

## SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

The first session of the 173rd Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, at 10:00 A.M. on Saturday, April 5, 2003. President James E. Faust conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and John Longhurst was the organist. To begin this session, the choir sang “High on the Mountain Top.” 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 173rd 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 likewise acknowledge the Relief Society, Young Men, Young Women, Sunday School, and Primary general presidencies in attendance at this conference.

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 Internet at lds.org.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with John Longhurst at the organ.

The choir opened this session by singing “High on the Mountain Top” and will now favor us with “Where Love Is.” At the conclusion of the singing, the invocation will be offered by Elder J. Kent Jolley of the Seventy.

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The choir sang “Where Love Is.”

Elder J. Kent Jolley offered the invocation.

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### **President Faust**

It will now be our pleasure to hear from President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet.

## President Gordon B. Hinckley

### **The progress of the Church**

My beloved brethren and sisters, what a miracle it is that we are able to address you out across the world. We speak here in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City. We speak in our native tongue. But many thousands of you are assembled in Church facilities in many lands, and you hear us in 56 languages.

We are met again in a great world conference of the Church according to the will and instruction of the Lord.

As we do so, the world is in turmoil. There is war and contention. There is much of unrest. Members of the Church family are citizens of many nations. We find ourselves on both sides of a great debate. I intend to speak about this tomorrow morning.

But with all the troubles with which we are confronted, I am pleased to report that the work of the Church moves forward. We continue to grow across the world. Our missionary work goes on without serious impediment. Converts continue to come into the Church, and our numbers are constantly being increased.

Paralleling this activity is the need to solidly integrate all those who are baptized as converts. We call upon every member of the Church to reach out to new converts, to put your arms around them and make them feel at home. Bless them with your friendship. Encourage them with your faith. See that there are no losses among them. Every man, woman, or child who is worthy of baptism is worthy of a secure and friendly situation in which to grow in the Church and its many activities.

Our sacrament meeting attendance gradually edges up. There is room for improvement, and I urge you to work at it constantly. Even so, I do not know of another church with as high a percentage of consistent attendance at its meetings.

### **Increased strength of our youth**

I am so grateful for the strength of the youth of the Church. Sadly enough, some fall between the cracks. But it is a miracle to witness the strength of our young people in the midst of all of the sordid temptation that is constantly around them. The sleaze and the filth of pornography, the temptation to partake of drugs, the titillating invitation to drop all bars on sexual behavior, these are among some of the enticing attractions they constantly face. Notwithstanding the allurements of the world in which they live, they remain true to the faith of their fathers and the gospel they love. I cannot say enough of good concerning our wonderful young people.

### **Faithfulness in tithes and offerings**

Faith in the payment of tithes and offerings increases despite the straitened

economic circumstances in which we find ourselves. We are able to go forward with the building of meetinghouses and temples, with our vast education program, with the very many activities which are conditioned upon the tithing income of the Church. I promise you that we will not put the Church in debt. We will strictly tailor the program to the tithing income and use these sacred funds for the purposes designated by the Lord.

I call attention to that which has received much notice in the local press. This is our decision to purchase the shopping mall property immediately to the south of Temple Square. We feel that we have a compelling responsibility to protect the environment of the Salt Lake Temple. The Church owns most of the ground on which this mall stands. The owners of the buildings have expressed a desire to sell. The property needs very extensive and expensive renovation. We have felt it imperative to do something to revitalize this area. But I wish to give the entire Church the assurance that tithing funds have not and will not be used to acquire this property. Nor will they be used in developing it for commercial purposes.

Funds for this have come and will come from the commercial entities owned by the Church. These resources, together with the earnings of invested reserve funds, will accommodate this program.

### **Building of chapels and temples**

I am pleased to report that we are able to go forward with the building of chapels. We are constructing about 400 new chapels a year to accommodate the growth in the membership of the Church. This is a significant and wonderful thing for which we are deeply grateful. We are also continuing to build temples across the earth and are pleased to report an increase in temple activity. This very important work, in behalf of the living and the dead, is a fundamental part of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Increased family preparedness**

We are pleased to note an increase in family preparedness among our people. This program, which has been advocated for more than 60 years, adds immeasurably to the security and well-being of the Latter-day Saints. Every family has a responsibility to provide for its own needs to the extent possible. We again urge our people to avoid unnecessary debt, to be modest in the financial obligations which they undertake, to set aside some cash against an emergency. We warn our people against “get rich” schemes and other entanglements which are nearly always designed to trap the gullible.

### **Volunteer service**

I am constantly amazed at the vast amount of volunteer service which our people give. I am convinced that volunteer service is the Lord’s way of accomplishing His work. The operation of wards and stakes and quorums, and the functions of the auxiliary organizations, all move forward under the direction of volunteers. The vast missionary program is dependent on volunteer service.

Additionally, we have a large number of older members who serve in a Church-service missionary capacity. More than 18,000 give all or a large part of their time to this work. We thank them for their dedicated service.

### **Progress of the Perpetual Education Fund**

This conference marks the second anniversary of the establishment of the Perpetual Education Fund. I am pleased to report that this program is now going forward on a solid basis. Some 8,000 young men and women are now in training to improve their skills and their employment opportunities. On average, with the two years of education they are now receiving,

they are increasing their income some four and a half times. It is a miracle!

### **Increased faith and love for the Lord**

And so I might go on. Suffice it to say, the Church is in good condition. I believe its affairs are prudently handled. Our people are growing in faith, in love for the Lord, and in adherence to His teachings.

These are difficult times. The economy is struggling. There is conflict in the world. But the Almighty is keeping His promise that He will bless those who walk in faith and righteousness before Him.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the way of peace. To the extent we follow it and incorporate it in our lives—to this extent will we be blessed and prospered. What a wonderful thing it is to be involved in this glorious work. Let us rejoice in our great opportunity. Let us serve with gladness.

May heaven’s richest blessings rest upon you, my beloved associates. May faith grow in your hearts. May there be love and peace in your homes. May there be food upon your tables and clothing on your backs. May the smiles of heaven warm your hearts and bring comfort in times of trial. This is my prayer this morning as we open this great conference, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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The choir sang “Praise to the Man.”

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### **President Faust**

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, has just spoken to us, followed by the choir singing “Praise to the Man.”

We shall now hear from Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He will be followed by Elder David E. Sorenson of the Presidency of the Seventy. The choir and congregation will then sing “Now Let Us Rejoice.”