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The World Convention of Churches of Christ

By Henry E. Webb

The fifteenth World Convention of Churches of Christ convened in Brisbane, Australia August 2-6, 2000. Sessions were held in the magnificent new Convention Center in downtown Brisbane. The weather (it was winter in Australia) was perfect since Brisbane is situated far enough to the north to be sub-tropical.

The World Convention dates from 1930 and was organized by Dr. Jesse M. Bader. He was aware of the global spread of the Stone-Campbell Movement to approximately 30 countries. He deeply believed that some means of fellowship on a world-wide basis ought to be developed and made available to the whole body. Dr. Bader issued the call for the first World Convention and served as General Secretary until his death in 1963.

The first World Convention was held in the United States in Washington, D. C. At that time the whole world was caught in a serious economic depression. However, 10,000 people gathered from many countries despite the hardships caused by the Depression. Since then, conventions have been held every 4 or 5 years, except for the years during World War II. Britain, Australia, Canada, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Mexico, and New Zealand have hosted the Convention. The next World Convention will be held in 2004 in Brighton, England. Dr. David Thompson, a professor at Cambridge University and leader in the URC fellowship of the British Churches of Christ, will serve as president of this convention.

The World Convention operates under the direction of an international committee that includes representatives of the three portions of the Stone-Campbell heritage in the United States, as well as representatives of the many nations where work is being conducted. Funding for the convention comes from registrations, fees, contributions from churches, and from gifts given by interested individuals.

The World Convention office identified 165 countries around the world in which churches of the Stone-Campbell Movement sustain some kind of work or witness. Thirty-two nations were represented at the Brisbane Convention and many leaders from these nations gave very positive reports of the work currently being done in their countries. The wide geographic scope of the Movement is both awesome and inspiring. It suggests that our people take the Great Commission seriously and that we maintain a significant global witness. We rank well ahead of most religious bodies of our size in the scope of mission activity and the number of workers that we sustain.

As one would expect, the largest representation at Brisbane was from the Australian churches. Holding the convention in Australia enabled many from our churches "down under" to participate in a World Convention.

Fellowship at the convention was warm and cordial. Everyone was gracious and friendly and the hospitality of the Australian Christians was

superb. More intimate fellowship was afforded by the several breakfasts and luncheons for special interest groups in which many delegates enthusiastically participated.

All of the main sessions were conducted in English, eliminating the need for translators, which were necessary in San Juan and Mexico City. Preaching at the convention was of high caliber, beginning with the opening message by Dr. Robert Schuler of Garden Grove, CA. Other speakers reflected the international nature of the assembly. The singing was good (at times a praise band was irritatingly loud) and the music at the Sunday Morning worship and communion service (a cappella) was outstanding.

A very positive feature of the convention was the number of seminars on a wide range of topics from which the delegates could choose. The leaders and the topics of these seminars reflected the multinational scope of the convention.

The World Convention has an important and unique ministry among our churches. It brings together the three streams currently found in the Stone-Campbell Movement in the United States with brothers and sisters from many different nations and cultures. It is the only resource we have with this kind of ministry and it is badly needed. It is amazing how sectarian differences and racial and national distinctions fade away when Christians unite in worship and fellowship.

The initiative for founding the World Convention of Churches of Christ seventy years ago came from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and that body provided the funds and dominated the Convention in its early years. This is no longer the case. Today there is a much broader base of support for the Convention. The current general secretaries, Lyndsay and Lorraine Jacobs are from our Movement in New Zealand and are equally at home in each of three fellowships of the American

Movement. Just as the financial support for the Convention comes from all three groups in America, so are all represented on the board of directors and in the programs. Currently there is growing sentiment within the three bodies of the Movement in the United States to develop a more congenial spirit and closer relationships with each other. The World Convention, along with the Historical Society, is the only agency that serves all three segments and brings them together in fellowship and service. Hopefully, by the time of the next World Convention, the Churches of Christ, the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will have made progress in developing more fraternal relationships.

The 2004 World Convention will provide a delightful opportunity for delegates from America to visit the old "mother country" and enjoy its fabled beauty. The convention office organizes a variety of reasonably priced and otherwise attractive tours for delegates who enjoy traveling with people they know. For more information on the 2004 convention, you may place your name on the mailing list by writing to the following address:

World Convention of Churches of Christ
1101 Nineteenth Ave. S
Nashville, TN 37212- 2196

The convention in 2008 was scheduled to be held in one of the African countries but political instability mandated a move. It will probably be held in Nashville, Tennessee, USA. This location, in the heart of the Stone-Campbell Movement in the United States, will insure that this will be the largest World Convention ever assembled.

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