

BAHÁ'Í CANADA

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Celebrating the Bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh

From the Writings

This is the month wherein was born He Who beareth the Most Great Name, Whose appearance hath caused the limbs of humankind to quake and the dust of Whose footsteps the Concourse on high and the dwellers of the cities of names have sought for a blessing. Whereupon they rendered praise unto God and cried out in joy and exultation. By God! This is the month through which all other months have been illumined, the month wherein He Who is the hidden Secret and the well-guarded Treasure hath been made manifest and hath called aloud amidst all humankind. All dominion belongeth to this newborn Child through Whom the face of creation hath been wreathed in smiles, and the trees have swayed, and the oceans have surged, and the mountains have taken flight, and Paradise hath lifted its voice, and the Rock hath cried out, and all things have exclaimed, “O concourse of creation! Hasten ye towards the dawning-place of the countenance of your Lord, the Merciful, the Compassionate!”

Bahá'u'lláh, Má'idíy-i-Ásmání, vol. 4, p. 342, Selections from Days of Remembrance

While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head. Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden—the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord—suspended in the air before Me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful. Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God's honoured servants.

Pointing with her finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His Treasure, the Cause of God and His glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation, if ye be of them that perceive. This is He Whose Presence is the ardent desire of the denizens of the Realm of eternity, and of them that dwell within the Tabernacle of glory, and yet from His Beauty do ye turn aside.

Bahá'u'lláh, Súriy-i-Haykal, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, pp. 5-6.

The Revelation which, from time immemorial, hath been acclaimed as the Purpose and Promise of all the Prophets of God, and the most cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now, by virtue of the pervasive Will of the Almighty and at His irresistible bidding, been revealed unto men. The advent of such a Revelation hath been heralded in all the sacred Scriptures. Behold how, notwithstanding such an announcement, mankind hath strayed from its path and shut out itself from its glory.

Say: O ye lovers of the One true God! Strive, that ye may truly recognize and know Him, and observe befittingly His precepts. This is a Revelation, under which, if a man shed for its sake one drop of blood, myriads of oceans will be his recompense. Take heed, O friends, that ye forfeit not so inestimable a benefit, or disregard its transcendent station. Consider the multitude of lives that have been, and are still being, sacrificed in a world deluded by a mere phantom which the vain imaginations of its peoples have conceived. Render thanks unto God, inasmuch as ye have attained unto your heart's Desire, and been united to Him Who is the Promise of all nations.

Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 5-6.

Say: Should the quintessence of assurance be dismayed before the clamour of the peoples of the world? Nay, by His beauty, which sheddeth its radiance upon all that hath been and all that shall be! This, verily, is the majesty of the Lord that hath encompassed the entire creation, and this is His transcendent power that hath pervaded all them that see and all that is seen. Take fast hold of the cord of His sovereign might and make mention of your Lord, the Unconstrained, at this dawntide whose light hath laid bare every hidden secret. Thus hath the Tongue of the Ancient of Days spoken on this Day wherein the choice wine hath been unsealed. Take heed lest the vain imaginings of them that have disbelieved in God perturb you, or their idle fancies deter you from this outstretched path.

O people of Bahá! Soar upon the wings of detachment into the atmosphere of the love of your Lord, the All-Merciful. Arise then to render Him victorious, as bidden in the Preserved Tablet. Beware lest ye contend with any of My servants. Bestow upon them the sweet savours of God and His holy utterances, for through their potency all men will be enabled to turn unto Him. They that remain heedless of God in this Day are in truth lost in the drunkenness of their desires and perceive it not. Well is it with the one who, with lowliness and humility, hath set his face towards the Dayspring of the verses of his Lord.

Bahá'u'lláh, Ayyám-i-Tis'ih, pp. 45-47, Selections from Days of Remembrance.

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ON THE COVER Trevor Husband carves a cedar bench commissioned for the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh in Duncan, B.C., displaying the quotation: "So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth," in English and in HUL'Q'UMI'NUM'. Photos: Galen Humber

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Marking the dedication of the House of Worship in Battambang, Cambodia

From the Universal House of Justice to the Friends Gathered in Battambang, Cambodia, for the Dedication of the House of Worship, 1 September 2017.

Dearly loved Friends,

A full year has yet to pass since the Bahá'í world marked the completion of the last of the continental Houses of Worship, and already a new dawn is breaking in the development of the institution of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*. You are gathered at the very dawning-place itself—the site of the first local House of Worship to rise above the horizon in the stage that has now opened. The dedication of this unique edifice is a historic occasion, prefiguring the appearance of many more local as well as national *Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs*, in obedience to Bahá'u'lláh's commandment revealed in His Most Holy Book: “Build ye houses of worship throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions.”

It is fitting that this special moment is celebrated in a region that has a long and proud association with the Faith, for even within the lifetime of Bahá'u'lláh His message had reached as far as Asia's south-eastern peninsula. It was a message that summoned all peoples to work for unity and peace, and its urgency has only intensified in the intervening years. Does not disunity fuel the crises and conflicts that afflict the world? Does it not exacerbate the pain and hardship experienced by so many? God be praised that the pure-hearted people of Cambodia, who have themselves suffered much, are responding with such enthusiasm to the call of the Ancient Beauty. Drawing on the power of unity, they are making strenuous efforts to uplift souls through spiritual and material education and are enabling populations to develop their capacity for service. Indeed, the believers in Cambodia are among those on the frontiers of learning in the Bahá'í world's efforts to build communities on enduring foundations.

The emergence of a House of Worship in Battambang, then, is a testament to how brightly the light of faith shines in the hearts of the friends there. Its design,

the work of an accomplished Cambodian architect, reflects the grace and beauty of that nation's culture; it uses innovative techniques but blends them with forms traditional to the region; it unquestionably belongs to the land from which it has risen. Even before its dedication, the Temple has succeeded in elevating the consciousness of those who reside in its shadow about a theme that is integral to the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*—the inseparability of worship and service in the life of a community. It has fostered a greater appreciation of the importance of unity, now reinforced through the collective worship that will occur within its walls. Its emergence is a spur to the efforts being made to nurture communities of spiritual distinction. It is an edifice of noble purpose, erected by a people of noble spirit.

Now that this Temple is opening its doors to the inhabitants of Battambang and to those living far beyond, may the blessings of heaven be attracted to this region in even more abundance than before—we entreat Bahá'u'lláh that it be so. May those who pass through its portals feel their spirits soar within, may their worship of the one true God strengthen the bonds of affection between them, and may their love for God be expressed through the service they render to those around them. We call to mind at this moment the benediction of Bahá'u'lláh: “Blessed are they that occupy themselves in the House of Worship with the remembrance of Him Who is the Lord of the righteous! Blessed are they that arise in the service of this House! Blessed are they that have raised up this House!”

– The Universal House of Justice



Top: Raised within the House of Worship is a sacred symbol that represents the connection between God, His Manifestations, and mankind. Bottom: The Local Bahá'í House of Worship in Battambang, Cambodia.

Photos: Bahá'í International Community



Marking the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh

From the Universal House of Justice to all who celebrate the Glory of God, October 2017.

To all who celebrate the Glory of God

Dearly loved Friends,

This salutary truth we maintain: that the peoples of the earth have always been remembered by their God. In every era of history, that unknowable Reality has opened the gates of grace to the world by sending an Emissary charged with providing the moral and spiritual stimulus that human beings need to cooperate and advance. Many of the names of these great Lights to humankind are lost. But some shine out from the annals of the past as having revolutionized thought, unlocked stores of knowledge, and inspired the rise of civilizations, and Their names continue to be honoured and praised. Each of these spiritual and social visionaries, stainless mirrors of virtue, set out teachings and truths that answered the urgent needs of the age. As the world now faces its most pressing challenges yet, we acclaim Bahá'u'lláh, born two hundred years ago, as such a Figure—indeed, as the One Whose teachings will usher in that long-promised time when all humanity will live side by side in peace and unity.

From His early youth, Bahá'u'lláh was regarded by those who knew Him as bearing the imprint of destiny. Blessed with saintly character and uncommon wisdom, He seemed to be touched by heaven's kindly light. Yet He was made to endure forty years of suffering, including successive exiles and incarcerations at the decree of two despotic monarchs, campaigns to vilify His name and condemn His followers, violence upon His Person, shameful attempts on His life—all of which, out of a boundless love for humanity, He bore willingly, with radiance and forbearance, and with compassion for His tormentors. Even the expropriation of all His worldly possessions left Him unperturbed. An observer might wonder why One Whose love for others was so complete should have been made the target of such hostility, given that He had otherwise been the object of universal praise and admiration, famed for His benevolence and high-mindedness, and had disavowed any claim to political power. To anyone who is familiar with the pattern of history, the reason for His ordeals is, of course,

unmistakable. The appearance of a prophetic Figure in the world has invariably given rise to ferocious opposition from wielders of power. But the light of truth will not be put out. And so, in the lives of these transcendent Beings one finds sacrifice, heroism and, come what may, deeds that exemplify Their words. The same is evident in each phase of the life of Bahá'u'lláh. In spite of every hardship, He was never silenced, and His words retained their compelling potency—words spoken with the voice of insight, diagnosing the world's ills and prescribing the remedy; words carrying the weight of justice, warning kings and rulers about forces that would ultimately sweep them from their thrones; words that leave one's soul uplifted, awed and transformed, determined to free itself from the thorns and brambles of self-interest; and words that are clear, arresting, and emphatic: "This thing is not from Me, but from God." Might one not ask, in considering such a life: if this be not from God, what can be pointed to that is?

The perfect Educators Who, throughout history, brought light to the world, left behind a legacy of sacred words. Within the words that flowed like a river from the pen of Bahá'u'lláh are gifts of enormous range and sublime character. Not infrequently, one who encounters His Revelation responds first to prayers of surpassing beauty that satisfy the soul's longing to befittingly worship its Maker. Deeper in the ocean of His words are discovered the laws and moral imperatives to liberate the human spirit from the tyranny of worldly instincts unworthy of its true calling. Here, too, are found enduring ideals in whose light parents may raise children not simply in their own likeness, but with aspirations more exalted. There are also explanations that reveal the hand of God at work in the history of humankind's winding journey through the stages of tribe and nation towards higher forms of unity. The diverse religions of the world are shown to be expressions of a single underlying truth, related to one another by a common origin, and also by a common purpose: to transform humanity's inner life and outer



Entrance to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

conditions. Bahá'u'lláh's teachings testify to the nobility of the human spirit. The society He envisions is one worthy of that nobility and founded on principles that guard and reinforce it. The oneness of the human family He places at the core of collective life; the equality of women and men He unequivocally asserts. He reconciles the seemingly counteracting forces of our own age—science and religion, unity and diversity, freedom and order, individual rights and social responsibilities. And among His greatest gifts is justice, manifested in institutions whose concern is for the progress and development of all peoples. In His own words, He has “blotted out from the pages of God’s holy Book whatsoever hath been the cause of strife, of malice and mischief amongst the children of men” and, concurrently, “laid down the essential prerequisites of concord, of understanding, of complete and enduring unity”. Might one not ask, what would be a befitting response to such gifts?

“It is the duty of every seeker to bestir himself and strive to attain the shores of this ocean,” Bahá'u'lláh states. The spiritual teachings brought by successive Messengers through the ages found expression in religious systems

that, over time, have become fused with aspects of culture and weighed down with man-made dogmas. But look past these and it becomes clear that the original teachings are the source of the universal values through which diverse peoples have found common cause and which have moulded humanity’s moral consciousness. In contemporary society, the reputation of religion has suffered a great deal, and understandably so. If, in the name of religion, hatred and strife are promoted, it is better to do without it. However, true religion can be known by its fruits—its capacity to inspire, to transform, to unite, to foster peace and prosperity. It is in harmony with rational thought. And it is essential to social progress. The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh cultivates within the individual and the community the discipline of acting in the light of reflection, and by this means, insights gradually accumulate about effective ways to work for the betterment of society. Attempts at social change through political intrigue, sedition, vilification of particular groups, or outright conflict are condemned by Bahá'u'lláh, for they merely perpetuate cycles of struggle while lasting solutions continue to elude. He champions instruments

of a very different sort. He calls for good deeds, kind words, and upright conduct; He enjoins service to others and collaborative action. And to the task of constructing a world civilization founded on the divine teachings, He summons every member of the human race. Might one not ask, in contemplating the breadth of His vision, upon what foundation shall humanity realistically build hope for the future, if not this?

In every land, those who have been attracted to the message of Bahá'u'lláh and are committed to His vision are systematically learning how to give effect to His teachings. Cohorts of youth are becoming ever more conscious of their spiritual identity and are directing their energies towards the advancement of their societies. People with divergent perspectives are discovering how to replace contention and the imposition of authority with consultation and the collective search for solutions. From every race, religion, nationality, and class, souls are uniting around a vision of humanity as one people and the earth as one country. Many who have long suffered

are finding their voice and becoming protagonists of their own development, resourceful and resilient. From villages, neighbourhoods, towns and cities are arising institutions, communities, and individuals dedicated to labouring together for the emergence of a united and prospering world that might truly deserve to be called the kingdom of God on earth. On this two hundredth anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's appearance, the many who are part of this enterprise are reaching out to those around them with a simple invitation: seize this opportunity to find out who He was and what He represents. Put to the test the remedy He has prescribed. His coming offers sure proof that the human race, threatened by numerous perils, has not been forgotten. When so many people of goodwill throughout the world have for so long beseeched God for an answer to the problems that beset them in their common homeland, is it so surprising that He should have answered their prayer?

– The Universal House of Justice

Following the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh

From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 31 October 2017.

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Reports continue to stream in from all continents, but we will wait no longer to communicate to you our unbounded joy. The outpouring of love and esteem for Bahá'u'lláh witnessed around the world at His bicentenary has moved us greatly. In settings of all kinds, from homes to stadiums, His life was celebrated with the utmost devotion and remarkable creativity. At many a gathering, guests outnumbered the Bahá'ís several times over; in some island nations, participation may be measured as a proportion of all the inhabitants. Truly, we confess our astonishment at the flood of grace Bahá'u'lláh has poured forth. And in every precious effort made to honour Him, we recognize the wholehearted striving of each believer to attain a full share. With all that transpired, we know that every one of you will wish to reflect on the implications for the progress of the Cause in your own locality. We urge you to see in each person who responded to your invitation a potential protagonist

in the community-building process. Consider how conditions may be created that would enable many to walk this path together. Connected to the transformative power of the Revelation, every soul can draw closer to Bahá'u'lláh, grow in capacity, find joy in service, and learn to assist others. The results of the magnificent effort you have made offer tremendous promise—but fulfilling that promise will require fortitude. Let the forces released in this period lend impetus to your personal and collective endeavours during the remainder of this bicentennial year and, indeed, through all eight cycles leading up to the two hundredth anniversary of the Birth of the Báb. With our expectations heightened and our hearts imploring divine favours on your behalf, we give praise to the Ancient Beauty, a fresh glimpse of Whose soul-entrancing glory He has in these days chosen to disclose.

– The Universal House of Justice

Regarding climate change

From the Department of the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice to individual believers, 29 November 2017.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 21 June 2017 raising questions about the involvement of the Bahá'í community in addressing the issue of anthropogenic climate change. You express your views about the contemporary discourse surrounding climate change, observing that there is pressure to accept an extreme position about the causes and predicted catastrophic results of climate change and to support associated economic and social policies. You also share your perception that some Bahá'ís have taken a position strongly aligned with such an extreme position, promoting its arguments and suppressing the views of other believers and, as a result, you fear that they may be raising the requirement to act on this issue to the level of a religious principle and involving the community in a partisan political debate. We have been asked to convey the following.

The House of Justice appreciates your turning to it for clarification of matters that have been a source of concern to you. It welcomes the opportunity not only to address the issue of climate change itself but, more broadly, to clarify certain ideas about the way in which Bahá'ís are to understand and contribute to the betterment of the world.

Your letter reflects thoughtful concern about the practical limits of scientific knowledge, its implications for public policy, and its possible misrepresentation in an argument warning about catastrophic anthropogenic climate change that you feel is extreme, political, and unjustified by the facts. Although you do not mention it, you are surely aware that your measured skepticism is largely overshadowed in the public debate by another extreme perspective, promoted by political and vested interests, that goes as far as denying climate change and attempting to dismiss or contend with relevant scientific findings. Specific concerns about possible extremes on one side of the debate, therefore, must be addressed without appearing to advocate the other extreme. On the matter of climate change and other vital issues with profound implications for the common good, Bahá'ís have to avoid being drawn into the all too common tendencies evident in contemporary discourse to delineate sharp dichotomies,

become ensnared in contests for power, and engage in intractable debate that obstructs the search for viable solutions to the world's problems. Humanity would be best and most effectively served by setting aside partisan disputation, pursuing united action that is informed by the best available scientific evidence and grounded in spiritual principles, and thoughtfully revising action in the light of experience. The incessant focus on generating and magnifying points of difference rather than building upon points of agreement leads to exaggeration that fuels anger and confusion, thereby diminishing the will and capacity to act on matters of vital concern.

One of the most pressing problems of humanity in the current century is how a growing, rapidly developing, and not yet united global population can, in a just manner, live in harmony with the planet and its finite resources. Certain biological realities present themselves when an organism negatively affects or exceeds the capacity of its ecosystem. The limited availability and inequitable distribution of resources profoundly impact social relations within and between nations in many ways, even to the point of precipitating upheaval and war. And particular arrangements of human affairs can have devastating consequences for the environment. The question of the impact of climate change, and to what extent it is man-made and its effects can be ameliorated, is today a major aspect of this larger problem. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh directly and indirectly touches on a range of such concerns in a manner that speaks to a harmony between society and the natural world. It is essential, therefore, that Bahá'ís contribute to thought and action regarding such matters.

Among the Bahá'í teachings are those concerning the importance of science. "Great indeed is the claim of scientists ... on the peoples of the world," Bahá'u'lláh observed. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that the "sciences of today are bridges to reality" and repeatedly emphasized that "religion must be in conformity with science and reason." Significantly, on an occasion when a scientific question was asked of Shoghi Effendi, he responded in a letter written on his behalf that "we are a religion and not qualified to pass on scientific matters." And in reply

to scientific issues raised on a number of occasions, he consistently advised Bahá'ís that such matters would need to be investigated by scientists.

Scientific inquiry into the question of human contributions to global warming has gradually unfolded over a century of investigation and, more recently, with intense scrutiny. While there will naturally be differences of view among individual scientists, there does exist at present a striking degree of agreement among experts in relevant fields about the cause and impact of climate change. Sound scientific results, obtained through the employment of sound scientific methods, produce knowledge that can be acted upon; ultimately, the outcomes of action must stand the test of further scientific inquiry and the objective facts of the physical world. In the spectrum of issues under discussion—which includes the extent of human contribution, projections of the possible future consequences, and alternatives for response—some aspects are, of course, less supported than others by scientific findings and hence subject to additional critical analysis.

A phenomenon as complex as climate change cannot be reduced to simple propositions or simplistic policy prescriptions. Even when there is agreement on some underlying facts, there may be a diversity of views about what to do in response to those facts, and the problem is compounded when uncertainty exists or when basic facts are contested for partisan reasons. But while there may indeed be a localized and highly charged political component to the public discussion, more remarkable is the fact that at a time when nations have difficulty reaching agreement on many important issues, the governments of nearly every country on earth have reached political consensus on a joint framework, in the Paris accord, to respond to climate change in a manner that is anticipated to evolve over time as experience accumulates. More than a century ago, 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred to “unity of

thought in world undertakings, the consummation of which will ere long be witnessed.” The recently adopted international agreement on climate change, irrespective of any shortcomings and limitations it may have, offers another noteworthy demonstration of that development anticipated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The agreement represents a starting point for constructive thought and action that can be refined or revised on the basis of experience and new findings over time.

While as a fundamental principle Bahá'ís do not engage in partisan political affairs, this should not be interpreted in a manner that prevents the friends from full and active participation in the search for solutions to the pressing problems facing humanity. Given that the question of climate change gives rise to social, economic, and environmental concerns across the world, interested Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions and agencies have naturally addressed it, whether at local, regional, national, or international levels. However, this does not mean that conclusions about scientific findings on climate change associated with such initiatives should be construed or presented as matters of religious conviction or obligation. Different Bahá'ís will, given their range of backgrounds, understand ideas about science and climate change in different ways and feel impelled to act differently, and there is no obligation for them to have uniformity of thought in such matters. Whenever Bahá'ís do participate in activities associated with this topic in the wider society, they can help to contribute to a constructive process by elevating the discourse above partisan concerns and self-interest to strive to achieve unity of thought and action. A range of Bahá'í concepts can inform these efforts; the letter of the House of Justice dated 1 March 2017, for example, addresses moral questions of consumption and excessive materialism that are associated with the exploitation and degradation of the environment. At the start, there are no doubt many uncontroversial areas of overlap where the



effort to address the question of anthropogenic climate change corresponds with widely accepted approaches to improving the environment. Areas for collaboration with others could broaden as experience and learning unfolds.

In those parts of the world where discussions surrounding anthropogenic climate change have indeed fallen prey to an almost intractable divide, Bahá'ís must be sensitive to the danger of this divisive partisan approach taking root in the community. This may well mean that some individuals or agencies have to consider to what extent their views about action required on climate change reflect a posture that is too extreme, whether in exaggerating the problem or minimizing it. Concepts and principles associated with Bahá'í consultation inform how the friends should interact among themselves and how they participate in social discourses and social action. Consultation provides a means by which common understanding can be reached and a collective course of action defined. It involves a free, respectful, dignified, and fair-minded effort on the part of a group of people to exchange views, seek truth, and attempt to reach consensus. An initial difference of opinion is the starting point for examining an issue in order to reach greater understanding and consensus; it should not become a cause of rancor, aversion, or estrangement. By acting in unity, a conclusion about a particular course of action may be tested and revised as necessary through a process of learning. Otherwise, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains, “stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden.”

Also relevant to such participation is greater appreciation and application of Bahá'u'lláh's insights on moderation. “In all matters moderation is desirable,” He states. “If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil.” This call for moderation includes in particular the manner of speech if a just conclusion is to be achieved. “Human utterance is an essence which aspires to exert

its influence and needeth moderation,” Bahá'u'lláh writes. “One word is like unto springtime causing the tender saplings of the rose-garden of knowledge to become verdant and flourishing, while another word is even as a deadly poison,” He explains. “It behoveth a prudent man of wisdom to speak with utmost leniency and forbearance so that the sweetness of his words may induce everyone to attain that which becometh man's station.” By moderation, Bahá'u'lláh is in no way referring to mere compromise, the dilution of truth, or a hypocritical or utopian consensus. The moderation He calls for demands an end to destructive excesses that have plagued humanity and fomented ceaseless contention and turmoil. Moderation in deliberation and action stands in contrast to the arbitrary imposition of views through power or insistence upon ideological aims, both of which obstruct the search for truth and sow the seeds of continuing injustice. A moderate perspective is a practical and principled standpoint from which one can recognize and adopt valid and insightful ideas whatever their source, without prejudice. “Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation,” Bahá'u'lláh states. “He discerneth the truth in all things, through the guidance of Him Who is the All-Seeing.”

The House of Justice trusts that, in pursuing the many facets of their work of community building, social action, and involvement in the discourses of society, individuals, communities, and institutions will continually grow in their capacity to make a distinctive and effective contribution to addressing the multitudinous problems afflicting society and the planet, including those associated with climate change.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat



Regarding bicentenary celebrations across Canada

From the National Spiritual Assembly to the Bahá'ís of Canada, 20 November 2017.

To the Bahá'ís of Canada

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

What marvels you have accomplished in honour of this powerful moment in history! Your reports of the celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh continue to arrive, transporting us on the wings of inspiration from one part of the country to another, to settings of every kind. We have been taken to Pond Inlet, Nunavut, to the grandmothers' gathering; to the Provincial Legislature in Ontario where an historic tribute to Bahá'u'lláh was made by a Minister of the Government and representatives of the two other Parties; to the small Brandon community's dramatic presentations of the life of Bahá'u'lláh that attracted over 100 townspeople; to the Cowichan Valley cluster in British Columbia, where a bench with a beautifully hand-carved panel of Bahá'u'lláh's words in the Hul'q'umi'num and English languages was presented as a gift to the elders' residence in honour of the bicentenary; to Cut Knife, Saskatchewan, a town of 600 people in which 100 gathered to celebrate the Holy Day; to Quebec City, where a choir lifted the hearts of participants in the celebration; to Whitehorse, Yukon where the Dakhká Khwáan dancers drew the children into a dance of unity amidst a beautiful art display; to a myriad home-based Holy Day celebrations, family gatherings, film screenings and studies of the October 2017 message about Bahá'u'lláh. The range of ways that you have brought His "soul-entrancing glory"¹ to the minds and hearts of every kind of person is breathtaking. To hold a worthy mirror to your joyful, creative efforts is impossible.

Yet, while the numbers are truly countless from a national perspective, they are surely not to each of you. In most of your reports, the count of friends and neighbours who participated in the celebrations has surpassed the number of Bahá'ís. Seeing in each soul who accompanied you a potential protagonist in the community-building process,

you are also seeing the next simple steps that will connect them more deeply to the transformative power of the Revelation. As you continue to act, these simple steps are widening a path for the tens of thousands with whom you are already connected and the circle of friends around them. This is the work of the next eight cycles of the Plan, until the 200th anniversary of the Birth of the Báb in 2019.

Each Holy Day presents a special opportunity to continue to draw in the widest possible cross-section of society. For example, in a few short days might the Day of the Covenant extend the pattern of invitation to a range of spaces and meaningful conversations that has now been so clearly established? In what ways might those with whom you celebrated the bicentenary, and who you view as your companions on the path of service, contribute to the change in the way that Holy Days are celebrated, as part of their deepening engagement with the Word of God and participation in community life?

The energy, focus and confidence you have abundantly demonstrated in the months leading up to the bicentenary have built new capacities and changed the landscape in which the Cause is growing in Canada. Steadfastness and the fortitude mentioned by the Universal House of Justice in its joyous 31 October 2017 message to the Bahá'ís of the world will ensure that the seeds you have lovingly planted will flower. The National Assembly's study of that message brought to mind this stirring passage from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh with which we close, with the deepest love and our assurance of grateful, constant prayers:

Centre your attention unceasingly upon that which will cause the Word of God to be exalted. In this Most Great Revelation goodly deeds and a praiseworthy character are regarded as the hosts of God, likewise is His blessed and holy Word. These hosts are the lodestone of the hearts of men and the effective means for unlocking doors. Of all the weapons in the world this is the keenest.²

– National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

1 Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, 31 October 2017.

2 Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 256

About this issue

In a message in late November, the National Spiritual Assembly wrote, “What marvels you have accomplished in honour of this powerful moment in history!”¹ It has been invigorating to receive reports from across the country describing celebrations of the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh, the “One Whose teachings will usher in that long-promised time when all humanity will live side by side in peace and unity.”² This issue of *Bahá’í Canada* provides a window into some of these celebrations, from which it is hoped an evolution in how the Bahá’ís of Canada commemorate Holy Days can be discerned.

Communities across the country harnessed the impetus of the bicentenary to reach new heights – numerically, as some localities’ celebrations constituted the largest gatherings held in recent memory, involving the largest number of those from the wider community, and also qualitatively, as these celebrations strengthened their ability to collaborate, learn and coordinate their efforts.

It is difficult to recall a time when we were able to share, within a single issue, an item from every province and territory in Canada: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, the Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Saskatchewan and Yukon. Our feature article is a compilation of such stories. Despite this, what follows is, of course, only a glimpse into bicentenary celebrations across the country, as countless more occurred. Again, to quote the National Spiritual Assembly, “To hold a worthy mirror to your joyful, creative efforts is impossible.”³

Of particular note was the response of the wider community to joining Bahá’ís in marking the bicentenary, from children and youth in neighbourhoods to prominent dignitaries. These friends not only attended celebrations, but were active agents in planning them and

inviting others. As the National Spiritual Assembly wrote: “Seeing in each soul who accompanied you a potential protagonist in the community-building process, you are also seeing the next simple steps that will connect them more deeply to the transformative power of the Revelation.”⁴ We look forward to following your progress in accompanying these friends as we approach another significant juncture – the bicentenary of the Birth of Báb – in October 2019.

Other content in this issue provides a closer look at several stories from across Canada within the context of the bicentenary: An individual in Montreal, Que., overcomes her doubts regarding holding a neighbourhood celebration; friends of the Piikani Nation, Alta., are reminded of Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm’s visits in past decades; a play performed in Victoria, B.C., conveys Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings to a large number of people; a junior youth group in Toronto, Ont., undergoes a test of unity; a service project in Iqaluit, Nunavut, brings joy to local taxi drivers; a group in Ottawa, Ont., dedicate a combined 400 hours to creating a quilt; and an individual from Charlottetown, P.E.I., reflects on the capacities her community strengthened during this potent period. Several of these stories can also be found online at <bahaicanada.bahai.ca>.

We are also happy to include several artistic works, including poetry, in honour of the Twin Manifestations. Each piece sought “to convey a sense of what it means for humanity that these two Luminaries rose successively above the horizon of the world.”⁵ We hope that we can incorporate the arts in ways that speak to the themes of future issues, and invite friends who are thus inclined to consider contributing. For submissions and inquiries, we can be reached at <bcanada@cdnbnc.org>. We hope that you enjoy this issue and look forward to continuing our collaboration.

“It is difficult to recall a time when we were able to share, within a single issue, an item from every province and territory in Canada...”

1 From the National Spiritual Assembly to the Bahá’ís of Canada, 20 November 2017.

2 From the Universal House of Justice to all who celebrate the Glory of God, October 2017.

3 From the National Spiritual Assembly to the Bahá’ís of Canada, 20 November 2017.

4 From the National Spiritual Assembly to the Bahá’ís of Canada, 20 November 2017.

5 Ibid.

Statement by the Prime Minister of Canada on the bicentennial of Bahá'u'lláh's birth

Ottawa, Ontario - October 22, 2017

The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today issued the following statement to mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of Baha'u'llah:

“Today, we join the Bahá'í community in Canada and around the world to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Baha'u'llah, the prophet and founder of the Bahá'í faith.

“Baha'u'llah's teachings aim to inspire respect, as well as to promote diversity and inclusion, gender equality, and education for all – values that we hold dear as a country.

“Canada's diversity is one of our greatest strengths and sources of pride. This year, as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation, I invite all Canadians to reflect on how they can put into practice these values of openness and respect.

“Sophie and I extend our best wishes to all those celebrating this historic milestone for the Bahá'í faith.”

Message from National Chief Perry Bellegarde

Greetings to the Bahá'í Community of Canada!

It is my honour as National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations to send my best wishes to the Baha'is of Canada and the entire Baha'i community around the world on the 200th anniversary of the birth of Baha'u'llah, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith. This is a milestone worth celebrating!

On behalf of all First Nations, I would like to thank the Baha'is of Canada for supporting First Nations inherent and Treaty rights. Baha'u'llah taught the importance of unity and justice among all peoples regardless of their race or faith. This message resonates deeply with First Nations peoples, as witnessed by the many First Nations people that are part of the Baha'i community.

I look forward to working together with the Baha'is of Canada as we walk together towards a new era of peace, justice and reconciliation.

Best wishes for a memorable and enjoyable celebration.

Kinanāskomitin

National Chief Perry Bellegarde
Assembly of First Nations





Historical view of Bagdad, Iraq, c. 1930, where Nabíl-i-Akbar met with Bahá'u'lláh.

Photo: Bahá'í International Community

From the history of the Bahá'í Faith

The following account from Adib Taherzadeh's *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, tells the story of how a learned man – doubtful of the exalted station of Bahá'u'lláh – decides to study His character. His observations provide us with insight into the Person of Bahá'u'lláh and the penetrating influence of His Words.

Nabíl-i-Akbar's search for truth

Of those who travelled to Baghdád and attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, unquestionably the most learned and erudite was Mullá Muhammad-i-Qá'iní, later surnamed Nabíl-i-Akbar¹ by Bahá'u'lláh. This great man was endowed with extraordinary qualities and intellectual powers. Some considered him a prodigy among scholars and learned men. His eminence may be judged from the fact that, after several years' study at home, he spent about six years in 'Iráq studying theology and various other subjects associated with Islámic

1 Not to be mistaken for Nabíl-i-'Azam, the famous Bahá'í historian, author of *The Dawnbreakers*.



Mulla Muhammad-i-Qa'ini, known as Nabil-i-Akbar (1829-1892). Photo: Bahá'í International Community

From a Tablet addressed to Nabil-i-Akbar:

"He that riseth to serve My Cause should manifest My wisdom, and bend every effort to banish ignorance from the earth. Be united in counsel, be one in thought. Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday. Man's merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches. Take heed that your words be purged from idle fancies and worldly desires and your deeds be cleansed from craftiness and suspicion."

– Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawh-i-Ḥikmat*, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 139.

jurisprudence. His teacher was the renowned Mujtahid² of Karbilá, Shaykh Murtidáy-i-Ansárí, the head of the Shí'ah community, who was well disposed towards the Faith. He was a divine whose standards were so exacting that he reputedly gave the title of mujtahid to only three people during his entire life. One of these three was Nabil-i-Akbar. In His writings Bahá'u'lláh has extolled Shaykh Murtidá and numbered him among 'those doctors who have indeed drunk of the cup of renunciation'. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has also described him as 'the illustrious and erudite doctor, the noble and celebrated scholar, the seal of seekers after truth.'³

Nabil-i-Akbar was acknowledged as one of the most outstanding men of learning in Persia. His fame had spread throughout the country to such an extent that once, when he spoke incognito to a number of divines in far-off Kirmán, his listeners were lost in admiration of his superb discourse and some were heard to say that the only person in the whole country who could rival such a man in the field of learning and knowledge would be the famous Mullá Muhammad-i-Qá'iní (that is, Nabil-i-Akbar himself).

He embraced the Bábí Faith about the year 1853. Some six years later, while in Baghdád, he went to visit Bahá'u'lláh. There he was warmly received by Him, and was accorded the honour of staying in the outer apartments of His house, normally reserved for the reception of visitors. Mírzá Áqá Ján was instructed by Bahá'u'lláh to act as host to him. The following is an extract from the spoken chronicle of Nabil-i-Akbar relating the events of those few days that he spent in the house of Bahá'u'lláh:

One afternoon I was seated in the room talking with Mullá Muhammad-Sádiq-i-Khurásání, known as Muqaddas. He was a learned man of great dignity and stature. As we were talking together, Bahá'u'lláh, Who had just returned from the town, arrived in the outer apartment accompanied by Prince Mulk-Árá whose hand He was holding. Mullá Sádiq, who was the embodiment of dignity and solemnity, immediately rose to his feet and prostrated himself at the feet of Bahá'u'lláh. This action did not please Bahá'u'lláh Who angrily rebuked Mullá Sádiq and ordered him to rise immediately, after which He went out of the room followed by the Prince.

I was amazed and bewildered at such behaviour on the part of Mullá Sádiq as I had never expected such an important person to act in this manner. Having witnessed Bahá'u'lláh's reaction also, I expressed my disapproval of Mullá Sádiq's behaviour and admonished him for it, saying: 'You are a man who occupies an exalted position in the realm of knowledge and learning and, above all else, you had the honour of attaining the presence of the Báb Himself. Your rank is next to the Letters of the Living and you are one of the

² Doctor of Islamic Law.

³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 143.

Witnesses⁴ of the Dispensation of the Báb. It is true that Bahá'u'lláh is an eminent person Who belongs to the nobility and His ancestors have occupied high positions in the government. It is also true that He has suffered persecution and imprisonment as a result of embracing the Cause of God, that all His possessions have been confiscated and that He has finally been exiled to this land. Yet, your behaviour towards Him this afternoon was like that of an unworthy servant towards his glorious Lord.'

Mullá Sádiq refrained from answering me. He was in a state of spiritual intoxication, his face beaming with joy; he merely said to me, 'I beseech God to tear asunder the veil for thee and shower His bounties upon thy person through His abundant grace.'

After this incident, I decided in my heart to investigate and began to observe the person of Bahá'u'lláh and His actions very carefully. The more I observed the less I discovered any sign which could point to His claiming a station. On the contrary, I observed in Him nothing, either in word or deed, except humility, self-effacement, servitude and utter nothingness. As a result, I was led into grievous error, believing that I was in every way superior to Bahá'u'lláh, and preferred my own self to Him.

It was through my vain imagining that in the gatherings of the friends I always used to occupy the seat of honour, assume the function of the speaker and would not give an opportunity to Bahá'u'lláh or anyone else to say anything. One afternoon, Bahá'u'lláh arranged a meeting in His house and a number of friends had gathered, as usual, in the same large room, a room around which, according to the Pen of the Most High, circle in adoration the people of Bahá. Again, I occupied the seat of honour. Bahá'u'lláh sat in the midst of the friends and was serving tea with His own hands.

In the course of the meeting, a certain question was asked. Having satisfied myself that no one in the room was capable of tackling the problem, I began to speak. All the friends were attentively listening and were absolutely silent, except Bahá'u'lláh Who occasionally, while agreeing with my exposition, made a few comments on the subject. Gradually He took over and I became silent. His explanations were so profound and the ocean of His utterance surged with such a power that my whole being was overtaken with awe and fear. Spellbound by His words, I was plunged into a state of dazed bewilderment. After a few minutes of listening to His words—words of unparalleled wonder and majesty—I became dumbfounded. I could no longer hear His voice. Only by the movement of His lips did I know that He was still speaking. I felt deeply ashamed

and troubled that I was occupying the seat of honour in that meeting. I waited impatiently until I saw that His lips were no longer moving when I knew that He had finished talking. Like a helpless bird which is freed from the claws of a mighty falcon I rose to my feet and went out. There three times I hit my head hard against the wall and rebuked myself for my spiritual blindness.

After this incident, I decided in my heart to investigate and began to observe the person of Bahá'u'lláh and His actions very carefully.

The eyes of Nabil-i-Akbar were at last opened. He attended another meeting, this time in Kázimayn in the house of a certain Háji 'Abdu'l-Majíd-i-Shírání. Bahá'u'lláh was present at this meeting. He spoke about the mysteries and origin of creation. Here a new world, full of fresh significances, dawned upon Nabil-i-Akbar who considered every word of Bahá'u'lláh's to be like a priceless gem. All that Nabil-i-Akbar had heard and studied during his life appeared to him to be but the talk of children.

At this point he decided to find out directly from Bahá'u'lláh Himself what His station was and wrote a letter to Him which he begged 'Abdu'l-Bahá to deliver. The next day he received a Tablet in which Bahá'u'lláh alluded to His lofty station. This was the end of Nabil-i-Akbar's search for truth, for he wrote a second letter to Bahá'u'lláh, this time humbly acknowledging Him as the Supreme Manifestation of God and begging Him to guide his steps in His service. Bahá'u'lláh instructed him to return to Persia and teach the Cause of God there.

Nabil-i-Akbar dedicated his whole life to the service of the Cause, suffering much persecution from the enemies of the Faith. He rose to such heights of service and dedication that few among the Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh have been able to rival his attainments.

– Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 1, pp. 91-95.

⁴ The Báb nominated certain believers as 'Witnesses' to the Bayán—the Mother Book of the Bábi Dispensation—to testify to its validity and authenticity as the Word of God, until the appearance of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' (i.e., Bahá'u'lláh) when their function as 'Witnesses' would come to an end.

Remembering Rúhíyyih Khánúm's visits to Piikani Nation

Celebrating the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh held special significance for those in Piikani Nation, Alta., who remembered when Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm came to visit many years ago.

On October 22, 2017, the Piikani Nation Bahá'ís in Alberta, alongside their friends, gathered not only to celebrate the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, but also to remember precious visits received long ago from a member of the Holy Family.

Hand of the Cause Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm travelled by car from Calgary to the Piikani Nation – then known as the Peigan Reserve – in May of 1960. She was welcomed into the home of Councillor Samson Knowlton, a well-loved Bahá'í and elected Band Council member. She met members of the Bahá'í Peigan Group, as well as Councillor Walter Bastien and Councillor Charlie Crow Eagle, who – regardless of his advanced age and failing health – had walked three miles to meet her.¹

More friends gathered, including Head Chief John Yellowhorn, Councillor Pat Bad Eagle and Councillor Joe Crowshoe, until the guests at the Knowlton home numbered 30 adults and about 12 children.² A Bahá'í prayer was shared along with a prayer in Blackfoot, the native language of the Peigan people.

Rúhíyyih Khánúm spoke to the crowd and offered what she called a “little rug” to Chief Yellowhorn, who

received it graciously. In the centre of the rug was woven the Greatest Name, which she explained in the following way:

“It says, ‘O Glory of the Most Glorious,’ in other words, a prayer to God that is the Highest of all high things. Brightest of all bright things. And these are words in Persian which are very beautiful and I know we all believe them. They say that all men are like the leaves on one branch and branches on one tree. The other part says we must all associate with each other with the greatest kindness. I think you believe this, and I believe it.”³

Councillor Crow Eagle then asked everyone to go outside so that they could give Rúhíyyih Khánúm a special name. Standing with her head bowed and the eldest councillors on either side of her, she prepared to receive this gift. The 1960 issue of [Canadian] Bahá'í News describes the moment her name was revealed.

“As the sun came out from behind a cloud, Councillor Crow Eagle raised his right hand and called out in his own language for the Great Spirit to come and bless this lady with a holy name.”

He named her Natu-Ocsist, meaning “Our Blessed Mother.”

After lunch, Rúhíyyih Khánúm had to return to Calgary. But her visit made a deep impact on the community she left behind.

One of those attending said, “This has been one of the most memorable days for those of us who were privileged to be on the reserve with Rúhíyyih Khánúm and the Indian people, and to hear her address the Chief and Councillors as if they were kings.”⁴

Twenty-six years later, news came that Rúhíyyih Khánúm was to return for another visit to the Peigan Reserve. Dale Lillico, who had pioneered to the area in 1959, remembered learning of Amatu'l-Bahá's long-hoped-for return:

“In April 1986, the Canadian Bahá'í community received word that Rúhíyyih Khánúm, whom the Peigans had

1 Issue No. 129 of [Canadian] Bahá'í News, 1960

2 Ibid.

3 Issue No. 129 of [Canadian] Bahá'í News, 1960

4 Ibid.



previously given the name Natu-Oksist, was returning to Canada for a visit. She wished to see her friends at Peigan again.”

This was a momentous time for the Peigan Bahá’í community. Clarence Knowlton⁵ and others were instrumental in securing a building for a Bahá’í Centre on the reserve, and what better way to commemorate it than with a visit from this beloved friend?⁶ Mrs. Lillico recalled, “It was decided this would be an ideal time to have the dedication of the Bahá’í Centre, even though the final stages were not complete. The date was set for July 20, 1986.”

Amatu’l-Bahá cut the ribbon to open the Naat owa’pii Bahá’í Centre, and the community held a pipe ceremony, which she spoke about in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada on October 28, 1986.

“I need not tell you what a profound experience the Pipe Ceremony on the Peigan Reservation was,” she wrote. “It was probably the most moving thing that happened to me in my whole trip, and one of the most moving things that happened to me in my whole life.”

This was her last visit to the Peigan Reserve. Over time, the community took a new name: the Piikani Nation.

The community moved forward, and, 31 years after her last visit, the Bahá’ís and their friends came together to celebrate the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh. Reminiscing about Rúhíyyih Khánum’s loving visits to their community lent a special significance to the gathering.

Many of those present were only children when Natu-Oksist, Hand of the Cause Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, came. And most were the family members of the original Piikani Bahá’ís.

Other attendees were the descendants of the men and women who had performed the ceremonies that Amatu’l-Bahá appreciated so deeply.

Jocelyn Bad Eagle, the daughter of Ben and Louise Whitecrow, shared some of her own family’s history with the crowd. “My parents,” she said, “had the first legally-recognized Bahá’í marriage in Canada.”

These memories permeated the celebration, which began with Elder Margarete Plain Eagle praying in Blackfoot and using the name of God repeatedly, which in that language is a multi-syllabic word. She also talked about the need to live a good life and to treat one another with respect, reminiscent of when Amatu’l-Bahá said, “We must all associate with each other with the greatest kindness,” so many years before.

Then, spontaneously, the grandson of one of the holy men who had been present during Rúhíyyih Khánum’s visits shared a Blackfoot song.

Together they read the bicentenary message from from the Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Perry Bellegarde, to the Bahá’ís of Canada which acknowledged the unity between the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh and those within First Nations communities.

The stories of Rúhíyyih Khánum’s visits and the rich history of the Bahá’ís in Piikani stirred the hearts of the friends. They were filled with the desire to continue to illuminate the community with the light of Bahá’u’lláh.

“My grandfather and grandmother were Bahá’ís here in the 60’s,” said Eddy James Bad Eagle. “So were my wife’s parents. We need to honour our families. And we want to hold Bahá’í meetings again.”

– Based on reports submitted by Joan Young and historical documents.

5 Clarence Knowlton was the son of Samson Knowlton, who was elected chief in the ‘60s and had passed away by 1986.

6 Vol. 8 issue No.7 of *Bahá’í Canada*, 1986.

Rúhíyyih Khánum first met with the friends in Peigan, Alta., in 1960 (left, photo colour altered), and again to participate in the dedication of their new Bahá’í centre in 1986 (centre, right). Photos: Canadian Bahá’í Archives





For the bicentenary, one of the tents used by Bahá'u'lláh was put on display on the grounds at Bahjí for pilgrims and visitors. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

Canada celebrates the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh

The friends across Canada – whether Bahá'ís or those from the wider community – came together with “an outpouring of love and esteem for Bahá'u'lláh.”¹ Reports streamed in from across the country, sharing how this love flowed into homes, halls, schools and centres in villages, neighbourhoods, towns and cities in every part of the nation. This has given rise to an invigorating wave of activity that is being transformed into long-term plans and a new understanding of the role Holy Days can play in community development.

We have grouped your stories into two themes: *Intimate gatherings*, which recognizes celebrations that were made profoundly more meaningful by the tender relationships developed between the participants, and *Reaching larger numbers*, where groups and individuals found their efforts confirmed when an unprecedented number of friends gathered to celebrate of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh. The following stories constitute but a droplet of the joy that has flooded the country.

¹ The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 31 October, 2017.

Intimate gatherings

"The locus of activity for the bicentenaries is to be at the local level. The House of Justice anticipates that in countless places across the world, both rural settings and urban centres, the friends will find creative ways to honour the Twin Manifestations Whose lives and sacred missions will be recalled on Their anniversaries."

– Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 18 May 2016.

These stories appear online at <bahaicanada.bahai.ca>.

Stirling, Ontario

In our rural village in Eastern Ontario, we struggled with how to befittingly recognize and celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh while also supporting our larger, cluster-wide celebration. We decided to hold a home-based dinner a few weeks before the bicentenary to provide an introduction to Bahá'u'lláh and His teachings.

We invited those from the community who had not been seen for some time: friends from Tyendinaga Mohawk Reserve, isolated Bahá'ís, new Bahá'ís still getting to know the community and a few other friends from surrounding villages and towns.

The atmosphere at this gathering was one of peaceful fellowship and celebration. Friends of the Faith were at one with long-time Bahá'ís. The light streaming through the window was a metaphor for the light that filled our souls!

– Mary Vander Dussen

Lower Cloverdale, New Brunswick

Lower Cloverdale, a small settlement near Moncton, N.B., is home to one Bahá'í couple. They decided to include nearby family members in celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh by inviting them to supper and to watch *Light to the World* in French. Seven came – six adults and one three-year-old – all of whom are Acadians and staunch members of the Roman Catholic Church. They had never had an in-depth look at the Bahá'í Faith before and said they appreciated being part of a global celebration.

Since this event, the Bahá'í couple has been motivated to continue reaching out to others in their home community.

They planned a French fireside, another film viewing with a nearby Bahá'í and his neighbour and have started studying Ruhi Institute Book 9: *Gaining an Historical Perspective*.

– Ron Sullivan

Orleans, Ontario

For over a year, a few families in the neighbourhood of Orleans, Ont. – a suburb of eastern Ottawa located on the Ottawa river – have been holding weekly devotionals in several different homes. To celebrate the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, in addition to their usual devotional, this small group of friends planned a potluck dinner and invited others to join them. Five friends from the wider community attended the celebration and were moved by “prayers of surpassing beauty that satisfy the soul’s longing to befittingly worship its Maker.”¹

– Jacquie Fildes

Hinton, Alberta

Hinton is a small city on the edge of Jasper National Park and home to a handful of Bahá'ís who describe themselves as “seniors with serious health issues.” Six months prior to the bicentenary, they started inviting people to a devotional gathering, but only a few people ever attended. For the bicentenary, they put posters up around town and personally invited people to their celebration. They rented a room in the library, put up decorations and made a birthday cake. Six Bahá'ís came along with one friend. Then, a young woman arrived whom no one knew. She was so happy to be there and asked questions throughout the entire social period, stayed to help clean up and accepted a ride home from one couple. They now have plans to follow up with her and continue teaching her about Bahá'u'lláh.

– The Hinton Bahá'í group

St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

At a gathering for the 200th anniversary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh in a local seniors complex in St. John's, about a dozen residents learned about the joy of building friendships within the centre.

The event included games, Newfoundland music and created a space for the residents to get to know each other better. They now plan to get together once a month to deepen these new friendships born out of the celebration.

– Local Spiritual Assembly of St. John's, N.F.

Hay River, Northwest Territories

To commemorate the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, the Hay River Bahá'ís hosted a gathering for 13 friends and acquaintances. Written invitations were delivered to the new Roman Catholic priest, who

¹ The Universal House of Justice to all who celebrate the Glory of God, October 2017.

is from Ghana, and to the new Anglican pastor and his wife. The priest had never heard of the Bahá'í Faith and was happy to accept a copy of the newly released magazine *The Bahá'ís*.

The group ate a lovely dinner served by their hosts and afterwards viewed the film *Light to the World*. The guests were diverse: a young Filipino student – who happily recognized her native language in the film – a young man from Africa and a man from Scotland whose wife is from the Czech Republic.

The last copies of the magazine were given out by the end of the night. To accommodate the interest shown, the group will be collaborating with Bahá'ís from Yellowknife to follow up with their newfound friends.

– Rosalee Prentice

Drayton Valley, Alberta

At my home-based celebration in Drayton Valley, Alta., I experienced a touching moment when I opened the door and found one of my invited friends holding an armful of oranges. She explained that she wanted to bring something appropriate to the event and had read that Bahá'u'lláh often brought oranges to such gatherings. The bowl of glowing oranges shone brightly on my table that day; a symbol of a friend's thoughtfulness and love.

– Colleen Proctor

Iqaluit, Nunavut

The friends in Iqaluit, Nunavut, bundled up early Saturday morning, October 21st, for a walk by the sea. Buffeted by cold winds and -25° C weather, they were carried by their prayers as they walked across the land before returning to the warmth of hot chocolate to watch the film *Light to the World*.

– Edith Sweetwater



A group of friends in Iqaluit huddles together before braving the -25° C weather to say prayers by the sea.



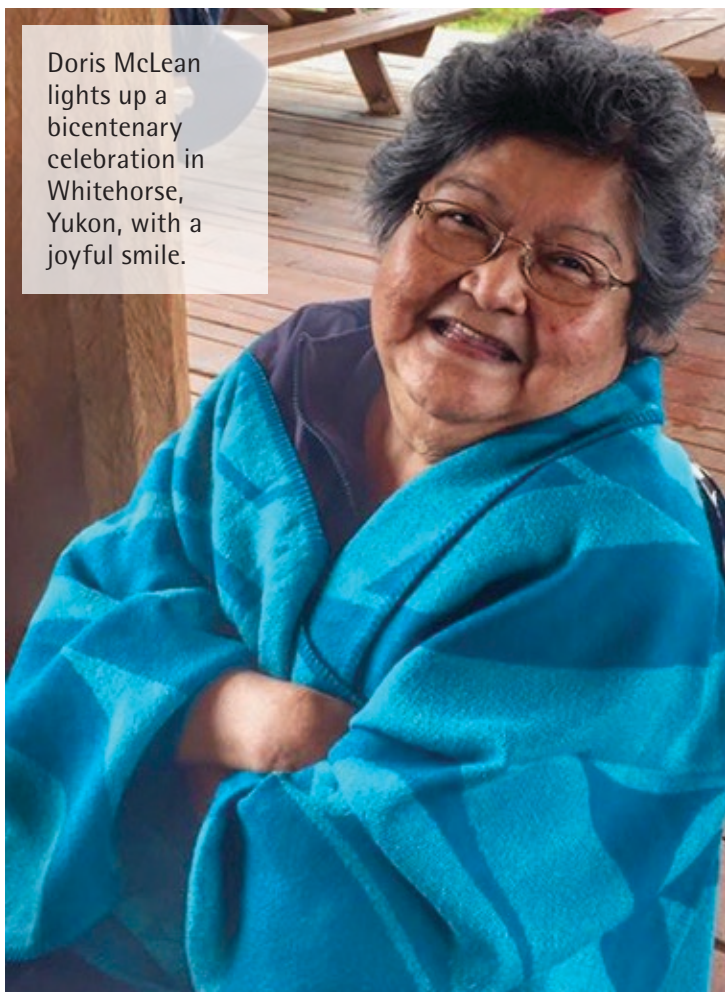
Friends in Drayton Valley, Alta., enjoy each other's company at a home-based celebration of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh. Photo: Colleen Proctor

Swift Current, Saskatchewan

Swift Current, the main city in the agricultural cluster of Palliser in Saskatchewan, became a gathering place for long-distance friends – some travelling for two hours to attend. The community invited people through emails and follow-up phone calls, booked a meeting room at a local hotel and welcomed 13 friends to the celebration.

Those who couldn't make it were not forgotten: copies of the magazine *The Bahá'ís* were distributed so that those present could take them to friends and family who weren't able to come.

– Marilyn Sargent



Doris McLean lights up a bicentenary celebration in Whitehorse, Yukon, with a joyful smile.

Reaching larger numbers

"A broader cross section of the population is being engaged in conversations, and activities are being opened up to whole groups at once—bands of friends and neighbours, troops of youth, entire families—enabling them to realize how society around them can be refashioned."

– The Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Board of Counsellors, 29 December 2015.

These stories appear online at <bahaicanada.bahai.ca>.

Montreal, Quebec

The community-building process started in the Côte-des-Neiges neighbourhood in 2010. Currently, a group of nearly 20 individuals live and serve there, including Bahá'ís as well as friends from the wider community. Together they planned a celebration for the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.

The event was the culmination of weeks of effort to undertake home visits, primarily with young people and their parents, to explore the importance of Bahá'u'lláh's message. The youth each came up with ideas of how they could contribute: by making posters for the event, ushering guests as they arrived, writing speeches about how Bahá'u'lláh's teachings have influenced their lives and reading prayers at the celebration. Adults in the community prepared meals, drove children to the event and beautified the venue. Around 130 participants attended, 70 of whom were friends of the Faith. The celebration was incredibly joyful and moving. The short speeches that were given regarding the influence of Bahá'u'lláh moved some to tears.

In his speech, one 13-year-old shared, "The junior youth group helped me to think about the meaning of life; for example, what is our purpose here on earth? It helped me establish my own identity – to know who I am and how I should act towards others. It developed my capacity to serve society and to work with others to help the community ... and showed me the importance of true friendship."

A portion of the film *Light to the World* was also shown and the event concluded with a dance featuring music from all over the world – a befitting tribute to the diversity of those in the neighbourhood. Following the bicentenary celebrations, plans were made to expand the educational process by starting study circles, a children's class and a junior youth group, accompanying friends as they arise to serve as teachers and animators. Dates for a junior youth camp and a

children's festival have been set and are in the process of being planned.

– Aayah Amir

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

Celebrating Bahá'u'lláh and His teachings gave me the motivation I needed to visit my neighbours in the community that I recently moved into.

With the help of a friend, I made a simple invitation saying, "Unity Potluck: Celebrating the vision of Bahá'u'lláh: Unity of all races, religions and cultures." We then met my neighbours over several days and invited them to the potluck.

The conversations we had during these visits transported us to another world. Those we met said that they're happy a space is being created for people to come together, while others looked forward to meeting other neighbours and creating unity. We went home flying with joy and ecstasy.

Still, before the day of the celebration, we really only thought that the neighbours and youth already involved with the junior youth program would come. Imagine our surprise when people – many of them new faces – started to stream into the apartment! We reached out to make our new friends feel comfortable and welcome. When it was time to eat, I realized three rooms were filled with more than 40 people with little space to move.

After the introductions, music and a story about the life of Bahá'u'lláh were shared. A friend also talked about the vision of Bahá'u'lláh in the context of the community-building process underway in the neighbourhood. The junior youth handed out quotations from Bahá'u'lláh. Over 30 people, one after the other, read the Words of the Blessed Beauty with wonder, tenderness and sincerity. Everyone attending was encouraged to write about how they practice unity on a sticky note and put it on the wall.

After the celebration, several friends asked for more spaces like this. The spirit was joyful, celebratory, and filled with gratitude for the vision of Bahá'u'lláh.

– Lomeharshan Lall

Belleville, Ontario

The bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh opened up opportunities for our community to reflect on what we have learned so far about connecting with new friends of the Faith. We had created bonds with people by working with like-minded organizations: volunteering with the Syrian refugee support group, the spiritual health services committee and the interfaith Quinte group. We became regulars at our local coffee shop, where we engaged others in meaningful conversations. Through these outlets we have regularly invited people to firesides, devotional gatherings and, more recently, a children's class. Inviting these friends to come celebrate the life of Bahá'u'lláh with us was a natural next step.



Prayers from different faiths are shared at the bicentenary celebration in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, a neighbourhood in Montreal, Que. Photo: Lorraine Goh

Opportunities to teach the Faith increased during this potent time. While we were setting up for our bicentenary event, my husband, Steve, went outside. He ran into a woman we hadn't seen for several years and she asked what we were doing. Steve provided a short explanation of the bicentenary and asked her to come see our preparations. They ended up having a two-hour discussion about the Faith as Steve took her through each of the Bahá'í principles posters we had put up, speaking with her about each one. That evening she came back to celebrate with us. Since then she has come to two devotional gatherings and we recently showed her our pilgrimage photos.

The evening itself was filled with happiness. We watched the film *Light to the World* and participants talked about how much it touched their hearts. One friend, our volunteer photographer, borrowed the DVD and told us she's watched it twice since the event. Afterwards, there was a devotional program with music. One of our friends brought his tabla drums and played alongside us while the words were shown on a screen so everyone could join in.

Our celebration brought so many friends together who all found different ways of recognizing the bounty of having Bahá'u'lláh in all of our lives. Right after the bicentenary, we hosted two devotional gatherings and a fireside. All of our community members are now being encouraged to host their own devotional or fireside with their friends.

We are very pleased with how well the event turned out and the response of our friends. It was the biggest event that this community has ever planned and it was amazing to see the results of the unified effort put forth by the whole cluster. We definitely feel that a new spiritual energy has been released.

– Kathy Hayman

Brandon, Manitoba

Opening up their Holy Day celebration to the public has shown the Bahá'í community of Brandon that a small number of people can achieve a great deal.

The city of Brandon has approximately 48,000 inhabitants, 20 of whom are Bahá'ís. For the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, the community decided to hold a public event and invite “a wide cross-section of society” with the goal of conveying “a sense of what it means for humanity that these two Luminaries rose above the horizon of the world.”³

Together they distributed 750 invitations and hung 200 flyers throughout the city. They placed four large banners in key locations, including at the local Greyhound bus station. They also advertised the event in the local newspaper.

The residents of Brandon responded: 100 members from the wider community joined the celebration, including their Member of Parliament, two Members of the Legislative Assembly and the Chief of Pine Creek First Nation.

Held in the city's concert hall, the program included music, a presentation on the Bahá'í Faith and dramatic performances illustrating the influence of Bahá'u'lláh on those with whom He came in contact with during His life, from fellow prisoners in the *Siyáh Chál* to Professor Edward Granville Browne.

Guests commented on the quality of the celebration, shared their appreciation for the opportunity to learn more about Bahá'u'lláh and expressed their amazement that this small Bahá'í community could organize such an event.

Emboldened by the success of their efforts, follow-up activities were immediately planned to carve an inviting path for newfound friends to join the community-building process. Potluck dinners have been arranged so that all who participated can get to know each other better. One parent said that she would like her daughter to attend children's classes and has offered to invite other children to join them. Additionally, a prominent member of the First Nations community has expressed an interest in collaborating with the Bahá'ís to work with youth in the community.

– Ali Razzaghi

³ Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 18 May 2016.

Ottawa, Ontario

Before the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, in the large suburban community of Greenboro, Ottawa, a group of homefront pioneers, alongside animators native to the neighbourhood, came together to study the October 2017 message from the Universal House of Justice.

Together they read, “On this two hundredth anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's appearance, the many who are part of this enterprise are reaching out to those around them with a simple invitation: seize this opportunity to find out who He was and what He represents.”⁴ With this guidance in mind they decided, through a series of home visits, to invite those in their neighbourhood to come together to learn about the significance of this moment.

With more than 10 elementary and secondary schools, the population of Greenboro is primarily made up of families with children. At its heart is an active community centre and library that acts as a hub for people of diverse backgrounds to come together. A variety of housing types – from low-rise apartment buildings to detached houses – are in close proximity, allowing residents to develop friendships with a wide range of people.

The bicentenary celebration took place at the local community centre in the form of an open house. Starting in the mid-afternoon and lasting for five hours, members of the community were invited to come and learn about the life of Bahá'u'lláh and how a growing number of individuals is working to practice His teachings through the core activities. In total, 80 people attended the event: 20 children, 21 junior youth, 25 youth and 14 adults. Each group found something specific to their interests. The children did an art activity; the junior youth were told about the junior youth program by others their own age; the youth were



The junior youth take a moment to memorialize their bicentenary celebration in an Ottawa, Ont. neighbourhood. Photo: Louis Burnet

informed of their important role in the institute process; and the parents were given the chance to explore the aims of the programs in which their children were involved. Everyone, of any age, was also invited to contribute to a collective art project inspired by the Writings.

The junior youth brought their friends and family – even extended family members – to learn more about the programs they participated in. Others, spending a usual day at the centre, found they were drawn to the joyful atmosphere of the event, were welcomed and given the opportunity to find out about Bahá'u'lláh.

So attractive was the message being shared that the head of the staff at the community centre began to invite people walking by to take part in the celebration. By the end of the night he had such an appreciation for the work that he said he wanted to be considered a collaborator in the community.

– Caitlin Moore

4 From the Universal House of Justice to all who celebrate the Glory of God, October 2017.



Community members in Ottawa contributed to a collaborative art project to create two wings for the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh. Photo: Caitlin Moore



A dance troupe performs for a bicentenary celebration in West Hants, N.S., for a crowd of friends and family.

West Hants, Nova Scotia

The friends in West Hants, a large rural community in central Nova Scotia, found that people – especially children – are willing to participate in events when asked.

One of the Bahá'ís invited her child's dance troupe to come perform at their bicentenary celebration. As a result, not only did the children come, but so did their parents and friends. Their dance teacher, who choreographed the routine, also attended. Forty friends of all ages gathered – about half of whom were friends of the Faith – to pray, learn about the community, share food and see the dancers perform. Together they delighted in celebrating

Bahá'u'lláh's birth. The community now has plans to share the Faith with a growing circle of friends.

They later reflected that although there was some reticence in inviting others, they discovered that it was easier than initially thought. They are now looking for more opportunities to speak of the Faith.

– The Spiritual Assembly of West Hants, N.S.

London, Ontario

Kipps Lane, the focus neighbourhood of London, played host to an unexpectedly large celebration after those serving in the neighbourhood conducted a series of home visits to the families they knew.

For over a month the animators and children's class teachers visited each family and spoke with them about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh and the significance of the bicentenary of His birth. Together, the parents and teachers deepened on His teachings for humanity and spoke about the oneness of mankind. Meanwhile, their children prepared for how they wanted to contribute to the celebrations.

Many Nepalese refugees have made Kipps Lane their home and these families have been increasingly involved in various activities over the last two years. More recently, there has also been an influx of refugees from Arab countries. The cultural backgrounds of those involved shone through in their celebration of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.

The event, held in the school's auditorium, welcomed about 150 people and was a display of the unity envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh. The junior youth performed Nepalese dancing, the children sang songs and some friends performed Arabic drumming. Each presentation



A children's class encourages the crowd to celebrate friendship at a bicentenary gathering in London, Ont.

was introduced in the context of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, allowing families to learn more about the life of Bahá'u'lláh through historical readings, Writings and clips from the film *Light to the World*.

"We were all very surprised at the number of families that showed up. People invited their family and friends to the celebration, so there were quite a few new faces," wrote one of the junior youth animators in her report. "Of course, the fact that the program involved the children and junior youth increased participation from their families as well."

Many of the guests said that they were impressed at the level of organization. Now, those serving in the neighbourhood are following up with each family to hold screenings of *Light to the World* and invite them to start new study circles.

– Azeen Moradipour

Toronto, Ontario

Irاندokht Laghai had been living at the Kipling Acres Long Term Care facility in the Etobicoke area of Toronto for a few months when it came time to plan for a bicentenary celebration. Her family decided to hold one in the facility's large gathering space and invite the residents to the occasion. The idea was supported by the Bahá'ís in Etobicoke and a group of four formed a planning committee.

On Saturday, October 21st, the chaplain and spiritual coordinator of Kipling Acres welcomed 50-60 residents, volunteers and community members to an afternoon celebration, which included a talk by a community member and singing by the local Bahá'í children's class. This was followed by the enjoyment of a beautiful cake and apple juice. It was truly a joint effort!

– Mona Muronji



Elder Ida Calmagane shares a prayer with the friends at a celebration hosted by the First Nations Bahá'ís in Whitehorse, Yukon.

Baie D'Urfé, Quebec

The Baie D'Urfé community started the bicentennial period with a "Unity Writing Festival," which was organized in collaboration with a local librarian from the wider community. Grade 6 students at three local schools were invited to consider different aspects of the theme of unity – for example, unity in the family, the community, the nation, the world, and between different races, cultures and genders – in light of eight Bahá'í quotations. They were then asked to express their thoughts in the form of a 300-word essay. In total, 48 entries were received, and of these 14 selected for a reading festival at the town's library, which was attended predominantly by the parents and friends of the readers.

– Dr. Merryll Hammond



Fourteen students were selected to present their essays on unity at a Baie-D'Urfé, Que., bicentenary celebration.

St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

More than 160 people gathered in The Rooms cultural centre in St. John's to celebrate the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh. The majority of the attendees were friends of the Faith, invited by local Bahá'ís, including senior representatives of several faith communities and immigrant groups.

Greetings from the Lieutenant-Governor of Newfoundland and Labrador, His Honour Frank F. Fagan, were shared with the gathering. The event itself comprised an overview and celebration of the life and mission of Bahá'u'lláh, focusing on His teachings about the oneness of humanity.

The idea of the unity of peoples and cultures was reflected in two special prayers shared that evening. The celebration opened with a prayer in Inuktitut by an Inuit Bahá'í, who signaled the start and finish of the prayer with drumbeats. The night then closed with the chanting of a prayer by a local Persian Bahá'í.

In between, it was a night for the arts. There were performances by a newly-formed Interfaith Choir, a local

classical pianist, and displays of visual arts created by members of the Bahá'í community. These complemented dramatic readings about periods from Bahá'u'lláh's life as well as excerpts from His Writings.

Surrounded by the war memorials that fill The Rooms to remember those who were lost during the First World War, the presenters took time to reflect on what effect the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh could have had on Newfoundland and Labrador had they been accepted worldwide at the time of His proclamation.

Presenter Harry Connors said the challenge to change hearts and communities now falls to all peoples directly: "This is our blessing now, conferred upon each one of us, to achieve personal spiritual growth, to transform our neighbourhoods and societies."

Afterwards, those now connected to Bahá'u'lláh were invited to view the film *Light to the World* the following evening to deepen further on His life and mission for humanity.

– Local Spiritual Assembly of St. John's, N.F.

Friends of every generation met at the home of Beverley Davis in Toronto, Ont., to celebrate the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.





From Across Canada

A Montreal Bahá'í reflects on how hosting a neighbourhood celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh changed her attitude towards commemorating Holy Days at the local level.

A colourful sign welcomes guests to a bicentenary celebration in Mornelle, a neighbourhood in Toronto, Ont.
Photo: Arian Monadjem

The warmth of a neighbourhood celebration

This story appears online at <bahaicanada.bahai.ca>.

During the final days preceding the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, as images of diverse celebrations around the world appeared online, I had a moment of doubt about organizing the celebration in my neighbourhood.

I live in Montreal, in a neighbourhood full of young families. We have a wonderful children's class, but it has not expanded in some time. Although I know many families, involving them in our activities on a regular basis has been a challenge.

On the other hand, our Bahá'í community life has greatly intensified in the last few years. The number of people attending the Nineteen Day Feast has increased, our bonds of friendship have strengthened and our Holy Day celebrations have become more joyful and artistic.

I am not fond of large gatherings, so for the bicentenary I planned to hold a simple neighbourhood celebration in my living room. However, as the day approached, I began to worry that we might not be fittingly honouring the significance of the day. Should we have rented a hall? Planned it on a larger scale? Invited dozens more people? Organized a longer program that included viewing the film *Light to the World*?

It was a beautiful way for me to present the Faith directly to my friends, to share with them the love of Bahá'u'lláh and to rekindle my desire to place service at the centre of our lives.

I have three young children, and with the work this entails, I often feel overwhelmed. Nevertheless, when I saw the magnificence of the events taking place around the world, I questioned whether I should be doing more.

Then the day of the celebration came. The children were so excited. We started making apple pies at 7:30 a.m., the boys got out their best shirts and an hour later friends started arriving to prepare the space, install the stage for the puppet show, and organize the reception. Some brought roses, one took charge of the meal in honour of a dear friend who had recently passed away, while yet another brought drinks. The children's class participants had made a poster on which they glued 200 hearts, which was displayed prominently by the door.

Our living room gradually filled with children, adults, neighbours and friends. The diversity of ages, origins and religious backgrounds

represented illuminated the space. I fretted that we did not have enough chairs. Why had we not held it at a friend's much larger house? Would people be comfortable?

Then the prayers began. A beautiful puppet show dramatizing the story of the dream of Bahá'u'lláh's father captivated the children and adults alike. Following the show, the children happily engaged in a drawing activity while the adults spoke in more depth about the coming of Bahá'u'lláh and the significance of His teachings for humanity.

Approximately 50 people gathered in our home to celebrate Bahá'u'lláh that day. I had difficulty containing the emotions I felt, and I don't think I was the only one.

The children soon returned to sing "We Are Drops" and "So Powerful is the Light of Unity" with such enthusiasm that they personified the words they sang. And just as they finished their presentation, a beautiful Persian meal was served to the great delight of our guests.

I could not have dreamed of a more dignified celebration of Bahá'u'lláh and what He has brought to my life, my marriage and my family. It felt like the spirit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was present and that He was delighted at the sight of the friends assembled in unity and happiness through the power of the Faith. I have never experienced such a celebration. I really felt that the spirit was different from any other I have attended. Were we moved by the reports of other celebrations around the world? Was there something different in the air?

It was a beautiful way for me to present the Faith directly to my friends, to share with them the love of Bahá'u'lláh and to rekindle my desire to place service at the centre of our lives. In my neighbourhood we organized a celebration that mirrored the warm, family-oriented and open spirit of our community, and this was the key to its success.

– Justine Rastello-Gralepois



Children at the celebration carry out an art activity.

Opening doors through the arts

The community of Victoria, B.C. had a resoundingly positive response to a play that presented concepts from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, reminiscent of Shoghi Effendi's statement that "Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the people."¹

Victoria, the beautiful capital city of British Columbia, is home to 86,000 people of diverse backgrounds. Many new immigrants, refugees and foreign students commingle with young families, business professionals and retirees as well as the original inhabitants: the Coast Salish First Nations.

For the 200th anniversary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, the Victoria Bahá'í Community hosted a variety of small family and neighbourhood-based celebrations. They also rallied around a more formal artistic evening: a play commissioned by the Local Spiritual Assembly. This prompted them to further reach out "to all those with whom they share a connection."²

The play, titled *The Gathering*, was directed by Victoria resident Laura Lee and performed at Glenlyon Norfolk School Theatre in Victoria on the 20th and 21st of October. Approximately 650 people attended over the two nights, including a diverse mix of children, youth and adults from across the



The play features two youth, played by Kate-la Hanuse and Gabriel Paul, who explore questions about the meaning of existence and their purpose in it.

city. A third performance, held in Sidney, B.C., was attended by over 150 Bahá'ís and their guests.

Drawing inspiration from a traditional Hopi legend and the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the play, Ms. Lee explains, is meant to affirm "our origins as one human family and offer a glimpse of our noble destiny." The plot follows an Indigenous youth searching for the meaning of existence and his purpose in it. His questions are answered through the tales of his grandmother, which come to life through visuals, music and dance. The concept that humanity is undergoing a period of turbulent adolescence parallels the journey of the youth in the drama. The play also explores other Bahá'í themes, including progressive revelation and the independent investigation of truth.

The production featured First Nations actors, including 14-year-old Gabriel Paul and 15-year-old Kate-la Hanuse, as well as Deloria Bighorn, who played the part of the grandmother. Of the 18 main actors, singers, dancers and musicians who participated in the production, only two were Bahá'ís. A Bahá'í

community choir was also formed to contribute to the music.

Intensive effort was directed toward inviting those from the wider community. Community member Katya Naragi, for instance, invited friends attending her Ruhi study circle, devotional, those she home-visits, her medical care team, personal friends and new acquaintances who showed an interest in the Faith. She also challenged herself to invite dignitaries from the community.

"Each invitation led to a moving and uplifting conversation about the teachings and the life of Bahá'u'lláh," she explained. "The fact that this play was woven into the origins of the people here gave it credibility and an acceptance that I had not felt before."

Victoria resident Mona Shariarty shared that, of the 70 people her family invited to the play, 55 attended. All felt honoured by the invitation. Young people seemed to be particularly engaged. "Right after the play one family continued to ask questions about progressive revelation," she shared. "Their 13-year-old daughter had also attended and they felt that the

¹ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 10 October 1932.

² Department of the Secretariat, The Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 18 May 2016.

questions asked during the play are essential for youth her age.”

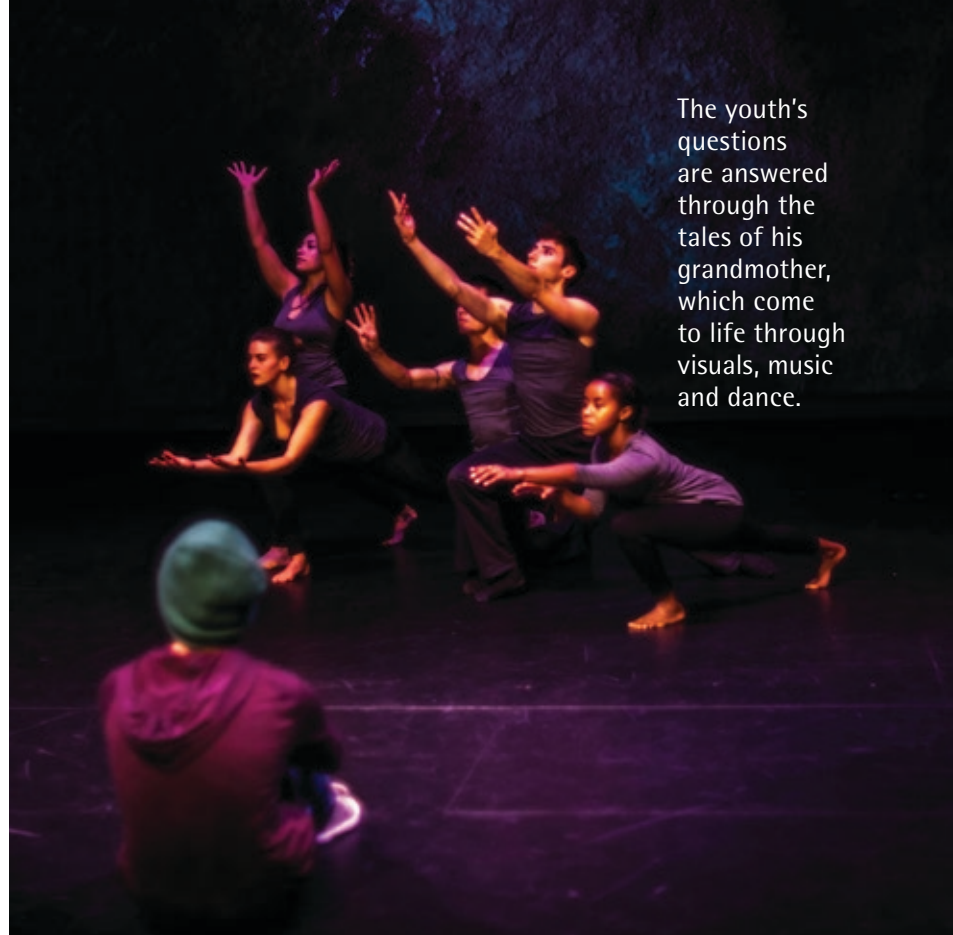
Speaking of her contacts who had attended, Ms. Naragil said, “Each separately and on different occasions said they understood the teachings in a new light because of this event. This way of showing the universality of Bahá’u’lláh’s message and covering many deep questions was beautiful and moving.”

The power of the arts in aiding understanding was clearly apparent. One guest said that she was shocked when the grandmother in the play said that Bahá’u’lláh was the fulfillment of every promise and prophecy of past traditions. The individual who invited her reflected, “In all our gatherings, we’d never mentioned that little fact. So many details recounted, and we’d missed the spiritual heart of the Revelation! Thank goodness for the arts. They do what they do so well: in context, joyfully and gently.”

Community members continued to follow up with those who had attended the play, in many cases conversing over coffee or dinner. These and other events contributed to the goal of 95 home visits, firesides or devotional gatherings set by the Local Spiritual Assembly to be achieved from the close of the bicentenary up to the Day of the Covenant. Some were extended invitations to a local theatre where over 100 people viewed the film *Light to the World*.

In her case, Ms. Naragil purchased 14 copies of the newly-published magazine *The Bahá’ís* and brought them to each of her friends who had either attended the play or expressed an interest in attending. They all received it with eagerness. “This ingenious little play,” she later commented, “opened so many doors and so many hearts.”

Following the performances, a meal was organized to express



The youth's questions are answered through the tales of his grandmother, which come to life through visuals, music and dance.

gratitude to the youth and adult artists who gave their time to the project and to reflect with them on the experience. There were many insightful comments about the short but intense journey of preparing for the performances. Notable was the sense of community that everyone felt throughout the process. The mother of one of the youth actors spoke from the heart of her gratitude for the warm welcome the Bahá’í community extended to her and her son during the month of rehearsals.

One audience member seemed to sum up the thoughts of many in commenting, “It was the highlight of 2017 for me.”

– Anisa Skuce-Newell

Twin Manifestations

The cries of countless hearts around the world
The human dawn-chorus
for “The Day Star of the Universe”

How intense the rising heat -
Restless agitation in every corner of the globe
The quickening
pace of everything

One flash of lightning is enough
to turn night into day
Two Suns have ended all nights

The curtains are drawn
go to the window
and see for yourself

– Ashraf Rushdy

Changeless splendour



"Hear Me, ye mortal birds! In the Rose Garden of changeless splendor a Flower hath begun to bloom, compared to which every other flower is but a thorn, and before the brightness of Whose glory the very essence of beauty must pale and wither. Arise, therefore, and, with the whole enthusiasm of your hearts, with all the eagerness of your souls, the full fervor of your will, and the concentrated efforts of your entire being, strive to attain the paradise of His presence, and endeavor to inhale the fragrance of the incorruptible Flower, to breathe the sweet savors of holiness, and to obtain a portion of this perfume of celestial glory."

– Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 320-321.

"Changeless Splendor" by Reza Mostmand. Ink on paper with Persian calligraphy.



The joy of friendship found expression through music at a bicentenary celebration in Toronto, Ont. Photo: Arian Monadjem

A test of unity

An animator from a Toronto neighbourhood shares the story of how a crisis of unity led to a stronger and more united junior youth group just in time for the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.

This story appears online at bahaicanada.bahai.ca.

A few weeks before the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, our junior youth group faced such a crisis of unity that it felt like the group was going to fall apart.

There were two incidents and both were conflicts between members that became conflicts between parents. It all happened within a week's time and right before we were planning to invite everyone to a neighbourhood celebration. We felt discouraged in the face of such disunity, but placed our reliance in the special nature of this time and prayed for a spiritual army of support to come to our aid.

We started by having a long visit with the parents, and looked at what capacities the junior youth needed to strengthen to resolve the conflict – the ability to share how they felt, as

well as compassion and forgiveness. This discussion seemed to be exactly what was needed.

“...it feels like the bicentenary brought new life to our neighbourhood.”

Soon this visit, which evolved over six hours, turned into a family consultation. The junior youth and even their siblings joined in to discuss how to bring the group back together. We prayed to God and asked for His assistance. As we met, talked and prayed, things became clearer. The families involved even decided to meet one another to support the junior youth through these challenges.

Our prayers were soon realized: the junior youth reunited. The parents rejoiced in their children's newfound capacities and we were incredibly encouraged by the nature of the friendships blossoming out of this experience. Not only were the junior youth more united, but we became significantly closer with the parents – true partners working to

accompany their children through this challenging stage of life. The door was finally open to joyfully invite everyone to come together to celebrate the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.

On the day of the event, the junior youth arrived hours early to help set up. Of their own volition, they arranged the entire potluck dinner and offered to serve everyone. Many of the parents said they were impressed with the behaviour of the group and that they could feel the spirit of unity filling the room. Others from the neighbourhood commented on how beautifully the group's true nature was shining that night.

The group eagerly decided to use their newfound knack for hospitality to organize a party for another junior youth group and children's class in the area. Those of us serving as animators can't wait to nurture our newly-strengthened friendships with these families.

Looking back, it feels like the bicentenary brought new life to our neighbourhood. The unity of our group was intensely tested and it was, truthfully, quite painful to experience. But now we are able to see the wisdom of these tests and the power of unity that was released as a result.

Twin Luminaries

The two circles are characteristic of the Sun on the horizon leading humanity to light, each encompassing a piece of Bahá'í history. The blue represents the vast ocean in which Bahá'u'lláh's father dreamt of Him with fish upon His locks of hair and the green is inspired by the green turban worn by the Báb as a radiant youth.



"Twin Luminaries" by Melenya Bighorn. Created on thick paper with ink, acrylic paint, watercolour, gel pens and set with epoxy resin.

In remembrance of a friend

In Iqaluit, Nunavut, a junior youth group's service project in honour of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh also paid tribute to a dear friend who had recently passed away.

At 6 p.m. on October 20th, 50 sandwiches and 50 dessert plates were lined up and ready to go. There were four choices of sandwich: turkey, ham, beef and vegetarian, with pickles and raw carrots on the side. Each dessert plate had a selection of Rice Crispy squares, brownies and chocolate chip cookies, with a choice of coffee or juice to go.

Twenty minutes later, the first two taxi drivers came in for their specially-prepared sandwich dinner.

Let me back up a bit.

A very special woman, Beth McKenty, came to Iqaluit in the '90s and lived here for about 14 years, offering a safe haven to many of the local children in the form of art classes. Her program grew and grew until she was offering it all over Nunavut. In 2009 she received the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award for her service to children.

Ms. McKenty took taxis all over town. In the taxi drivers, she recognized fellow frontline workers: people who were of service, day and night, to everybody. She recognized the same look of loss and loneliness: like her, many had left loved ones far away.

Every Christmas Eve – at a time when being away from family hurt so much – she made a sandwich and cookie plate for the taxi drivers to thank them for their service to her and to the community. They would pass by her house at any time between 8 p.m. and midnight on their shift to pick up the plate and spend some time with Ms. McKenty.



Two taxi drivers receive a meal as part of a junior youth service project in Iqaluit, Nunavut.

This lovely woman left Iqaluit some five years ago. She passed on to the Abhá Kingdom on September 22, 2017.

When our nascent junior youth and youth groups heard this story, they decided that their act of service – in honour of the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh – would mirror Ms. McKenty's gracious taxi sandwich service. With generous donations from Rankin Inlet, local parents and Bahá'ís, we made sandwich after sandwich. A small photo of Ms. McKenty was attached to each plate, along with a handwritten note from the youth thanking the taxi drivers for what they do.

The first two taxi drivers remembered Ms. McKenty. They were thankful for the opportunity to honour her, speak of her and receive the food from the youth group. Every other taxi driver entered the house with

trepidation. Why were we doing this? Was it to raise money? Were we trying to trick them into becoming Bahá'í? All of the children and all of the adults who were there eloquently, simply and gracefully answered questions and passed out sandwiches. One fellow spent 30 minutes at the house – at his busiest time of night – asking question after question after question. He left with a big smile on his face.

All of the youth (and everyone else) had a great time doing this – so much so that they want to do it again for Ayyám-i-Há. The only change that they would make was with the pickles. It was too hard to dig 'em out of the jar. Next time, they will pour 'em out of the jar into a sieve. Much easier!

– Edith Sweetwater



Afia VanHorne, Nathalie Thirlwall and Elham Seddigh Ayafor present two blocks from the quilt they helped make for the bicentenary. Photo: Stephen Thirlwall

A creative gift

Nathalie Thirlwall describes how a group of ten women in Ottawa, devoted months of effort to creating a quilt that expresses their love for the Blessed Beauty.

Before the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, the consultation at one of our sector feasts focused on exploring what we could do to honour this momentous occasion. As a quilter, it seemed appropriate to create a quilt. I invited others to participate in this project, resulting in nine of us who wanted to sew: Shahnaz Adnani, Elham Ayafor, Catherine Carry, Jacquie Fildes, Katja Gillmore, Sima Mostaghim, Nazila Salmanzadeh, Afia VanHorne and myself, as well as Susan Ward, who offered to iron – an important part of the quilting process.

A simple design consisting of nine eight-pointed stars was chosen. The quilt was created using 22 different hand-dyed batik fabrics in shades of turquoise and mauve, reminiscent of hues found in the

Holy Land, nestled on a mottled cream background. As Ruhi Institute Book 10: *Building Vibrant Communities* affirms, advancing as a community requires accompanying one another. Most of the women had no experience with quilting, so each person sewed one block of the quilt under my guidance. Once the blocks were combined, I stitched intricate patterns of roses, fleur-de-lis, lotus flowers and a single nightingale using thread ordered from Italy.

Between the 10 of us, approximately 400 hours of work went into creating the quilt.

We worked at the Ottawa Bahá'í Centre and my home. In an effort to strive for excellence, great care was taken in sewing. When corrections

were necessary, portions were taken apart and re-sewn to ensure that edges matched up and all the stars had sharp points. Between the 10 of us, approximately 400 hours of work went into creating the quilt.

Upon completion, we gifted the quilt to our Local Spiritual Assembly and community in honour of Bahá'u'lláh's bicentennial birthday. We named it "Seek and Ye Shall Find," and it is now on display in the Ottawa Bahá'í Centre. We also plan to show it at a quilt guild exhibition along with a description of why it was created.

Some qualities and attitudes demonstrated by those involved in the project include patience, a humble posture of learning, perseverance, creativity, precision, and of course, joy. Through our efforts, we have all developed a more profound appreciation of artistic workmanship. Our common desire to express our love for the Blessed Beauty in a creative manner bound us closer together, like the blocks of one quilt.

– Nathalie Thirlwall

There will be no more darkness

There will be no more darkness
The time has come, the day is here.

Darkness has been turned into light by the splendour of
Two brilliant, radiant Luminaries
Leading humanity forward along its path of destiny.

Two brilliant Orbs
Shining Their Light, Proclaiming Their Divine message
For all of humanity to see and hear.

Their spiritual radiance illuminating,
Calling on each and everyone to join Them
In enveloping the entire planet
With peace, love and joy.

They have reached every corner of this earth,
Every rock, plant and heart.

Hear Their message, gladden Their hearts
By turning to Them.

Immerse yourselves in the wonder of this time
When this God-given gift
Of joy, peace and love surrounds each of you,
Surrounds us all.

Take this gift, this moment in time,
Let your spirit soar, let your heart lead you to ensure
There will be no more darkness.

– Sheila Idoine

Lessons from the bicentenary

A junior youth stays home from school to bake a cake for Bahá'u'lláh; the Local Spiritual Assembly plans for a large celebration; a young family finds courage by inviting friends to their children's party. Through examples such as these, the cluster of Prince Edward Island reflects on several capacities they developed during the bicentenary period, as well as a few attitudes they left behind.



The children, parents and friends at a celebration in Charlottetown, P.E.I. work together to create colourful and vibrant memories for the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh.

Photo: Paul Vreeland

The community of Prince Edward Island, consisting of 104 Bahá'ís, held 30 individual bicentenary events between the 14th and 29th of October. Over 450 friends of the Faith participated - some of whom took a lead in organizing the celebrations. Events varied from a large "Unity of Humanity Gala," a photography exhibit in a gallery space, a traditional Mi'kmaq sweat lodge ceremony held on Lennox Island, a storytelling evening, gatherings to view the film *Light to the World* and several potluck events.

Two weeks after this flurry of celebrations, community members came together for a reflection meeting. They gathered to discuss the capacities that they had developed during this potent time and how these could be further used to advance the community-building work. They identified over 20 capacities, including speaking about Bahá'u'lláh, drawing on the power of the arts, accompanying a list of contacts, encouraging a diversity of ideas and supporting one another in their efforts.

One capacity – the ability to invite friends freely to events, without being inhibited by fears of rejection –

When they thought of their efforts as an offering of love to Bahá'u'lláh, making an effort seemed more important than the results, and this attitude seemed to attract confirmations.

proved particularly important, and the friends found that this attitude of detachment led to increased participation. In one instance, a few friends had invited families with small children to a gathering at the Bahá'í Centre, without knowing if anyone would attend. Yet, when the day arrived, more and more people streamed in, leading to a total of 44

participants. When they thought of their efforts as an offering of love to Bahá'u'lláh, making an effort seemed more important than the results, and this attitude seemed to attract confirmations.

The capacity to help others take ownership, which in some cases involves relinquishing ownership oneself, was another profound learning that the community feels will permeate future Holy Day celebrations, especially in neighbourhoods. One instance involved a young person who has been participating in a junior youth group for about two years. He lives with his grandmother. In the beginning, the group was small and sometimes he was the only one to attend sessions. Regardless, his animators would faithfully pick him up from his school every week and engage him in meaningful discussions. Over time, the junior youth group grew in membership, and as the bicentenary of Bahá'u'lláh's birth approached, they embraced their role in planning a celebration.

Unbeknownst to his animators – though hopefully not to his dear grandmother – the day before their planned bicentenary event, this youth stayed home from school.

Jasmine Michel practices the musical piece she planned to contribute to a bicentenary celebration in Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Photo: Paul Vreeland



He wanted to bake a cake for the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh. Unfortunately, as can happen when developing new capacities, his first attempt failed. But he tried again and baked another, much more satisfactory, creation.

The next day he proudly brought the cake to the group's bicentenary event. His animators were pleasantly surprised when he presented them with a beautiful blue and gold cake, decorated with the Bahá'í ringstone symbol and a border of roses. They were curious as to how he came to include the symbol on the cake as its meaning wasn't something that they had previously discussed. His simple answer was that he had seen it on the lectern at the Bahá'í Centre and thought that it would be a good thing to include on the cake.

He wasn't the only youth to take ownership of the celebration. Another made a list of what needed to be organized on the day of the event and diligently ensured that everything was carried out. And

when still another junior youth noticed that no drinks had been purchased, he gave their driver money so that he could go and buy them. Through many examples such as these, the Bahá'í community learned how to entrust ownership of neighbourhood Holy Day celebrations to a growing number of collaborators.

The community also made great progress in overcoming the oft-perceived dichotomy between small gatherings and large events. Since there were so many smaller gatherings planned in Charlottetown, there were some concerns that very few people would attend the large gala organized by the Local Spiritual Assembly. However, the opposite came true: the community found that smaller events during the week leading up to the bicentenary weekend helped new contacts gain a foundation of understanding, carving a path for them to attend larger gatherings that would have otherwise lacked

context. The sheer mosaic of events also made reaching a large cross-section of society possible, as some were geared toward those who were hearing of Bahá'u'lláh for the first time, while others primarily focused on those involved in community-building activities.

Following the resounding response of the wider community to celebrating the Twin Birthdays, the cluster agencies have begun to plan future expansion phases around upcoming Holy Days, as they noted that often at least one Holy Day falls within each cycle. This has helped the community to think about Holy Days as an integral component of the community-building process and as opportunities to expand their nucleus of friends. This is now part of the community's strategy for the cycles leading up to the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb in 2019.

– Based on an interview with
Alanna Vreeland

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Contribute to the Funds of the Faith through the Treasurer of your Local Assembly, the Regional Bahá'í Council in your area, or online at www.bahai-funds.ca. You can also donate through the National Spiritual Assembly. In this case, kindly make your cheque payable to "Canadian Bahá'í Fund" and mail it to:

The Treasury Department, Bahá'í National Centre,
7200 Leslie Street Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8.

The major Funds of the Faith to which one can make contributions are:

The Local Fund (only through a Local Spiritual Assembly or online)

The National Fund

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The Wilmette House of Worship Fund

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Or contact:

University of Toronto

Press Distribution

Phone: 1-800-565-9523 or 416-667-7791

In the event that the title you are looking for is not available, contact the Bahá'í Distribution Service:

Email: bds-admin@cdnbnc.org

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Online catalogue:

<http://bookstore.bahai.ca/sdb-catalogue.pdf>

To travel teach or pioneer within Canada or internationally,

contact the Pioneer Desk at pioneer@cdnbnc.org or 905-889-8168.

To change your address, please notify your Local Spiritual Assembly, Regional Council or the Records Department of the National Spiritual Assembly, providing your name, old address, new address and your Bahá'í ID number to: Records Department,

Bahá'í National Centre,
7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8;
Phone: 905-889-8168; Fax: 905-889-8184;
Email: records@cdnbnc.org.

To request international credentials from the Bahá'í National Centre when planning to visit countries other than the United States, contact the Records Department: 7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8;
Phone 905-889-8168; Fax: 905-889-8184;
Email: records@cdnbnc.org.

Pilgrimage requests (nine-day pilgrimage or three-day visit) are to be made directly to the Bahá'í World Centre through the Bahá'í Pilgrimage Website <http://pilgrimage.bahai.org> or by post or fax: Office of Pilgrimage, PO Box 155, 3100101, Haifa, Israel;
Fax: 011-972-4-835-8507.

Getting married? Getting married? A Bahá'í wedding cannot take place without the authorization of a Local Spiritual Assembly. Please contact, as early as possible, the Local Assembly in whose jurisdiction the wedding will take place. The Records Department at records@cdnbnc.org can provide you with the necessary contact details.

Submit news, photos, etc. to Bahá'í Canada through email bcanada@cdnbnc.org or mail to 7200 Leslie St., Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8. Items submitted to *Bahá'í Canada* are considered for publication online and in the magazine

The Right of God ~ Ḥuqúqu'lláh

"Ḥuqúqu'lláh is indeed a great law. It is incumbent upon all to make this offering, because it is the source of grace, abundance, and of all good. It is a bounty which shall remain with every soul in every world of the worlds of God, the All-Possessing, the All-Bountiful." – Bahá'u'lláh, Ḥuqúqu'lláh – *The Right of God*, p.5.

ḤUQÚQU'LLÁH PAYMENT INFORMATION

In response to guidance from the International Board of Trustees, the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Canada has set up a centralized system of receiving and recording of payments at the Treasury Department of the Bahá'í National Centre. Payments of the Right of God (Ḥuqúqu'lláh) are not processed through individual Deputies or Representatives.

Payments should be sent directly to the Ḥuqúqu'lláh Treasury at the Bahá'í National Centre, 7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8. The Ḥuqúqu'lláh Treasury will issue one receipt, which will serve both as an acknowledgment receipt and as an official tax receipt. It is up to the individual to determine whether or not she/he wishes to use the receipt when filing her/his income tax return. Cheques, bank drafts, bank and/or postal money orders should be made payable to "Canadian Bahá'í Fund" earmarked "Ḥuqúqu'lláh" or "Right of God." Payments to the Right of God can also be made utilizing the <www.bahai-funds.ca> Online Contribution System. The individual's Bahá'í identification number must be provided on all payments.

Payments should not be made through a Local Spiritual Assembly.

Inquiries regarding the law of the Right of God (Ḥuqúqu'lláh) should be directed to your nearest Representative or Deputee Trustee.

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