

A Conversation About Simpsonwood

Though the North Georgia Conference has long been discussing, researching and praying about the future of Simpsonwood, some neighbors of the property are understandably surprised to hear that there is potential for change. Below find a few answers to questions about the future of Simpsonwood.

How long has the Conference owned Simpsonwood?

The North Georgia Conference has owned the Simpsonwood property since 1973.

Why is the Conference considering selling the property?

Subsidizing the operation of the retreat center has become a significant expense for the Conference. Unfortunately, the retreat center has been underused for many years. Third party consultants have concluded that increasing occupancy is not likely.

Why is the property underused?

According to the consultants' research, one of the reasons the retreat center is being underused is that people in Atlanta do not want to attend a retreat in Atlanta. They also found that people living outside Atlanta do not want to come into Atlanta for a retreat. For those who are interested in hosting a meeting in this area, Simpsonwood prices cannot compete with the prices of discounters and national hotel and meeting centers.

Is the retreat facility operated by the Conference or by professionals?

In 2007 we contracted with a successful hotel management company for operations. This company has had little to no success increasing occupancy. We have come to a point where the funds we are using to subsidize Simpsonwood could be better used in other ministries or mission.

Some local residents have said that they believed that Miss Simpson's gift of the property to the Methodist church would remain intact forever. They are now wondering if that is no longer valid.

The Superior Court of Gwinnett County ruled that the North Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church not only honored its legal and ethical obligations to the Simpsonwood property for 20 years as required by law under the terms of the original bequest, but that it also maintained the property for 20 more years – two decades longer than required.

Who is making the decisions and how?

The future of Simpsonwood is being decided in a lengthy, prayerful and carefully researched process. Our Annual Conference is made up of more than 900 churches in North Georgia. Representatives from each of those churches will make the final decision.

What is the timeline?

This process began in 2007 and the intent is to make the very best decision rather than adhere to other restraints. There is no timeline on when a decision may occur. Our Conference Board of Trustees will make a report on the status of Simpsonwood at the Annual Conference session this summer.

Have you spoken with the Simpson family?

Representatives of the North Georgia Conference met with Simpson family members last summer. From that conversation, the Conference assured the family it would preserve the chapel and old chimney on the property, which the family members and the Conference value.

Are you considering developing the property?

The Conference desires to keep the property intact, as it has done at great expense for more than 40 years. Our real estate broker is only speaking with groups who would keep the property intact rather than real estate developers at this time.

Who is interested in the property?

Several public entities have expressed interest in the property, and if the Conference decides to sell Simpsonwood, the preference is for a public entity to acquire it. However, that scenario requires acquisition efforts by a public entity, and that is beyond the Conference's control. No formal purchase offers have been made.

How will the Conference keep us informed?

We will inform local media of any decisions if and when they occur.