School of Theology during the 1930s. He says of the Poor Boys' School that: "they studied regular text books as any public school teaches....As a teacher we had Ms. Mims....And Bishop Jones' son, Robert...would teach craft work....The boys had to work from 9 to 12 and then after [lunch] would go to class [until 4 P.M.]."

Ruth Sanders went to Gulfside in its early days also through her church, Wesley United Methodist, the oldest Black Methodist congregation in New Orleans. A Ms. Purnell would take the girls every summer for a week. Sanders remembers rigorous religious instruction and recreation. She also vividly recalls "being awakened in what they called early morning, but it was still night."

How could a Black man purchase beachfront property in Mississippi during the heyday of Jim Crow?<sup>3</sup> According to one theory, because Bishop Jones was fair-skinned, the sellers mistook him for White. It has also been said that there were White men who knew he was Black and who assisted him with the negotiations.

There was only one building standing on the whole of the 616 acres. It was called the Jackson House because it had once housed President Andrew Jackson.

It was a magnificent old mansion with very large rooms filled with antique furniture. The structure could not be seen from the beach. Large oak trees surrounded the house, hiding it from view. The edifice stood some 8 to 10 feet above the ground. The first floor had a wraparound porch that was wide enough to be used for meetings. The space beneath "provided shelter for the cows and hogs that roamed the nearby forest."

Bishop Jones marshalled his force of 14 preachers and local craft workers and set about putting the deteriorated structure into living condition. The open area under the porch was eventually closed in to become a kitchen, dining room, and sweet shop. A screened-in pavilion with a dirt floor was built where meetings could be held.

There was a makeshift dirt road leading to the Jackson House area. But when it rained, the road flooded and turned to mud. So most people walked the three miles through the woods from the train station to the Jackson House.

#### **Program Activities**

Those first two decades, under the leadership of Bishop Jones, Gulfside blossomed into a pivotal point of the New Orleans area and the surrounding region.

In the early days, events at Gulfside took place in the spring and summer months from April

### Surviving the Hard Times

Bishop Jones' tenure at Gulfside, which spanned the Great Depression, was speckled with threats of foreclosure. But Gulfside always managed to meet payment. Pennies were collected, philanthropists courted, and lots sold from the 300 acres that had been bought.

There was also the prejudice of the times. My father, who was from Waveland, volunteered often at Gulfside. He told me of cross burnings on several occasions.

One winter morning in the 1940s, the Jackson House mysteriously caught fire. Some blamed it on the Poor Boys' School. Some blamed it on Whites. After the fire, a hurricane in 1947 finished the Jackson House as well as other buildings on the purchased land.

Bishop Alexander P. Shaw had been assigned to the New Orleans Area in 1936. He and, from 1940 to 1944, Bishop William A. C. Hughes carried on the good work of Bishop Jones at Gulfside.

In 1944, Bishop Robert N. Brooks became administrator of Gulfside. Bishop Brooks was called "Mr. Methodist" because of his superb knowledge of doctrine. Under his leadership, a board of trustees was formed so that the burden of Gulfside did not rest with just one person. Bishop Brooks encouraged people to give dollars instead of pennies. Over a period of eight years, Brooks Chapel, Gulfside Inn, Harry Hoosier Auditorium, and the Bishop's house were built. These buildings were reinforced concrete constructions, better able to withstand fire and hurricane than the frame buildings had been.

### The Effects of Unification

Under Bishop Brooks' leadership, Gulfside continued to be the focal



*Picnicking under the oaks beside the pavilion at Gulfside, circa the 1920s or 1930s.*

point for "training...youth retreats, jurisdictional meetings, and leadership training enterprises." It was a place where Blacks and Whites could come together with much less questioning from the local authorities than would have taken place elsewhere in the South. But progress at Gulfside was slowed in 1968 with the formation of The United Methodist Church. Then, Black Methodists were finally accepted on an equal footing by White Methodists. But, as was the case with some other Black institutions, integration hurt rather than helped Gulfside.

The segregated, all-Black Central Jurisdiction, created with Northern and Southern church union in 1939, was disbanded. The Black membership was integrated into the existing White conferences. Then, in 1969, Hurricane Camille struck, destroying 26 buildings on the grounds. That massive destruction and the fact that Blacks could now go to other conference centers diminished the interest in and need for Gulfside.

This ultimately meant that Gulfside's services had to expand so that the center could support itself. It could no longer depend on Methodism as its sole support.

After the hurricane, there was talk of selling Gulfside and dividing the proceeds among the 12 Black Methodist Episcopal colleges. But those efforts were laid

to rest by Bishop Mack B. Stokes, Bishop Ernest T. Dixon, and laymen Wayne Calvert, Henry Harper, and others. These leaders worked tirelessly to preserve what they knew was a Black treasure. The fruit of their labor can be seen in the newly renovated, modern facility that exists today with the support of the General Board of Global Ministries' National Division. Included in the complex are newly constructed cottages for older adults. They were made possible by a grant from the Harry R. Kendall Fund (from the Health and Welfare Ministries Program Department).

It should be noted that during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, Gulfside served as a meeting place for the region. Civil-rights activist Hollis Watkins of Jackson, Mississippi, says: "there were only three places where Blacks could meet in Mississippi during the movement—Toogaloo College, Rusk College, and Gulfside."

### Gulfside Present and Future

Today, Gulfside is still being used as a meeting place for groups of African Americans from all walks of life. The Southern Black Cultural Alliance, the People's Institute, and the independent YMCA of Mississippi are among the groups that have been meeting there annually over the past 12 years.

## Gulfside Assembly in 2023

Under the leadership of Bishop Ernest T. Dixon, Jr., and the Board of Trustees, Gulfside has grown. It is once again used as a training and retreat center—but now by groups and individuals of all denominations and by secular groups as well. Now a Center for Human Rights is to be established at Gulfside, in honor of the late Thelma Stevens of the GBGM's Women's Division. A new president of the board has also been elected: Bishop Alfred L. Norris.

According to its acting executive director, Marian Martin, in celebration of its seventieth anniversary, Gulfside will increase its programming for today's youth. Martin points out that those who love and support the institution most today hold fond memories of their experiences there as children and young adults. Gulfside was built on a concept of wholesomeness that it has never lost. This would be a powerful gift to some of the youth of today. Who knows—maybe some semblance of Bishop Jones' Poor Boys' School will be resurrected. All that is certain is that Gulfside is hallowed ground—not just for Black Methodists but for all people. It must be preserved for posterity. □

*Raymond R. Breaux is a local writer and historian who works in housing. He grew up in the Waveland area.*

1. The Chautauqua movement of adult education at a summer assembly was founded in 1874 at Lake Chautauqua, New York.
2. Robert E. Jones, E.M. Jones, William Robinson, M.W. Dogan, M.S. Davage, William Jones, T.F. Robinson, L.H. King, R.N. Brooks, S.W. Brown, M.T.J. Howard, J.W. Golden, P.H. Rembert, C.S. Briggs, M.R. Walker, and J. F. Farmer, Sr.
3. Jim Crow: Discrimination against and suppression of Black people.



by Marian Martin

You are all invited to a celebration of faith, praise, and thanksgiving on August 13-15, 1993, honoring Gulfside Assembly's 70th Anniversary. Worship, memorials, candlelight and sunrise vigils, youth activities, bonfires, and concerts are among the events being planned to reflect the theme: "A Past To Cherish, A Future To Claim." Cynthia Felder, diaconal minister, is chairperson of these festivities.

*New World Outlook* has asked me to visualize what Gulfside's 100th Anniversary in 2023 might be like. As I close my eyes, I picture the beautiful landscaping designed by students from the University of Southern Mississippi and completed during the 1990s. I see oak trees, planted 30 years ago as "babies" by trustees, in honor of loved ones. Now they are laden with moss and stand majestically among the beautiful buildings that were restored by Volunteers in Mission and by income from the Advance.

The Leisure Village at Gulfside in 2023 consists of 10 cottages. A youth complex—combining housing with kitchen, dining, and recreational facilities—is bursting with activities. At the small lake, surrounded by picnic grounds, some people are fishing while others enjoy the gazebo. There are

folks playing tennis, basketball, and softball, while others swim, bicycle, or ride horseback. Among those walking on nature trails, I see people in wheelchairs and on crutches.

Gulfside now has both a front and a back entrance. Cottages are scattered along the rear entrance. They were built and are occupied by United Methodists on land leased from the Assembly.

**Gulfside is self-supporting!** Most importantly, I see all kinds of people and many children. I hear music from Brooks Chapel: "Come Ye That Love the Lord." Those children who were nurtured at Gulfside during the 1990s are now the leaders carrying on the legacy. They, in turn, are saying: "Let the Children Come."

My vision is only a glimpse into what mission means. Sharing through the Advance can make the 2023 celebration a reality:

*Gulfside Assembly Program  
Advance #761337-2  
Gulfside Assembly Capital  
Renovation #761335-0*

The future is here to claim. With your help, Gulfside Assembly can continue to grow and flourish for centuries to come—like the oak trees newly planted on its grounds.

## GULFSIDE UNITED METHODIST ASSEMBLY

950 South Beach Blvd - Waveland, MS 39576

ph/fx: (228)467-4909 or ph: 467-5252

email: [gulfsideassembly@earthlink.net](mailto:gulfsideassembly@earthlink.net)

### WHAT IS GULFSIDE ASSEMBLY?

A non-profit agency related to the United Methodist Church; the only remaining agency of the former Central Jurisdiction. It has been called an Oasis of Hope for strengthening community and family life. A place of hospitality for groups of 20 or more, welcoming an average of 4,800 individuals annually from 50 states and from overseas. It is a conference center open year round and utilized by local churches, universities, government, and others. Regularly used for Family Reunions, Banquets, and Picnics. Gulfside welcomes persons of all races, cultures and religions. It has been designated an historical site by the United Methodist Church and the state of Mississippi.

It stands on 60 acres on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, facing the Gulf of Mexico, next to Buccaneer State Park (formerly Gulfside property) in Waveland, Mississippi, one hour from New Orleans.

### WHAT IS IT'S HISTORY?

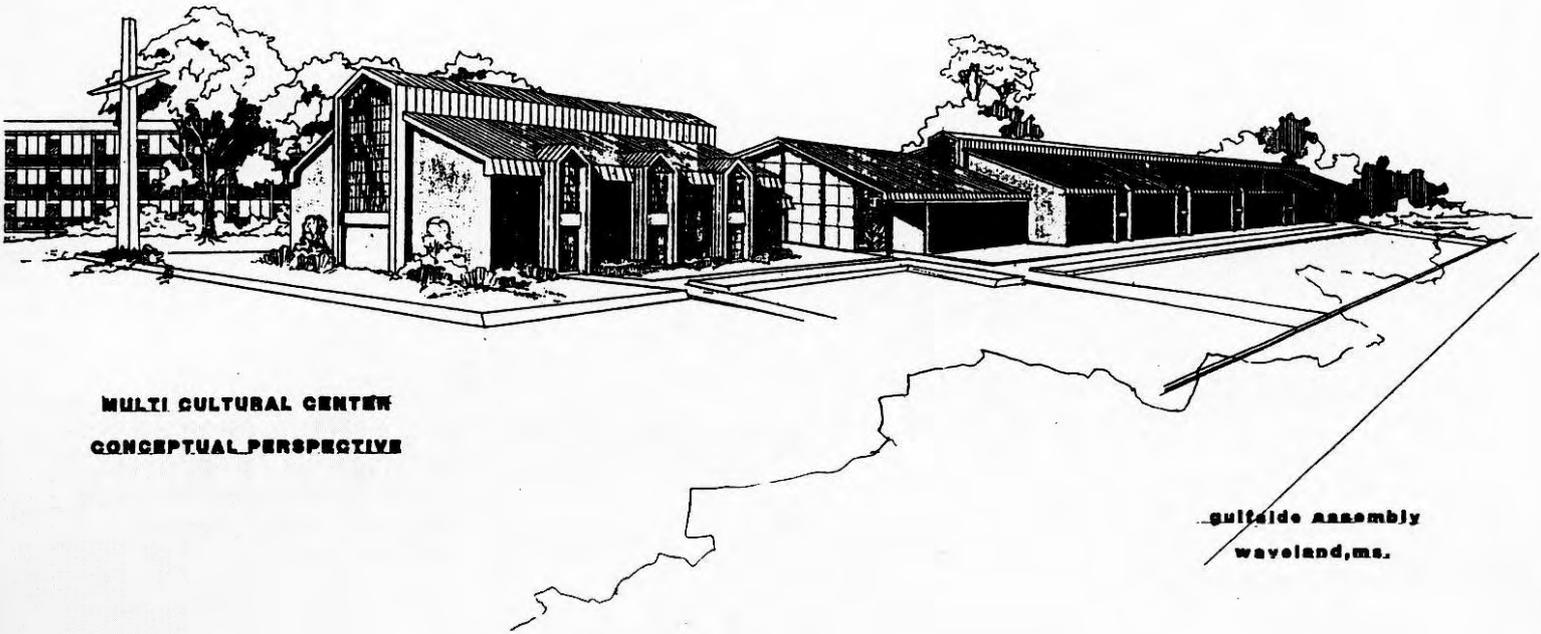
In 1923 Bishop Robert E. Jones, first African American Bishop and 14 men accumulated up to 600 acres of land to develop for African Americans who were being denied access and quality education because of the Law of Segregation. The Andrew Jackson house was its first building and was used as a boarding school for African American boys from rural areas and a day school for children from the community. There was no public school for African Americans in Waveland. It quickly became a training center for African Americans from Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, and from all over the segregated South. It has offered educational, missional and cultural programs throughout its existence. Damaged extensively in 1947 and 1969 by tidal waves and hurricane Camille, and with the abolition of the Central Jurisdiction in 1968, its future became uncertain. Gulfside has always been a place where black and white could meet together and was very prominent during the Civil Rights movement.

### WHAT IS ITS MISSION ?

The Gulfside Assembly/Association is an institution of the United Methodist Church that serves Jesus Christ, the church and community through providing (1) a place for remembering and for passing on the heritage of the Black United Methodists in the Wesleyan tradition, (2) quality facilities for conferences, seminars, and retreats, and (3) programs of nurture and spiritual enrichment that equip the United Methodist people (lay and clergy) for their ministry in the world and church.

### WHAT IS ITS VISION?

- ◆ To be Debt-free, self supporting, and have an adequate Endowment Fund
- ◆ To use all existing property
- ◆ To restore existing buildings and bring them up to standard
- ◆ To expand with emphasis on economic development (Gulfside-Shalom Community Development Corporation)
- ◆ To construct a Multi-Cultural Family Life Center
- ◆ To develop Assisted-Living Housing for those independent in self care
- ◆ To reconstruct the pier on the beach
- ◆ To reconstruct Brooks Chapel for worship
- ◆ To establish a Head Start Program
- ◆ To establish a Cokesbury Book Store
- ◆ To expand activities and programs consistent with the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



**MULTI CULTURAL CENTER  
CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE**

**gulfside assembly  
waveland, ms.**

# To meet its vision, Gulfside has launched a \$4.5 Million Capital Fund Drive

Mollie M. Stewart, President Board of Trustees  
Willie Bradley/Cheryl Thompson, Co-Chairs Study Committee  
Marian T. Martin, Executive Director

**Capital  
Fund  
Campaign**

## WE NEED YOUR HELP

*Make your Tax-Deductible contribution towards the Capital Fund Drive Today!*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL INVESTMENT \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Payable: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Lump sum on \_\_\_\_\_  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Annually on \_\_\_\_\_  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

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 Box 4.1  
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Echo staff photo by J.R. Welsh  
 An artist's rendering of villas at Sea Song at Gulfside, a retirement community planned to be constructed along with the rebuilt Gulfside Assembly in Waveland. The original Gulfside disappeared in Hurricane Katrina.

## Developers plan luxury retirement center at Gulfside Assembly grounds

BY J.R. WELSH  
 Staff Writer

Plans are under way to build a luxury retirement center on the grounds of Gulfside Assembly in Waveland, where Hurricane Katrina pounded and destroyed the historic religious retreat that had served Methodists since 1923.

Since the hurricane, the windswept, 60-acre site has been used as a disaster recovery center. But now, as part of its rebuilding effort, the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church intends to establish a new campus and expanded ministry center there.

The engine driving economics of the project will be Sea Song at Gulfside, a not-for-profit retirement center featuring villas, both independent and assisted living facilities, short-term lodging, and assorted recreational and cultural attractions.

Sales prices have not yet been released. The development will include six to eight villa buildings that will have 24 units each,

said Skip Kedney, a Jacksonville, Fla. marketing strategist whose company is working with the Sea Song development. Plans are to offer villas with five different floor plans.

Marketing brochures picture four-story buildings that will be placed throughout the beach-front property at 950 South Beach Blvd., close to Buccaneer Park.

"We are in the final throes of getting construction pricing," Kedney said.

Aside from the Villas, the development will include a section with 120 units for assisted or unassisted living, with dining and recreational facilities. A third portion consists of short-term housing units to be used for retreats and other events.

The third phase will be developed depending "on what the market absorbs," Kedney said.

Buildings at both the ministry center and the villas will be built 24 feet above sea level to withstand high water and hurricane-force winds. Sea Song is being designed by Pi

Architects, an Austin, Texas firm that specializes in senior living communities. Waveland builder Julie Rosson is also involved in the project.

Sales of the villas involve a technique through which residents never receive deeds to the property, but pay entrance fees and monthly service fees for lifelong residency. Should residents leave, 90 percent of the entrance fee is refundable to them or their estates.

Monthly service fees will include concierge services, recreation and educational programs, personal security, transportation, utilities, and residence maintenance.

Organizers expect retirees will be able to pay entrance fees from profits on the sale of their homes, and pay monthly service fees through personal funds from retirement or Social Security.

Gulfside Assembly began as a retreat, ministry center and school for black Christians founded by Bishop Robert Jones in 1923. Jones raised money to buy the land by asking people to save their pen-

nies.

According to Gulfside's Web site, the facility served the black jurisdiction of the Methodist Church as a place where members could gather for spiritual and recreational retreats. In those days, it also housed a boarding school for boys, a day school for local children, and a theological training center for blacks.

In addition to the retirement housing, redevelopment of the site will include a ministry center with high-tech media equipment and a 300-seat auditorium for conferences and training events. There will also be a community center, wellness area and game fields.

Sea Song has opened an information center at 10203 Mississippi 603. Its Web site can be found at [www.seasonatgulfside.com](http://www.seasonatgulfside.com).

Over time, Kedney expects Sea Song to become a significant part of the Hancock County community and its economic picture.

"We're looking at total fill-up in maybe 10 years," he said. "It's going to have a notable impact on the economy there."

Gulfside Assembly

FEB 21 98

# Freedom

Continued from D-1

Many young men were educated during Gulfside's early years, but there were other activities too: The Young Men's Christian Association Conference, Summer School for Town and Country Pastors, Summer School of Theology for Aspiring Ministers, boys' camps and girls' reserves, 4-H and scouting events and picnics sponsored by different groups.

Success stories abound. "Jones) brought a very different atmosphere," said Roberts, a former Gulfside director whose husband, the late S.G. Roberts, was one of its founders. "He brought culture, he brought education and wholesome recreation. Every day Gulfside was open, something was going on."

Williams agreed. "I think it's just grand," said Williams, who went to Gulfside as a girl to learn home economics and domestic skills. "Gulfside was all we knew." Now a Phoenix resident, she worked at the old Charity Hospital in New

Orleans during the 1940s and as a teacher.

"As I grew up and got older, I worked out there," at Gulfside said Williams. "It's a remarkable place."

Today at Gulfside, writers rent rooms to work; civic, social and youth groups gather for seminars; students convene annually for college exhibitions; and Christian denominations hold spiritual retreats.

It links the past and present to the future for many African-American Christians, said Norris.

Fond memories may help trigger future success at Gulfside, a place that has survived segregation and the destruction wrought by fires and Hurricane Camille, a storm that wiped out 26 buildings in 1969.

"My mother," Norris reminisced, "used to sit me down and inspire me, encourage me, motivate me. I think there are still a lot of institutions that don't do that."

"Gulfside says you are important, you do count, you can amount to something, you have the potential to be a leader in any sphere of American life."

Eugene Stockstill can be reached at 896-2324 or at ehstock@sunherald.com

# Facing Freedom

## Methodist mission in Waveland looks to the future

By EUGENE STOCKSTILL  
THE SUN HERALD

Gulfside United Methodist Assembly is dreaming big for its future. The historic African-American Methodist mission kicked off a \$2 million fund-raising drive last month to coincide with this year's 75th anniversary celebration, "Gulfside: A Heritage Worth Preserving."

Originally called the Gulfside Chautauqua and Camp Meeting Ground, the mission was founded in 1923 by Bishop Robert E. Jones, a light-skinned black man, to train African-Americans as Christian missionaries.

In those days, towering oaks and cedars hid the property's only building, the Jackson House, and the seaside landscape flourished. The house, which is no longer there, was built by President Andrew Jackson's nephew and used as a hideout by soldiers during the Civil War.

"There used to be a swamp there, and you had to cross a bridge to get there," said Emily Williams, 80, who grew up on Broad Street behind the mission while her father worked as a chauffeur for a rich, white family in New Orleans.

"You couldn't see (the house) from the beach," said Rometta Roberts, 93, whose father, Emile, was the son of a slave.

"The state hired my father to be caretaker" of the property in the late 19th century, Roberts said. "They thought soldiers had hidden money there. It went to the state, and they hired my father."

Years later, Gulfside's old seeds are still bearing new fruit, and, moving into the next century, the mission has set ambitious goals that include plans to:

- Improve buildings and build a new Multicultural Family Life Center with room for housing, dining, recreation and meeting rooms.

- Work for racial and cultural diversity.
- Create new programs and projects for children and teens.

- Start a family life center.

- Connect the coast to the rest of the world through its programs.

"This is the only place of its kind left in the country," said executive director Marian Martin.

Jones, whose jurisdiction in the Methodist Episcopal Church (a branch of American Methodism) included West Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi, formed a 14-member team in the early 1920s. They bought 300 acres of land in Waveland for \$4,000, leased 316 acres from the state, and starting building.

During segregation, blacks had very limited property rights. Coast folklore relates that Jones may have been able to buy the property because of the fair color of his skin.



Bishop Robert E. Jones

"When Jones first came here, he fell in love with it," said Roberts, a Waveland resident. "At that time blacks were not allowed to go on the beach, and Bishop Jones knew this when he came here."

Gulfside quickly became a new beachside community for Coast blacks to worship, train for the mission field, play and enjoy entertainment.

"Gulfside was where I made my commitment to go into the ministry full-time," said Bishop Alfred Norris, a New Orleans native who studied at Gulfside as a teen-ager. "When you came from a local church that had 25 members, and you went to Gulfside for a week or two and rubbed shoulders with people from several different states — 200 or more in number — it intensified your

commitment."

"I can think of dozens of peers who are in the Christian ministry right now or who are the leading lay people in their congregations" who got their start at Gulfside, said Norris, who is in charge of the United Methodist Church's northwest Texas and New Mexico region.

"It's holy ground to me. It's my spiritual home."

Gulfside's story is tied to the history of relations between blacks and whites and the African-American church experience.

In their book "Defending Black Faith," Craig Keener and Glenn Usry say that some blacks, after coming to the United States as slaves, rediscovered ancient religious roots.

Africa's Christian heritage dates to the first century and the spread of Christianity into north and central parts of the continent, according to the book.

"Especially beginning in the 19th century," they wrote, "Western Protestant missions made significant impact in Africa. African Christians themselves spread this impact more than Western missionaries could have done, however, and the African church grew hundreds of times over, to currently more than half of Black Africa's population. But less known is the fact that many Africans had embraced Jesus and the Bible long before European missionaries came — in fact, before Britain and Germany had opened to Christianity."

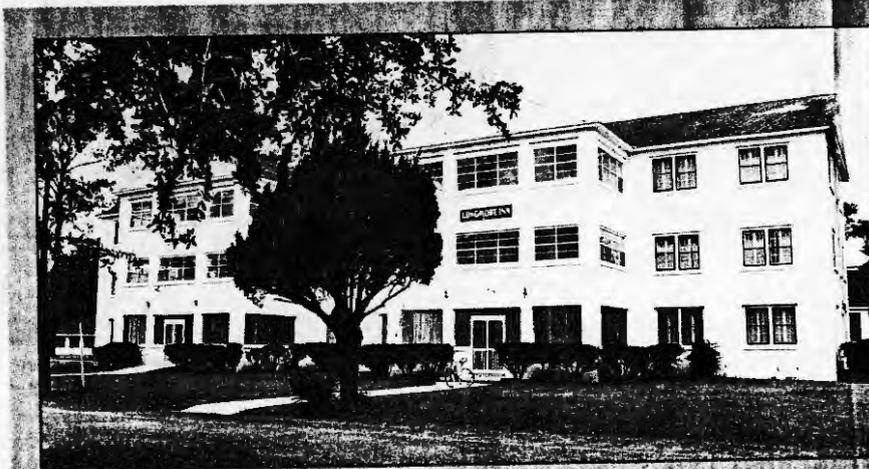
Gulfside was one of the main reasons the Christian faith flourished among Coast blacks during segregation. Norris said, despite oppression at the hands of some white churchgoers who manipulated the Bible for their own purposes.

"I take the view that there may have been some whites who wanted to use Christianity in that way, but the blacks were having an experience with God in the midst of that," Norris said. "Gulfside is largely responsible for that."



This photo from the 1940s shows young adults arriving at Gulfside for a program. Gulfside has been a center for religious, educational and cultural activities since its founding in 1923.

Please see Freedom, D-4



The Longmire Inn, one of the most well-known buildings at Gulfside United Methodist Assembly in Waveland, Mississippi, recently started a \$2 million capital fund-raising drive to upgrade facilities for the next century.

## Big Birthday Bash

Among the upcoming activities for Gulfside United Methodist Assembly's 75th anniversary:

- Meeting of black bishops and presidents of black colleges associated with the United Methodist Church — Feb. 27
- College & Career Fair/Life Choices Expo IV — Feb. 28
- Easter Sunday sunrise service on the beach — April 12
- Old-time camp meeting — August 4-8
- Gospel extravaganza — September
- 75th anniversary gala — October
- Youth Advent Retreat — Dec. 7-8

Details: (228) 467-4909

PHOTOS COURTESY GULFSIDE UNITED METHODIST ASSEMBLY

MCAH  
BOX 4.1  
GULFSIDE

## Gulfside Assembly accepting gifts to renovate historic Jones Home

WAVELAND, Miss. - Gulfside has a pledge of a \$25,000 gift from an anonymous donor for renovation of the Robert E. Jones house, providing matching funds can be raised. This former residence of the founder of Gulfside Assembly continues to be a target of vandalism. Two skilled work teams scheduled for January and February 1997, will be able to complete the renovation providing Gulfside can furnish materials.

The facility will be a self-contained, handicapped accessible retreat center that will house up to 50. It will include its own common kitchen, dining, recreation/lounge area and caretakers apartment. The house needs all new plumbing, appliances and electrical work. The first stage will be to complete the caretaker's apartment, thereby eliminating the vandalism it is continuously subjected to.

The facility has a new roof and porch thanks to Rev. Van Carpenter, the Main Street United Methodist Church, Bay St. Louis, Rev. Earl Greenough, the Seashore District

Work Team. It's a beautiful three-story, antebellum type house, which also included a stable.

To restore this historic site passes on a wonderful legacy to the children and youth who already enjoy the biblical training, spiritual enrichment and other educational opportunities offered a Gulfside Assembly. Present capacity at Gulfside is 120.

Registration for its annual Advent Youth Retreat, December 13-15th had exceeded this by November 15th. The church cannot afford to let this magnificent structure continue to deteriorate, nor can it afford to lose a \$25,000 gift. We have faith that United Methodists of Mississippi will participate in this mission project.

Gifts in any amount may be sent to Jerry Mitchell at the United Methodist Foundation of Mississippi at P.O. Box 1986, Jackson, MS 39215-1986 or to Gulfside Assembly at 950 South Beach Blvd., Waveland, MS 39576. Contributions are tax deductible.

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Box 4.1  
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The "Catch the Spirit" hosts and crew, along with staff members of Gulfside Assembly, Waveland, Miss., prepare to shoot a special edition of the national television program of the United Methodist Church, which aired first in February, and set to be shown again the week of July 19. In the background is Harry Hoosier Hall, the multi-purpose building used as a chapel and auditorium at the assembly grounds.

## Gulfside Assembly to be featured on 'Catch the Spirit'

In case you missed it the first time, you will have another chance the week of July 19 to see a special Black History Month edition of "Catch the Spirit" featuring a segment on Gulfside Assembly, the Waveland, Miss., retreat center dedicated to serving black United Methodists.

The segment on the national television program of the United Methodist Church originally aired the week of Feb. 2.

"Catch the Spirit," a 30-minute magazine program, tells God's story through the lives of people who are making a difference as they live out their Christian faith.

The special edition originates from the 140-acre campus located along the Gulf of Mexico. Founded in 1923 by Bishop Robert E. Jones, the first black bishop elected by the Methodist Episcopal Church, Gulfside was established as "an institution designed for and committed to the commemoration of the contributions and heritage of blacks in the historical Wesleyan tradition."

"Catch the Spirit" co-host Hilly Hicks points out that, at the time Gulfside was founded, "the doors of other Methodist retreat centers and the doors of society in general were closed" to black people. Today, all United Methodist institutions are racially inclusive.

According to Rosetta Roberts, a longtime Gulfside associate, the retreat center once represented the "only place on the Gulf Coast where a black toe could touch the white sand." She adds, "Gulfside was a whole new world" when it opened.

Today's co-directors of the assembly are Charles Kellogg and his wife Nora.

Mississippi United Methodist Advocate/July 1, 1992

Presently used as a center for Christian education, culture and recreation, the Gulfside complex includes a collection of artifacts, a chapel and auditorium, dormitory and hotel-type rooms, a retreat center for small groups, a recreation area, a dining hall and a social area.

A central building is Hoosier Hall, named in honor of "Black Harry" Hoosier, a slave preacher who accompanied Asbury on many of his travels. It is pointed out that his services often attracted larger audiences than those of Wesley himself.

Gulfside is presently involved in renovating the former retirement home of Gulfside founder Jones, for use as a self-contained youth retreat.

A United Methodist Advance Special Project since 1980, Gulfside was dedicated that same year as the denomination's 97th Historical Site.

The assembly is held in trust by an interracial board of trustees composed of United Methodist bishops, clergy and laypersons, and representatives from a number of churchwide agencies and caucuses.

The "Catch the Spirit" Black History Month special edition also includes a segment on black church archives, a "Moment of Faith" by the Rev. Neriah Edwards, associate council on ministries director for the denomination's East Ohio Annual Conference; a segment on U.S. black artist Henry Tanner; and an annual reunion of citizens and former citizens of an all-black town in Kansas.

## Two at Wood

Linda Nabors, Keokuk, Iowa, was awarded the Velma Rodgers Foundation Award for May 10, 1992 at Wood College.

The Velma Jernigan Memorial Scholarship, established in 1982, provides for Freshman Achievement the amount of \$1000 for outstanding academic achievement from the freshman year on the basis of her cumulative average of 4.0 for the year 1991-92, this award was presented to Linda.

## INFOSERV sets Conference service

In expectation of increasing use during Jurisdictional Conference, InfoServ will have electronic lines and staff on hand from July 13 through July 17. InfoServ is available for questions and results of balloting for Jurisdictional Conference in all jurisdictions, during conference hours, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern Time.

In addition, the results of episcopal elections will be available on a taped message.

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SEJ

# UNITED METHODIST

SOUTHEASTERN JURISDICTIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

Volume 15, Number 1

March 1991

Lake Junaluska, NC



Paula Garber prepares dry-wall mud while working on the Robert E. Jones Hall as part of a work team from Lake Junaluska.

## Executive Members Help Renovate Gulfside As Yearly Project

Executive staff members of The United Methodist Church's Southeastern Jurisdictional Administrative Council put down their pens and paper and picked up nails and sheetrock in Jan 7-11 to help out Gulfside Assembly in Waveland, MS.

The work, which was being done in the Robert E. Jones Hall, is part of the ongoing renovation of Gulfside.

"If I fix it anymore, I'm really going to mess it up." Millsaps Dye, a member of the SEJ Administrative Council program staff from Lake Junaluska, NC, said in January as he smoothed out the sheetrock putty around a window casing.

Like the others of the 15 administrative staff members who had come to Gulfside, Dye said he had no particular carpentry skills but was simply doing the best he could.

"Gulfside is a part of our ministry," said Reginald W. Ponder, executive director of the SEJ Administrative Council. "We want to identify with the ministry of this place." Once a year, the executive staff takes on

Gulfside's a special place for black Methodists. See page 3.

a project of this nature. Last year, they went to Sumter, SC to help in the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo.

Jones Hall has served as the educational building at Gulfside. When the renovation is completed, the first floor of the building will house the Gulfside administrative offices, meeting rooms, and a chapel; upstairs will be a library.

Bishop Ernest T. Dixon Jr., president of the Gulfside Assembly Board of Trustees, wrote the SEJ staff, "I want to express my deep gratitude and appreciation for the outstanding contribution you and the members of your group made to the realization of our dream to completely renovate the Robert E. Jones Hall.

The team also received a letter of commendation from Mayor Stella H. Frilot of the City of Waveland, MS.

"I have always wanted to experience the sharing that comes with being on a work team. The people at Gulfside were most appreciative of our efforts . . . I'm thankful I was a part of it." said Sue P. Smathers, the Lake's conference coordinator.

"The visit to Gulfside gave me the opportunity to spend more time together with other staff members of the jurisdiction . . . to get to visit again this assembly and become better acquainted with the staff and program." said Thomas L. Curtis, director Volunteers In Mission.

Joetta Rinehart, director of public relations, marketing and development at Junaluska, summed up the trip by saying, "The weariness of travel, spreading 'dry-wall', cleaning, etc. soon was replaced with a feeling of warmth and happiness as we shared the good food, the fellowship, the strategic planning—all made possible by Gulfside's gracious staff."



Across the lawn of Gulfside Assembly are the gleaming waters of the Gulf of Mexico



Some of the cabins among the pines of the Gulfside Assembly

# The Gulfside Assembly

By Bishop J. L. Decell

**T**HE first thing to be said about Gulfside is that it is a going concern. Seventeen summers have gone by with the imprint of its power, and thousands of people have felt the lift of its life. The Assembly has passed from the stage of a noble experiment to a career of successful experience in the religious and cultural advance of Negro people.

Place has much to do with progress of an enterprise. In the parallels of the deep South the American Negro, perhaps, has faced his greatest problems and largest opportunities. The vast majority continue to live in the Cotton States. It must have been more than mere chance or fortuitous fancy that led to the selection of Waveland, on the beautiful Mississippi Gulf Coast, about forty-five miles east of New Orleans and twenty-five miles west of Gulfport, for the location of the Gulfside Assembly for Negro Methodists. A semicircle can be drawn from Gulfside, with a radius of four hundred miles, that will include a Negro population of approximately five million. Over two and one-half million live within twelve hours automobile time of Gulfside, though it may be reached by land, sea, or air. The Old Spanish Trail, Highway 90, skirts its lovely grounds, trunk line railway trains stop at its door, Gulfport and Clermont Harbors wait for ships to come in over the Gulf of



Bishop Robert E. Jones, father of Gulfside

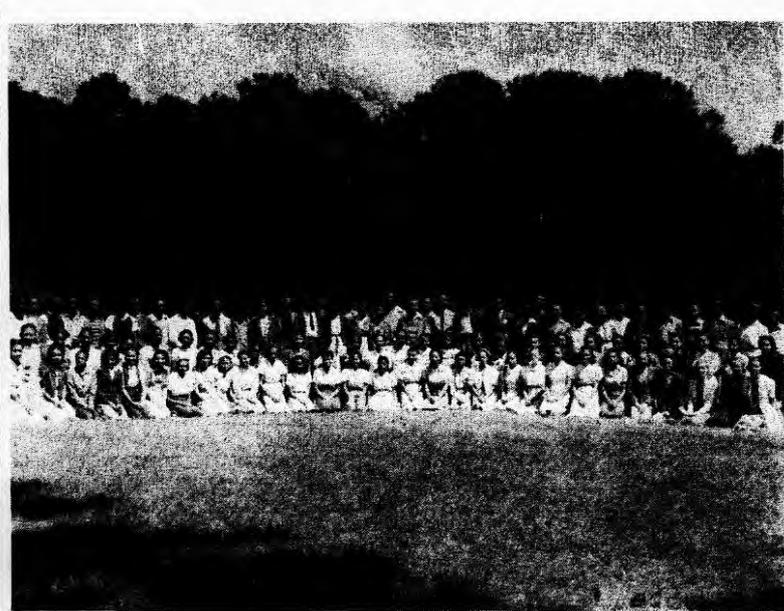
Mexico, and Biloxi's airport stands not far away.

Here at Waveland, hard by the creaming sea, on soft marine-made soil verdure adorned, and amid giant moss-draped oaks and erect long-leaf pine was begun in 1923 one of the significant services of American Methodism.

Bishop Robert E. Jones was in the first quadrennium of his episcopal ministry, and, traveling around as a general superintendent, he observed the methods and was convinced of the success of the Assembly Movement which Methodism, North and South, had adopted. Chautauqua, Ocean Grove, Lakeside, Lake Junaluska, and others were conserving many of the camp meeting values and adding educational and recreational features which were meet-

ing the needs of growing life. He saw the vision for his own people and dreamed of the day when there would be a gathering place, under Christian auspices, for Negro Methodists. It was not something which he worked up, but it was a vision which got hold of him and would not let him go.

Bishop Jones was then in charge of the New Orleans Area, which is now in the Central Jurisdiction. He had been married at Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, and he knew some of the romance which that section held. He went out five miles from the Bay in April, 1923, and purchased a lease on 315 acres of land



A typical gathering of young people at the Gulfside Assembly for Negro Methodists



They play at Gulfside

on which stood the old Jackson House. Tradition tells more than one story about Andrew Jackson, the hero of the Battle of near-by New Orleans, having lived in that colonial mansion with its spacious halls and wide verandas. Later 300 additional acres were purchased, with one and a quarter mile of beach front, thus providing one of the most picturesque settings imaginable for building the Assembly.

In June of the same year the first Ministerial Training School was held. The now lamented Dr. Allan McRossie was there, as was Dr. Hannah, of Drew. The classes met under the trees near the flowing tides. The surge of the sea seemed to epitomize the heart's upswing, as thoughts of the better day filled the breasts of teachers and pupils. Had not John Wesley himself preached at Saint Simon's under trees similar to these at Gulfside? Did not Methodism expand because trees had been her temples where multitudes waited upon her message? By the silver waters in the South and within protecting shadows of great trees the genius of Methodism again asserted itself by inaugurating a movement to meet the needs of a new time.

Gulfside began with meager equipment and is still hampered by lack of adequate tools. However, there is something inspiring and reassuring in the form of its beginning and development. In her expansion Methodism has never been able to linger along with the perfectionists of plenty or the elite of elegance who demand enormous and exquisite equipment before they are ready to initiate a program of sacrifice for a cause. "What is that in thy hand?" "A lad which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes" and "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much"; fields, lofts, sheds, and brush arbors substantiate the merit of meagerness when its potential is the multiple of Divine blessing and human toil which lead to measureless good. Methodism's passion has made her adventurous, and the builders of Gulfside have been true to their inheritance.

Starting with the Jackson House and a few dilapi-

dated buildings and a courageous commitment, Bishop Jones and ministers of his New Orleans Area and other friends of the cause worked on with what they had. At first, the Ministerial Training School and an all-year school for underprivileged (not delinquent) boys were the chief features of Gulfside's services. As the possibilities of the work caught the imagination of friends far and near, additional buildings were added. There are now an academic building, with a chapel for 250 persons, and suitable classrooms, a dormitory, Graff Hall, of twenty-four rooms, eleven cottages, a camp of ten huts with a bathhouse, an open-air dining hall seating 250, and an artesian well which supplies plenty of wholesome water.

Naturally, the summer program, June through August, was extended, and now a full quota of activities are offered each year: Preachers' Conference, Christian Education, Evangelism, College Extension Courses, Festival of Music, and Special Days. On Anniversary Day, the first Wednesday in August, as many as eight thousand have been in attendance. State leaders in Mississippi have been quick to utilize the facilities at Gulfside and have co-operated in better health, better homes, modern agriculture, and other extension programs. Representative people, Negro and white, in the fields of education, religion, and democracy have appeared on the platform.

Gulfside is a living institution. Its builders and promoters, having accomplished so much with so little, are guarantees of capacity for and prophecy of a much wider service and larger usefulness. Institutions and persons must draw upon supporting faith, funds, and friendships, Divine and human, equal to the range of responsibilities and opportunities to fulfil their mission in life. Gulfside is not a finished creation; it is a growing opportunity to meet the needs of Negro people.

The leaders in Church and State in Mississippi have co-operated from the beginning in the enterprise at Waveland. Down the beach, at Biloxi, for fifty years the former Methodist Episcopal Church,

South, had been operating the Seashore Camp-ground, Seashore Methodist Assembly, and gave encouragement, their charter being the form used for Gulfside. Bankers, county officers, professional people, and others in Hancock County have supported and commended the work and have co-operated in its progress. There are along the Coast flicflac rendezvous which claim the time of officers of the law, but not Gulfside. The administrators and hundreds of attendants create no problem. It is a laboratory of life where wholesome expression is given to racial consciousness and respect.

Many quotations could be listed from various sections of the nation commending Gulfside. Bishop Alexander P. Shaw says, "It is without doubt a most indispensable institution serving a very needy people in religious educational training combined with desirable recreational features by the seaside." Dr. J. H. Dillard wrote, "In my years of work through the South I came across no establishment or institution or activity of any kind that impressed me more than Gulfside. It holds out promise of immense usefulness."

Gulfside is unique and does hold "promise of immense usefulness" in that it is the only meeting place of its kind which Methodism has for Negroes. Furthermore, it is the only Assembly the Negro himself has easily accessible to nearly half of his race in America for group and associational meet-

ings for cultural, religious, civic, and social development.

The citizens of the United States now, we trust, recognize that Americans must put more money into character-building agencies. The American Negro is as free from subversive ideologies as any racial group, and more so than some. The Negro's loyalty to the American way of life is a national asset. The churchman and the citizen in this "Land of the Free" would do well to encourage and sacrifice for the well-being of any institution whose creative contribution makes for intelligent social relations, loyalty to country, and devotion to Christ and His Church. Whatever the Negro gets at Gulfside will put him forward—and Godward.

The old Jackson House has been destroyed by fire, and there is an urgent and immediate need at the Assembly for funds to sustain current operation, a library building, and an auditorium with a much larger seating capacity. This is to be the Harry Hoosier Memorial Auditorium.

Here, indeed, is an unique call and challenge: to participate in making strong an arm that will keep open a door of opportunity to a race, build for understanding and goodwill, and undergird the virtues of Christianity and democracy.

Methodism and Americanism should make Gulfside go.