



National Spiritual Assembly  
of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Annual Report

Ridván 2016 / BE 173



## Annual Report 2016 / BE 173

As we approach this first Convention of the new Plan, the Universal House of Justice's stirring messages dated 26 March 2016 – one to the Bahá'ís of the World and one to the Bahá'ís of the United States and of Canada – are yet fresh in our minds. It was one hundred years ago that the beloved Master turned toward the continent of North America, naming in meticulous detail its provinces, territories, states and its peoples. A mission was conferred upon this land, to be co-executed with our sister community in the United States, described as nothing less than the spiritual conquest of the planet. Placing Canada “among the vanguard of Bahá'u'lláh's resistless legions<sup>1</sup>”, He traced a path of service and sacrifice that engendered a movement of pioneers and teachers, swelled the number of believers and raised up institutions worldwide.

On April 20th, a new stage in that Divine Plan begins, one that will engage the Bahá'í world until 2021. In its 26 March message to the friends in the United States and in Canada, the Universal House of Justice points to the future:

“The tasks confronting you are not identical with those of an earlier age. With the international spread of the Faith largely concluded, demands on you are now most pressing on the homefront. The process of entry by troops that emerged so tenuously in the Ten Year Crusade, and was fostered in the decades that followed, is now being extended through a sound process of community building in centre after centre in all those countries and territories that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá marked out so long ago. Your sister communities, so many of which you helped to establish, are now mature, and you stand with them ready to take on the sterner challenges that lie ahead. The movement of your clusters to the farthest frontiers of learning will usher in the time anticipated by Shoghi Effendi at the start of your collective exertions, when the communities you build will directly combat and eventually eradicate the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and of ingrained prejudice eating away at the vitals of society.”

This stage of the mission, in which we will learn to welcome larger and larger numbers - groups of individuals, families and entire populations – builds on what has been learned in the last two decades about advancing the process of entry by troops. This annual report thus seeks to reflect on the foundations that have been built and how capacity to achieve this aim has developed in Canada. As we look forward, let us also look back – past even the 20 years' experience with this series of Plans - to see how truly inexhaustible have been the results of the Master's visit to this country and how mighty have been the confirmations as the Canadian community has pursued the sacred responsibility He gave us.

### Strengthening the pattern of action

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*Whatever the combination of strategies used, the chief aim is to initiate a process for building capacity within the cluster through which its inhabitants, prompted by a wish to contribute to the spiritual and material well-being of their communities, are enabled to begin offering acts of service...*

*Before long, there forms a nucleus of friends in a cluster who are working and consulting together and arranging activities. For the process of growth to advance further, the number of people sharing this commitment must rise, and their capacity for undertaking systematic action within the framework of*

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<sup>1</sup> 26 March 2016 Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the United States and the Bahá'ís of Canada

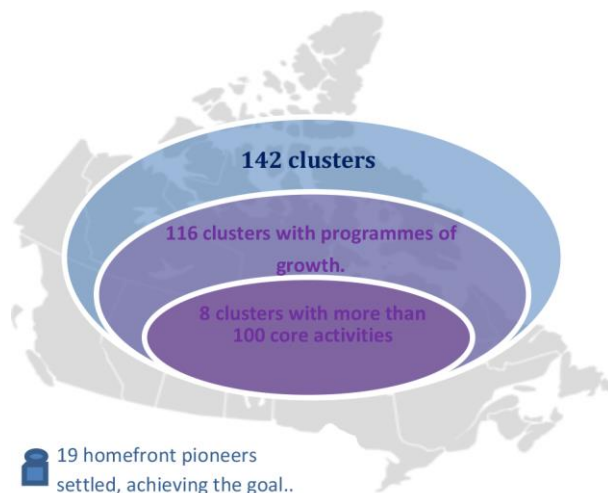
*the Plan must correspondingly increase. And similar to the development of a living organism, growth can occur quickly when the right conditions are in place.*

*Foremost among these conditions is an institute process gaining in strength, given its centrality to fostering the movement of populations*

29 December 2015 message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

By the Plan's end, in 116 Canadian clusters the capacity had developed to help people study the institute courses and then invite others to participate in an activity. While the scale and scope of the work varies according to the reality of a cluster, each has begun in the same way, through the dedication and commitment of a single believer or small group of friends to engage in meaningful, distinctive conversations with those around them. It has been helpful to think of the growth of the teaching work as the building of capacity for these profound, transformative conversations. In a myriad settings, a path to hope and faith has opened up: in the rapt attention to the stories of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a children's class in Pond Inlet; the earnest plans of a youth gathering in Calgary or the eager discussions of a junior youth group in rural Nova Scotia; in a joyful, noisy reflection meeting in a sector in Toronto or in the quiet, uplifting prayers of a few friends around a kitchen table on a farm in Saskatchewan. Patterns of community life have been built that are now ready to attract, welcome and sustain large numbers, beyond what we may have imagined possible.

We pause, now, to express our profound gratitude to beloved standard-bearers, the Continental Counsellors and their Auxiliaries, who have tirelessly helped institutions, communities and individuals draw on guidance and apply it in a mode of learning. Indeed, the Canadian community's quick and faithful embrace of guidance over the last four plans is surely one of the inexhaustible gifts of the beloved Master's visit to this land. Thus have hesitations and obstacles been overcome, disappointments set aside, temporary breaches of unity repaired. Small signs of progress have been tended, fledgling efforts nurtured and protected, flames of enthusiasm and courage fanned. A community has emerged that is outward-looking and inclusive. The call to now think beyond our current strengths and limitations will require this same faithful commitment to an ongoing study and application of the guidance shared with us in such abundance by the Universal House of Justice.



As noted above, of the 5,000 programmes of growth established worldwide, 116 are in Canada, increased from 101 a year ago. Of the scores of clusters in the world that are engaging over 1000 participants, eight are reaching that stage in Canada, with over 100 core activities established. The House of Justice reports that half a million individuals in the world have completed at least the first book in the sequence of institute courses, "Reflections on the Life of the Spirit": in Canada, that number has exceeded 12,000.

At the recent national institutional meeting, the friends reflected on progress and experience over the last Plan, and in that light considered the possible movement of clusters along a continuum of growth by 2021, the Plan's end. Out of the 145 clusters that would exist by 2021 if three additional clusters are formed in the North, it was felt that based on the achievements of this Plan, 25 clusters more clusters will

have passed the first milestone, 82 more would be intensive programmes of growth past the second milestone, another 27 clusters would be engaging larger numbers and have passed the third milestone, and there would be another 11 clusters with locations advancing towards the stage “where a significant percentage of the entire population is now involved in community-building activities”. This vision is well within reach: tens of thousands of individuals engaged in the work of community-building, transforming themselves, their families and communities, raising up institutions to serve the needs of diverse populations. And, says the House of Justice, the number of believers will naturally rise.

The challenge now is for all clusters to move along the continuum of growth, applying guidance to their reality, whether urban or rural, and taking whatever next steps are needed. One way that this process will be supported in the coming Plan is by creating spaces to connect groups of adjoining clusters, drawing on experience that was shared by the House of Justice in its 29 December 2015 message. “In some regions that stretch across a large territory, Councils have made arrangements for nurturing the development of groups of adjoining clusters.”

		October 2011			April 2016		
		No. of activities	Total No. of Participants	Est. No. of Friends of the Faith	No. of activities	Total No. of Participants	Est. No. of Friends of the Faith
		524	2102	582	545	2535	642
STUDY CIRCLES		608	4152	1222	1084	8082	1910
DEVOTIONAL MEETINGS		287	1649	846	318	1808	910
CHILDREN'S CLASSES		167	1017	654	290	2139	1743
JUNIOR YOUTH GROUPS		1586	8920	3304	2237	14564	5205
TOTAL CORE ACTIVITIES							

The foremost condition for growth to occur in a cluster is an institute process gaining in strength, “given its centrality to fostering the movement of populations”. We see this condition in every region of the country. In small settings of every kind, its ability to empower populations, to inspire deep conversation centred on the Word of God, to create true bonds of friendship between those of diverse backgrounds, develop skills of service and strengthen a community are becoming evident. As individuals advance through the sequence of courses and clusters advance along a continuum of development, a deeper understanding of the process is also emerging, movingly described by the House of Justice in its 28 December 2010 message. “It should be apparent to all that the process set in motion by the current series of global Plans seeks, in the approaches it takes and the methods it employs, to build capacity in every human group, with no regard for class or religious background, with no concern for ethnicity or race, irrespective of gender or social status, to arise and contribute to the advancement of civilization. We pray that, as it steadily unfolds, its potential to disable every instrument devised by humanity over the long period of its childhood for one group to oppress another may be realized.”

As more individuals enter the sequence of courses, and those who have already studied the first few books continue their study, the institute process strengthens and what we see as a pyramid of human resources expands. With experience, tutors develop insight and skill and the study circle environment is enriched.

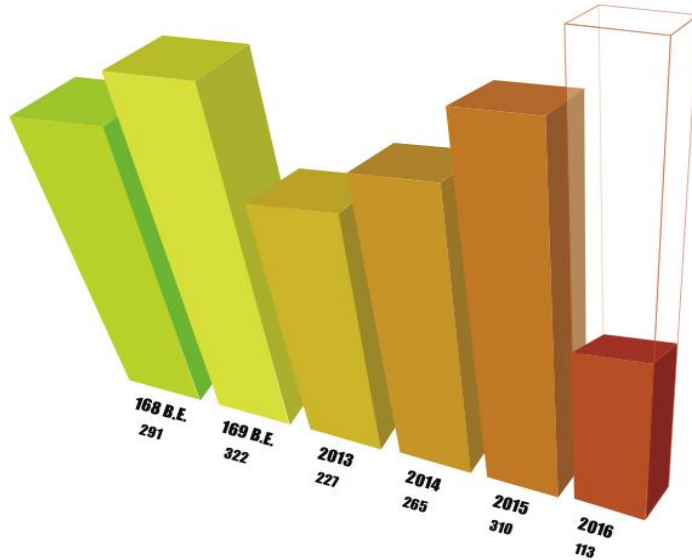
With each step, the ability to share the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in various settings, in conversation and service, is increasing. In the environment of the study circle, serious and uplifting, systematic and sacred, an army of teachers of the Cause is developing. This army needs the knowledge, skills and insights developed by the study of the books offered both early and later in the sequence, to learn at this critical time how to apply the notion of empowerment to their particular social reality.



Institute Courses	No. Individuals who have completed each <b>Ruhi Book</b>
Book 8 Unit 1	2,103
Book 7	3,788
Book 6	4,588
Book 5	2,888
Book 4	5,844
Book 3(Grd. 2&3)	788
Book 3	5,941
Book 2	7,492
Book 1	12,105

*...Central to the pattern of action evolving in a cluster is the individual and collective transformation effected through the agency of the Word of God. From the beginning of the sequence of courses, a participant encounters Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation in considering such weighty themes as worship, service to humanity, the life of the soul, and the education of children and youth. As a person cultivates the habit of study and deep reflection upon the Creative Word, this process of transformation reveals itself in an ability to express one's understanding of profound concepts and to explore spiritual reality in conversations of significance. These capacities are visible not only in the elevated discussions that increasingly characterize interactions within the community, but in the ongoing conversations that reach well beyond—not least between the Bahá'í youth and their peers—extending to include parents whose daughters and sons are benefiting from the community's programmes of education. Through exchanges of this kind, consciousness of spiritual forces is raised, apparent dichotomies yield to unexpected insights, a sense of unity and common calling is fortified, confidence that a better world can be created is strengthened, and a commitment to action becomes manifest. Such instinctive conversations gradually attract ever-larger numbers to take part in a range of community activities. Themes of faith and certitude surface naturally, prompted by the receptivity and experiences of those involved. What is clear, then, is that as the institute process in a cluster gains momentum, the act of teaching comes to assume greater prominence in the lives of the friends...*

29 December 2015 message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors



While the numbers of individuals from the wider community involved in the community-building work has continued to rise throughout the Plan, it is only in the last year that we have begun to see a slight rise in the rate of enrolment. This is not surprising, as the passage states that “naturally, the number of believers grows” as the pattern of community life based on Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings spreads. Yet, among the thousands of friends of the Faith who are currently participating in core activities and attending regular firesides, might there not be those who only await the next stage of their ongoing, meaningful conversation to embrace the Cause fully?

## Embracing large numbers and managing complexity

*This kind of progress requires the concerted efforts of the friends wherever in the cluster they reside.*

*Nevertheless, experience in the present Plan demonstrates that a pattern of action that is able to embrace large numbers comes chiefly from working to bring more neighbourhoods and villages—places where the convergence of spiritual forces is effecting rapid change within a body of people—to the point where they can sustain intense activity...*

*In the course of their endeavours, the believers encounter receptivity within distinct populations who represent a particular ethnic, tribal, or other group and who may be concentrated in a small setting or present throughout the cluster and well beyond it. There is much to be learned about the dynamics involved when a population of this kind embraces the Faith and is galvanized through its edifying influence. We stress the importance of this work for advancing the Cause of God: every people has a share in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, and all must be gathered together under the banner of the oneness of humanity. In its early stages, the systematic effort to reach out to a population and foster its participation in the process of capacity building accelerates markedly when members of that population are themselves in the vanguard of such an effort. These individuals will have special insight into those forces and structures in their societies that can, in various ways, reinforce the endeavours under way...*

29 December 2015 message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

In Canada as in the rest of the world, we have learned how to reach out beyond a circle of family and friends to invite new people, a process that gives birth to a programme of growth in a cluster. Beyond



that, experience has shown how to expand the number of core activities, how to plan expansion phases for a surge of participation, reaching out to many more people, helping them to serve and sustaining their involvement through the institute process. Establishing a regular rhythm of activity and working in smaller settings of neighbourhoods and villages as well as with broader networks of friends and acquaintances have contributed to one of the Plan's finest fruits: the active participation of those from a diversity of backgrounds never before seen.

Among Indigenous Canadians and those of French-Canadian background, the work of community building has taken on new life. In such communities as Victoriaville and Quebec City, Morley in Alberta, Curve Lake in Ontario, Rankin Inlet in Nunavut, in such neighbourhoods as Commercial Drive in Vancouver, White Buffalo in Saskatoon and Cote-de-Neiges in Montreal, among others, the process of growth has advanced, experiencing victories and setbacks and yielding the fruit of perseverance. There is clear and continued receptivity among Chinese and Persian populations. Indeed, this Plan has seen the emergence of strong Chinese-speaking tutors and study circles, with the related capacity to invite and facilitate the participation of many. With these developments, the National Assembly has noted the pressing need for a generous flow of and easy access to literature and materials in many languages, a flow of resources that is one of the most practical ways of empowering a population.



Another flow of resources has quickened, in response to the National Assembly's 2014 call for 19 homefront pioneers. This goal has just been won as this report is being penned, with friends settling in clusters across the country to help establish new programmes of growth or strengthen existing ones.

Structures to support growth have adapted in response to conditions at the grassroots. For example, the 29 December 2015 message describes an environment of mutual support and assistance where learning flows between adjoining clusters. At the regional level, efforts are underway to facilitate a flow of resources and learning between such groups, so that the experience gained in one quickly flows to another. At the same time, an evolution of structures in communities working with larger numbers brought reflection, analysis and planning closer to the grassroots in communities. As a few of these clusters were divided into sectors or units as described in the document "Insights from the Frontiers of Learning", agencies and institutions noted an increase in dynamism at the reflection meetings, greater participation in expansion phases, a new vibrancy in Feasts and Holy Days.



In other clusters, such as those in Canada's northern territories with its vast distances and special conditions, the application of the Plan's framework has called for a slightly different approach. Individuals were identified to learn at the side of the friends in Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and help flow learning from other regions that could assist the friends devotedly labouring in the special reality that is the north. Consistent, systematic attention by resident believers and visitors in one community, Rankin Inlet, with a population of 2,500, has attracted over 70 youth out of a youth



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population of 400 between the ages of 15-24<sup>2</sup>, to participate in an ongoing conversation about community-building. Some of these friends are studying the junior youth materials and some the first book of the sequence of courses. All are involved in conversation about service to their communities.

The implementation of the Badí‘ calendar this year provided a wonderful opportunity for communities across the country to celebrate this first commemoration of the Twin Holy Birthdays with newfound friends, deepening their knowledge of the lives of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. Among the inspiring stories recounted was one from Vancouver, where the Local Assembly encouraged a completely decentralized pattern of celebration, yielding over 24 events with some 900 participants.

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*...However humble an instance of social action might be at the beginning, it is an indication of a people cultivating within themselves a critical capacity, one that holds infinite potential and significance for the centuries ahead: learning how to apply the Revelation to the manifold dimensions of social existence.*

29 December 2015 message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

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Finally, in the 29 December message the House of Justice refers to the stirrings of social action that are visible in clusters approaching what is described as a third milestone. To prepare for this stage, the National Assembly arranged for seminars across the country to study a document penned by the Office of Social and Economic Development and distributed by the Universal House of Justice in 2012. Approximately 300 believers have thus far engaged in this systematic and facilitated study, reflecting on contributions the community may make in this area of Bahá’í endeavour in the coming years. At the same time, the strength of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme in Canada, with 2 sites for the dissemination of learning working with 11 Canadian clusters, has provided fertile ground for learning about social action that arises organically from the grassroots, as groups consult about conditions in their neighbourhoods and design service projects. Their many endeavours join varied initiatives, some of short duration and some longer-term, that have emerged to serve the social, spiritual and material needs of populations: English corners focussing on the integration of newcomers to Canada, math tutoring for junior youth and pre-school spaces for the enrichment of parents and children alike are examples of more sustained endeavours.



## Releasing the potential of youth

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*The enthusiastic participation of the youth also highlighted the fact that they represent a most responsive element of every receptive population to which the friends have sought to reach out...*

*As youth advance along the path of service, their endeavours are integrated seamlessly into the activities of the cluster, and as a consequence, the entire community thrives as a cohesive whole.*

29 December 2015 message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

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<sup>2</sup> According to the 2011 Census

As the most responsive element in a population, youth have taken their place in the vanguard of action, buttressed by the support of the community. Indeed, it was the wholehearted support of the entire community that moved the Universal House of Justice to comment in December 2013: “And while we acknowledge that the youth are at forefront of this advance, its distinguishing feature is that the community rose as one to support, encourage, and champion this phenomenon, and now rejoices to see itself progress as an interdependent, organic whole, readier to meet the imperatives of this day... Given all this, we have no hesitation in recognizing that what these developments reveal is an advance in the process of entry by troops of a kind not experienced heretofore.”

With the call for youth conferences around the world in 2013, the Universal House of Justice gave life to a new movement of youth that has become unstoppable. Three original conferences in Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto led to gatherings on a sub-regional scale in 2014, and most recently at the cluster level across the country. What is

**Youth Movement Statistics for April 2016**

	Alberta	Atlantic Provinces	British Columbia	Ontario	Quebec	Saskatchewan & Manitoba	Northwest Territories	Nunavut	Yukon	Canada Totals
In the Conversation	98	67	542	1182	87	196	2	70	-	2244
In the Training Institute	182	70	475	929	236	51	1	62	3	2009
Sustaining a Core Activity	43	27	174	251	51	29	-	0	2	577
Accompanying Others	14	9	37	97	33	18	-	7	1	216
Total Number of Youth Engaged	337	173	1228	2459	407	294	3	139	6	5046

being learned is that a vigorous outreach to youth, followed by a gathering to study the materials provided by the House of Justice in 2013, then bears the most fruit if immediately followed by an institute campaign that builds skills of service and continues to engage more youth. It is becoming clear that in



working with youth and junior youth, capacities are developing that both benefit and draw on the strengths of the entire community. In Charlottetown, a systematic regional focus, the support of the Local Assembly, the presence of a hometown pioneer and the willingness of adults in the community to host youth devotional gatherings and other activities have combined to raise up an active youth contingent among whom there have been several new believers. In neighbourhoods in Toronto, the same kind of dedicated resources, an intensity of focus and commitment to learn and share learning, have had the same results.

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Many factors have contributed to the strength of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme, so sacrificially supported by youth who dedicate so many of their waking moments to serving their younger peers. The two sites for the dissemination of learning about this programme in Canada, Vancouver and Toronto, have served as dynamic examples of a systematic approach to a learning process, and the entire country owes a debt of gratitude to them. As they have learned to increase the number of junior youth groups in a neighbourhood or cluster from 0-10, or from 10-20, they have quickly shared that learning with other clusters through regular seminars. From the dissemination of that learning, the entire community has benefitted and drawn lessons that help multiply other core activities.

## Enhancing institutional capacity

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*As indicated earlier, the movement of clusters along a continuum depends on there being a commitment from the institutions to guide and support cluster agencies and provide resources as necessary. This work is a critical responsibility of Regional Bahá'í Councils and regional training institutes...*

*For its part, and in response to growing numbers attending activities, the Local Assembly is enhancing its capacity to discharge the many responsibilities it carries on behalf of an expanding community. It seeks to create an environment in which all feel encouraged to contribute to the community's common enterprise. It is eager to see the cluster agencies succeed in their plans, and its intimate familiarity with the conditions in its area enables it to foster the development of interacting processes at the local level...*

*As institutions and agencies seek to accelerate the processes of expansion and consolidation in every land, the question of financial resources will surely claim increased attention. Indeed, an important aspect of enhancing institutional capacity over the coming years will be the ongoing development of local and national Funds...*

29 December 2015 message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

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The above excerpts from the 29 December 2015 message illumine aspects of institutional development that we have seen at every level in Canada over the course of the Plan.

In their annual reports, an increasing number of Canada's 217 Local Spiritual Assemblies describe their efforts to support the work of expansion and consolidation – the participation of their membership in the teaching work, the Assembly's material support of the activities of the Plan, their collaboration with Auxiliary Board members and with regional agencies, the increase in consultative time devoted to aspects of the work of community-building. In these descriptions, we see evidence of a new state of mind, one that has dissolved the boundaries between those formally enrolled and the wider community and allows Assemblies to think and plan even beyond those friends who are already associated with the Bahá'í community, to the entire population of their locality.

As noted above, at the level of the cluster, an increase in the numbers of participants and the resulting complexity has called for the introduction or re-introduction of structures such as Area Teaching Committees, cluster development facilitators and institute coordinators. Some clusters are beginning to serve as reservoirs of resources and experience on which nearby clusters can draw.

At the regional level, marked capacity is developing to foster a mode of learning, build consensus and unity of vision, read the reality of a spectrum of clusters from the perspective of both the movement of

individuals through the sequence of courses and the movement of clusters along a continuum of growth, devise strategies appropriate to their stage of development, and to work with all three protagonists. They have learned the attitudes and qualities required for effective collaboration, which will be critical as groups of clusters begin to work together to help flow learning among them.

Especially through their work with the youth, the training institutes continue to learn about the nature and potential of the institute process. Gradually, as skills are developed and knowledge generated, insight is being gained into questions such as those raised in the 29 December message: the pace of study and raising up tutors in a population, the nature of the spaces created to reflect and study guidance, the environment of the study circle, the importance of accompaniment in the field of action.

The need to support youth offering service, the rise in the movement of pioneers, and the increase in collaboration with Local Spiritual Assemblies has offered Regional Bahá'í Councils an opportunity to refine the administration of six regional branches of the National Fund. Currently, about 70% of contributions to the National Fund flow through these regional branches, evidence of the rich experience in a decentralized system that is growing in strength.

Nationally, the Assembly has continued its efforts to learn about building capacity in four areas: expansion and consolidation, participation in the national-level discourses of society, institutional development related to upholding Bahá'í law, and social action. We are deeply grateful to the Counsellors, our close companions and guides in this learning process. One of the year's highlights was the institutional meeting in February, at which Ms. Antonella Demonte represented the International Teaching Centre. Together with Dr. Borna Nouredin and Ms. Shabnam Tashakour, the two Counsellors following Canada most closely, she brightened the study of guidance with clarity and helpful stories from around the world. Concrete plans were developed in every region, to ensure that not a moment of the first cycle of the new Plan is lost.



As part of these efforts to build capacity to grow, the National Assembly has also given consideration to strengthening the electoral process that raises up institutions in this country. Having studied guidance from the Universal House of Justice, the National Assembly encouraged five electoral units with large numbers of friends to hold sub-unit electoral gatherings to elect delegates to this year's National Convention. Where the convenors were able to implement this step, the results were promising, with an increase in participation in voting as well as a broader participation in the consultation at the Convention.

At the National Centre, adjustments to technological systems are continuing to increase capacity to administer growth: the membership database has been enhanced and with the help of Assemblies across the country, is becoming increasingly accurate. An increase in the frequency of the hard copy version of Bahá'í Canada has been approved, owing in part to the National Assembly's concern with the continued low subscription rate to the online version. The Bahá'í Canada Committee has been working with collaborators in two interesting ways, the first drawing on friends across the country who are experimenting with distributing the magazine to their close friends in the wider community. They are also working with small groups of friends who are writers, to help develop content and enrich the substance of the magazine.

As mentioned above, a significant development in the National Fund has been the increase in the flow of funds through the regional branches, administered by Regional Bahá'í Councils. A financial report provided separately demonstrates how much capacity has grown at all levels to provide the necessary material means to support the expanding needs of the Plan. Part of this picture is the countless number of

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friends who offer voluntary, sacrificial service of every kind, and in many cases, parents support the material means for their youth to offer these periods of service. The National Assembly finds that its own growing ability to budget strategically and accurately, aligning anticipated revenues and expenditures, is mirrored at the regional and local levels.

A major area of consideration and concern for the National Assembly in recent years has been the acquisition, maintenance and use of properties. With the expansion of the institute process, the increase in participation, and the penetration of the work into neighbourhoods and smaller settings, a new landscape has opened up. The limited availability and high cost of appropriate space for the activities of large numbers of youth and junior youth has become a pressing challenge. In Canada's two learning sites, Vancouver and Toronto, the ability of the agencies and institutions to respond to and channel the eagerness of these populations is limited by a lack of space, and task forces have been appointed to assist in finding solutions. At the same time, the Assembly has asked a team of friends to undertake a study of guidance provided by the House of Justice, assess the condition and use of properties at every level, including local Bahá'í Centres, and propose a framework within which strategic and measured plans can be put in place to ensure that the property needs of this stage of the Divine Plan are met. An example of a new approach is a property acquired in Hamilton to serve the needs of a particular neighbourhood, through a believer's bequest to the National Fund, and the National Assembly looks forward collaborating with the Local Assembly and the cluster agencies in learning about using the space to the best effect.

The National Assembly was very happy this year to consolidate a number of earmarked bequests and formalize arrangements to make financial assistance available for educational endeavours, through the "Bahá'í Foundation Canada / Fondation baha'ie du Canada". Detailed information on how to apply for this assistance will be made available shortly.

In October, the world will celebrate the dedication of the last continental House of Worship in Santiago, Chile. Canada has been blessed to play a special role in this magnificent project, and we thank Bahá'u'lláh that we have been able to provide substantial human and financial resources.

The development and publication of materials in French, undertaken by the Comité bahá'í de littérature et de productions françaises (CBLPF) continues to serve francophone populations across Canada, but also worldwide. The National Assembly continues to collaborate with its sister Assemblies of France and Belgium on the development of a website that will provide access to the most recent French translations of the Writings. Another gift to our country this year that followed on a wonderful meeting with the Board of Trustees of the Right of God, was their request to publish for worldwide availability the compilation on Huququ'lláh in English, French and Persian.

## Participation in National-Level Discourses

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*The overarching objective of the Bahá'í community's external affairs efforts for the coming years will be to increase the range and depth of its contributions to the life of society at the level of thought in an ever-rising number of social spaces on the national and international stages...*

*At the centre of this strategy lie the concepts of capacity building and learning, concepts that are equally relevant to National Assemblies and their Offices of External Affairs and the Offices of the Bahá'í International Community. For, in the final analysis, and in common with virtually every other significant aspect of collective Bahá'í endeavour, there is no simple formula to be followed. Knowledge is*

*generated through a process of learning—of interwoven action, reflection, study of guidance, and consultation.*

“National and International External Affairs Endeavours of the Worldwide Bahá’í Community”, a paper prepared by an Ad Hoc Committee and approved by the Universal House of Justice, 20 October 2014

Participation in national discourses has been a rich arena for learning throughout the Plan, and in the last year in particular. The themes that have been most fruitful to pursue have been discourses related to youth, the role of religion in society, the notion of citizenship and a particular aspect of that conversation revolving around the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. A film entitled *The Path Home*, produced to honour the survivors of residential schools and in recognition of the Commission’s work, was premiered at one of the closing events. It has since been used by several communities to open up discussion on this subject, as part of an educational endeavour.



Seeking to generate knowledge through the same process of interwoven action, reflection, study of guidance and consultation, the External Affairs coordinating group is learning about the generation of content in the form of “thought pieces”, working with small teams of collaborators. These thought pieces have been studied with like-minded individuals with whom the Bahá’í community has a relationship through connections with over 200 national organizations. The thought pieces are available on the Bahá’í Community of Canada’s website at <http://www.ca.bahai.org/public-discourse/thought-pieces>.

The Bahá’í community continued to contribute to a broader discourse in other ways as well. A representative of the community was appointed to Canada’s Advisory Committee on the Freedom of Religion, and others served such varied organizations as the Canadian Interfaith Conversation and the Couchiching Institute on Public Affairs. A key role was played in collaborating to organize the second conference on the role of religion in society which took place in Vancouver, with a third planned for this year. A symposium to examine the experience of Bahá’í refugees in the early 1980’s was held in Ottawa in the fall of 2015 in collaboration with the Canadian Immigration Historical Society and Carleton University, with the participation of senior government officials. The Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) collaborated with the University of Toronto and the Trudeau Foundation to host a symposium on citizenship.

In July 2013, the National Assembly was thrilled to receive a letter from the Universal House of Justice about stimulating the intellectual life of the community, and particularly about the role of the Association for Bahá’í Studies. Los Angeles was the site of the second conference to be held since the guidance was received, and this year’s conference will take place in Montreal from 11-14 August. A newly-appointed committee with members from the United States and Canada has advanced plans to collaborate closely with the ISGP in arranging spaces for individuals to examine ways of more directly contributing to discourses in their professions, and to share with each other what they are learning. Participants in the ISGP have been enthusiastic contributors and collaborators in this process. This year, the ISGP undergraduate seminar was attended by 128 youth, and we are delighted to see that the first French-language undergraduate seminar is taking shape for this summer.

Strong relationships with government continue to bolster the Canadian community’s ability to contribute to the defense of the Bahá’ís in Iran and other countries where the community is threatened. The federal

election presented an opportunity for Local Spiritual Assemblies to introduce themselves to new Members of Parliament, and to date, 86 MPs have been contacted.

As the teaching work has developed capacity to engage in meaningful, distinctive conversation, so too, has the capacity developed to engage in the discourses of society and with governmental and non-governmental agencies.



Looking back, we see that so much has been learned on a path that began one hundred years ago. Looking forward, we see the peoples that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá honoured by His mention, ready for the herculean labour to which every individual, community and institution is now called. With grateful hearts, we return to the 26 March 2016 message of the Universal House of Justice addressed to the chosen recipients of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets of the Divine Plan:

This is a time for jubilation. Take pride in the sacrifices and victories of so many devoted souls who arose in response to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s call. With the same spirit of renunciation shown by your predecessors, cast away the idle fancies and distractions of a world that has lost its way that you may consecrate yourselves in the next five years to the priceless opportunities and inescapable obligations of the latest stage of a spiritual enterprise on which the fate of humanity depends.

Our prayers are ever with you.