

SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

The first session of the 174th 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 3, 2004. President James E. Faust conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Clay Christiansen was the organist. To begin this session, the choir sang "Press Forward, Saints." President Faust then made the following remarks.

President James E. Faust

We welcome you to this, the first general session of the 174th 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 satellite and cable systems for offering 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 Mack Wilberg, with Clay Christiansen at the organ.

The choir opened this session by singing "Press Forward, Saints" and will now sing "For the Beauty of the Earth." The invocation will then be offered by Elder Ronald A. Rasband of the Seventy.

The choir sang "For the Beauty of the Earth."

Elder Ronald A. Rasband offered the invocation.

President Faust

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

President Gordon B. Hinckley

The Church grows stronger

My beloved brethren and sisters, we warmly welcome you to another worldwide conference of the Church. We are now a great international family, living in many nations and speaking many languages. To me it is a marvelous and miraculous thing that you are able to see us and hear us across the globe.

During my life as a General Authority, we have moved from the time when we thought it a remarkable thing that we could speak in the Salt Lake Tabernacle and be heard by radio throughout the state of Utah. Now we are assembled in this great and magnificent Conference Center, and our images and words are available to 95 percent of the membership of the Church.

New technology has become available as the Church has grown larger and stronger. Our membership now reaches almost 12 million, with more members outside North America than within. Once we were recognized as a Utah church. Now we have become a great international body.

We have made a very long journey in reaching out to the nations of the world. There is much more yet to be done, but what has been accomplished is truly phenomenal.

Strong and committed members

It is a fact that we lose some—far too many. Every organization of which I am aware does so. But I am satisfied that we retain and keep active a higher percentage of our members than does any other major church of which I know.

Everywhere there is great activity and great enthusiasm. We have strong and able leaders across the world who give of their time and means to move the work forward.

It is wonderfully refreshing to see the faith and faithfulness of our young people. They live at a time when a great tide of evil is washing over the earth. It seems to be everywhere. Old standards are discarded. Principles of virtue and integrity are cast aside. But we find literally hundreds of thousands of our young people holding to the high standards of the gospel. They find happy and uplifting association with those of their own kind. They are improving their minds with education and their skills with discipline, and their influence for good is felt ever more widely.

Construction and humanitarian efforts

I am pleased to report, my brothers and sisters, that the Church is in good condition. We continue to build temples, to construct houses of worship, to carry forward many projects of construction and

improvement, all made possible because of the faith of our people.

We are carrying on a great humanitarian effort, which is blessing the lives of many of the less fortunate of the earth and those who are the victims of the catastrophes of nature.

Changing attitudes toward the Church

We are pleased to note that on April 1 of this year, the Illinois House of Representatives unanimously passed a resolution of regret for the forced expulsion of our people from Nauvoo in 1846. This magnanimous gesture may be coupled with action taken by then Governor Christopher S. Bond of Missouri, who in 1976 revoked the cruel and unconstitutional extermination order issued against our people by Governor Lilburn W. Boggs in 1838.

These and other developments represent a most significant change of attitude toward the Latter-day Saints.

Expression of gratitude and blessing

How deeply grateful I feel to each of you and all of you for your dedicated and consecrated service. I thank you for your many kindnesses to me wherever I go. I stand as your servant, ready and willing to assist you in any way that I can.

God bless you, my dear associates. How I love you. How I pray for you. How I thank you.

May heaven smile upon you. May there be love and harmony, peace and goodness in your homes. May you be preserved from harm and evil. May our Father's "great plan of happiness" (Alma 42:8) become the standard by which you live. I ask it humbly and gratefully in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

It will now be our pleasure to hear from our beloved associate Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve, who is now 97 years of age. Elder Haight, come up here and speak to your multitudinous friends.