

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Gathering for conference

My brethren and sisters, it is wonderful that we have the opportunity of meeting together each six months in these great world conferences. We gather from over the earth to bear our testimonies one to another, to hear instruction, to mingle as brethren and sisters. We partake of that sociality which is so pleasant and so important a part of the culture of this great organization.

For more than a century these gatherings have originated in this historic Tabernacle. From this pulpit has gone forth the word of the Lord. Through the years the speakers have come on the stage and then moved on. The personalities are different. But the spirit is the same. It is that spirit referred to when the Lord said, "He that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together" (D&C 50:22).

This great Tabernacle seems to grow smaller each year. We now meet with far larger groups gathered under a single roof in some regional conferences. For instance, not long ago we were in the Tacoma Washington Region. There on a Sunday morning we had the privilege of speaking to 17,328 Latter-day Saints assembled together as one congregation. The acoustics were not as good as they are in this remarkable structure.

Broadcasting conference to the world

Of course there are far more of you participating through the wonders of the electronic media than there are here on Temple Square. Increasingly the Tabernacle is becoming a broadcast studio from which these conference services go by radio, television, cable, satellite, and other resources to many tens of thousands of you in various parts of the world. They are now seen across the

United States, Canada, and the Caribbean. They are carried to many areas of the British Isles and Europe. We hope that the time is not far distant when they can be carried live to the islands of the Pacific, to New Zealand and Australia, to the lands of Asia, to the nations of Mexico, Central America, and South America. As it is, however, more than half of the membership of the Church can, with a little effort, both see and hear me as I speak to you today.

Just below where I speak, in the basement of the Tabernacle, a large group of translators are at work so that each who wishes to hear may do so in his or her own language. I pay tribute to and express thanks for the tremendous services of these dedicated men and women who give so freely of their time and talents to this work of translation.

The kingdom of God—one great family

The little stone which was cut out of the mountain without hands is rolling forth to fill the earth (see D&C 65:2). What a wonderful thing it is to be part of this growing kingdom of our Lord. There are no political boundaries separating the hearts of the children of God, regardless of where they may live. We are all of one great family. We are sons and daughters of God. We are engaged in the service of His Beloved Son. He is our Redeemer and our Savior, and a testimony of this truth burns within our hearts. Each is entitled to such a testimony of this work. It is an individual knowledge of great fundamental truths that binds us together into what we call the church and kingdom of God.

And so we gather each six months to renew our faith, to enlarge our understanding of things divine, to express our love and respect one for another in this great and remarkable brotherhood and sisterhood which all of us know as The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. With you I look forward to the services in which we shall participate today and tomorrow, praying that the Lord will bless us, each one of us, with the companionship of His Holy Spirit.

I invoke the blessings of the Lord upon all who will speak, upon all who

will sing, upon all who will offer prayers, and in a very particular way, with great love and appreciation in my heart, upon all who will listen by the voice of the Spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder M. Russell Ballard will now speak to us.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

My dear brothers and sisters, I am grateful to be able to stand before you today. After undergoing heart-bypass surgery two months ago, I am grateful to be able to stand anywhere. I have felt the powerful faith and prayers of Church members exercised in my behalf these past months, for which I express my sincere appreciation. I have been greatly blessed and publicly express humble gratitude to my Heavenly Father.

Visiting the sites of the Restoration

During the early part of July, Sister Ballard and I had the opportunity to travel to Church historic sites in Palmyra, Kirtland, and Nauvoo with our seven children, their companions, and twenty of our grandchildren. Some people have suggested this may have contributed to my heart problems. I don't know about that, but I do know that our tour of these locations filled our souls with an ever greater love and respect for the Prophet Joseph Smith, for his family, and for the stalwarts who first embraced the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and became members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. What an extraordinary experience it was to teach my family from the Doctrine and Covenants while standing on the very ground where many of those revelations and instructions were received.

Visiting those inspirational sites and immersing ourselves as a family in the

events of the Restoration reminded me again of the marvelous privilege we have to live in a day when we have such clear doctrinal understanding of our Heavenly Father's plan for the salvation and exaltation of His children. The clarity of our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and His restored church is precious, empowering knowledge for each one of us. I thank God that in these difficult days of moral decay and departure from sound values, we have no shortage of revealed truth to guide our lives.

Hyrum Smith's legacy of faithfulness

During the past several weeks of physical recovery, I have found myself with more time on my hands than I am accustomed to, with an unscheduled opportunity to think, to ponder, and to pray. I do not recommend the course of action that brought this gift of time to me, but I believe all of us would benefit from time to ponder and meditate. In the quiet moments of personal introspection, the Spirit can teach us much.

The Spirit has confirmed to me the important responsibility we have to see that the legacy of faith of our pioneer forefathers is never lost. We can derive great strength, particularly our youth, from understanding our Church history. As a descendant of Hyrum Smith, I feel a solemn obligation to ensure that the Church never forgets the significant ministry of this great leader. Recogniz-