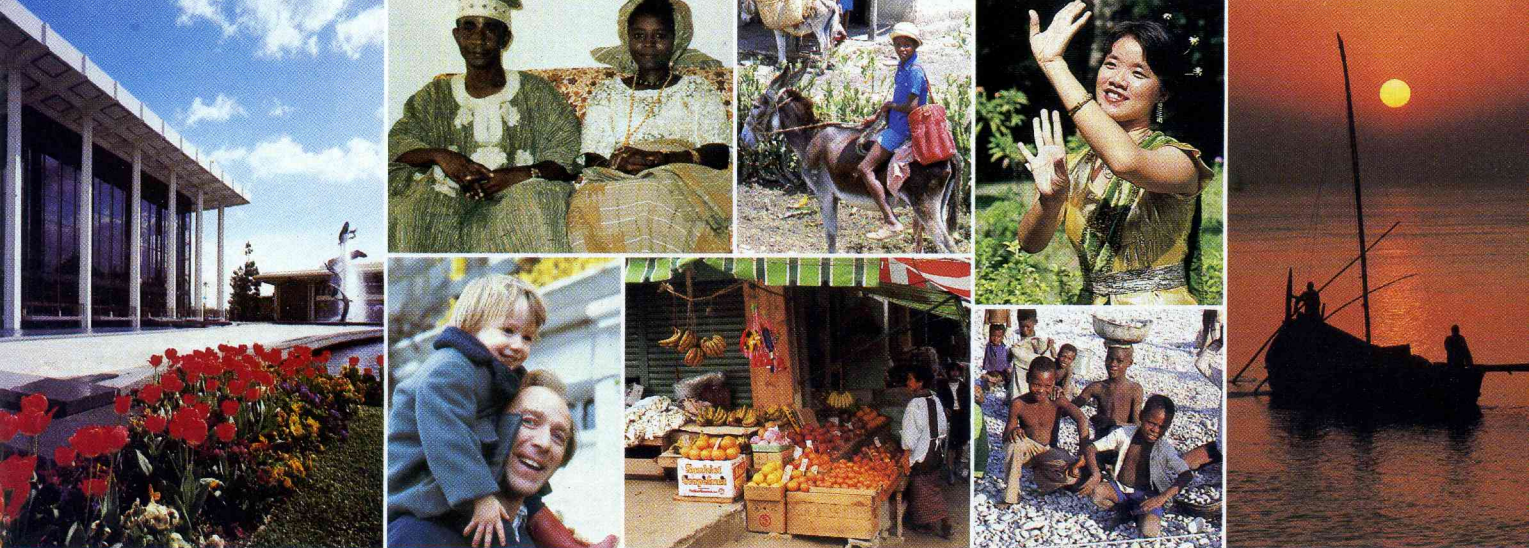




A Worldwide Family Reunion

When you attend the Feast you are part of a worldwide family participating in the greatest family reunion on earth.

By John Halford

Have you ever wondered what the Feast would be like if the whole Church could keep it together at one location? Not just everyone in your country, but all of God's people worldwide, together for eight days.

The Church used to do this. In the early years of this Work, Herbert W. Armstrong and his wife Loma would gather with just about every member at Belknap Springs, Ore., for the eight-day Fall Festival. But the Church was small then, and most of the members lived in the northwest United States.

Today, we have some 70,000 members living in about 124 different countries. Some of these brethren live on the other side of the earth from you.

But the cost of travel is prohibitive. Some members only have a few dollars in festival tithe, even though they save it faithfully all year long. Others live in countries that are virtual prisons — they are not permitted to leave, even temporarily.

These and many other problems keep God's people separate today. There is probably no place on earth where all of God's people, with all their different nationalities, could meet together in peace, because of diplomatic and political problems among the world's governments.

No, at this time one Festival site is

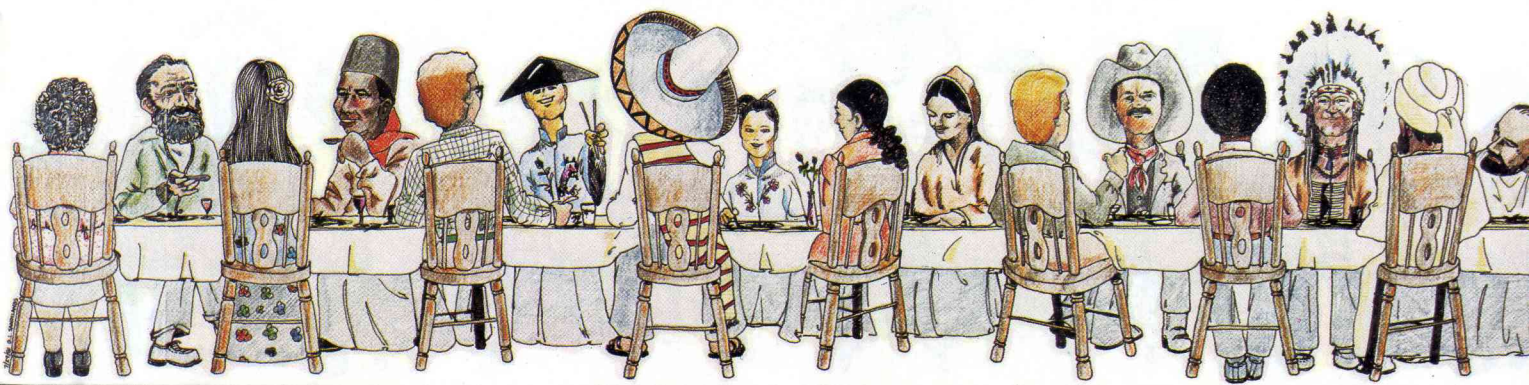
not possible. But suppose it was. What would it be like? Use your imagination for a few minutes.

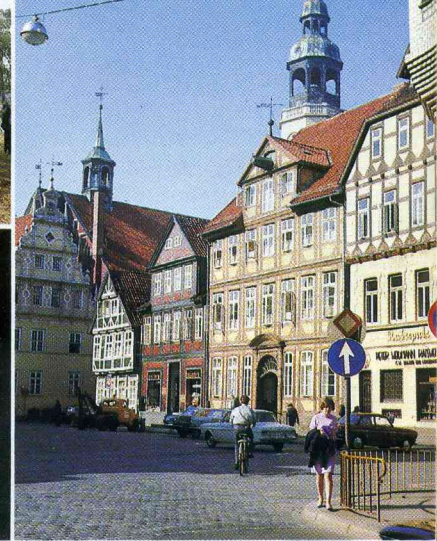
One Festival site

Most of the brethren would be Americans, from every state in the Union. The next largest contingent would be the Canadians, and then the Australians. You might be forgiven for confusing the 600 brethren from New Zealand with the Australians, but there would be no mistaking the members from England, Ireland and South Africa. Their accents are quite distinct.

There would be people from most of the European countries. They would be mainly French, German, Swiss, Belgian and Dutch — but also represented would be the Scandinavian

Illustration by Greg Sandlands





countries, along with Greece, Italy, Malta and Liechtenstein. There would even be brethren from behind the Iron Curtain, and some from Spain and Portugal.

Most of the brethren who spoke Spanish and Portuguese, however, would be from South and Central America — Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Brazil and embattled El Salvador.

The West Indies would be represented in force — God has people on most of the islands in the Caribbean region. African members would come mainly from Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya, but many of the countries of the African continent would have at least one or two representatives. So would many of the smaller island nations of the world — Mauritius, the Seychelles, Fiji, Tonga and even Kiribati.

Most of the Asian brethren would be Filipinos; God's Church has nearly 2,200 members scattered throughout the Philippine islands. We'd also have about 50 each from Sri Lanka, Burma, Malaysia and Singapore and about 100 from India.

What a fantastic gathering it would be!

As you experienced the eight days, you would begin to understand that God is not a respecter of persons, but that "in every nation he that feareth

him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35).

We would have to figure out ways around the language difficulties, but think of the fellowship opportunities. You could have breakfast with a Greek and then walk to services with a couple of Dayaks from Borneo. After lunch with an Apache Amerindian and some fellowship with a couple from Hong Kong, you could perhaps spend the afternoon with a man who spends most of his life above the Arctic Circle in Lapland.

At dinner you might have a chance to get to know the brethren from Lesotho. And if there was room at the table for a member from Thailand, so much the better. And don't forget that nightcap with the Australian aborigine and his friend from Papua New Guinea. Don't stay out too late, though — remember you are meeting the Swedish man and his wife for breakfast tomorrow.

Yes, these brethren exist. They are all part of the worldwide family God has called to work with Christ now, and to be the firstfruits in God's Family in the world tomorrow.

At such a Feast, perhaps we would come to understand even more fully why our Father in heaven does love the human race, with its variety, personalities, talents and potentials. Per-

haps we would develop even more of the mind of Christ, who gave His life so that everyone, from the greatest to the least, eventually might have the opportunity for salvation and eternal life (Rev. 5:9).

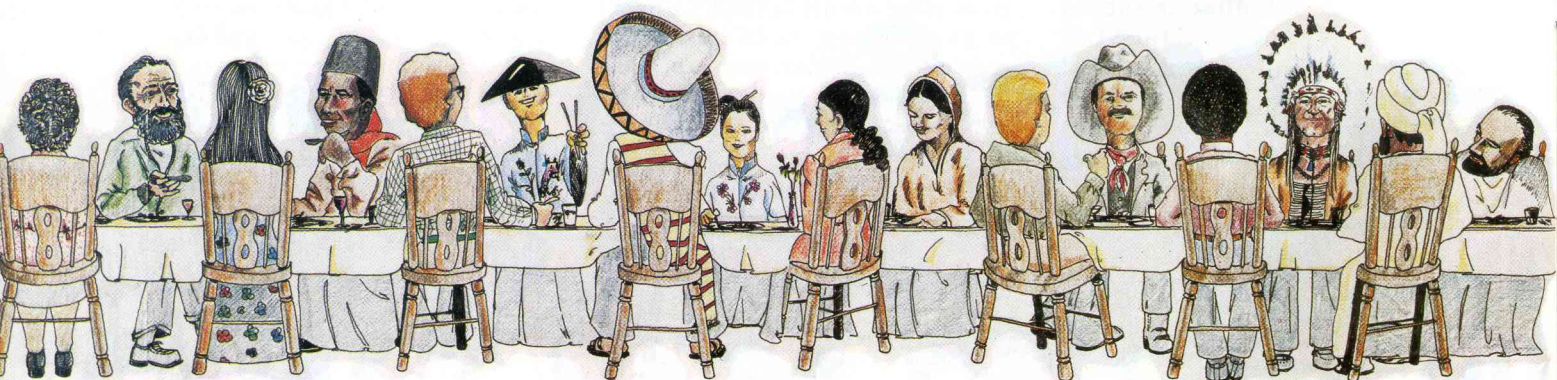
Spiritually united

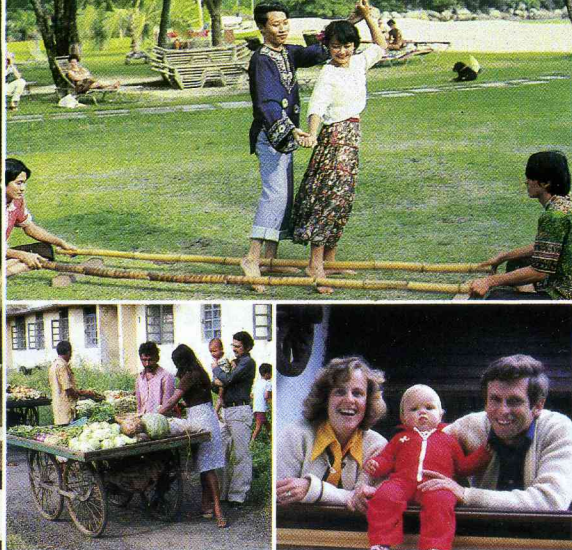
Such a Feast is not possible — yet. But we can make a start. The brethren in God's Church are united, not physically, but spiritually as they make their way to the sites where God has placed His name.

This year there are 84 Feast sites in 44 countries. Thousands will attend some sites, like the Lake of the Ozarks, Mo., and Squaw Valley, Calif. Only a few brethren will meet at other sites, such as Les Cayes, Haiti, or Cape McMear, Malawi. But the same Spirit is at all God's Feast sites.

Brethren around the world will at least hear a tape recording of Mr. Armstrong's Feast messages. Many will actually see him speak through microwave and satellite television transmission. Modern communications technology has made it possible for brethren who are oceans apart to sit in the same service together and hear the same message.

So during the Feast this year, broaden your horizons. You are part of a worldwide family participating in





the greatest family reunion on the face of the earth.

Family reunions are exciting times. There are old acquaintances to renew. New relatives to meet for the first time — new wives and husbands to welcome to the fold, and grandchildren to be shown off.

Mr. Armstrong has proclaimed 1981 the “year of the family.” Think of God’s Feast as a family reunion. Of course, it is a time to spend time with your own family and friends, especially those you have not seen for a year or more.

But make room for new family members — some visitors from abroad, perhaps, who might be feeling a bit lost. Many people are lonely at the Feast. Christ warned that some people would be rejected by their families if they followed Him (Luke 12:52-53). Remember what He said about these people:

“There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses [where he is welcome], and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30).

Will you and your family help ful-

fill Christ’s promise and make the Feast memorable for some lonely people? Think about it. Ask God to guide you to someone you can help. After all, God “setteth the solitary in families” (Ps. 68:6).

Remember your brethren

Remember the Feast sites around the world. Pray that your brethren may meet in peace at all those sites. Particularly remember those brethren who are meeting in or near the world’s trouble spots, and those members who must travel through dangerous areas like Northern Ireland and El Salvador. Pray that those meeting in the poorer countries will be physically as well as spiritually blessed.

Remember also the truly solitary members of our worldwide family — those who because of sickness, finances or distance must stay at home this year. If you know someone in this situation, be sure to write him a card or phone. Let the person know he is not forgotten.

God, of course, cares for them, and He will not forget them. But He wants to see if we care too. He needs to know if His worldwide family is learning the lesson of giving and sharing, the way of life that will pervade the world tomorrow.

That, after all, is what the Feast of

Tabernacles is all about — it pictures a time when this world will be at peace, with nations showing genuine concern for each other’s well-being. It pictures a time when great and powerful countries will not fritter away precious time competing with one another, or squandering their resources in an arms race to destruction.

How will you use the time and resources God has made available to you this Feast? You can show God that you do want His way, and that you are indeed serious about qualifying to rule with Christ in the world tomorrow.

God has not made it possible for us all to meet together at one Feast site just yet. It wouldn’t be practical, and it isn’t necessary. We can learn the lessons, and enjoy many of the blessings of the worldwide family, wherever we are, be it Anchorage, Alaska; Auckland, New Zealand; Bentota, Sri Lanka; or Big Sandy, Tex.

The underlying meaning of the Feast is that soon all of us will be together — not just for eight days, but for 1,000 years. And then, as the Last Great Day shows, an even greater celebration is in store. Our worldwide family will eventually be joined by nearly everybody who has ever lived — in a great family reunion that will encompass the entire universe and last forever! □

Photos: John Hallford, Warren Watson, Good News

