

# Ronald Eugene Sleeth

## 1921 - 1985

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### The 13th President of Wesleyan

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Former Wesleyan President **Ronald E. Sleeth**, 63, professor of preaching at Iliff School of Theology, Denver, CO, died Thursday, April 11, in Denver.

Funeral services were held on Saturday in Denver at the Wilshire Presbyterian Church with the Bullock Funeral Home in charge of arrangements. Private internment services were held at 10 a.m. Tuesday, April 16, in Evanston, IL, followed by an 11 a.m. service for the public in the chapel of the Evanston United Methodist Church.

Dr. Sleeth assumed the Wesleyan presidency in 1976, succeeding John D. Rockefeller IV. Within a year, however, Dr. Sleeth returned to his original profession of teaching, preaching, and writing.

He was born on June 7, 1921, at Charleston, WV.

A 1942 Wesleyan graduate in English, Dr. Sleeth earned his Bachelor of Divinity degree at Yale University and his master's and doctorate degrees in communication at Northwestern University.

Widely known as a professor and scholar, Dr. Sleeth held teaching positions at Wesleyan, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Vanderbilt University, and the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. He joined Iliff in 1981.



Dr. Sleeth was the author of several books on theology including "Persuasive Preaching," "Proclaiming the Word," and "Which Way to God?" He was also the author of numerous articles in religious and scholarly journals.

Dr. Sleeth was ordained a deacon and elder by the West Virginia United Methodist Conference in 1944, and in 1947 was received into full connection in the West Virginia Conference.

His wife, the former Natalie Wakeley, is a well-known composer of choral music who has published over 65 works. One of her compositions, "Joy in the Morning," was written and performed especially for her husband's inaugural ceremony.

Dr. Sleeth believed that preaching has very close connections with the Gospel. In an interview with the *Iliff Reporter* in 1983, he stressed the value of the "told Word, a theological act, constitutive of the nature of the Gospel itself. . ."

He loved teaching. "If there were a stick on the ground before me labeled preaching on one end and teaching on the other," he told Iliff reporter Claire Childress, "I would have to think for a while about which end to pick up. But, nine times out of ten, I would pick up the teaching end. . . it is still my greatest love."

And, as a writer who became a college president, he conveyed his respect for the written word, advising faculty that while publishing was not "imperative" to their work, it was "indicative."

His own place in scholarship secure, Dr. Sleeth gave the Peyton Lectures on Preaching at Southern Methodist University and was awarded a faculty research grant from the American Association of Theological Schools for a year's study in Heidelberg, Germany, among his many accomplishments.

According to the *Iliff Reporter*, the "why" of preaching was as significant as the content to Dr. Sleeth.

"God uses our words to embody the Word," he said. "We don't know anything about the Gospel unless it's told us."

Survivors in addition to his wife include his children, Molly and David. Their address is POST HOUSE #1002, 2550 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80210.

The Wesleyan Board of Trustees on May 18, 1985, passed a resolution naming the Wesleyan Art Gallery the Ronald E. Sleeth Art Gallery.