

# TOGETHER in CHRIST



# A JOURNEY OF FAITH

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## 2013 USA National Conference

June 2011

### Overview of the USA National Conference

Friday, April 19, 2013–Sunday, April 21, 2013

As we journey toward the USA National Conference, the USA Team of Apostles is prayerfully planning the event with specific details still to be developed. Many questions arise such as:

- What is the purpose of the 2013 USA National Conference?
- Why are we considering the topics identified?
- Why were the dates changed to the USA National Conference?
- What are the preparation expectations for the church and for delegates?
- How are delegates being elected?
- Will most of our time be spent in small groups or as a whole group?
- Will I have a chance to share my voice as a delegate?
- Will my input as a delegate make a difference?
- What is the benefit of building consent rather than making a decision using *Robert's Rules of Order*?
- What constitutes enough consent of the body to indicate a particular preference regarding the two pressing issues?
- Do the recommendations from the USA National Conference have to go to a World Conference for final approval?

### Purpose of the USA National Conference

The purpose of the 2013 USA National Conference is for delegates to indicate their level of support along a range from “no support” to “strong support” for the following statements. The statements are phrased in the affirmative not to influence a specific outcome, but to question whether policies should or should not change.

1. Extending the sacrament of marriage to persons of the same sex/gender OR providing a church-recognized way for two persons of the same sex/gender to publicly express their commitment to each other.
2. Allowing people in committed, monogamous, long-term, same-sex/gender relationships (legal marriage, civil union, church-recognized commitment) to be considered for ordination.

Based on the level of support indicated by the 2013 USA National Conference, the Council of Twelve Apostles and the First Presidency will develop policies that reflect the outcomes of the conference.

### **Why Are We Discussing These Particular Topics?**

There were 22 resolutions about same-sex/gender marriage and ordination of persons involved in same-sex/gender relationships brought to the 2010 World Conference. USA mission centers brought 15 of those resolutions. The adoption of Doctrine and Covenants 164 allowed for the consideration of these topics in national or field conferences because of the difficulties involved in addressing them at World Conference. In a meeting of USA delegates at the 2010 World Conference, 95 percent of those responding indicated there were no other pressing issues, in addition to the ones identified, that needed to be addressed at a national conference.

### **Change of Date for the USA National Conference**

The First Presidency approved a date change for the USA National Conference from July 2012 to April 2013, following the 2013 World Conference. The World Conference will be six days, Saturday, April 13, 2013, through Thursday, April 18, 2013. The USA National Conference will be two-and-a-half days, Friday, April 19, 2013, through Sunday, April 21, 2013. The total duration of both conferences will be only one day longer than previous World Conferences. Both events will be in Independence, Missouri. The USA National Conference dates were changed in response to growing concerns about the impact of the global economic recession on members and the conservative estimate that delegates would spend at least \$1 million in travel, lodging, registration, and meal expenses to support a longer, separate USA National Conference as originally scheduled for July 2012.

In deciding to move the USA National Conference to April 2013, the First Presidency and Council of Twelve Apostles discussed many issues, including implications for delegates and participants from other nations. Though the original desire to hold the USA National Conference in the summer and back-to-back with SPECTACULAR could not be met, we hope because the conference will be an extended weekend, starting Friday morning and ending at noon Sunday, many students and professionals will be able to attend.

### **Expectations for the Church in the USA, Delegates, and Participants of the USA National Conference**

From now until we gather, members are requested to pray daily for delegates, participants, and leaders of the USA National Conference. Together in Christ, they also are invited to faithfully participate in the journey by using the resources created to prepare the body to make recommendations. Resources being provided include individual, small-group, and large-group experiences. Information about these resources is updated routinely on the USA National Conference website: [www.CofChrist.org/usaconf/](http://www.CofChrist.org/usaconf/).

### **Election of Delegates**

Delegates to the USA National Conference will be elected between August 2012 and December 2012 at mission center conferences. This also is when World Conference delegates will be elected. Because World Conference and the USA National Conference are separate events, mission center conferences will hold two elections, one for each conference. The number of delegates to each conference also may be different. People can allow their names to stand as delegates for either conference or for both conferences. However, to be a delegate at both conferences, people must be elected in both the

election of delegates for World Conference and the election of delegates for the USA National Conference.

### **Additional Expectations for Delegates and Participants of the USA National Conference**

There will be many opportunities to study, explore, and use our various lenses to discover God's will together ([www.CofChrist.org/discernment/backhome.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/backhome.asp)) regarding the two pressing issues before USA National Conference delegate elections. Active preparation and participation in preparatory events is essential for people anticipating placing their names in consideration to be elected as delegates to the USA National Conference. It is an expectation that delegates will have participated faithfully in all of the various preparatory steps being provided within their mission center.

Following delegate/alternate elections in August 2012 through December 2012, mission center leaders will provide delegate orientation and training for the USA National Conference, as well as the opportunity for further dialogue and answers to questions raised.

Additionally, it is expected that delegates and participants of the USA National Conference will come open to the leadings of God's Spirit and faithfully listen for God's guidance. They are to "surrender the perceptions, opinions, and agendas of the self (the individual ego) to the mind and heart of God, the Source of all truth, wisdom, and beauty." Discernment includes information-gathering and discussion but must move beyond these if we are to reach "spiritual freedom" or "holy indifference." Spiritual freedom means we give up the answers we have (or want) and are free to receive guidance from the Spirit that may confirm or contradict what we thought we knew. This is difficult because most of us are comfortable and secure in the rightness of the familiar worlds of thought, belief, and reality we have constructed.

"Holy indifference" invites us to trust God to see, know, and be the truth and wholeness beyond our human perceptions. We offer God our limitations and biases and say, "Not my will, Creator, but yours; not my truth, God, but yours." We stand open and empty, "indifferent" (non-attached) to the outcome of our discernment. We care deeply about receiving guidance from the Divine, but we have stopped caring about whether or not that guidance matches what we already believe or desire" ([www.CofChrist.org/discernment/articles/transformative.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/articles/transformative.asp)).

### **USA National Conference**

Because of the intentional preparation by the church, delegates, and participants, during the two-and-a-half-day USA National Conference, delegates will spend focused time processing the two pressing issues together. The discussions and deliberations will occur in the whole body rather than in small groups. There will be some opportunity for delegates to ask questions and share comments. Delegates also will have many opportunities during the journey to the USA National Conference to express their perspectives, listen to others' perspectives, and try to understand the multiple perspectives found throughout the church.

Delegates and participants also will share in Spirit-led worship during conference sessions on Friday and Saturday evenings, as well as a Sunday Communion service.

### **Consent-building Process**

A consent-building process will be used to guide the USA National Conference rather than *Robert's Rules of Order*. Through the use of an electronic system, each delegate will express a level of support for specific statements. Delegates also will use the electronic system to express why they indicated that support level by choosing a statement that best describes their perspective. The electronic system will provide the conference body with a comprehensive view of the summarized results regarding what level of support the body indicated for a specific topic and why it indicated that support level.

### **Benefits of the Consent-building Process**

In the *Robert's Rules of Order* process, delegates can only vote in favor, against, or abstain on a topic. In the consent-building process, which uses an electronic system, delegates can indicate their level of support for a topic by using a graduated scale, for example "no support," "little support," "moderate support," "significant support," and "full support." Following the indication of their level of support, delegates can express why they indicated that support level by choosing a statement that best describes their perspective. If none of the statements apply, the delegate can choose "none of the statements represents my feelings."

In both processes, the value of each delegate's input is significant and makes a difference. In the *Robert's Rules of Order* process, delegates are limited to indicating what they support. In the consent-building process, delegates indicate what level of support, as well as why they hold that level of support. Every delegate's response to these "what" and "why" questions is important as we build consent on what recommendations the USA National Conference will make. The electronic system will allow delegates and participants to see the level of support for a particular topic, as well as why that level of support is held.

Training on the consent-building process will be held in USA mission centers between delegate elections for the USA National Conference and the start of the USA National Conference on Friday, April 19, 2013.

### **Determining Consent**

The USA Team of Apostles continues to prayerfully consider what constitutes consent of the body. We understand the level of support required to declare consent of the body ranges somewhere between a simple majority and unanimity. The specific flow of events for consent building at the USA National Conference and the level of support required to achieve consent still are being developed. Details on this information will be communicated to the church before delegate elections that start in August 2012. Information also will be provided for delegate training before the USA National Conference.

A consent-building process is also being developed for use in the international setting of World Conference. As people begin to read about the consent-building process being developed for World

Conference, it is important to remember the process used at the 2013 USA National Conference will have some similarities, but also some differences.

### **Conference Results**

When the 2013 USA National Conference adjourns on Sunday, April 21, 2013, delegates will have reached consent on what recommendations will be made to the Council of Twelve Apostles and the First Presidency. These recommendations will indicate to the Council of Twelve Apostles and the First Presidency whether or not to change policies within the USA on the two pressing issues and, if change is recommended, what types of changes should be made. Because these recommendations focus on policies only within the USA, nothing from the 2013 USA National Conference will need to be considered by a World Conference.

The delegates' recommendations also will be communicated to the church through the website, *Herald*, *10-Minute News Report*, social media, etc.

As a people of faith, we continue to trust in God's guidance and the Spirit's presence as we journey together toward the 2013 USA National Conference. We remain committed to pursuing Christ's mission as our mission and walking together into the future.

### **Questions and Answers**

- Q1.** What is the purpose of the 2013 USA National Conference?
- A1.** The purpose of the 2013 USA National Conference is for delegates to indicate their level of support along a range from "no support" to "strong support" in response to the announced topics.
- Q2.** What are the two pressing issues?
- A2.** USA mission centers submitted 15 resolutions to the 2010 World Conference on two subjects: same-sex/gender marriage and ordaining people involved in same-sex/gender relationships. Also, USA delegates at the 2010 World Conference indicated that these two topics should be addressed at a future USA Conference. As a result, the USA Team of Apostles, in consultation with the Council of Twelve and the First Presidency, concluded these two issues need timely attention to allow the "restoring work of the gospel to move forward with all of its potential" (Doctrine and Covenants 164:7c) in the USA.
- Q3.** Why were the dates changed to the USA National Conference?
- A3.** The USA National Conference dates were changed in response to growing concerns about the impact of the global economic recession on members and the conservative estimate that delegates would spend at least \$1 million in travel, lodging, registration, and meal expenses to support a longer, separate USA National Conference as originally scheduled in July 2012. The new date results in a shorter 2013 World Conference and a shorter USA National Conference. The two conferences combined are only one day longer than the traditional World Conference length of eight days. If a person attends

both the 2013 World Conference and the 2013 USA National Conference, the person will be attending for nine days.

**Q4.** What will be the impact of a shortened World Conference?

**A4.** By beginning World Conference earlier in the afternoon on Saturday, April 13, 2013, and scheduling ample time for business sessions, the Presidency believes the World Conference can accomplish its business within the time available. For example, it will not be necessary to schedule a three-hour morning session at World Conference for national and field discussions because those discussions are being handled in other settings. Of course, based on previous experience, we anticipate the Spirit will bless all of our activities as we assemble to conduct the business of the church and clarify direction for the future.

**Q5.** What are the preparation expectations for the church in the USA and for delegates?

**A5.** The members of the church in the USA are to “surrender the perceptions, opinions, and agendas of the self (the individual ego) to the mind and heart of God, the Source of all truth, wisdom, and beauty.” All members in the USA are expected to participate in the journey by using the resources created to prepare the body to make recommendations and by participating in the various individual, small-group, and large-group experiences being planned by mission centers. Delegates are expected to have participated fully in all USA National Conference preparation activities provided by the mission center and to complete delegate training.

**Q6.** How are delegates being elected?

**A6.** Delegates to the 2013 USA National Conference will be elected between August 2012 and December 2012 at mission center conferences within the USA. Delegates to the 2013 World Conference will be elected at the same mission center conferences. Each election will be separate. A person can be elected to either conference. It is not a requirement to attend or to be a delegate at both conferences. People can be delegates at both conferences provided they are elected as a delegate at each of the respective conference elections.

**Q7.** Will most of our time be spent in small groups or as a whole group?

**A7.** Our time at the 2013 USA National Conference will be spent building consent together as a whole group. We are expecting that all delegates will have participated in smaller group activities offered by the various USA mission centers in preparation for the 2013 USA National Conference.

**Q8.** Will I have a chance to share my voice as a delegate?

**A8.** The schedule details of the 2013 USA National Conference are still being developed. Enough is known to report that there will be opportunity for a reasonable number of delegates to ask questions and provide comments during the conference. Additionally,

all delegates will have the opportunity through the electronic system to indicate what level of support they have for a particular statement and indicate why they hold that level of support.

**Q9.** Will my input as a delegate make a difference?

**A9.** Yes. The electronic system tallies every delegate's input to indicate what level of support the body has on a particular statement and to indicate the various reasons that level of support is held. The combined responses will indicate desired direction to church officers about policies related to the announced topics.

**Q10.** What is the benefit of building consent in the 2013 USA National Conference rather than making a decision using *Robert's Rules of Order*?

**A10.** In the *Robert's Rules of Order* process, delegates are limited to indicating what they support. In the consent-building process, delegates indicate what level of support, as well as why they hold that level of support

**Q11.** What constitutes enough consent of the body to indicate a particular preference regarding the two pressing issues?

**A11.** The USA Team of Apostles continues to prayerfully consider what constitutes consent of the body. We understand the level of support required to declare consent of the body ranges somewhere between a simple majority and unanimity. The specific flow of events for consent building at the USA National Conference and the level of support required to achieve consent still are being developed.

**Q12.** Do the recommendations from the USA National Conference have to go to a World Conference for final approval?

**A12.** Because the recommendations of the 2013 USA National Conference are focused on policies only within the USA, nothing from the 2013 USA National Conference will need to be considered by a World Conference.