

Ministerial Forum

FOURTH QUARTER, 1976

REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL MINISTERIAL CONGRESS

By Elder Ray L. Straub

Everyone was preparing for the special event. The ministers from Latin America were due, and brethren already present from the U. S. and Canada were set to welcome them. Speeches were ready for delivery. A reception would follow which would allow for a time of nibbling snacks and enjoying informal visitation. There was a problem: the brethren from below the U.S. - Mexico border hadn't arrived, and none seemed to know where they were.

There was no use welcoming ourselves. So, time was extended to brethren who had served longest in the ministry. They recalled experiences of several years past. There were the revival days under brush arbors, in schoolhouses, in homes. There were the debates, the financial dilemmas, the opposition from the skeptical. But, there were also many baptisms, new churches organized, sizeable crowds of interested neighbors.

It was a time for nostalgia, for encouragement and inspiration. These older brethren were worth hearing from!

The Spanish-speaking brethren arrived in four vehicles between 11:00 p.m. and midnight. They had become separated from each other during their efforts to cross the border into the U. S. Once they arrived, their presence was felt and appreciated.

It was more work on bylaws! We've adopted enough of them lately to develop skill, but our expertise failed to surface. After one and one-half days of work we had a document that looks good. It calls for an International Ministerial Congress which will be the highest worldwide authority of the Church in matters concerning the ministry. As soon as necessary changes can be made in the General Conference Bylaws and corresponding amendments made in the Congress' bylaws, this newly formed organization will be autonomous. There is a new horizon for the Church that will be interesting to watch develop. The Congress membership as a whole is enthused about the future.

The two official interpreters were Elder Daniel Davila of Oklahoma City and Dr. John Barrera of Mexico City. Several other bilinguals found their interpreting abilities in constant demand. Needing an intermediary to converse was a handicap, but the interpreters can report there was much visitation and good fellowship despite the language barrier.

Two "sides" were presented on two topics. One dealt with the need for women to wear a headcovering when in a religious service. The other sought to determine whether rebaptism should be a requisite for church membership. Since neither study qualified for formal adoption, it was understood there would be no vote on them. Recognizing this seemed to allow for greater relaxation in the presentations, questions and answers.

Additionally, there were ideas presented concerning what constitutes the call of God, which are appropriate titles to use for the various levels of church leadership, a study on the relationship between law, grace and forgiveness, a promotion for the work of United Missions, and thoughts concerning the interpersonal relationships between ministers. Naturally, not everything suggested was pleasant or interesting or profitable, but most of it was thought-provoking and worth hearing.

The banquet on Friday night was a highlight. The tables were beautifully decorated. Everyone dressed up. It was a sit-down affair where the dinner was served. Good food, atmosphere, and company promise a good time.

After the meal, various leaders of the Church were introduced. Elder Jonathan Martinez, chairman of the Executive Committee in Mexico, gave a message reflecting unusual insight into the challenge facing the Church, particularly in her outreach. Slides were shown of the work in Central America followed by moving descriptions of problems caused there by the earthquakes. It appeared that the meeting with its warm fellowship might happily go on and on when the management reminded us that the evening was well advanced.

The warm feeling continued through the Sabbath and on to the close of the session. Never has such a closeness and mutual concern swept over us. It is clear that the ministers of the Church of God (Seventh Day) from around the world can get together and do excellent service for God and His Church.