

SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

The first session of the 172nd Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Saturday, April 6, 2002, at 10:00 A.M. President James E. Faust conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Barlow Bradford directed the choir, and Richard Elliott was the organist. To begin this session, the choir sang "The Spirit of God." President Faust then made the following remarks.

President James E. Faust

My dear brothers and sisters, we welcome you to this, the first general session of the 172nd Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Faust, conduct this session.

We acknowledge the General Authorities seated on the stand in the Conference Center and at the overflow locations in the Tabernacle and the Assembly Hall. We also recognize the Relief Society, Young Men, Young Women, Sunday School, and Primary general presidencies seated on the stand in the Conference Center.

We extend a special welcome to government, education, and civic leaders who are present with us.

We are grateful to the owners and operators of the many television and radio stations and cable systems for offering their facilities as a public service to bring this conference to a large audience in many areas of the world.

We are also pleased to make available these proceedings via the Internet at lds.org.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Barlow Bradford, with Richard Elliott at the organ.

The choir opened this session by singing "The Spirit of God" and will now favor us with "God Is Love." Following the singing, the invocation will be offered by Elder Bruce C. Hafen of the Seventy.

The choir sang "God Is Love."

Elder Bruce C. Hafen offered the invocation.

President Faust

We will now be privileged to hear from President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Remarkable growth of the Church

My beloved brothers and sisters, it is wonderful to meet with you again in a great world conference of the Church.

One hundred and seventy-two years ago today, Joseph Smith and his associates met in the inconspicuous log house on the Peter Whitmer farm in the quiet village of Fayette, New York, and organized the Church of Christ.

From that modest beginning something truly remarkable has happened. Great has been the history of this work. Our people have endured every kind of suffering. Indescribable have been their sacrifices. Immense beyond belief have been their labors. But out of all of this fiery crucible has come something glorious. Today we stand on the summit of the years and look about us.

From the original six members has grown a vast family of worshipers, 11 million-plus strong. From that quiet village has grown a movement that today is scattered through some 160 nations of the earth. This has become the fifth largest church in the United States. That is a remarkable development. More members of the Church reside out of this nation than in it. That too is a remarkable thing. No other church to come out of the soil of America has grown so fast or spread so widely. Within its vast embrace are members from many nations who speak many tongues. It is a phenomenon without precedent. As the tapestry of its past has unrolled, a beautiful pattern has come to view. It finds expression in the lives of a happy and wonderful people. It portends marvelous things yet to come.

When our people first arrived in this valley 155 years ago, they saw with prophetic vision a great future. But I sometimes wonder if they really sensed the magnitude of that dream as it would unfold.

Positive impressions during the Olympics

The headquarters of the Church are in this city, which recently hosted the 19th Winter Olympics. We made a deliberate decision that we would not use this as a time or place to proselytize, but we were confident that out of this significant event would come a wonderful thing for the Church. The great buildings we have here—the temple, the Tabernacle, this magnificent Conference Center, the Joseph Smith Memorial Building, the family history facilities, the Church Administration Building, the Church Office Building, our welfare facilities, together with scores of chapels in this valley—could not be overlooked by those who walked the streets of this and neighboring cities. As Mike Wallace once remarked to me, “These structures all denote something solid.”

And beyond this, we had total confidence in our people, many thousands of them, who would serve as volunteers in this great undertaking. They would be dependable; they would be pleasant; they would be knowledgeable; they would be accommodating. The unique and distinctive capacity of our people in speaking the languages of the world would prove to be a tremendous asset beyond anything to be found elsewhere.

Well, it all worked out. The visitors came by the hundreds of thousands. Some came with suspicion and hesitancy, old and false images persisting in their minds. They came feeling they might get trapped in some unwanted situation by religious zealots. But they found something they never expected. They discovered not only the scenic wonder of this area, with its magnificent mountains and valleys, they found not only the wonderful spirit of the international games at their best, but they found beauty in this city. They found hosts who were gracious and accommodating and anxious to assist them. I do not wish to infer that such hospitality was limited to our people. The entire community joined together in a great expression of hospitality.

Laudatory comments of journalists

Out of all of this came something wonderful for this Church. Representatives of the media, so often a tough and calloused group, with very few exceptions spoke and wrote in language both complimentary and accurately descriptive of a unique culture they found here, of the people they met and dealt with, of the spirit of hospitality which they felt.

Television carried the picture to billions of people across the earth. Newspapers and magazines ran story after story.

Thousands upon tens of thousands walked through Temple Square, admired the majestic house of the Lord, sat in the Tabernacle and listened to the matchless

music of the choir. More thousands filled this great Conference Center to watch a wonderful production dealing with the Church and its worldwide mission. Other thousands visited the Family History Center. The media were hosted in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. We were interviewed for television, radio, and the press by correspondents from many parts of this nation and from across the world. I am told that nearly 4,000 stories about the Church appeared in the German press alone.

Georgie Anne Geyer, prominent syndicated writer whose column appears in many newspapers, wrote as follows:

"How on Earth could a largely Mormon state do something so daring as hosting an international celebrity meeting? Would the world come gladly to a state whose dominant religion asks members to abstain from alcohol, tobacco and even caffeine, three staples of international conferences?"

And then she went on to quote Raymond T. Grant, artistic director of the Olympic Arts Festival. He talked of the opening ceremony and said:

"You know, 98 percent of the entire cast were volunteers, and that's huge. In fact, most were not paid at all. This is an extraordinary story, and I'd link it directly to Mormon culture. As a Catholic boy from New York, I found it interesting that Brigham Young, the founder of the Utah settlement of the Mormons, built a theater before anything else."

"He went on to tally up: The state has six dance companies; more pianos and harps are sold in Utah than anywhere in the United States; the Mormon Tabernacle Choir has [360] members; and the oldest Steinway dealership in Utah . . . was started as early as 1862. In Utah, their per capita spending on students is one of the lowest—yet they boast high test scores. 'It has been fascinating for me, having to tap into this culture.'"

Miss Geyer concluded her story by writing: "It is simply the mix of a serious and upright religion, of families who foster and insist upon providing the highest levels of culture right along with the highest modern technology, and of generally sensible organizing and governing. In short, it is a modern mix of the old America" ("Salt Lake City and State of Utah Reveal Themselves to the World," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 15 Feb. 2002, A15).

If there were time, I could give you many quotations from the seasoned journalists of the world, who wrote in a most laudatory fashion.

Was there anything negative? Of course. But it was minimal. We had private interviews with presidents of nations, with ambassadors, with leaders in business and other fields.

Fulfillment of Brigham Young's prophecy

In 1849, two years after our people first arrived here and following the discovery of gold in California, many were discouraged. They had struggled to wrest a living from the arid soil. Crickets had devoured their crops. The winters were cold. Many thought they would go to California and get rich. President Young stood before them and encouraged them to remain, promising that "God will temper the climate, and we shall build a city and a temple to the Most High God in this place. We will extend our settlements to the east and west, to the north and to the south, and we will build towns and cities by the hundreds, and thousands of the Saints will gather in from the nations of the earth. This will become the great highway of the nations. Kings and emperors and the noble and wise of the earth will visit us here" (in Preston Nibley, *Brigham Young: The Man and His Work* [1936], 128).

We have witnessed the fulfillment of that prophecy in these recent days. Need-

less to say, I am happy with what has happened. Those visitors tasted the distinctive culture of this community. We believe that culture is worth preserving. I compliment and thank our people who participated in such numbers and so generously, and I compliment and thank all others who worked together to make of this a wonderful and most significant event.

Growth of the Perpetual Education Fund

Now I wish to speak rather quickly of one or two other matters.

Speaking of Brigham Young has reminded me of the Perpetual Education Fund which we have established. It was only a year ago that I first spoke of this in our general conference. The contributions of generous Latter-day Saints have come in to assure us that this endeavor is now on a solid foundation. We will need more yet, but already it has been demonstrated that vast good will come of this undertaking. Young men and women in the underprivileged areas of the world, young men and women who for the most part are returned missionaries, will be enabled to get good educations that will lift them out of the slough of poverty in which their forebears for generations have struggled. They will marry and go forward with skills that will qualify them to earn well and take their places in society where they can make a substantial contribution. They will likewise grow in the Church, filling positions of responsibility and rearing families who will continue in the faith.

I have time to read only one testimonial. It comes from a young man who has been blessed by this program. He says:

"It is so wonderful that I do not have to just dream anymore about my education or my future. The Lord has cleared the way, and I am doing it!

"I am currently attending a great technical institute in our country, where I am studying to become a computer technician. . . . By going to school, I am discovering my

abilities. The discipline I developed on my mission helps me to succeed. . . . Never before has any young man felt more blessed than I do. The PEF has strengthened my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, more than ever, I feel the responsibility the gospel places upon me to prepare myself to be a better member, a better leader, and a better father. . . .

"My dear mother, who has sacrificed so much, gets so emotional that she cries when she prays at night because of her gratitude to the Lord. . . .

"Now, I envision my town being blessed because of me. I envision the Church with leaders who have financial stability and who can support the Lord's work with all their might, mind, and strength. I see the Church prospering. I am excited to start my own family and teach them that we can be self-sufficient. So I must finish my education. I will then repay the loan quickly to help my fellowmen. . . . I am grateful for the Savior's mercy. He truly sustains us with His love."

And so it goes, my brothers and sisters. As this great work moves across the earth, we are blessing now some 2,400 young people. Others will be blessed.

May the Lord bless you, and each of us, as we rejoice in our opportunity to be a part of this great cause in this wonderful season of the Lord's work is my humble prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Jesus, Once of Humble Birth."

President Faust

President Hinckley has just spoken to us, followed by the choir singing "Jesus, Once of Humble Birth."

Our next speaker will be President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He will be followed by Elder Earl C. Tingey of