

President Gordon B. Hinckley

My beloved brethren and sisters, it is a great pleasure to welcome you again to a general conference of the Church. You have come from far and wide. You have come with the expectation of being inspired and blessed and of drawing nearer to the Lord. The Tabernacle is filled to capacity. I am pleased to report that we broke ground last July 24th for the large new assembly building which is going up on the block to the north of us. It will seat some 21,000, about three and a half times the capacity of this Tabernacle. We have been promised that it will be ready to use for the April conference of the year 2000. We will have a great new building for a great new century.

An environment of goodwill

We meet today under very favorable circumstances. For the most part the world is at peace, and what a priceless boon this is. We walk, generally, in an environment of goodwill. It is true that many do not care for us, and some few may even hate us, using every opportunity to lash out against us. But these are few and they are largely ineffectual. Never before has the Church had a better reputation than it has now. This is because of you, my brethren and sisters. The opinions of people concerning us for the most part arise out of personal and individual experiences. It is your friendliness, your concern for others, and the good examples of your lives that result in the opinions held by others concerning the Latter-day Saints.

Extensive, favorable press coverage

The media have been kind and generous to us. This past year of pioneer celebrations has resulted in very extensive, favorable press coverage. There have been a few things we wish might have been different. I personally have been

much quoted, and in a few instances misquoted and misunderstood. I think that's to be expected. None of you need worry because you read something that was incompletely reported. You need not worry that I do not understand some matters of doctrine. I think I understand them thoroughly, and it is unfortunate that the reporting may not make this clear. I hope you will never look to the public press as the authority on the doctrines of the Church.

Notwithstanding these occasional blips we have been treated very well, and we are grateful to the writers and the editors who have dealt with us honestly and generously.

Two weeks ago this morning I had the opportunity to speak to the Religion Newswriters Association. They were gracious and receptive. There was nothing of contention or argument. I have great respect for these people and great appreciation.

Now the sun is setting on our celebration and there is much serious work to be done. I intend to speak more of this tomorrow morning.

Thanks to those being released

We are releasing at this conference a number of the Seventy and also the presidency of the Young Women of the Church. This is in conformity with a policy of five years of service.

These faithful and able brothers and sisters have served so very well. Without complaint of any kind they have gone wherever they were sent. They have freely given of their talents and devotion in carrying forward the work of the Lord at home and abroad. This cause is much the stronger because of their efforts.

To their spouses and families, particularly in the case of the Young Women presidency, we express thanks for enduring the inconveniences of sharing their

wives and mothers with the entire Church.

We extend our love and blessing to each one who is being released and wish for them continuing satisfaction concerning the service they have given and much of happiness wherever their paths lead them.

May the Spirit of the Lord be with us

At this time I wish only to invite the Spirit of the Lord to be with us as we go forward with another great conference. May all who speak be inspired in their remarks. May the prayers lift our thoughts to high and sacred levels. May the music bring beauty and spiritual nourishment to each of us.

I wish that all of the General Authorities could speak to us. Unfortu-

nately, that is not possible. But we shall all be as one as our hearts reach out to you, our beloved brothers and sisters, in testimony of this great work. God is our Father, who watches over His kingdom. Jesus is the Christ, whose name this Church bears. He stands at its head. The gospel has been restored and is moving with power across the earth. Our faith is made secure by the things which we know to be true.

May the blessings of the Lord attend us I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, will now address us.

President Boyd K. Packer

O suns and skies and clouds of June,
And flowers of June together,
Ye cannot rival for one hour
October's bright blue weather.¹

Called to serve

Several years ago we were looking for something to inspire a conference of mission presidents. In a very interesting way we found it in a long-unused Primary songbook. The song, entitled "Called to Serve," teaches in a few simple lines the message that I bring to you today.

Called to serve Him, heav'nly King
of glory,
Chosen e'er to witness for his name,
Far and wide we tell the Father's
story,
Far and wide his love proclaim.

Called to know the richness of his
blessing—

Sons and daughters, children of a
King—
Glad of heart, his holy name con-
fessing,
Praises unto him we bring.

Onward, ever onward, as we glory in
his name; . . .
God our strength will be; press
forward ever,
Called to serve our King.²

The willingness of Latter-day Saints to respond to calls to serve is a representation of their desire to do the will of the Lord. That arises from the individual witness that the gospel of Jesus Christ, restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith and contained in the Book of Mormon, is true.

Our baptism is a call to lifelong service to Christ. Like those at the waters of Mormon, we are "baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that