

Welcome to Conference

PRESIDENT THOMAS S. MONSON

My brothers and sisters, I am pleased to report that the Church is doing very well. The work of the Lord continues to move forward uninterrupted.



My dear brothers and sisters, as we open this, the 179th Annual General Conference, we note with sadness the absence of Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. We mourn his passing. We miss him. We extend our love to his family. I have no doubt that he is carrying on this great work on the other side of the veil.

Because of the passing of Elder Wirthlin, there exists a vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. After much fasting and prayer, we have called Elder Neil Linden Andersen to fill this vacancy. We present his name to you this morning for your sustaining vote. All those of you who feel you

can sustain him in this sacred calling will please signify by the uplifted hand. Any who may be opposed may signify by the same sign.

We thank you for your sustaining vote. Elder Andersen's name will be included when the officers of the Church are read this afternoon.

Elder Andersen, we invite you now to take your place on the stand with the members of the Twelve. We look forward to hearing from you in the Sunday morning session of conference.

Since we met six months ago, my brothers and sisters, I have traveled to Mexico City, Mexico, with President and Sister Henry B. Eyring, to rededicate the temple there. For many months it had been undergoing extensive renovations.

The evening before the rededication, a magnificent cultural event was held in the Aztec Stadium. Approximately 87,000 spectators squeezed into the open-air stadium, and a cast of more than 8,000 young people participated in the program, which featured an 80-minute display of music, dance, and Mexican history.

President Eyring and I were each presented a serape and a sombrero. Outfitted in this native costume, I couldn't resist serenading the group with an impromptu version of



“El Rancho Grande,” which I had originally learned in my ninth-grade Spanish class. I shall not do that today.

Each of the two dedicatory sessions the following day were filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

Just two weeks ago, in 12 sessions we dedicated the Draper Utah Temple, a magnificent structure nestled in the foothills of the mountains in the south portion of the Salt Lake Valley. There



were approximately 685,000 people—members and nonmembers alike—who attended the open house. Over 365,000 members were present at the dedicatory sessions, including the sessions broadcast by satellite to various stake centers. The Spirit of the Lord was present in rich abundance as the temple was dedicated.

In the near future, we will be dedicating the Oquirrh Mountain Utah

Temple, and then in the coming months and years there will be many more dedications. We look forward to these occasions. There is something about a temple dedication which prompts a reevaluation of one's own performance and a sincere desire to do even better.

Now, my brothers and sisters, I am pleased to report that the Church is doing very well. The work of the

Lord continues to move forward uninterrupted.

We now have approximately 53,000 missionaries serving in 348 missions throughout the world. We take most seriously the Savior's mandate when He said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."¹ We are deeply grateful for the labors of our



missionaries and for the sacrifices which they and their families make in order for them to serve.

We also have countless volunteers and missionaries in nonproselyting activities. These are generally mature individuals who donate their time and talents in order to further the work of the Lord and to bless our Heavenly Father's children. How thankful we are for the valuable services these individuals are providing.

The Perpetual Education Fund, established in 2001, continues to move forward. Since its inception, 35,600 young men and young women have been enrolled in the program and have trained to improve their skills and their employment opportunities. Thus far, 18,900 have finished that training. On average, with the 2.7 years of education they are now receiving, they are increasing their income by three to four times. What a

blessing this is in their lives! This is indeed an inspired program.

My brothers and sisters, I thank you for your faith and devotion to the gospel. I thank you for the love and care you show to one another. I thank you for the service you provide in your wards and branches and in your stakes and districts. It is such service that enables the Lord to accomplish His purposes here upon the earth.

I express my thanks to you for your kindnesses to me wherever I go. I thank you for your prayers in my behalf. I have felt those prayers and am most grateful for them.

Now, my brothers and sisters, we are anxious to listen to the messages which will be presented to us during the next two days, that we might be taught and inspired and have a renewed determination to live the gospel and to serve the Lord. Those

who will address us have sought heaven's help and direction as they have prepared their messages. They have been impressed concerning that which they will share with us.

To those of you who are new in the Church, we welcome you. To those of you who are struggling with challenges or with disappointments or with losses, we pray for you. Our Heavenly Father loves each of us and is mindful of our needs. May we be filled with His Spirit as we listen to that which will be presented. Such is my prayer this morning as we open this great conference. I also add a fond remembrance of President Gordon B. Hinckley, who preceded me as President of the Church. I'm sure he's serving well on the other side. In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTE

1. Matthew 28:19.