THE BICENTENNIAL
OF AMERICAN METHODISM

We are glad to print these statements on the meaning of the Bicen­tennial by Bishop Lord and Dr. Maser.

THE PURPOSE OF
THE BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

Methodism at its inception was a scalding, effective, original force that challenged the established church even as it challenged the na­tion. In a particular way the Holy Spirit intervened in the affairs of men. Holding in their lifeless hands the riches of the fathers, the churchmen of that day had lost or dissipated the spirit which created the sacred patrimony. The church had made the heritage of God a reproach among the people, and God acted through the people called Methodists.

Today we stand upon the threshold of a great religious awakening. Once again the Lord is pouring out His spirit on all flesh. In this hour we are witnessing the collapse of traditional religion and the discarding of religious shibboleths, doctrines, and practices that no longer possess vitality. Urbanization and secularization are indeed the hallmarks of this era. Man is coming of age, and the church must effectuate God’s work in this new world of science and technology.

The great purpose of the Bicentennial Celebration is to proclaim that The Methodist Church possesses a lively and viable faith; that the sacred patrimony inherited from the fathers is not to be dissipated or frozen within a framework of futility that is little more than denominational self maintenance; that as a church we welcome the change which God hath wrought and rejoice as old customs give way to new. In messages from the pulpit, in song and drama, and through our united fellowship, we must make very clear that man may become the master and not victim of these new and terrifying forces; that ultimately these forces do not have the power to deter­mine man, but man under God has the responsibility to rule them and to use these new powers.

And what is to be the place of the institutional church of our day in this new revolution? Here the observance must give no uncer­tain sound. The Church is pioneering God’s great purpose for His children. Its mission is not to be a bastion of the past but a break­through point into the new era of mankind. Acting with courage and integrity and not protective of its own interests or jealous of socially accorded rights and privileges, the Church must move into the un­tried and the unknown on unseen evidence.

“The significance of the Bicentennial,” Mayor Theodore R. McKeldin of Baltimore tells us, “is not that American Methodism
has had a great past, but that it has come to be a vital and powerful force in America. The power of Methodism, wisely exerted, may now impress the future more effectively than at any earlier period. In other words, the greatness of our history is not to be compared with the greatness of our opportunity."

The peaceful and constructive use of nuclear power, the acceptance of a cultural pluralism leading to greater justice and equality for minority groups, humanizing every part of our society, dealing with our "depleted resources" in an affluent society so that true wealth may accrue and patterns of poverty disappear, these are some of the issues of concern to the church in this new age.

BISHOP JOHN WESLEY LORD, Chairman
Bicentennial Program Committee

THE BICENTENNIAL OF AMERICAN METHODISM
ITS MEANING AND CHALLENGE

We have a threefold purpose in the Bicentennial celebration of American Methodism to be held in Baltimore, April, 1966: First, we shall seek to lay hold of the eternal truth embedded in the heritage and history of the Methodist Church. We are proud of the life and work of our Methodist forebears and the influence they had upon the early life of our republic. We know it was by their dedication and witness to the truth in Christ Jesus that they pressed toward their goal of reforming the continent and spreading scriptural holiness over these lands. This truth in Christ Jesus we would again grasp.

Second, we shall try to understand as fully as possible the place and purpose of the church in our present age. Recognizing our need to free ourselves from the confining shackles of dead tradition and lifeless custom, we shall seek to explore acceptable forms and fresh challenges for the expression of truth at a time when a totally new world is being born, and when men are passing through a maze of conditions that were unimagined by an earlier generation.

Third, realizing that the greatness of our history is not to be compared to the greatness of our opportunity, we shall strive to direct the thinking of the Methodist Church to the challenge of the future and the needs of a post atomic age. We shall seek to understand in fuller measure and in the light of our history and the complexities of a new day, the doctrines of our church, the personalities of our history, and the enduring purposes of Methodism.

Above all, we shall rededicate ourselves to the supreme goal of spreading scriptural holiness over these lands.

FREDERICK E. MASER, Co-Chairman
Bicentennial Program Committee
A PREVIEW OF
THE BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

By Frederick E. Maser

People from all walks of life will gather in Baltimore, Maryland, April 21-24, 1966, to celebrate the Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Beginning of American Methodism. They will use varying modes of travel, but the most romantic group will be twelve Methodist preachers who come on horseback, just as did the circuit riders of two hundred years ago.

When the Publicity Committee first thought of a possible horseback ride from Old McKendree Chapel in Missouri to Baltimore, some doubted that anyone would undertake such a venture today. To the surprise of many, some 130 Methodist preachers asked for the privilege of being "The Circuit Rider to the Bicentennial of American Methodism." In the end it was agreed that twelve preachers would be permitted to ride to Baltimore, starting from different points of the compass north, west, and south. The riders will be housed at parsonages along the way. They will preach and will be interviewed on radio and television and by newspaper reporters.

"Forever Beginning"

The theme of the celebration is "Forever Beginning." The purpose of the observance is stated elsewhere in this magazine by Bishop John Wesley Lord and by this writer.

Papers, Panels, Addresses

On Friday and Saturday mornings, April 22 and 23, delegates and visitors in Baltimore will be invited to hear the presentation and discussion of lively papers by experts on a wide variety of subjects. Some of these papers and addresses will recall the memorable moments, the doctrines, and the personalities of Methodism. Others will deal with such issues as the place of Methodism in the world of tomorrow. Everyone in attendance will have a choice of lecturers and seminars.

The committee has assigned the topics and chosen the speakers with the aim of making the Bicentennial a celebration for the whole country and, in a sense, for the whole world. Methodism, it is true, began in America on the eastern seaboard, but the committee has wisely refused to center all the historical papers in a restatement of the history of Methodism in this section of America. Since we will celebrate all Methodist beginnings in 1966, the Bicentennial is for every Methodist.

Due attention will be given to the work of men like Francis Asbury and Philip William Otterbein, the best known early leaders.
A PREVIEW OF THE BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

of the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren Churches. But at the same time a man like Jason Lee, who carried Methodism all the way to Oregon, will not be forgotten. Methodist work among the Indians and among the Negroes will be recalled. The organizational plan of Methodism will be seen through the eyes of Joshua Soule, who drafted the constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1808. The place of the people and the role of the itinerant will be reviewed as lecturers discuss "Methodism, a People’s Movement," and "The Genius of the Methodist Itineracy."

The doctrines which concerned our fathers and the truths they sought to express will be placed over against the complexities of our own day. The old tenets will be restated in modern thought forms so that we may more clearly perceive the truth of Methodism and what it means for our time. For example, one lecturer will consider "American Methodism and the Theological Challenges of the Twentieth Century" and another will address himself to "The Enduring Issues of Methodism."

During the afternoon sessions on April 22 and 23, the program will feature panels and symposiums. Under the general theme of "Vital Issues Facing the Church Today," such questions as Race, War and Peace, the Arts, the Church and Science, and the Church and Society will hold the center of the stage. Also, Methodism’s Place in the Ecumenical Movement will be examined.

Special addresses are scheduled for the evening sessions. Bishop Gerald Kennedy will be the keynote speaker on the night of April 21 as the great celebration begins. On the same evening, Dr. W. Walker Lee, President of the British Methodist Conference, and Rev. Robert Nelson, President of the Irish Methodist Conference, will bring greetings.

A Methodist bishop will be the moderator on an evening when two prominent religious leaders speak—Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, Roman Catholic leader in Baltimore, and Mr. Charles C. Parlin, one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches. Cardinal Shehan is one of the most popular speakers in the Roman Catholic Church, and Mr. Parlin is one of the ablest and most widely known laymen in the Protestant world.

A surprise visitor and speaker is expected on another evening of the celebration, and there is considerable speculation as to who he will be and what he will have to say.

Music

Music will play a large part in both the day and evening programs of the celebration. Dr. Edward Moyer of Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D. C., will be in charge of the music. Each evening at the beginning of the meeting a massive choir numbering
more than 500 persons will perform for half an hour. One night they will sing primarily the hymns of Charles Wesley, thus emphasizing our heritage from British Methodism. On another evening camp meeting songs and the early tunes and lyrics of the Methodist and the Evangelical United Brethren Churches will be featured. It is hoped that the new Methodist hymnal will be available by the time of the Baltimore meeting. It would be very appropriate for the new hymnal to be used for the first time in the Bicentennial celebration.

Climax of the Meetings

The climax of the meetings will begin on Saturday, April 23, at noon. There will be a great luncheon sponsored by the General Board of Evangelism with Bishop Kenneth W. Copeland speaking on "Preaching the Gospel in the Post-Atomic Age."

On Sunday morning at an early hour, Love Feast services will be held in the three most historic churches in Baltimore—Lovely Lane, Otterbein, and Mount Vernon Place. At eleven o'clock the ministerial delegates will occupy the pulpits of the various churches in and about Baltimore.

In the afternoon a Time Capsule will be buried in Mount Olivet Cemetery near the grave of Francis Asbury and the shaft commemorating Jesse Lee. The capsule will contain books and other Methodist related objects. A specially taped message from each of the bishops of The Methodist Church to the Methodists of the year 2066 will be sealed in the capsule. The capsule ceremony will be a time of rejoicing and celebration and also an occasion of dedication.

The Program-Drama

Sunday night, April 24, a great Program-Drama, especially written for the Bicentennial celebration, will be presented under the direction of the Rev. Dr. E. Jerry Walker in the Civic Center. Those who saw the religious dramas written and directed by Dr. Walker at the 1964 General Conference and the 1965 Laymen's Meeting at Purdue know they may expect to witness an impressive religious drama as the closing event of the Bicentennial celebration.

This drama will be in ten scenes and it will be enacted by about twenty-five carefully chosen players. It will compare early American Methodism with the Methodism of today, and it will seek to capture the spirit of historic Methodism and point to the challenge of the future.

The Committee and the Delegates

At the head of the Bicentennial General Committee are four Methodist leaders: Bishop Paul N. Garber, Bishop T. Otto Nall, Bishop John Wesley Lord, and Mr. Charles C. Parlin. Assisting them are
General Committee members, Consultants, and Sub-Committees representing every phase and agency of The Methodist Church. At the direction of the General Conference, the American Association of Methodist Historical Societies, Bishop Nall, President, and Dr. Albea Godbold, Executive Secretary, is sponsoring the Bicentennial celebration.

In each Annual Conference the bishops are appointing delegates to the Baltimore meeting. But whether you are an official delegate or a visitor, you will be welcome at the Bicentennial celebration. Plan now to join the Methodist pilgrimage to Baltimore, April 21-24, 1966. They are coming in large numbers from every part of the country and from every walk of life.

ON TO BALTIMORE