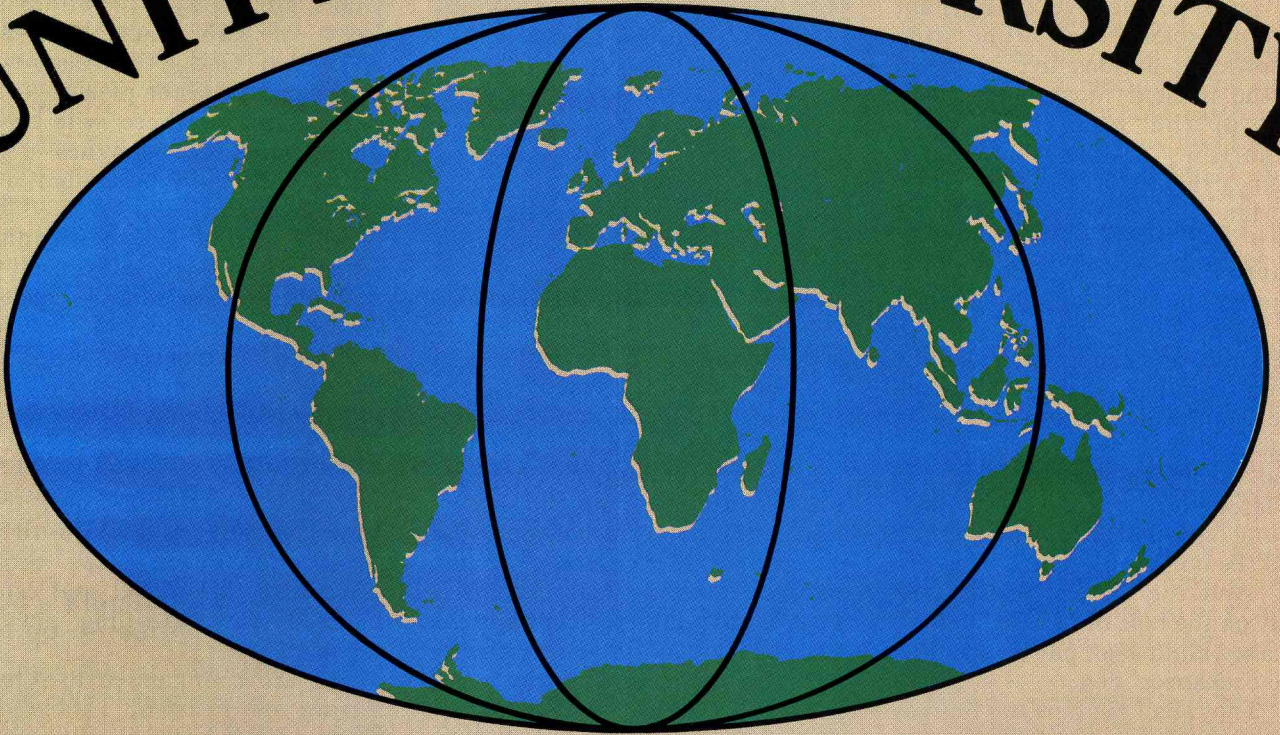


FEAST OF TABERNACLES, 1982 UNITY IN DIVERSITY



At 77 sites in 44 countries, God's people — some in out-of-the-way corners of the world, many facing severe trials — will celebrate this Feast together.

By Rod Matthews

Did you know that some brethren in God's Church don't see any other members for months at a time — perhaps even for an entire year?

When these brethren think of the Feast of Tabernacles, they feel a swell of excitement. They start contemplating airline tickets, passports, hotel reservations — and their Bibles — a checklist of items related to the time that is, for them, the most wonderful of the year.

The excitement of seeing Pastor General Herbert



Feast of Tabernacles as our scattered brethren appreciate it?

In 1982 God has placed His name at 77 Feast sites in 44 countries — at Cape McLearn in Malawi, Tar-

W. Armstrong on film, of glimpsing the spectacular Ambassador College campuses behind the Young Ambassadors as they sing and dance on film, of fellowshiping with brethren they haven't seen for a year, of listening to the stirring sermons that have far greater impact live than on tape — can we who are fortunate enough to live near other members, in larger church areas, appreciate the

tane in Martinique, Krokklieva in Norway, Rotorua in New Zealand, Lago Rapel in Chile, Port Dickson in Malaysia. More than 100,000 people will praise God for His calling and try to grasp a stronger vision of the world tomorrow.

For most of us it will be the shortest week of the year, but especially for those who have faced hardships to get away from home and who have endured arduous journeys to their sites.

An arduous journey

Consider, for instance, this experience:

A week before the Day of Atonement, the brethren in southern Burma will set out for the Feast site at Kya In, on the nation's western border. There they will meet with brethren from the western Chin Hills district — in all the combined groups will number about 55 members — to keep an exciting eight-day Festival. But it's no easy journey.

Elder Saw Lay Beh and the members from the southern Irrawaddy River delta area will, on Sept. 20, depart from Sa Khan Gyi village on a motorboat, bound for the town of Myaung Mya. There they must board a government motor launch that travels, by way of the tributaries, to Rangoon, the capital. This journey alone takes an afternoon and a night — on a boat without cabins, where passengers recline on the deck — and they arrive in Rangoon early the next day.

At sunset Sept. 22, the brethren will catch a train in Rangoon for the provincial city of Mandalay, arriving there the next morning. From Mandalay, it's a day's bus trip west to Monywa, then another ride on a government motor launch, this one traveling against raging currents up the Chindwin River. The ship is always overcrowded and the trip from Monywa to the town of Kalewa takes three days ("provided the ship does not run



aground," according to Saw Lay Beh). At Kalewa another bus will carry the group southwest 30 miles to Kalembo. From there it is nine miles to Kya In.

They hope to make it before the Day of Atonement. In 1979, when traveling to the same site, the brethren were forced, because of sudden flooding, to use a rowboat for part of the last leg of the jour-

ney. They had to wade through thigh-deep water, with luggage held overhead, under a hot sun, on the Day of Atonement to reach Kya In, because there was no place to rest on the way.

The other main group of brethren in Burma live in the western Chin Hills district. During this time they also will be traveling to Kya In.

For two to three days, they must climb and descend high mountains on foot to reach the town of Haka. On a crowded bus they will come down from Haka to Kalembo and finally to Kya In. That will take another two days. Since it's the rainy season in Burma, the road will be slippery and dangerous.

The main road passes through paddy farms around the Feast site in Kya In. At the northern end of the site is a brook, crossed by a small bridge. A mile to the west stand the lower edges of the Chin Hills. It is a beautiful and peaceful locale.

The Feast is the only time during the year that the brethren from all over Burma can be together. They will rejoice in the fellowship and the meals — rice, soup, curry, vegetables and Burmese tea.

Feast-keeping trials

And for expenses? God says in Deuteronomy 14:26, in reference to second tithe, "And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after [desires], for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household."

It costs about 400 kyats (\$60) to travel from the delta region to Kya In. This amount exceeds the second tithe the members can save from their meager salaries, which in Burma average less than \$400 per year. Festival assistance from the brethren overseas covers the expenses of those traveling and the needs at the site.

But it's all worth it, because there is nothing else like God's Feast of Tabernacles.

The trip back can be harder still. In 1981 members throughout Central America kept the Feast in Guatemala. War and guerrilla activity is a problem throughout the region, and traveling to the Feast can be dangerous.

On the trip home last year, members from

Costa Rica and Panama had to drive through El Salvador and Nicaragua. As soon as the cars entered Salvadorian territory they were stopped by soldiers so that the vehicles with Costa Rican license plates could be searched — arms shipments had been smuggled into El Salvador from Costa Rica.

The soldiers mistook one of the Panamanian members, a dark-skinned man, for a Cuban guerrilla. The soldiers immediately released the safety clips on their rifles and took aim! The man, just baptized at the Feast, thought his life was over, but a few hours later he and the rest of the group were permitted to continue their trip home. God was with them.

Travel in many areas involves some exposure to danger, even if only in having to use certain roads in countries where insurgent forces are operating. Roadblocks and personal searches can become a matter of course, and yet must be tolerated in order to reach the place set aside to observe the time of peace, prosperity and rejoicing to come.

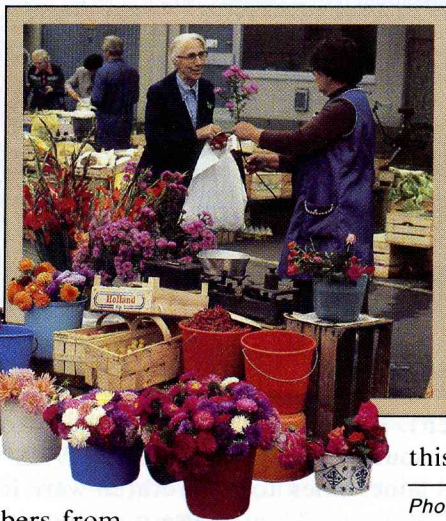
In other places brethren might experience outages of electricity, crackling phone lines that don't permit Mr. Armstrong's Holy Day messages to be heard well, endless traffic jams or even an unreliable supply of good food. But wherever the Spirit of God is found, a good-humored patience replaces carnal frustrations and the local people are inevitably impressed with this "different" group.

A worldwide family

This year people of like mind, with the same purpose, will praise God in English, French, Spanish, German, Dutch, Italian, Tongan and Burmese and possibly in numerous other languages. We are all part of a truly worldwide Work — an international body in the process of being "fitly framed together" (Eph. 2:21-22).

Don't forget, as you gather with the brethren at your Feast site on that first evening, that your brethren in India, Haiti, Australia, Malta, Kenya, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Fiji, South Africa, the Philippines and other places will also have met a little before you, if the Sabbath reached them earlier, or will do so soon afterward.

Regardless of race or language or country, if you could "drop in" at the Feast at any of the other sites than the one you are attending this year, you'd feel right at home. □



Photos: Jeffrey Patton, Gene Hogberg, Colin Kelly, Clarice Crossen, Glen Prokesch, Michael Snyder