

January 2000

---

## 57th General Conference Session 2000

**PLACE:** SkyDome and Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Toronto, Canada

**DATES:** **June 25 - June 29 (Sunday - Thursday)**  
World Ministers Council  
**June 29 - July 08 (Thursday - Sabbath)**  
General Conference Session

**THEME:** *Almost Home*

---

### How it Used to Be

Bert B. Beach looks back at the past General Conference Sessions he attended.

Today, as it has over the years, his office communicates vital stories about the Church's past with a *tour de force* vision. Dr. Bert B. Beach, one of the most colorful personalities in modern Adventism, is ready to take you into his rich collection of facts and narratives. Though formally retired from the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty post he held at the Church World Headquarters until 1995, he looks forward to attending the Session in Toronto, his thirteenth in a career of 50 years as an Adventist Church leader. He is always ready to compare and interpret, and his excitement today does not change, though, as he often says, "today things ain't the same as they used to be."

"I have attended all 12 General Conference Sessions since 1946. Now, one of the differences is that in the early days we had a General Conference Session every four years. Since 1975, it's every five years," he comments.

It was a matter of finance, Dr. Beach says without hesitation. "It was felt that it was cheaper to hold them every five years, and a better way of operating a big church. In the early days of our Church, of course, Sessions were held every year. But then that was a small group, maybe 150-200 people meeting. Now, when you have several thousand delegates and tens of

thousands of people coming to the meeting, it is a big meeting. In fact, some people might call it even a big jamboree."

His contact with General Conference Sessions brings memories of being a "page" boy. "I think I made \$150-200 at the 1946 Session because I was one of the 'page' boys with Secretariat. My task was to deliver messages also for the Nominating Committee, calling people in who had been chosen to tell them that they had been elected, or maybe telling them they hadn't been elected, or whatever the message was." Beach draws a lesson which proved to be important to him during the years in the Church's leadership. He explains: "I would recommend working as a 'page' to anyone, any young person in their late teens or in college. It's a great experience because not only do you find out how the Church operates, but you get to know so many people. My knowledge of the leadership of the Church worldwide comes from the fact that I was a 'page' at the General Conference Session in 1946. There, I got acquainted with just about all the leaders of the Church." Today, Bert Beach is a delegate.

Differences abound when one compares the earlier General Conference Sessions such as 1946 and those organized these days. According to Beach, "one obvious difference is that the Session in 1946 was a much smaller event. It was the first Session right after World War II—the war had ended in 1945—and this was the first time that leaders of the Church came together in a big way from around the world."

"It may surprise you to know that that meeting took place in the Sligo Church. It was not in a big convention center such as the one coming up in the Toronto SkyDome, with tens of thousands participating. It was actually held in the Sligo Church, which had recently been completed in Takoma Park, Maryland. It was a newly built church. It was the biggest church we had in the denomination, and we had, as I recall, less than 1,000 delegates in attendance there. It fitted very well for the meeting to take place in the Sligo Church. On the Sabbaths, however, we went down to the National Armory. It wasn't the most suitable place, but it was the best available in the Washington, DC, area at that

time.”

Yes, things have changed. “In the early days, I recall, when we came to the General Conference Session, those who came to the Session from abroad arrived by boat. That gave you time to relax before you arrived. Now we all arrive mostly by plane, and it’s a little more hectic, more pressed for time than in the past,” he adds.

Scanning the past, Beach points to other differences between the bygone era and the way the denomination conducts its Sessions. “One big difference between the early Sessions and nowadays is that the early Sessions were a bit less professional, in a way. It was more the Seventh-day Adventist family coming together and doing its church business. Now it’s highly professional and organized.”

“Allow me to illustrate. In the early days, beginning in 1958, when my father was the Secretary of the General Conference, one big event at the Session was the Missions’ Pageant. I remember that my father would be on the platform and he would just . . . ad lib the program of the pageant, with all the people marching by and he would talk about them and the work. Obviously he had prepared for it, but it was basically an ad lib. Now, you have professional script writers who prepare the program. It’s much more complicated, much more expensive and much more involved. The spirit of the Session was more the spirit of a family and more of a pioneer church. Now it’s more of a large, more professional church. And that makes some difference.”

Reflections about the past bring Beach quickly to an area which planners for the Session hold as one of their objectives; namely, positively impacting the place and the community where the Session is held. Yes, the Session is a business meeting of the Church, but as Seventh-day Adventists, we do things because we are missionaries in the world. Beach comments that “overall the local community has been rather favorable to the General Conference Session. We’ve always made a positive impact.”

“I remember in San Francisco a newspaper article about the General Conference Session saying, ‘The Seventh-day Adventists came to town with a \$10 bill and the ten commandments, and they broke neither.’ This was kind of a back-handed compliment to our morality, but maybe less to our spending ability to help

local businesses during the General Conference Session.”

Today, such mega-events impact the cities and countries in which they are held in a much bigger way than before. “We plan more to take into consideration the local community than we did before. We invite more public officials than we did in the past. Now, we have more guests attending, including observers from other Christian churches. In the past, the other churches practically always ignored our Session. Perhaps one reason was, we had ignored them, too. We just had ‘our’ Session and didn’t pay attention to others. All of this contributes to the kind of impact we make.”

“And we are also intentional about having some activities outside, like we did in Utrecht. ADRA’s Global Village made an impact on the community, so did youth activities and public concerts. Beginning with, maybe the Session in Dallas, Texas, in 1980, we started issuing public and official statements regarding issues that were of interest to the general public, and not only to ourselves.”

Looking forward to Toronto, like every delegate, Bert Beach has personal expectations. He hopes that Toronto 2000 will be a meeting in which the global outreach of the Church and its international character will continually be highlighted and that the meeting will not be viewed as “business as usual.”

“With a smaller delegate number of 2,000, even though the Church has several million more members than it did in 1995 in Utrecht, we can do better business than if we get so big that it becomes unmanageable to actually do business and give people the opportunity to express themselves in speeches on the Session floor regarding the business of the Church.”

But for him, even this smaller number of delegates still seems too big. “I would personally hope that we could bring down the size of the actual voting business delegation even further. I think an assembly of 2,000 is a very big assembly. I know of no other church that has anything that size.”

As he enters into his rich memory bank, Beach does not hesitate to explain that one single thing that has made him proud of the Church is “her tremendous growth and missionary activity and inspiring reports from the world divisions, highlighting evangelism in all parts of the world.”

Looking back at the past Sessions, he is eager to

---

speak about “the energy of the Church. That has always impressed me in a great way. Now, we must never let the Church get bogged down by majoring in minors. A Session is a wonderful occasion but more important is to finish the work.” [A *Session 2000 News* interview by Ray

Dabrowski]

## **Canadian Postage Stamp to Commemorate GC Session 2000**

Canada Post has announced that its year 2000 stamp program will include a special commemorative stamp featuring the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which will coincide with the opening of the General Conference Session in Toronto on June 29. Plans are already underway for a stamp unveiling ceremony that will take place during the Session’s opening events. The special stamp will be the first honoring the Adventist Church to be issued in North America.

“What an exciting development,” says Canadian Gerry Karst, assistant to Church president Dr. Jan Paulsen. “Adventists in Canada and around the world will be proud of this public recognition by the Canadian postal service.”

The idea for an Adventist World Session 2000 stamp was first conceived in 1997 by Barry Bussey, secretary of the Ontario Conference. A long-time stamp collector, Bussey was aware that Canada Post accepted ideas for stamp designs from the public. His suggestion for a stamp to commemorate the GC Session received support from many in the community.

Ivan Grose, Member of Parliament for Oshawa, wrote to Canada Post in favor of the idea. He noted two Adventist institutions in his district, saying, “I am very familiar with [the Church’s] good works, not only locally, but nationally and internationally as well. I can think of no more worthwhile subject for a special commemorative stamp.”

Bussey believes that the stamp issue is an exciting way to highlight the Adventist Church in Canada. “This is an opportunity to get more involved in the community and to let Canadian society know we’re here,” says Bussey. “I am so pleased that I could have a small part in helping Canada know more about the Adventist Church.”

The design of the 46-cent, first-class stamp, which will not be disclosed until its release, is based on material and information provided to Canada Post by Bussey and his Canadian team. Ray Dabrowski, communication director for the World Church, also supported the project and assisted with information. “We are all anxious to see the stamp, but, like everyone else, we will wait until the release sometime in the next few months,” says Dabrowski.

After its release, just prior to the Session, the stamp can be purchased by phoning (800) 565-4362 (in North America) or (902) 863-6550 (internationally).

[Bettina Krause]

## **Hospitality Services**

Volunteers play a very vital role in the smooth operation of a General Conference Session. During the ten days of the Session, thousands of visitors from around the world will attend and participate in the activities planned for them. For many, this will be their first attendance at a Session, as well as their first visit to Toronto. It will be the work of the volunteers to make their stay a pleasant one.

Volunteers will give directions, answer inquiries and provide information regarding the services that are available within the venues of the Session or nearby in the city of Toronto. They will be stationed at information booths and kiosks throughout the Metro Toronto Convention Centre and the Skydome. Some will be mobile, making themselves available to visitors needing assistance. Because inquiries and applications have come from around the world, it is anticipated that visitors should be able to find a volunteer to communicate with in their language of choice. Volunteers will be easily identifiable, wearing a bright red vest with a large white maple leaf on the back.

These people are volunteers in the truest sense of the word. Even though they are responsible for all of their expenses to travel to and stay in Toronto, they are still willing to donate their time and effort to help insure the smooth operation of this big Church event. It is exciting to know that God’s people are willing to rise to the occasion when their assistance is needed. [Ralph Janes]

## Newsroom Preparations for Toronto 2000

It is anticipated that 400 media representatives will cover the General Conference Session in Toronto. The Session 2000 Newsroom will provide accreditation, as well as press facilities, for both the Adventist and external media.

Toronto, being one of the world's foremost cosmopolitan cities, offers media sophistication comparable to such cities as New York or London. The Newsroom operation will avail the Toronto press corps, both religious and secular, with access to the Session proceedings and associated events. Equally, the *Adventist Review* or the Adventist World Radio reporters, as well as the representatives of numerous church or non-church media entities, will be offered the use of the press services during the ten-day event in the SkyDome.

In Toronto, the Newsroom operation will coordinate two primary services to accredited press—official news coverage of the Session and its events through the Adventist News Network (ANN), as well as operation of press facilities for all of the accredited representatives of the media.

Similar to previous Sessions, each world division of the Church, as well as its institutions, will be able to access the Session proceedings and events and cover it for their audiences and readers. “The SkyDome Press Box will provide adequate space and services to accommodate the needs of the print, radio and television media,” says Ray Dabrowski, communication director of the General Conference and in charge of the press operation at the Session. “We expect much interest—and not only in the Church—from the media. In 1995, in Utrecht, the press office was one of the busiest places of the Session. Our 20-member international communication Newsroom team is ready to be even busier in Toronto!”

The Newsroom will provide local and international services, and individual work stations, equipped with modem access, will be set up for accredited journalists. The ANN Newsroom activities will include photographic services, and the news will be uploaded in an as-it-happens mode on the Session 2000 web page at [www.adventist.org](http://www.adventist.org) (see following article).

“With today's technology well utilized in our communication, the only unknown now will be the choice of

the content matter. Communication will happen live and instantly,” Dabrowski says. “Our intention is to make sure that the news will be delivered quickly and that the reporters are provided with a user-friendly and open atmosphere to cover this important meeting.”

The Newsroom plans daily morning news briefings and will coordinate news conferences. One of the biggest challenges at such mega-events is providing the reporters with access to individuals who are sought to be interviewed. Plans include staging several news conferences with church leaders.

It is expected that several news releases will be issued daily by Adventist News Network. “This is primarily a business session of the Church, so our press office is always challenged to bring the news that would be of interest. Church growth, its challenges, and the excitement of sharing the victories for God will no doubt prove to be worthy of reporting. But the presence of the Christian witness in the contemporary world will attract media attention,” says Jonathan Gallagher, news director of the General Conference.

The SkyDome press area will provide the accredited press with access to needed technical facilities to prepare their reports. The reporters will be able to view the proceedings and events of the Session from the press box. Seating has also been arranged near the stage. The newsroom will liaison with the Session audiovisual broadcast team to provide services required by the media. [Ray Dabrowski]

## Internet On-line Service for the Toronto Session

With the continuing development of electronic communication, Toronto 2000 will be the first General Conference Session that can provide a level of on-line access so that members around the world can experience a virtual General Conference Session as it happens.

Many of our members have come to expect a high level of service from the World Church as it communicates its program. With the rapid development of the World Church website, over half-a-million individual members and visitors are taking advantage of this electronic communication avenue each year. They now

expect as a matter of routine the ready availability of news, text material, pictures, graphics and video clips.

In order to capitalize on this useful technology and to fulfill both the World Church's mission and the members expectations, plans are underway to bring this "virtual" General Conference Session program into reality. It is planned to provide regular news updates, feature stories, background information, pictorial presentations, video highlights and even updating webcams—inexpensive automated video shots of the Session—at regular intervals. In this way, the membership and interested visitors can be made aware of the significance and process of General Conference Sessions as never before. The overall communication plan includes interfacing with the audiovisual broadcast team and their audio and video productions. Session photography will be also stored and offered digitally by the Internet team for instant downloads by publishers.

The provision of this On-line Toronto 2000 Session service is not expensive. The on-line team will utilize the existing web server which will be complemented by some additional hardware. A four-member technical support team will cover web technical support, including encoding, design, and layout.

The General Conference Communication Department is committed to assisting the Session Planning team in fulfilling its mission and mandate of sharing this highly important event by making it accessible in as many ways as is feasible. This includes using the providentially provided technology to speed the sharing of the gospel message. [Jonathan Gallagher]

## **Theme Hymn**

The Session Planning Committee voted that the theme hymn of the Session will be "We Have This Hope."

### **How are you receiving *Session 2000 News*?**

*Session 2000 News* is a monthly publication available to you in the following formats: 1) fax copy; 2) e-mail text copy; 3) e-mail PDF copy; 4) mail; 5) viewing through the official website: [www.adventist.org/gc2000/](http://www.adventist.org/gc2000/)

Let us know how you would prefer to receive the newsletter. Contact:

General Conference Communication Department  
12501 Old Columbia Pike  
Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 USA  
Phone: 301-680-6300; Fax: 301-680-6312  
E-mail: [session2000news@gc.adventist.org](mailto:session2000news@gc.adventist.org)

**Have you visited the official website for GC Session 2000? The website contains information you can't afford to miss.**

**Visit us today at:  
[www.adventist.org/gc2000/](http://www.adventist.org/gc2000/)**

---