SPECIAL INVITATION

Spiritual Renaissance Retreat Marks 20th (and Final) Yearly Weekend

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The speakers this year include several Andrews University teachers; Bailey Gillespie from La Sierra University; Lonnie Melashenko who was a speaker for major Adventist media ministries and then a vice president at Kettering Health Network before he retired; Arlene Taylor on "The Physiology of Forgiveness" and Dick Duerksen from Maranatha Volunteers International. This will be the 20th annual event.

It has become a tradition for many families in California, especially professionals in small churches outside the major metropolitan areas. It is an opportunity for open discussion and spiritual stimulation, "a 20-year tradition," stated one couple. "A great combination of social, spiritual, intellectual and aesthetic elements." It has included each year special programs for children and youth as well as adults. "My kids can't wait to get back" each year, stated a mother. Musicians well known to Baby Boom generation Adventists have often shared their talents, such as the Heritage Singers and the Wedgwood Trio. Read more
Spiritual Renaissance Retreat Marks 20 Years with What May Be Final Weekend

By AT News Team, December 6, 2013

A scholar who focuses on the famous Christian writer C. S. Lewis will be among the presenters at this year's Spiritual Renaissance Retreat, December 27-30 in Monterey, California. This will be the 20th annual event and the organizer, Pastor John Hughson, says it will be his last.

Since 1994 crowds of 200 to 250 Adventists have gathered at a resort in northern California on New Year's weekend to reflect on the past year and gain "inspiration for a life that matters." The speakers this year include several who were popular presenters in past years: Richard and Jo Ann Davidson, both professors in the seminary at Andrews University, Bailey Gillespie from La Sierra University, Lonnie Melashenko who was a speaker for major Adventist media ministries and then a vice president at Kettering Health Network before he retired, Arlene Taylor on "The Physiology of Forgiveness" and Dick Duerksen from Maranatha Volunteers International.

The C. S. Lewis scholar is Dr. Louis Markos, a faculty member at Houston Baptist University. He will make three presentations: "Sharing the Gospel with Moderns," then "Sharing the Gospel with Post-moderns," and "The Lion, Witch and Wardrobe." The other speakers will touch on controversial, timely and intriguing topics: "God is a Romantic" (Jo Ann Davidson), "Spiritual Formation" (Richard Davidson) and a review of research insights from the recent summit of Adventist social research scholars at the General Conference by Gillespie who has made a career leading the most far-reaching project of this kind in the denomination's history; the three rounds of Valuegenesis surveys.

The stimulating and broad range of topics has been typical for this event each year over the past two decades. In 2008 attendance swelled when Dr. Desmond Ford, the famously fired Adventist theologian from Australia, spoke. That is probably the most controversial event in two decades Hughson remembers. His conference president initially approved the invitation to Ford and then the Pacific Union Conference and North American Division presidents got into the act and told Hughson he should be fired for inviting Ford. He washed his hands of the invitation and it came from an independent, lay organization so that the announced plan could be implemented.

"Usually New Years is kind of an empty holiday," Hughson told Adventist Today. "It's almost a let-down after Christmas." The retreat "gives people something to look forward to when Christmas is over." He got the idea in the early 1990s when he heard of the Renaissance Weekend that is held at Hilton Head, South Carolina, each year, attracting "the movers and shakers" across the United States; writers, leaders from government and business, etc. At the time he was administrative pastor at the Adventist Church in Paradise, an outer suburb of California's capital, Sacramento. When he moved to the Pacific Union College Church he continued the annual project.

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Dr. William Loveless, who has been senior pastor at both Sligo Church in Takoma Park, Maryland, and the University Church in Loma
Linda, California, as well as a conference president and a college president for the denomination, has been a speaker several times with his wife, Dr. Edna Maye Loveless, an English professor for many years at La Sierra University. "We don't get paid to do this," he told the crowd once. "We do this because we believe in it." That is a clear expression of the support this event has generated from many people over the years. Hughson has a list of more than 500 families and singles who have participated at some point over the 20 years.

It has never been just a meeting. The afternoons are always free for recreation and rest. Participants walk the beach, play golf, go kayaking and visit the art galleries and the Monterey Aquarium. Traditionally Sabbath lunch brings the whole group together, while other meals include small clusters of friends at the numerous restaurants in town.

Asked why this is his last retreat, Hughson told Adventist Today, "When I started this, I was 48. Now I'm 68." He is thinking about retirement in the next two or three years. He admits that some want to keep it going and said he would be willing to turn over his list of former participants to new leadership, but "it ought to be reinvented for a new generation." He named three men who may take on the task; Greg Hoenes, Roy Ice and Doug Mace.

If you want to attend the event, contact Hughson at (707) 965-7106 or by Email at jhughson@puc.edu to pre-register and get information about reservations at the Monterey Hyatt Regency Hotel. (Full disclosure: the event is cosponsored by the Adventist Today Foundation and the Association of Adventist Forums as well as the Pacific Union College Church.)