



BAHÁ'Í CANADA

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Weaving together a life of service

From the Writings

The third Tajallís concerning arts, crafts and sciences. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world. Unto this beareth witness the Mother Book on the day of His return. Happy are those possessed of a hearing ear. In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him. Thus hath the Tongue of Grandeur spoken in this Most Great Prison. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tajalliyát, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*

O peoples of the world! Forsake all evil, hold fast that which is good. Strive to be shining examples unto all mankind, and true reminders of the virtues of God amidst men. 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. Dissipate not the wealth of your precious lives in the pursuit of evil and corrupt affection, nor let your endeavors be spent in promoting your personal interest. Be generous in your days of plenty, and be patient in the hour of loss. Adversity is followed by success and rejoicings follow woe. Guard against idleness and sloth, and cling unto that which profiteth mankind, whether young or old, whether high or low. Beware lest ye sow tares of dissension among men or plant thorns of doubt in pure and radiant hearts. Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawh-i-Hikmat, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*

The source of all glory is acceptance of whatsoever the Lord hath bestowed, and contentment with that which God hath ordained.

The essence of love is for man to turn his heart to the Beloved One, and sever himself from all else but Him, and desire naught save that which is the desire of his Lord.

True remembrance is to make mention of the Lord, the All-Praised, and forget aught else beside Him.

True reliance is for the servant to pursue his profession and calling in this world, to hold fast unto the Lord, to seek naught but His grace, inasmuch as in His Hands is the destiny of all His servants.

The essence of detachment is for man to turn his face towards the courts of the Lord, to enter His Presence, behold His Countenance, and stand as witness before Him.

The essence of understanding is to testify to one's poverty, and submit to the Will of the Lord, the Sovereign, the Gracious, the All-Powerful.

The source of courage and power is the promotion of the Word of God, and steadfastness in His Love.

The essence of charity is for the servant to recount the blessings of his Lord, and to render thanks unto Him at all times and under all conditions.

The essence of faith is fewness of words and abundance of deeds; he whose words exceed his deeds, know verily his death is better than his life.

The essence of true safety is to observe silence, to look at the end of things and to renounce the world.

The beginning of magnanimity is when man expendeth his wealth on himself, on his family and on the poor among his brethren in his Faith.

The essence of wealth is love for Me; whoso loveth Me is the possessor of all things, and he that loveth Me not is indeed of the poor and needy. This is that which the Finger of Glory and Splendor hath revealed.

The source of all evil is for man to turn away from his Lord and set his heart on things ungodly.

The most burning fire is to question the signs of God, to dispute idly that which He hath revealed, to deny Him and carry one's self proudly before Him.

The source of all learning is the knowledge of God, exalted be His glory, and this cannot be attained save through the knowledge of His Divine Manifestation.

The essence of abasement is to pass out from under the shadow of the Merciful and seek the shelter of the Evil One.

The source of error is to disbelieve in the One true God, rely upon aught else but Him, and flee from His Decree.

True loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self.

The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye.

Thus have We instructed thee, manifested unto thee Words of Wisdom, that thou mayest be thankful unto the Lord, thy God, and glory therein amidst all peoples.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Asl-i-Kullu'l-Khayr, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*

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Contents

Universal House of Justice	4
Riḍván Message	
Election of the Universal House of Justice	
Regarding the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb	
Dedication of the Bahá'í Temple in Norte del Cauca, Colombia	
National Spiritual Assembly	10
Regarding the Community Properties Fund	
A Message to the Bahá'ís of Canada	
Historic property development	
"A Widening Embrace" film now available	
Election of the National Spiritual Assembly	
National Convention	16
A message from the Continental Board of Trustees for Ḥuqúqu'lláh to the delegates of National Convention 2018	
From the delegates to the Universal House of Justice	
Response to the 2018 National Convention letter	
About this Issue	19
From the History of the Faith	20
Reflecting on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's youth	
A revolution of identity: The Montreal Youth Group	
Feature	28
Youth reflect on taking a period of service	
From Across Canada	33
Canada's 70th National Convention	
"The Fund is here and helping us to serve"	
Striving to put service at the centre of family life	
Finding my profession	
Forever servants of Bahá'u'lláh	
Dear Bahá'í Canada	
Information	47

Ridván 2018 Message

From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World.

Dear loved Friends,

We greet you in the enduring afterglow of those memorable events that marked the bicentenary of the Birth of the Blessed Beauty. As we consider what transpired then and since, we find that the global Bahá'í community now in view is not the same as when it embarked on the first six cycles of the current Plan. It is more conscious than ever before of its mission. It has experienced an unprecedented surge in its capacity to bring friends and acquaintances into contact with its community life; to inspire neighbourhoods and villages into unified endeavour; to articulate how spiritual truths can be translated into sustained practical action; and, above all, to converse not only about the teachings that will build the world anew, but about the One Who taught them: Bahá'u'lláh. Accounts of His life and of His suffering told in myriad tongues by adults, youth, and children touched countless hearts. Some showed themselves ready to explore His Cause further. Others pledged collaboration. And many a receptive soul was moved to an avowal of faith.

One telling indicator of progress was the numerous places where it became clear that the Faith had emerged from obscurity at the national level. There were government leaders and leaders of thought who stated publicly—and sometimes emphasized privately—that the world stands in need of Bahá'u'lláh's vision and that the Bahá'ís' endeavours are admired and should be expanded. It delighted us to see that it was not only Bahá'ís who wished to honour Bahá'u'lláh and celebrate His life—special gatherings were hosted by some from beyond the Bahá'í community. In areas where hostility to the Faith exists, the friends were undismayed; showing marvellous resilience, they encouraged their compatriots to examine the truth for themselves, and many joyfully participated in the festivities. The bicentenary also gave rise to a seemingly limitless efflorescence of artistic expression, magnificent testimony to the wellspring of love from which it stemmed. The character of the Bahá'í community's entire approach to this occasion was confirmation of how much has been learned over more than two decades now, since the current series of global Plans began. The individual believer took initiative, the community arose in collective effort, and the friends channelled their creative energy into the plans prepared by the institutions. A significant anniversary, marking the passage of two centuries, offered a powerful stimulus to the work of building communities for the century to come. In the period leading up to the second bicentenary, let every seed so lovingly sown at the first be nurtured patiently towards fruition.

Two years into the present Plan, although naturally progress is not uniform from country to country, the number of intensive programmes of growth in the world is approaching half the five thousand contemplated in the current global endeavour, and the rate at which this number is rising has been steadily increasing. Looking more closely, there are promising signs of how the powers and potentialities of individuals, communities, and institutions are being manifested. For the believers everywhere, the experience of the bicentenary celebration demonstrated that many of their day-to-day interactions with the people around them can be infused with the spirit of teaching. And as the work in thousands of villages and neighbourhoods gathers momentum, a vibrant community life is taking root in each. The number of clusters where the system for extending this pattern of activity to more and more locations is becoming well established—enabling, thereby, the friends to pass the third milestone along a continuum of development—has grown markedly. And it is here, at the frontiers of the Bahá'í world's learning, particularly in the movement of populations towards the vision of Bahá'u'lláh, where not only are large numbers coming into the widening embrace of Bahá'í activities but the friends are now learning how sizeable groups come to identify themselves with the community of the Most Great Name. We are seeing the Faith's educational efforts take on a more formal character in such places, as children move seamlessly

through the grades year after year and one level of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme reliably succeeds another. In these places, the training institute is learning to ensure that sufficient human resources are being raised up to provide for the spiritual and moral edification of children and junior youth in ever-increasing numbers. Participation in these foundational activities is becoming so embedded in the culture of the population that it is viewed as an indispensable aspect of the life of a community. A new vitality emerges within a people taking charge of their own development, and they build immunity to those societal forces that breed passivity. Possibilities for material and spiritual progress take shape. Social reality begins to transform.

Cherished friends, this is truly a moment to give thanks to the Best-Beloved. There are a great many reasons to be encouraged. Yet we are only too aware of the scale of the task that remains. Fundamentally, as we have previously indicated, there must emerge in many hundreds of clusters a growing band of believers who can maintain, with those around them, a sustained focus on nurturing growth and building capacity, and who are distinguished by their ability and their discipline to reflect on action and learn from experience. Raising up and accompanying an expanding nucleus of individuals in each place—not just at the level of the cluster but within neighbourhoods and villages—is at once a formidable challenge and a critical need. But where this is occurring, the results speak for themselves.

We are reassured to see that the institutions of the Faith are keeping this supreme need at the forefront of their thinking, devising effective mechanisms to enable the insights arising from progress to be widely applied. At the same time, greater experience is endowing national, regional, and local bodies alike with broader vision. They are becoming involved in all aspects of the community's development and are concerned with the well-being of people beyond its formal membership. Conscious of the profound implications the institute process holds for the advancement of peoples, they are paying particular attention to how the training institute can be strengthened. They remain mindful of the need to maintain the community's focus on the requirements of the Plan and call the ever-widening circle of friends to higher and higher levels of unity. They faithfully uphold their responsibility to refine their administrative and financial systems so that the work of expansion and consolidation can be properly supported. In all this, they are ultimately occupied with cultivating in the community those conditions that conduce to the release of powerful spiritual forces.

As the work of community building intensifies, the friends are using the new capacities they have developed to improve conditions in the society around them, their enthusiasm kindled by their study of the divine teachings. Short-term projects have soared in number, formal programmes have expanded their reach, and there

are now more Bahá'í-inspired development organizations engaged in education, health, agriculture, and other areas. From the resulting transformation visible in the individual and collective lives of peoples may be discerned the unmistakable stirrings of the society-building power of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. No wonder, then, that it is from such instances of social action—whether simple or complex, of fixed duration or long sustained—that the Offices of the Bahá'í International Community are increasingly taking inspiration in their efforts to participate in the prevalent discourses of society. This is another important field of endeavour for the Faith that has advanced well. At the national level, contributions to discourses that are meaningful to that society—the equality of men and women, migration and integration, the role of youth in social transformation, and religious coexistence, among others—are being made with growing confidence, proficiency, and insight. And wherever they live, work, or study, believers of all ages and backgrounds are making valued contributions to particular discourses, bringing to the attention of those around them a principled perspective shaped by Bahá'u'lláh's vast Revelation.

The Faith's standing in various spaces in which discourses unfold has been much enhanced by its official presence on the World Wide Web, a presence which has expanded considerably through the launch of numerous national Bahá'í websites and the further development of the family of sites associated with Bahai.org. This has immense value for both the propagation and protection of the Cause. Over the span of just a few days a large global audience was attracted to carefully conceived content about the Faith that was presented on the bicentenary website and updated in nine languages simultaneously, and which has now been augmented by individual country pages illustrating the diversity of the celebrations that occurred. Plans are already far advanced for introducing to the Bahá'í Reference Library site a feature that will allow previously untranslated and unpublished passages or Tablets from the Holy Writings to be released online over time. As well as this, new volumes of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings rendered into English are set to appear in the coming years.

In Santiago, Chile, and Battambang, Cambodia, the world's most recently dedicated Houses of Worship are becoming established centres of attraction, beacons to their societies of all that the Faith stands for. And their number is about to grow. We are delighted to announce that the dedication ceremony for the Temple in Norte del Cauca, Colombia, is to take place in July. Further, the construction of more Houses of Worship lies just over the horizon. In Vanuatu, permission is being obtained to start building. In India and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a highly complex and exacting process has at last led to the successful acquisition of land. The joy at seeing the design of the first national *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* unveiled in Papua New Guinea at Naw-Rúz had hardly subsided when the design of the local House

of Worship in Kenya was also revealed. Meanwhile, we have every expectation that the recently released statement and compilation about the institution of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, prepared by our Research Department, will further stimulate the friends' appreciation of the significance of worship in community life. For in their acts of service, especially in their regular devotional gatherings, Bahá'ís everywhere are laying the spiritual foundations of future Houses of Worship.

Only three years remain of a quarter-century effort that began in 1996 focused on a single goal: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. At *Riḍván* 2021, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will embark on a Plan lasting a single year. Brief, but pregnant with portent, this one-year endeavour will begin a new wave of Plans bearing the ark of the Cause into the third century of the Bahá'í Era. During the course of this auspicious twelvemonth, the Bahá'í world's commemoration of the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá will include a special gathering at the Bahá'í World Centre to which representatives of every National Spiritual Assembly and every Regional Bahá'í Council will be invited.

This, however, is to be but the first in a sequence of events that will prepare the believers for the demands of the decades to come. The following January, the elapse of one hundred years since the first public reading of the Master's Will and Testament will be the occasion for a conference in the Holy Land bringing together the Continental Boards of Counsellors and all members of the Auxiliary Boards for Protection and Propagation. The spiritual energy released at these two historic gatherings must then be carried to all the friends of God in every land in which they reside. For this purpose, a series of conferences will be convened worldwide in the months that follow, a catalyst to the multi-year endeavour that shall succeed the coming One Year Plan.

Thus, a new phase in the unfoldment of the Master's Divine Plan is approaching. But a thrilling and more immediate prospect lies directly ahead. The bicentenary

of the Birth of the Báb is now just a year and a half away. This is a period in which to recall the extraordinary heroism of the Martyr-Herald of our Faith, Whose dramatic ministry thrust humanity into a new era of history. Though separated from our own time by two centuries, the society in which the Báb appeared resembles the present-day world for the sense of oppression and for the longing of so many to find answers to slake the soul's thirst to know. In considering how this two-hundred-year anniversary might befittingly be marked, we recognize that these festivities will have a special character of their own. Nevertheless, we anticipate a flourishing of activity no less rich and no less inclusive than that which accompanied the bicentenary just passed. It is an occasion to which every community, every household, every heart will undoubtedly look forward with eager expectation.

The months ahead will also be a time for calling to mind the lives of the Báb's intrepid followers—heroines and heroes whose faith was expressed in matchless, sacrificial acts that will forever adorn the annals of the Cause. Their qualities of fearlessness, consecration, and detachment from all save God impress themselves upon everyone who learns of their ventures. How striking, too, is the young age at which so many of those lionhearts made their indelible mark on history. During the coming period, may their example give courage to the entire company of the faithful—not least to the youth, who are once more summoned to the vanguard of a movement aimed at nothing less than the transformation of the world.

This, then, is our bright, bright hope. In the six cycles that lie between this *Riḍván* and the next bicentenary—indeed, throughout the remaining three years of the current Plan—let the same all-consuming, all-surpassing love that spurred the Báb's disciples to the diffusion of the divine light inspire you to great deeds. That you may be the recipients of heavenly aid is our supplication at the Sacred Threshold.

– The Universal House of Justice



Election of the Universal House of Justice

From the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 30 April 2018.

The newly elected members of the Universal House of Justice are Paul Lample, Chuungu Malitonga, Payman Mohajer, Shahriar Razavi, Stephen Hall, Ayman Rouhani, Stephen Birkland, Juan Francisco Mora, Praveen Mallik.



The members of the Universal House of Justice.

Regarding the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 1 June 2018.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The tremendous stimulus given to the work of the Five Year Plan by the celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh is apparent in all parts of the world. Thoughts are naturally turning to the two hundredth anniversary of the Birth of the Báb and what must be accomplished before this second bicentenary, so that “every seed so lovingly sown at the first” may be “nurtured patiently towards fruition”. The Universal House of Justice has requested that we convey to you a number of points to assist your deliberations on this theme. You are welcome to share the contents of this letter with the friends in your communities in any manner you deem appropriate.

The broad framework for understanding the Bahá'í world's approach to both bicentenaries has already been set out in the letter to you dated 18 May 2016, written on behalf of the House of Justice. This letter indicated, in particular, that the locus of activity was to be at the local level. It also described the eight cycles between the two anniversaries as the period during which the greatest share of the effort needed to fulfil the objectives of the Five Year Plan would be required. This, therefore, must be the main focus of the believers in their clusters. It is a season of intensive activity that is well under way, and less than a year and a half remains. Included in this precious period are the Twin Holy Days this year, due to be observed in only a few months' time. On these occasions, the friends will have a valuable opportunity to draw on the rich experience they gained last

year by bringing people together in local celebrations that uplift hearts and kindle spirits.

Preparations for the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb should be undertaken with a recognition that the festivities marking this anniversary have a special context. They will occur just two years after the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, and the Báb was of course the Herald of Bahá'u'lláh. Before and after the first bicentenary, the believers engaged family, friends, and acquaintances of all kinds in conversations about the life and teachings of the Blessed Beauty, and the conversations which occur in connection with the upcoming anniversary will in many ways be an extension of these, centring on both of the Faith's Twin Founders. For the greatness of this Day, this "matchless Day" extolled by Bahá'u'lláh, is evident from the fact that its advent was announced by two divine Manifestations, Whose Birthdays are "accounted as one in the sight of God". In Himself, and in the break

from the prevailing order which His Revelation brought about, the sacred figure of the Báb was an answer to the prayers and entreaties of the generations that awaited the One foretold by all the Holy Scriptures. With His coming, the eternal Faith of God was renewed and revitalized with extraordinary swiftness. Yet, in the very title He chose for Himself, He signalled that He was the portal to a superior Revelation of which, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, "He considered Himself to be the humble Precursor." The endeavours of the Bahá'ís throughout the world to labour for the promotion of the Cause call to mind the exhortation of the Báb explicitly set down in the Bayan: "Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and rendereth thanks unto his Lord."

As plans for the next bicentenary take shape, there will doubtless begin to emerge many examples of artistic expression arising from a profound reflection on the appearance above the horizon of the world, in quick succession, of two Manifestations of God, and the implications for the life of humanity. You will find it helpful to know that the House of Justice intends once again to commission both a film and a dedicated website for the occasion. It also anticipates preparing a special letter to mark the two-hundred-year anniversary. More details about these will become available in due course.

A notable feature of the last bicentenary was the number of tributes to Bahá'u'lláh and messages of congratulation issued by dignitaries and prominent members of society, often in response to invitations they had received to offer thoughtful sentiments. However, the character of this occasion does not lend itself to attempts to seek public statements of this kind. Nevertheless, efforts to help such persons become more familiar with the teachings and

fundamentals of the Faith, as well as the endeavours of the community, would, of course, continue in a natural manner.

In this year's Riḍván message, the House of Justice referred to the heroism of the Báb and His followers, the stirring accounts of whose lives are sure to be revisited and retold in the coming months. In keeping with the overall approach to this bicentenary, it will be important to reflect on the purpose of calling to mind these remarkable narratives, which possess a merit far beyond an exploration of

history. They enable the friends, who are occupied with responding to the needs of the Cause in this day, to draw inspiration and courage from the sacrifices of the dawn-breakers. They assist the company of believers to realize that, by consecrating themselves to the acts of service required in this age, they are emulating the noble qualities of their spiritual forebears.

The heights to which the Bahá'í community so recently soared, in its longing to befittingly honour "a Being peerless in creation", are still vivid in the memory. The possibilities created by the celebration of this second bicentenary, following so closely upon the first and building upon what was learned then, appear boundless. Be assured of the prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines for all the friends of God, supplicating that heavenly bestowals may surround them at every stage of their deliberations and in every action they take for His sake.

– Department of the Secretariat



The House of the Báb, where the Báb declared His mission on 23 May 1844 in Shiraz, Iran, before its destruction in 1979. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

Dedication of the Baha'i Temple in Norte del Cauca, Colombia

To the Friends gathered in Norte del Cauca, Colombia, for the Dedication of the House of Worship, 22 July 2018.

Dearly loved Friends,

It is with hearts brimming with joy that we greet you on this historic occasion, when the doors of the first *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* in Colombia are opened to all. The Temple that has been built through strenuous effort over four years is now ready to assume its divinely-ordained function—a place “solely designed and entirely dedicated to the worship of God”; “a place of great happiness and joy”; “a collective centre for men’s souls” which “forgeth bonds of unity from heart to heart”; “a means for the exaltation of the Word of God”. What is being celebrated here today is not only the culmination of the construction of a physical edifice, but a significant milestone in a process of development that has unfolded in this region over the course of many decades.

When the Bahá'í Faith entered this land, it took root in its fertile soil; a few pure souls with the courage to break through social barriers plunged into the living waters of this new Revelation from God and drank their fill. Without hesitation, they embraced the sublime vision of Bahá'u'lláh for the betterment of the world and endeavoured to illuminate heart after heart with the light of His Teachings. In the midst of powerful winds that acted to destabilize a society, they attended to the planting of seeds. Their

humble efforts to nurture in the young those qualities characterizing a faithful follower of the Blessed Beauty and to imbue their family and community life with the divine teachings evolved into a process of education that would reach thousands upon thousands. While the fruits of the committed labours of growing numbers are witnessed across the whole of Colombia, the region of Norte del Cauca is blessed with the singular honour of being the site of the first Bahá'í House of Worship in the country.

This House of Worship stands now as a symbol of the beauty inherent in the noble people of this region and its design evokes the generosity of their land. It is a manifestation of the power released through persistent collective action, a centre of attraction for all those longing to work for the renewal of their society, an oasis of hope for the spiritual and material upliftment of a population that has endured the trials of history and emerged with an indomitable spirit. Let all who gather within its walls occupy themselves with the remembrance of the One Creator so that “the melodies of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* may rise at dawning to the Concourse on high, and the songs of the nightingales of God may bring joy and ecstasy to the denizens of the All-Glorious Realm”.

– The Universal House of Justice



Regarding the Community Properties Fund

From the National Spiritual Assembly to all Local Spiritual Assemblies, 7 December 2017.

This letter explains the development of a new Fund, now named the Community Properties Fund, included here to lend context to a letter sent in April of this year.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

At the National Convention last year, the National Spiritual Assembly shared with the delegates its stimulating consultation with the Counsellors about a strategic approach to property needs within the overall context of plans for the advancement of the Faith in Canada. At the time, we referred to a special endowment fund that was to be established to support the acquisition, maintenance and use of properties at all levels of the community. We are very happy to now share more information about the Community Endowment Fund¹ and the thinking that led to its establishment with you.

In a letter dated 1 April 2016 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, the National Assembly was encouraged to undertake a careful inventory of all properties owned by the Faith at the national, regional, cluster and local levels and to conduct an assessment of the evolving needs related to property. This assessment included such wide-ranging possibilities as facilities with dormitory space dedicated to all forms of educational activity, offices to serve the needs of regional agencies and neighbourhood space to support children's classes, junior youth groups and study circles. Aided by this inventory and analysis, the National Assembly developed a framework that over the next few years will guide the timely acquisition of rental or purchased properties that are so critically needed in response to the receptivity being encountered across the country.

The Community Endowment Fund has thus been established to generate, over time, the resources these exciting developments will require. The National Assembly has allocated an initial sum of \$2.5 million to

the Fund and will be calling the community to match that amount over the course of the Five Year Plan. By 2021, a \$5 million capital endowment fund will be generating the funds for an ever-expanding community's needs. We lovingly invite your participation.

The 1 April 2016 letter included guidance about the acquisition of local properties, placing the decision whether to acquire a local Bahá'í Centre within the context of an annual national plan. Aware that many communities have earmarked funds for Local Centres but will not be acquiring a Centre in the near future, the National Assembly is now inviting you to consider pooling these earmarked funds into the Community Endowment Fund, allowing more advantageous returns than smaller amounts would attract. All earmarking would of course be respected, and should it become timely to acquire a Local Bahá'í Centre in your locality within the overall plan, the funds would be made available without delay.

Dear friends, it is clear to us from the reports of bicentenary celebrations flooding in from across the country that unprecedented numbers are drawing closer to the Cause in Canada, each soul with a desire to serve their communities. As the House of Justice said in its 5 December 2013 message, the challenge for every Bahá'í institution is to furnish the means for every soul to translate that desire "into the practical steps that day by day and week by week accrete to build vibrant, flourishing communities."

It is our hope that the establishment of this Fund will in part address that challenge, providing the physical spaces for a strengthening community-building process to do its work of empowering entire populations.

– National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

¹ Now called the Community Properties Fund

A Message to the Bahá'ís of Canada

From the National Spiritual Assembly to the Bahá'ís of Canada, 6 April 2018.

Dearly-loved friends,

In its 26 March 2016 letter to the Bahá'ís of the United States and the Bahá'ís of Canada, the Universal House of Justice wrote: “The process of entry by troops that emerged so tenuously in the Ten Year Crusade, and was fostered in the decades that followed, is now being extended through a sound process of community building in center after center in all those countries and territories that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá marked out so long ago. Your sister communities, so many of which you helped to establish, are now mature, and you stand with them ready to take on the sterner challenges that lie ahead. The movement of your clusters to the farthest frontiers of learning will usher in the time anticipated by Shoghi Effendi at the start of your collective exertions, when the communities you build will directly combat and eventually eradicate the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and of ingrained prejudice eating away at the vitals of society”.

This moving description directly links Canada’s legacy and its future, relates the early pioneer work around the world to its present-day form in neighbourhoods and villages, and connects the heroism that the words of the beloved Master called out of the hearts of His loved ones to the eager response of countless friends today to the call to reach out to the “widest possible cross-section of society and to all those with whom they share a connection—whether through a family tie or common interest, an occupation or field of study, neighbourly relations or merely chance acquaintance—so that all may rejoice in the appearance, exactly two hundred years before, of One Who was to be the Bearer of a new Message for humankind.”¹ During the first stage of the Plan, leading up to the celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh, the unprecedented expansion of a conversation to over 100,000 souls was an offering of love to Him.

As this conversation has grown during the first stage of the Plan, capacities have developed: to act with intensity and purpose; to work together in groups, planning and organizing; to invite and welcome friends and strangers alike; to teach directly, confidently and systematically. Immense spiritual forces have been released, to now be channelled during this second stage leading up to the two hundredth anniversary of the Birth of the Báb, when the greatest share of the effort needed to fulfil the goal of the Plan is required.

Each person who responded to the invitation to celebrate the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh is a potential protagonist in the community-building process. The House of Justice wrote: “However, the real transformative power of the Faith is likely to be perceived more readily still if people experience how worship and meaningful service are being woven into the fabric of the lives of Bahá’ís everywhere. Indeed, from the community-building activities of the Five Year Plan emerges a pattern of collective life within which anyone can discern the vivifying influence of the divine teachings brought by God’s Manifestations.”² A change of culture begins to take root, nurtured by an outward-looking orientation, confidence in the interaction of the Word of God with the human soul, an “eager embrace of the approaches explored in the institute courses, a diligent cultivation of community life through the multiplication of core activities, and an audacious outreach and effective teaching among receptive populations.”³

We take time to describe these elements of growth though you know them well. In our message to the Bahá’ís of Canada studied at the unit conventions, the National Assembly referred to the new and promising landscape in Canada that is in the hands of experienced, enkindled gardeners. As gardeners, growers of the Cause, you have learned with certainty that a vibrant, healthy community is most easily developed in the more intimate setting of a neighbourhood or village. “The pattern of community life has to be developed in places where receptivity wells up, those small centres of population where intense activity can be sustained. It is here, when carrying out the work of community building within such a narrow compass, that the interlocking dimensions of community life are most coherently expressed, here that the process of collective transformation is most keenly felt—here that, in time, the society-building power inherent in the Faith becomes most visible... for existing programmes of growth to continue to gain strength, the strategy of initiating community-building activities in neighbourhoods and villages that show promise must be widely adopted and systematically followed.”⁴

The first steps on this path can be taken through direct teaching, establishing a children’s class, hosting a devotional gathering or starting a study circle, yet experience has shown clearly that the junior youth

2 *Ibid.*

3 1 May 2006, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada

4 29 December 2015, Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

1 18 May 2016, Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies.

spiritual empowerment programme is the most effective way to build a community that eventually engages all its members, of all ages. For the junior youth programme to thrive, an ever-expanding circle of dedicated youth are needed. For this circle to grow and be supported in the demanding work of serving their younger peers and their families, the entirety of the community must be growing in capacity to reach out, to teach, to provide the necessary resources, to affect the devotional character of a neighbourhood and bring the remembrance of God into the day-to-day life of a population. In this environment, receptivity can be quickly perceived in a longing to serve, to participate in changing the world.

It is clear: a defining moment has arrived. This letter is penned with joyful admiration for all that has been achieved. It is also written in recognition of the urgency of the hour. It is a call to action.

The first call is to every believer. It is a summons to a new intensity, focus and consecration in the work of teaching from now until the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, whatever your circumstances and whatever the opportunities before you. Whether you are living in a small village with a few friends who know of the Faith, or a large metropolis where entire populations are becoming attracted, what time can you consecrate — daily, weekly, monthly — to the teaching work? How can each one of you deepen your conversation with those with whom you gathered to celebrate the Glory of God? What extraordinary measures are possible, and even beyond what now may seem possible?

Where cycles of activity in a cluster are regular, could every soul arrange his or her life to be able to participate fully in teaching projects and campaigns during the expansion phase, in teaching and deepening activities during the consolidation phase, and gatherings for reflection and planning? Where cycles do not yet exist, could a group of friends begin to think together in this systematic way? Could special effort be devoted to building on the capacity to work together in collective efforts, teaching directly, multiplying core activities, and enhancing the devotional character of community life? Time — that most precious gift — will be needed even when the hope of rest beckons: weekends, holidays, evenings. In these sacrifices lies the heroism of the day.

A pattern is emerging where, alongside efforts everywhere in the cluster to teach in whatever context is available to the friends, teams of individuals of all ages visit youth, junior youth and their families to share a vision of growth, explore together the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, invite them to participate in the courses of the institute and initiate new activities. This approach is proving its effectiveness and should be pursued in cluster after cluster. Periodic collective efforts to do so are especially critical and require commitment on the part of all community members to participate and lend their support.

The implications of our arrival at this stage are clear: each

cluster moving towards the second milestone and beyond needs a neighbourhood; the work in a neighbourhood is sustained most easily when the effort is aimed at multiplying vibrant junior youth groups; to multiply junior youth groups requires a veritable army, especially — but not exclusively — youth, many of whom are devoting time to serving among a population, and fostering its movement as they learn to nurture its younger generations through the training institute. In this context, efforts will intensify to raise new animators in the wider community. Conversations will take place, friendships will be forged, a longing to serve will be enkindled, training will develop capacity, tests will be encountered: all these require a loving, supportive community which gradually welcomes the younger generations and their families into its embrace.

The second call, then, is especially to the young ones of the community: youth in high school, young adults engaged in higher education, young families beginning new patterns. Much depends on you, yet you are surrounded by a community that stands ready to support and champion you, rejoicing to see itself progress as an interdependent, organic whole. Again, time is needed, moments of life that your elders know to be swiftly-passing and yet seem to stretch out, limitless, in the time of youth. Animators are needed to establish and strengthen the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme as the most effective impetus for community-building in a neighbourhood. Pioneers are needed to settle in neighbourhoods and villages, with long-term commitment to learning about a population. However, in a letter dated 23 May 2016 to the Bahá'ís of the World, the Universal House of Justice described a pattern that takes advantage even of short periods of time: “While many friends who wish to serve as homefront pioneers can make commitments that span years, there are those who may only be able to offer shorter periods, sometimes as little as three months. Such friends can kindle a spirit of selfless service and transmit valuable experience from stronger clusters to emerging ones. In time, they return to their communities much inspired and enriched, able to contribute even more effectively to the advancement of their own clusters. We hope that the friends, especially the youth who may have the time and determination to do so during their extended holidays, will take advantage of the opportunity to enter the pioneering field...” It is our longing to see hundreds of high school and university students plan to regularly dedicate time during their summers and holidays in this way, with the unhesitating support of family and community.

All 119 clusters in Canada with a programme of growth aim to establish intensive programmes of growth by the end of the Plan, towards a worldwide goal of 5,000. Another 23 are taking their first steps along a continuum of growth. We challenge the friends in every one of these 119 clusters to either begin or strengthen work in a neighbourhood, focussing on learning about a receptive population who will take the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh

and apply it to their own spiritual and material conditions. For this to happen, we have seen in cluster after cluster, a basic junior youth spiritual empowerment programme that engages 50 to 100 junior youth — 5 to 10 groups — must be established. This is the work of the hour: urgent, joyful, focussed, consecrated. Step by step, heart by heart, street by street, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, a new world is rising. “In this worthy occupation all find a calling, and of the joy that comes from being engaged in this work none should deprive themselves. We entreat the one Beloved that the whole of this bicentennial year may be filled with this joy that is purest and sweetest: telling another soul of the dawning of the Day of God.”⁵

Last year, the National Assembly shared joyful news of steps that have been taken to make pilgrimage more accessible to a greater number and diversity of believers. We call this to your minds now, as you consider ways to lend powerful spiritual impetus to your plans for the

⁵ Ridvan Message 2017, Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World.

remaining cycles of the Plan. However, there are many for whom a trip to the Bahá'í World Centre will not be possible. The National Assembly is therefore soon launching a special program of visits to the Shrine in Montreal, blessed by the footsteps of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1912 and referred to by Him as His home. We will share more news of this development shortly.

In the notes of those who were in His presence during those precious days, there is an account of “Abdu'l-Bahá standing at the window, quietly looking out. When asked what He was doing, He responded that He was summoning souls. How else could we end this letter than with that image, with our love and our promise of ardent prayers for your own work of summoning souls. In a few short weeks, members of National Spiritual Assemblies from around the world will assemble in the Holy Land to elect the Universal House of Justice. You will be with us at the sacred Threshold.

– National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Historic development of properties

From the National Spiritual Assembly to all Local Spiritual Assemblies, 16 April 2018.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Further to our earlier announcement of the establishment of a Community Endowment Fund¹ for the acquisition and maintenance of properties to support the work of expansion and consolidation, attached for your ease of reference, the National Spiritual Assembly is delighted to share with you some exciting and historic developments in Canada.

Urged by a 1 April 2016 letter written on the Universal House of Justice's behalf to give priority to finding suitable properties with residential capacity in Vancouver and Toronto to serve all forms of educational activity, the National Assembly began a search. As you know, real estate costs in these two cities that serve as sites for the dissemination of learning about the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme are the highest in the country, and the task was daunting.

In December 2017, it came to our attention that two duplexes comprising four units were nearing completion immediately adjacent to the Vancouver Bahá'í Centre. When the Spiritual Assembly of Vancouver learned of the availability of these units, they wrote to the National Assembly to offer a repurposing of the Bahá'í Centre, in fulfilment of this goal.

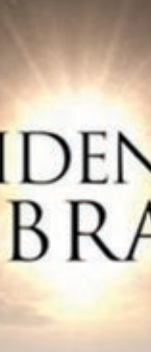
With gratitude for this ready spirit of collaboration and the vision of the Vancouver Bahá'í community, we are thrilled to announce the acquisition of the duplexes adjacent to the multi-purpose space of the Vancouver Bahá'í Centre, which together with the Centre form the first facility of its kind in Canada. It was quickly readied for the first camps and institute campaigns, which began in March.

As outlined in the National Assembly's 6 April 2018 letter to all the friends, decades-long efforts to learn about growth have borne wonderful fruit during the bicentennial year. In clusters and neighbourhoods working with larger numbers, the lack of space is a substantial obstacle. To overcome this impediment and welcome all those who wish to participate in the work of the Cause, the National Assembly is developing a strategic national plan for the acquisition of properties at all levels to meet the most pressing of these needs. Contributions to the Community Endowment Fund are providing a strong foundation.

In addition to an initial infusion from the National Assembly, a community contribution goal of \$500,000 for this Fund has been set for the year to come, to ensure no delay in meeting the need for space for the building of strong communities. It is with joy and loving invitation that we share with you this step on a new path.

– National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada

¹ Now called the Community Properties Fund



A WIDENING EMBRACE

“A Widening Embrace” film now available

From the Secretariat Department of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 3 May 2018.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We have been asked to share with you news of the production of a film entitled “A Widening Embrace” which was presented at the Twelfth International Bahá'í Convention. In a letter dated 1 May 2018 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, it was stated that the film “captures experiences and insights from clusters, neighbourhoods, villages, towns, and cities in all parts of the world where peoples are taking charge of their own spiritual, social, and material development through the application of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. The segments of the film illustrate distinct but interrelated

dimensions of the work of building vibrant communities — embracing large numbers, youth summoned to the vanguard, and stirrings of social action.” It is hoped that the film may “be a source of inspiration and hope to growing numbers around the globe who are joyfully contributing to the collective effort of building the world anew.” The film is available to download or view online at <http://www.bahai.org/widening-embrace>.

Kindly ensure that this information is widely distributed among the friends.

– National Secretariat

Election of the National Spiritual Assembly

On the 26th of May, in a joyful and sacred atmosphere, the delegates at the 2018 National Convention elected Mehran Anvari, Deloria Bighorn, Hoda Farahmandpour, Gerald Filson, Judy Filson, Ciprian Jauca, Karen McKye, Enayat Rawhani and Élizabeth Wright to serve on the National Spiritual Assembly for the Bahá'ís of Canada for the coming year.

In July, the delegates were informed that, with love and regret, the National Spiritual Assembly had agreed to Mr. Enayat Rawhani's request to be permitted to relinquish his membership on the Assembly. A by-election was held to fill the vacancy thus created, and on 15 August 2018 Mr. Zelalem Bimrew Kasse of Winnipeg, Manitoba, joined the Assembly as the newly-elected member.



Newly-elected member
Zelalem Bimrew Kasse.

The members of the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada: (Back row from left) Mehran Anvari, Ciprian Jauca, Karen McKye, Judy Filson, Gerald Filson, (front row from left) Élizabeth Wright, Deloria Bighorn, Enayat Rawhani and Hoda Farahmandpour.

The sanctified gift of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

From the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Canada
to the delegates to the National Convention, 24 May
2018.

Dear Friends,

It is with great pleasure that the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Canada writes to the delegates of the National Convention and thanks the National Spiritual Assembly for this opportunity to again present a few thoughts on the sanctified gift that is the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

'Abdu'l-Bahá identifies "co-operation, mutual aid and reciprocity"¹ as "the basic principle on which the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is established, inasmuch as its proceeds are dedicated to the furtherance of these ends."² "Cooperation... Mutual Aid... Reciprocity. Each seems simple and straightforward when viewed independently. Yet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assertion ... lies within the combined vision of 'cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity'"³ – a theme implicit in many of the messages of the Universal House of Justice as both a methodology of action and as an outcome of its Plans.

What insights can we glean from a few of the many passages in the Writings that touch on these concepts? How can they help us better understand this great law that "causeth the people to become firm and steadfast and draweth Divine increase upon them"?⁴ How can contemplating this foundational principle of the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh assist us to more fully appreciate how fundamental, inter-related, and coherent integrating this law into our daily life is to the aims of the current Five Year Plan as well as all the Plans that will follow it?

In His Writings, 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses the human body as a metaphor for the "temple of the world"⁵, for "all created things"⁶, for "this endless universe"⁷, and for "the entire contingent world"⁸ He explains how if we "observe with an eye that discovereth the realities of all things, it would become clear that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that co-operation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being."⁹

This "endless universe is like the human body, and ... all its parts are connected one with another and are linked together in the utmost perfection. ... in the same way that the parts, members, and organs of the human

body are interconnected, and that they mutually assist, reinforce, and influence each other, so too are the parts and members of this endless universe connected with, and spiritually and materially influenced by, one another. ... And although our present methods and sciences cannot detect these relationships among the universal beings, their existence is nonetheless clear and indisputable. In sum, all beings, whether universal or particular, are mutually connected in accordance with God's consummate wisdom and mutually influence one another. Were it not so, the all-embracing organization and universal arrangement of existence would become disordered and disrupted."¹⁰

If we truly understood this oneness within creation, and how "all beings are linked together like a chain"¹¹, how would it affect the way we live our lives; how we interact with the planet that sustains us; and how we relate to our fellow beings, including one another?

'Abdu'l-Bahá uses the metaphor of the human organism to also describe the body politic, comparing 'disease, dissolution, death' in the human body to the 'always destructive and inevitably fatal', 'dissension, discord and warfare', in the body politic of humanity.¹² "As long as the various members and parts of that organism are coordinated and cooperating in harmony, we have as a result the expression of life in its fullest degree. ... As long as there is affinity and cohesion among these constituent elements, strength and life are manifest; but when dissension and repulsion arise among them, disintegration follows."¹³

Given the current state of humanity it is clear that, as a collective, we are not in an ideal state of health and wellbeing. Although there are "means in the human world by which physical association is established ... these fail to weld together the hearts and spirits of men and are correspondingly inefficient."¹⁴ What is missing is the recognition that, "in reality, all mankind represents one family."¹⁵ "The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity's collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours' or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected."¹⁶

Motivated "by a genuine concern for the welfare of others which derives from the love of Bahá'u'lláh, observance of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh provides the means to hasten the realization of this universal aspiration to ensure the well-being of all mankind."¹⁷ "Examining one's life to determine what is a necessity and then discharging with joy one's obligation in relation to the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

is an indispensable discipline to bring one's priorities into balance, purify whatever wealth one possesses, and ensure that the share which is the Right of God provides for the greater good."¹⁸

'Abdu'l-Bahá says if "the inhabitants of a whole country develop peaceable hearts, and if with all their hearts and souls they yearn to cooperate with one another and to live in unity, and if they become kind and loving to one another, that country will achieve undying joy and lasting glory. Peace will it have, and plenty, and vast wealth."¹⁹ If such a wonderful outcome awaits a single country, imagine the results if the majority of the earth's inhabitants were to do the same? "When the love of God is established, everything else will be realized. This is the true foundation of all economics."²⁰

"By the fire of the Love of God the veil is burnt which separates us from the Heavenly Realities, and with clear vision we are enabled to struggle onward and upward, ever progressing in the paths of virtue and holiness, and becoming the means of light to the world."²¹

Without co-operation and reciprocity, "the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness."²² Perhaps herein lies an insight into why purifying "one's riches and earthly possessions according to that which is prescribed by God"²³ ranks only after the recognition of God and steadfastness in His Cause²⁴, and, why the Universal House of Justice identifies the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh as "a key instrument for constructing the foundation and supporting the structure of the New World Order ... serving as a powerful element in the growth of a world civilization."²⁵ "Such a high station is due not only to the law's revolutionary impact on human society, but also to its beneficial nature."²⁶

Bahá'u'lláh's mighty law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is applicable to every believer. Why would He withhold a favour "invested with the ornament of His acceptance"²⁷ and "the means of attracting goodly gifts and heavenly blessings"²⁸ from any of his servants? It is our love for Him that is the motivator that brings to life the Right of God in our lives and – as a result – we reap the promised benefits for ourselves, for our children, and for our fellow beings. "Happy are they that have observed His commandments. No goodly deed was or will ever be lost, for benevolent acts are treasures preserved with God for the benefit of those who act."²⁹

– The Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Canada

1, 2, 5, 9, and 22, 4, 23, 27, 28 & 29
Ḥuqúqu'lláh – The Right of God, April 2007, Amended August 2009, #23, 22, 2, 15, 88, & 16 respectively

3 and 17
International Board of Trustees letter to a National Spiritual Assembly, *Ḥuqúqu'lláh Newsletter*, 73, January 2012, page 14

6 and 19
'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, #21 & 221 respectively

7 and 10 and 8 and 11
'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, #69, "The Influence of the Stars and the Interconnectedness of All Things", and #46, "Evolution and the True Nature of Man", respectively

12 and 13, 14, 15 and 20
'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, #41, 108, 102, & 84 respectively

16 and 18
Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017 letter to the Bahá'ís of the World

21 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, #27, "The True Meaning of Baptism by Water and Fire"

24 and 26
Varqa, Dr. Ali Muhammad, talk given during the Ḥuqúqu'lláh Conferences in Barcelona, Spain and Hofheim, Germany, October 1999

25 Universal House of Justice letter to the International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, 21 June 2016

From the delegates to the Universal House of Justice

From the delegates to the 70th National Convention to the Universal House of Justice, 27 May, 2018.

To our beloved Universal House of Justice,

With hearts brimming with joy, the delegates at the 70th Canadian National Convention began their earnest deliberations on the pressing requirements of the Plan, celebrating the accomplishments of the previous year, distilling their learnings and preparing to surge forward at an accelerated pace towards the monumental second Bicentenary and beyond. The diligent preparation of the space and materials by our highly esteemed National Spiritual Assembly, the spirit of excellence with which even the smallest acts of service were carried out by the volunteers,

the warmth of the atmosphere, the spontaneous integration of music, the presence of our stalwart Auxiliary Board members and the remarks of our much-loved Continental Counsellor Borna Nouredin conducted to a consultation rich, broad, inspiring and focused.

The most precious gift of the annual Riḍván message, held central in all our deliberations, flanked by the splendid May 3, 2018 message from the International Teaching Centre and the deeply moving documentary film "A

Widening Embrace” filled our souls, on the one hand, with awe and wonder at the possibilities that lie before us while simultaneously offering a sobering glimpse of the magnitude of the work at hand.

From those small, remote regions of Canada to the large metropole cities, stories abounded of how the friends arose in courageous and creative ways to converse with friends, neighbours, coworkers and acquaintances about the teachings and person of Bahá'u'lláh. Your guidance, urging us to see in each person who responded to our invitation a potential protagonist in the community-building process, has reconceptualized our understanding of what a Bahá'í community is.

Early in the Convention the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh offered an informative, illuminating presentation on the developments of its institution in Canada over the past year. At the half-way mark, in a rarefied and spiritual atmosphere, the new National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada was elected with a participation of 100 percent and not a single ballot spoiled. These same loved ones, later in the evening, who had had the privilege of participating in the International Bahá'í Convention shared highlights of their experiences — insightful, humorous and uplifting.

Of note, the presence of Mr. Douglas Martin, Dr. Firaydoun and Mrs. Vida Javaheri bestowed a special

blessing on this Convention. Dr. Javaheri's address, covering a range of topics including some reflections on the historic and recently concluded International Bahá'í Convention, the legacy of the Canadian Bahá'í community, the importance of re-examining habits of thought, and the indispensable need to rise to greater heights of sacrifice, left the friends so inspired and “re-fired” that a palpable spirit of joy and consecration was generated that will, in time, surely penetrate the many communities that we the delegates will soon be returning to.

Beloved Universal House of Justice – how strong our love for you! How wide the gap between our limited sight and your stupendous insight! How we long to see your vision unfold! As we, more than ever before, gird our loins in His Path, turn wholeheartedly to the example of our spiritual forebears, and stand willing to be led by the hand of Providence, we testify that we have no hope but your hope, and beseech the Primal Point to cause those scintillating qualities of the spirit that distinguished His loved ones to appear once more in the hearts of those who today dare to do battle in the Army of God.

With utter self-effacement,

The Delegates of the 70th Canadian National Bahá'í Convention

Response to the 2018 National Convention letter

From the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 5 June 2018.

Our hearts were moved by the longing of the friends gathered at your National Convention to fulfil the vital spiritual obligations entrusted to them. Indeed, the progress your community has made in recent years demonstrates not only its enhanced capacity and clear vision, but the believers' commitment to scale loftier heights of service to the Cause. We have every confidence that the friends across Canada will continue to test the

limits of their capacity to reach out to ever greater numbers of their compatriots, inviting each one to join in the spiritual enterprise gaining momentum in their midst. As they do so, they may be assured of our supplications at the Sacred Threshold for the heavenly bestowals of the Ancient Beauty to surround them on every side.

– The Universal House of Justice

About this issue

The Universal House of Justice, in its 29 Dec., 2015 message to the Continental Board of Counsellors, described a journey through life that held, at its heart, a deep and personal love for Bahá'u'lláh and His Cause. It noted, in particular, how “the marvelous exploits of the youth in the field of service are one of the finest fruits of the present Plan.”

And as the individual moves from youth into adulthood, the “freedom of movement and availability of time” that “enable many youth to serve in ways that are directly related to the needs of the community” start to change. “As they advance further into their twenties, their horizons broaden,” and other activities, “equally demanding and highly meritorious,” begin to draw on the attention of young adults as they consider their education, work and family life in their immediate and far-reaching futures.

With these changing requirements on how to spend their time, youth and young adults face many questions about what it looks like to pursue these activities while maintaining attention on the various realms of service that contribute to Bahá'í community life. How to weave the many strands of life to create a cohesive whole, drawn together through service to Bahá'u'lláh, is something that many people, of all ages, are striving to understand.

While we realize that this is a continually evolving topic, this issue of *Bahá'í Canada* shares some thoughts on this pivotal question. Through our featured article sharing the reflections of a few youth who decided to dedicate a period of their life to service, along with the stories from

across Canada from families and individuals working to place the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh at the centre of their activities – work, service, finances and family life – we can join them in contemplating the many facets of our lives and discuss the ways a coherent life can grow.

In the *From the History of the Bahá'í Faith* section of this magazine, we have the opportunity to explore the early life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His perfect example – how He lived His youth focused on the teachings of His Father and, from childhood to marriage to work, His every decision was based on Bahá'u'lláh's wishes. We also step back in time to when the Faith was new in Canada and a group of youth, through the guidance of Shoghi Effendi, transformed what it meant to live as a Bahá'í – something that we continue to see evolve today.

This issue also has the honour of sharing with the Canadian Bahá'í community insights from this year's National Convention. The many topics discussed, including the upcoming bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb,

are permeating the conversations of the community across the country, encouraging us to continue to press forward in our life-long service to the Best Beloved.

We hope that the stories in this issue can help explore what it means to weave together a life of service and that we will hear more from you about what you are learning on this topic. Please enjoy this magazine and, for more content, we welcome you to visit *Bahá'í Canada* online at www.bahaicanada.bahai.ca.

- Bahá'í Canada Committee

How to weave the many strands of life to create a cohesive whole, drawn together through service to Bahá'u'lláh, is something that many people, of all ages, are striving to understand.

Submitting stories to *Bahá'í Canada*

The *Bahá'í Canada* magazine and its website are spaces where we can continue to gain insight into the profound communication taking place between diverse individuals, communities and institutions. We invite people from across the country – from large cities to small towns – to submit stories and reflections about the efforts being made to translate the Writings of the Faith into action, the insights these actions are generating and the myriad questions that are arising. Send news, photos, insights, reflections and more to bcanada@bahai.ca.



The sea gate where Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Bahá and Their companions entered 'Akká in 1868, c. 1920. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

From the history of the Bahá'í Faith

Reflecting on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's youth

The Universal House of Justice wrote that the friends must "guard against adopting a narrow outlook on what development to maturity entails," and discussed various dimensions of "a coherent life," including service to the Cause, marriage and serving humanity through a trade or profession.¹ To gain further insight into what development to maturity might entail, and what a coherent life could be like, we thought it would be helpful to examine the early life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Perfect Exemplar of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings.

Some distinctive aspects of His early life included living as an exile and slowly relieving His Father, Bahá'u'lláh, of more and more hardships and responsibilities, His ability to resolve difficult situations, His profound contributions to pressing problems of the day and the circumstances surrounding His marriage.

It is challenging to look at a life as immense and varied as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's and select events of particular significance. Shoghi Effendi wrote: "It would be indeed difficult for us, who stand so close to such a tremendous figure and are drawn by the mysterious power of so magnetic a personality, to obtain a clear and exact understanding

¹ The Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 29 December 2015.

of the role and character of One Who, not only in the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh but in the entire field of religious history, fulfills a unique function."² While some time has passed since Shoghi Effendi wrote these words, it is still early in the history of the Cause and a deeper understanding of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station and its implication for humanity will surely grow.

Shoghi Effendi also wrote the following regarding 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station:

He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Centre and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being "round Whom all names revolve," the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation—styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the "Mystery of God"—an expression by which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.³

While it may be tempting to feel that it is futile to try to comprehend the tremendous figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, especially given that He is the Mystery of God, He is nevertheless also the Perfect Exemplar, and His words and deeds show us what to emulate. Ruhi Book 8, *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, highlights two possible extremes to avoid in reflecting on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life: "On the one hand, we should never imagine that we can ever attain His level of perfection, for He moves in a sphere all of His own, a sphere which is beyond the reach of any human being. On the other hand, we cannot assume an attitude of resignation, thinking that it is useless to make an effort to follow the example of such an exalted being. Throughout our lives we should not only constantly turn to Him but also strive to emulate His ways."⁴

This effort to recount some of the key events from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life with a view of gaining insight into how to live a coherent life is therefore provisional and undertaken in a spirit of humility. Hopefully others will also be moved to share any stories from the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá or quotations from his Writings that they have found illuminating.

² *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.131.

³ *Ibid.* p. 134

⁴ Unit 1-27.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was born in 1844 and Shoghi Effendi movingly alludes to the "sorrows, the poverty, the overhanging doom" of his earlier years.¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá experienced a level of adversity that is uncommon for a child and a young person. At the young age of eight, His Father entered the infamous dungeon, the Síyáh-Chál. In late childhood, while His Father was in prison, He was attacked in the streets for being a follower of the Báb. When He visited His Father in the Síyáh-Chál, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was so devastated by His Father's condition that He fainted. In his youth, he would experience many more hardships and calamities, including the departure of His Father for the mountains of Kurdistan for two years, the brutality of his uncle Mírzá Yahyá, as well as the untimely death of his brother Mírzá Mihdí.

He was 12 years old when Bahá'u'lláh told the friends to refer to 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Master.

In every person's life there are turning points of particular significance, and there appear to be a number of such moments in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life. He was 12 years old when Bahá'u'lláh told the friends to refer to 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Master.² Later, some time between the age of 19 to 24, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in Adrianople, Bahá'u'lláh revealed a Tablet in His honour called the Súriy-i-Ghusn (Tablet of the Branch). Bahá'u'lláh writes of the high station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, referring to Him as "this Branch of Holiness," and writing, "Verily the Limb of the Law of God hath sprung forth from this Root which God hath firmly implanted in the Ground of His Will, and Whose Branch hath been so uplifted as to encompass the entire creation." Also around this time, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was described as having "attained the full stature of His unmatched and resplendent manhood" and becoming "greatly revered and highly esteemed not only in the company of His Father's followers but in circles beyond."³

Another significant event in the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was the trip from Baghdad to Constantinople, undertaken in 1863, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was 19 years old. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was described during that trip as "handsome, gracious, agile, zealous to serve, firm with the wilful, generous to all."⁴ He made the journey more comfortable for

¹ *God Passes By*, Chapter XIX.

² H. Garst, *The Most Mighty Branch*, p. 25.

³ H.M. Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

his fellow travelers, sometimes staying up until midnight to look for food, waking early to prepare the caravan, as well as seeing to Bahá'u'lláh's comfort. Sometimes, to get some rest Himself, 'Abdu'l-Bahá would ride His horse ahead of the group of travelers. The horse would lie down and then 'Abdu'l-Bahá would sleep with His head on the its neck. When the horse heard the other travelers coming, it would shake 'Abdu'l-Bahá awake.⁵

All of the activities of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life were motivated by His devotion to His Father Bahá'u'lláh, as well as His Service to the Cause of God. This quotation from Bahá'u'lláh sheds light on how 'Abdu'l-Bahá, referred to as the Most Great Branch, was empowered to relieve His Father of more and more responsibilities as the years progressed.

In Baghdad We Ourselves would go and take a seat in the coffee-house to meet the people – friends and acquaintances, strangers and inquirers alike. We brought those who were remote near to the Faith, and led many a soul into the fold of the Cause. Thus We served the Cause of God, gave victory to His Word and exalted His Name. The Most Great Branch undertook the same task and served in the same way, to a much greater degree, in Adrianople, and then to a far greater extent and with greater efficacy, in Akká. The same hardships and afflictions which were Ours in the early days befell Him.”⁶

Shortly after His arrival in Akká, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was 26 years old, His “true stature” was revealed to the townspeople through seemingly everyday interactions in which enemies were turned into friends.⁷ One such interaction took place with a Christian merchant who felt he could seize some coal that some Bahá'ís had procured, since he took such a dim view of the community, as did most in Akká in those early days. 'Abdu'l-Bahá went to the merchant's place of business and waited for three hours until the merchant spoke to Him. “What was the crime for which you were imprisoned?” He asked. 'Abdu'l-Bahá replied: “The same crime for which Christ was indicted.” The merchant was taken aback since he spoke of Christ, and the two ended up conversing further about Jesus Christ and His Station. The man followed 'Abdu'l-Bahá onto the street, showing his respect and regard for Him.

*“He was immeasurably,
tirelessly patient.
He was undeviatingly,
unshakably firm.
He was magnanimous.
He was uncompromising.
He was kindness
personified.”*

In 1872, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was 28 years old, two Bahá'ís killed two followers of Mírzá Yahyá in Akká. Both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá were imprisoned, along with 25 other Bahá'ís.⁸ A passage describing 'Abdu'l-Bahá's handling of this difficult situation provides insight into the qualities of a balanced personality, necessary for living a coherent life:

“Qualities that He now brought forth amply and visibly demonstrated that He was indeed what His Father had affirmed of Him – the ‘Mystery of God.’ He was immeasurably, tirelessly patient. He was undeviatingly, unshakably firm. He was magnanimous. He was

uncompromising. He was kindness personified. He was stern. He walked in the ways of humility. He spoke in tones unmistakably authoritative. He was meek. He was the archetype of majesty. Divine paradoxes were revealed in His being, His actions, His words.”⁹

His contributions to the intellectual and social life of the community

Despite His young age and lack of schooling, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became known very early on for His wisdom and His ability to contribute to the thinking of those in the society in which He lived.

In His early youth, 'Abdu'l-Bahá read “avidly” what He could of the writings of the Báb, and “walked among the learned who were wise with the wisdom of the age and competent with experience, and conversed with them on their themes and topics.”¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, “they respected the speech of the young boy, because it was mature and enlightening, and because the speaker was modest and charming.”¹¹ In His early teens, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote a “lucid, illuminating commentary” on the well-known tradition ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad: ‘I was a Hidden Treasure and loved to be known, therefore I created beings to know.’¹² He was requested to perform this task by 'Alí Sháwkat Páshá, “a nobleman, highly-cultured and deeply-read.”¹³ According to Hand of the Cause Hassan Balyuzi, the commentary “not only reveals profound knowledge, striking mastery of language, and rare qualities of mind, but above all it shows the most profound understanding.”¹⁴ Also, during his teens,

⁸ *Ibid*, p.36.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp.36-37.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 14.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹² *Ibid*.

¹³ *Ibid*.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵ Garst, *The Most Mighty Branch*, p. 30.

⁶ Bahá'u'lláh qtd. in Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 26.

⁷ *Ibid*. p.32.

'Abdu'l-Bahá served as His Father's amanuensis, taking down the Kitáb-i-Íqán.¹⁵

By the time 'Abdu'l-Bahá was 29 and living in Akká, He had gained the trust of the governor of Akká, Ahmad Big Tawfíq. The governor begged Bahá'u'lláh for the privilege of offering Him some service, and Bahá'u'lláh directed him to repair the old aqueduct, so that the residents would have access to fresh water. This same governor sent his son to 'Abdu'l-Bahá for instruction and turned to 'Abdu'l-Bahá for advice on running the government.

As early as 1875, at the age of about 31, responding to Bahá'u'lláh's instructions, 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed to the rulers and people of Persia a treatise entitled *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, "setting out the spiritual principles that must guide the shaping of their society in the age of humanity's maturity."¹⁶ Shoghi Effendi described it as "‘Abdu'l-Bahá's outstanding contribution to the future reorganization of the world."¹⁷

In 1879, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was 35, He, although still formally a prisoner, traveled to Beirut at the invitation of Midhat Páshá, one of the most brilliant statesmen in the Ottoman Empire at the time, who was instrumental in inducing the Sultán to grant a constitution to his people.¹⁸ Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Lawh-i-Ard-i-Bá (Tablet to the Land of Bá) on this occasion, in which He writes: "All the atoms of the earth have announced unto all created things that from behind the gate of the Prison-city there hath appeared and above its horizon there hath shone forth the Orb of the beauty of the great, the Most Mighty Branch of God—His ancient and immutable Mystery—proceeding on its way to another land."¹⁹

Before 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to Beirut, the Váli of that city, whom they had known while in Adrianople, who had immense respect for both Bahá'u'lláh and His Son, also visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Bahá'u'lláh in Akká.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's marriage

In 1862, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was 18, Bahá'u'lláh sent a ring and a cashmere scarf to ask Shahrbanú Khánum to marry 'Abdu'l-Bahá. However, her uncle, due to lobbying from a female relative, did not give consent for her to go to Iraq, where the Holy Family was located. The woman ended up marrying another man and, heartbroken at not being able to marry 'Abdu'l-Bahá, died shortly afterwards.

For many years after that event, 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not marry and many in the community were naturally curious about this state of affairs:

During the youth of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the question of a suitable marriage for Him was naturally one of great interest to the believers, and many people came forward, wishing to have this crown of honour for their own family. For a long time, however, 'Abdu'l-Bahá showed

“. . . the glory and beauty of love and happiness were beyond and above all luxury and ceremony and circumstance.”

no inclination for marriage, and no one understood the wisdom of this. Afterwards it became known that there was a girl who was destined to become the wife of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, one whose birth came through the Blessing which the Báb gave to her parents in Isfáhán.²⁰

Fátimih Khánum, later to be known as Munírih Khánum, who would become 'Abdu'l-Bahá wife, was married briefly before marrying 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but her husband Kázim, passed away immediately after the wedding. As the author Baharieh Ma'ani has observed: "The mystery of Shahrbanu Khánum's sufferings and death as well as the death of Kázim, who died immediately after his marriage to Fatimih Khánum, remains in the treasury of God's knowledge."²¹

The marriage of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Munírih Khánum took place five months after her arrival in the Holy Land, on 9 March 1873, once the owner of the home in which they were living, Elias Abbud, offered to provide a room for them. On that night she wore a white dress that had been given to her by Navváb, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's mother. At about three hours after sunset, Bahá'u'lláh summoned her to His presence. Years later, Munírih Khánum spoke to Lady Blomfield, a Bahá'í from the West, about both her wedding and her marriage to 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Oh the spiritual happiness which enfolded us! It cannot be described in earthly words.

The chanting ended, the guests left us. I was the wife of My Beloved. How wonderful and noble He was in His beauty. I adored Him. I recognized His greatness, and thanked God for bringing me to Him.

You have known Him in His later years, but then, in the youth of His beauty and manly vigour, with His unfailing love, His kindness, his cheerfulness, his sense of humour, His untiring consideration for everybody, He was marvelous, without equal, surely in all the earth!

At the wedding there was no cake, only cups of tea; there were no decorations and no choir, but the blessing of Jamál-i-Mubárak;²² the glory and beauty of love and happiness were beyond and above all luxury and ceremony and circumstance.²³

15 G. Cameron with W. Momen, *A Basic Bahá'í Chronology*, p. 66.

16 *Century of Light*, II, p. 8

17 *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 37.

18 Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 37-38.

19 *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 227

20 John Esslemont qtd. in B.R. Ma'ani, *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees*, p. 318.

21 Ma'ani, p. 318.

22 A title for Bahá'u'lláh.

23 Ma'ani, pp. 318-319.

The marriage of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Munírih Khanum also brought joy to the believers residing in the Holy Land, who composed poems for the occasion. The two would be married for almost half a century and their marriage resulted in nine children, five of whom died in childhood.

In addition to the outstanding qualities of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s personality, Munírih Khanum described Him in his youth as a “strong and graceful swimmer.”²⁴ We also know that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in addition to all the services He rendered His Father, and the communities in which He lived, may have known how to weave straw mats. He is reported to have said: “In the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh, it is incumbent upon every soul to acquire a trade and an occupation. For example, I know how to weave or make a mat, and you know some other trade. This, in itself is an act of worship, provided that it is conducted on the basis of utmost honesty and faithfulness.”²⁵

In reflecting on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s early life, conscious of the impossibility of understanding the Mystery of God, yet also striving to follow His example, we see One who had a balanced personality and lived a balanced life, but not in the conventional ways we might view these terms, who lived a life of extreme hardship, suffering and sorrow, yet also took joy in His service to others, who performed a variety of services to others from searching for food for His fellow travelers to writing insightful commentaries, who did not have a straightforward path to marriage, yet eventually married the one He was intended to wed.



Portrait of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Edirne, c. 1868.

Photo: Bahá’í International Community

“O Thou Who art the apple of Mine eye! My glory, the ocean of My loving-kindness, the sun of My bounty, the heaven of My mercy rest upon Thee. We pray God to illumine the world through Thy knowledge and wisdom, to ordain for Thee that which will gladden Thine heart and impart consolation to Thine eyes. The glory of God rest upon Thee, and upon whatsoever serveth Thee and circleth around Thee.”

Tablet in Bahá’u’lláh’s handwriting addressed to Abdu’l-Bahá, translated by Shoghi Effendi. *The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 61

²⁴ Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, pp.87-90.

²⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from an article written by Dr. Z. Baghdadi entitled “‘Abdu’l-Bahá in America,” published in “*Star of the West*”, Vol. 19, No. 7, p. 219.

A revolution of identity: The Montreal Youth Group

Every generation faces a new set of needs and requirements in its service to the Cause, altering the role of the Faith in daily decisions and actions.

In the late 1920s, a group of youth in Montreal transformed what it meant to live with the teachings of the Faith at the heart of one's life.

From a mere collection of individuals, the Bahá'ís in Montreal acquired, with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the city serving as the catalyst, a sense of themselves as a community. That community rose from a loose collection of "occasional" Bahá'ís to a people collectively committed to sharing with the wider world its understanding of Bahá'í social principles related to racial amity, world order and Bahá'í administration, while also drawing in people from all backgrounds into the Bahá'í Faith. The Montreal Bahá'í community became the standard bearer of the future directions of many other Bahá'í communities in Canada.

A historical magnifying glass would reveal that, before 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit, many of the Bahá'ís in Montreal were deeply cemented in the life of the wider society and were making significant personal contributions to that world – often achieving fame or newsworthy mentions in the media of the day – while being a Bahá'í was an add-on to their already-established identities. By the time the Master came to Montreal in 1912, these and a few other believers were seen as part of the "older generation." Some disappeared, or drifted away, from the Bahá'ís.



Montreal Youth Group members in 1932. Back row, left to right: Eddie Elliot, Walter Lohse, Emeric Sala, Norman McGregor, Tom Lee and Edward Lindstrom. Second row, left to right: Ruth Cunningham Iee, Rosemary Sala, Alberta Sims Dubin, Ilse Lohse, Bahiyyih Lindstrom and Dorothy Wade, From row: left to right: Henry Bergholtz, Mary Maxwell, Glen Wade and Lorris Dear. Photo: Canadian Bahá'í Archives

From the end of August to early September of that year, the city was blessed with a nine-day visit from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, coordinated by May Maxwell, and He bestowed many treasured moments on the few still involved in the activities of the Faith. Naturally, His presence generated a great deal of attention, not only from the Bahá'ís but the wider community as well. The Master travelled the city and spoke in churches and halls to individuals from all walks of life, drawing people to the teachings of His Father. The abundance of women in the Bahá'í community was noteworthy, as was the relative scarcity of men, and early believers, such as Elizabeth Cowles, would ask 'Abdu'l-Bahá to pray that their husbands would accept the new Revelation as well.

Another early believer in Montreal was Dorothy Ward. Born in England, Dorothy, at the age of 17, married a widower who had a six-month-old baby. When the couple then emigrated to Canada in 1910, it was owners of a Montreal restaurant who first introduced her to the Bahá'í Faith. Dorothy was, at first, reluctant to take up an invitation by these owners to visit May Maxwell, but finally went. As "she was interested in the people rather than the [Bahá'í] religion," she thought that the people were "wonderful" and was so "fascinated with them" that in time she became a Bahá'í. Her daughter, Dorothy Wade, became a close friend of Mary Maxwell and was a member of the Montreal Youth Group.

The Montreal Bahá'í Youth Group re-envisioned Bahá'í identity:

In 1923, in his first letter to Canada, Shoghi Effendi referred to the country as "vast and flourishing" and "great," describing its people as "spiritually-minded." The Guardian also, however, characterized Canadians as "firmly entrenched in their religious sectarianism and strongly attached to their religious doctrines and traditions."

He then expressed the spiritual mandate of the Bahá'ís to Canadian society and how they could break down the "barriers of prejudice and religious exclusiveness." More particularly, he insisted that the qualities of "courage and persistence, kindness and wisdom," would be required to "conquer this longstanding stronghold of sectarian belief." The Guardian also raised the vision of Bahá'ís worldwide through his World Order letters.

These letters, and the vision they contained, struck a responsive chord among members of the Montreal Youth Group.¹ In 1927, the newly-emerging group – one of the first its kind in North America – responded with a love

1 This "youth" group would not fall under the contemporary age bracket of pre-teens and teens, but instead the group pulled in Bahá'ís who were in their twenties at least.

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and zeal that would take them far beyond the confines of the Montreal Bahá'í community. Until this moment, the community was restricted in membership, temperament and sometimes had superficial attachments to the Bahá'í Faith, with the exception of some notable Bahá'ís, such as May Maxwell, who saw the wider vision. The formation of a Bahá'í Youth Group in Montreal would alter the way new Bahá'ís would gauge their own relationship with the Bahá'í Faith and its community and would inevitably change the patterns of teaching the Cause.²

A young Bahá'í, Rowland Estall, had, through the attraction of May Maxwell and her daughter, Mary, enrolled in the Bahá'í Faith in the waning days of the 1927 National Convention in Montreal. After a summer of working as a wireless operator on ships on the St. Lawrence River, he decided to enroll in Sir George Williams College (now Concordia University). Finding the Bahá'í perspective "considerably more compelling" than the first-year Arts program at university, he teamed up with another young man, Emeric Sala – who had become a Bahá'í in December, 1927³ – to see whether a youth group could be formed to deepen their understanding of the Bahá'í Faith and to attract other youth to the new religion.

The group charted a new phase for the whole community: one that sought out like-minded organizations, hoping to attract their most active members to the Bahá'í Faith. The meetings of the Bahá'í Youth Group saw its task to unite an understanding of developments in the world with the guidance of Bahá'í teachings. Rather than replicating the tasks of the pre-1912 Bahá'ís who saw their mission to elucidate Christian teachings from the Bahá'í perspective, the Youth Group members had their eyes steadfastly fixed on the requirements of the future as envisioned by Shoghi Effendi. Dorothy Wade shared how the Montreal community responded to this new and entirely unique gathering within the city:

...the Maxwells, of course, set the wonderful example of lovely meetings and youth groups started with Emeric and Rowland, I believe. And suddenly we had about 50 people. People from all walks of life and a lot of communists that would argue. Bahá'ís don't argue. They thought we were too slow, that things would never happen unless you used force. And all these young people kept coming back and coming back until a lot of them became Bahá'ís.⁴

2 Violette Nakhjavani and Bahiyyih Nakhjavani (2016). *The Maxwells of Montreal: Vol 2: Middle Years 1923-1937, Late Years 1937-1952*. Oxford, UK: George Ronald.

3 Ilona Weinstein (2016). *Tending the Garden: A Biography of Emeric & Rosemary Sala*. Essex, MD: One Voice Press.

4 From interviews extracted from Will van den Hoonaard (1996), *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press)

Within a year, the first to have accepted the Bahá'í Faith through this novel approach was Rosemary Gillies, a young Scottish woman of Presbyterian background, in 1929. There was some hesitancy to ask Gillies to enroll:

Neither Emeric [Sala] or I [Rowland Estall] had had any experience of enrolling anyone in the [Bahá'í] Faith, but one day, in discussing it together, we decided it was high time that Rosemary should be given the opportunity to declare herself. We were not entirely sure of her reaction and so, neither of us wishing to bell the cat, so to speak, we tossed for it. I won, and invited Rosemary to become a Bahá'í. She simply wondered why we had waited so long to ask her.⁵

5 *Ibid.*



Rosemary Sala (née Gillies) soon after she declared her faith in Bahá'u'lláh. Photo: contributed by Ilona Weinstein

For these youth, being a Bahá'í was central to their identity and played a decisive role in their futures. Rowland Estall, for example, became one of the most effective teachers of the Bahá'í Faith in Canada. After he gave up his university studies, Sun Life Assurance Company hired him and he became an expert in the new field of group insurance, pensions, and employee benefits. He melded his Bahá'í beliefs with his professional aims, namely the encouragement of profit-sharing plans, security and full benefits for employees, and protecting employees from the financial hazards of death, disability, and old age. His position allowed him to transfer to places, namely Vancouver and Winnipeg, where the Bahá'í community was just emerging or where there were no Bahá'ís at all. By applying the same teaching method as in the Youth Group, he was particularly successful in seeking out like-minded organizations and encouraging their most active leaders and members into Bahá'í membership.

While in Montreal, Rosemary Gillis organized children's classes every Saturday afternoon. When, in 1934, she married Emeric Sala and moved to St. Lambert, Que., she continued to hold successful classes there, becoming one of the earliest Bahá'í educators of children. She also worked to establish the collection and preservation of archives for the Canadian Bahá'í community. Mr. and Mrs. Sala then pioneered to Venezuela in 1939, helping to bring the Canadian Bahá'í community into contact with the wider world. After the couple settled in Venezuela, the Montreal Bahá'í Youth Group gradually disbanded, with many of its members setting out on their own pioneering trips to teach the Cause across Canada and throughout the world.

The varied experiences of becoming a Bahá'í, as well as the diversity of cultural backgrounds and thought, prepared the Bahá'í community to continually evolve into new patterns of Bahá'í life, guided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and, today, the Universal House of Justice. It is heartening that, in the late 1920s when the idea of a Bahá'í community was still in its nascent form, the members of the Montreal Bahá'í Youth Group freed themselves from the grasp of society's norms and focused wholeheartedly on the needs of the Faith: purposefully reaching out to individuals outside of the Bahá'í community, revolutionizing the teaching work and finding enthusiastic response. While the work of this hour is different than that of the Youth Group's time, the same spirit and determination shown by these young souls, so deeply in love with the Faith, shines out through the faces of the workers of today.

– Will C. van den Hoonard, with thanks to Ilona Weinstein for helping with this article.

Youth reflect on taking a period of service

The choice to dedicate a period to full-time service to the Cause can be a difficult one; school, work and other aspects of life demand time and youth are often called on to give these their focus. The following four accounts are from youth across the country who, in the face of these demands, chose to focus their energies on serving Bahá'u'lláh for various periods of time and they discuss what it meant to make that choice.

When thinking about school, a career and service, I've seen a lot of young people struggle to fit them all into their lives, especially because we're told to think of ourselves before anyone or anything else.

I have seen a number of young people worry that if they don't focus only on what they think they need, like, "I need to do really well in school to have a really good master's degree and a really good job," then they won't have lived a good life. That feeling comes from a lot of places, and very rarely do I find that it comes from a youth coming to that conclusion on their own. It is often maybe their family, the things they see or hear around

them at school or the examples they have around them. It means that everything else comes second to that goal of school and work.

But, for me, being around a group of people trying to live according to a new standard helped me see it's also possible for myself. That, as someone who has a desire to serve others, it goes beyond what you want and don't want or what is comfortable for you. Being in spaces that open the way for you to see how great the needs are help you go beyond whatever plans you have for yourself. The needs are great, and you are someone who can help contribute with a clear action.



When I was deciding if I wanted to do a year of service, I was around people who were doing things that, though difficult, they knew were important. My study circle facilitator, for example, made time to help me in so many areas of my life while also dealing with her own. She was in university full time, preparing for med school and also working, but gave so much of herself to the program while all this was happening and she would sit and tutor me in chemistry, because I was struggling. Her help meant I could go to my junior youth group that week, even though she had exams and a job to think about. Being exposed to people who are thinking beyond themselves

helped me also see that this was a way to live your life and that I wanted to do that too.

I used to think that I only needed to work and go to school, so I could contribute to the world by making money and having a comfortable family. That was a bit more of a common view of what productivity looks like but being around other people with a different understanding of what it meant to contribute to the world helped me see that I don't need to make that my sole focus. I can study, I can work and I can serve and these things working together has me contributing to the world the way that I want to.

One of the most pivotal moments of my life was the 2014 youth conference. I was 15 and had just graduated from the junior youth programme. It had never occurred to me to go on a period of service; until then my life was guided by my parents in terms of service and life as a Bahá'í, so I wasn't really taking ownership of my religion. Then, literally over the three days of the conference, I went from just passively receiving information through the junior youth group and my parents to actually seeking to take action myself.

The encounters I had with the people at the youth conference really blew my mind. The potency of what youth can do, and the level of detachment youth can have was something I never thought was possible at that scale. Then I realized what a lot of these youth had in common was they all took a year of service and they said that was a time where they could develop those spiritual qualities that they were emanating, so to speak. That was eye-opening for me. It was something that never occurred to me before; it's not common in school to talk about service and spiritual qualities and things. So there I was, 15 years old, with 100 per cent certainty that I would take a year of service after high school.

After I went to high school I got confused, and unsure, about taking a year of service. I went further away from serving. Though I still had my junior youth group, I wasn't sure now about the year of service. When the time came to make the decision, I wasn't thinking it was the right thing to do in my mind. To me, taking a month, or a year, to serve sounded like forever. Not going to school a whole year was like, "What? That's a lot." But my heart remembered that time in the youth conference and the certitude I had then. That's still to this day what keeps me going.

*So there I was,
15 years old,
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after high school.*

Then I had to figure out what a year of service meant to me. At that time, I really wanted to travel and then I learned that may not be an option. I was told my community was in need of fulltime people and that's when I had to reconsider what it meant for me to go on a year of service. My parents helped me see how a year of service is meant to be you serving at your full potential and not anything else, not even what you want or where you want – just meeting what needs to be done. I had thought of maybe serving in Haifa but then I realized that my potential could be here rather than in the gardens; I had so many connections in my community. I've been serving for two years in the junior youth programme and I realized

it would be a great loss to lose those connections. It was a lot of reflection on the year of service and what is sacrifice.

What really sticks with me from when I was 15 is the detachment the youth at the conference had. I never realized that someone could be so detached to their own needs because I realized, for me, a year of service is a huge sacrifice. It was very impressive for me to see this mindset that was completely different from what I'm used to. There was a very unifying power at that conference and everyone had their minds on one unique goal. I feel like just being a part of that movement was the most attractive thing of going on a year of service for me. Before, the Bahá'í Faith in my life was my four friends in the junior youth group, and I knew a couple friends of my parents that were Bahá'í, obviously I went to Holy Days where I saw people, but no one really my age. To see the scale helped me see it more as my duty as a human, as a part of the human family, to act upon this. It's not just me.

"Although your realities are shaped by a broad diversity of circumstances, yet a desire to bring about constructive change and a capacity for meaningful service, both characteristic of your stage of life, are neither limited to any race or nationality, nor dependent upon material means. This bright period of youth you share is experienced by all—but it is brief, and buffeted by numerous social forces. How important it is, then, to strive to be among those who, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'plucked the fruit of life'."

From the Universal House of Justice to the participants in the forthcoming 114 youth conferences throughout the world, 1 July 2013

Towards the end of my service at the World Centre, I thought to myself, “I really need to decide what I’m going to do next,” because I was going back to Vancouver in a few short weeks.

I attended a talk by Paul Lample for the youth at the World Centre, which really helped me. One thing he said that stuck with me was that when people, especially within the Bahá’í community, say, “you need to balance your work, your service, and your education,” it can be pretty overwhelming, especially because of the word “balance.” But Mr. Lample said that “balance” doesn’t necessarily mean an equal proportion throughout your entire life. It means that at different stages of life, different areas of your life will take more or less precedence according to that stage.

Sometimes you find yourself in a position where you can really dedicate a lot of time to service and therefore the proportion of service becomes larger than your work or your education. Then there are other times where you need to focus on building your career, since as Bahá’ís we need to pursue a profession. You still do that with the spirit of service, but your work has a larger focus than the service you’re doing in the field with core activities.

He also said, “You need to evaluate in every stage of your life how these three are proportioned, as long as they are all continually present.” That really got me thinking.

I thought, “Okay, so many Writings say that the period of youth is the prime time to serve. It’s also the time

I had so much certitude about my decision... The fear of being a little behind in school compared to my other classmates was not an issue anymore.

that I don’t really have that many responsibilities to attend to.” It just made sense after that talk to do another year of service. But I still had a few doubts and fears.

I was really concerned about moving forward with school. Going to university, starting my education and not falling behind people my age seemed really important.

The week before I was leaving Haifa I had a staff visit to the house of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and I decided to dedicate the visit to the decision regarding another year of service. After the staff visit, I had zero doubts. I was going to dedicate another year of my life to full-time service, this time in Canada. I had so much certitude about my decision and it was so clear that it was the obvious next step. The fear of being a little behind in school compared to my other classmates was not an issue anymore.

I shared my decision with my parents. They were really happy about it and very supportive. The rest of my family also expressed their loving support – which was very encouraging and confirming. My grandma and my uncle even offered to contribute to the Deputization Fund to help support me.

The clarity I had developed in such a short period of time due to prayer, as well as the support and encouragement of my family, was confirmation enough for me to confidently know that this decision was the right one at this stage of my life. And so began another year of service!

Since I was 16, I've hosted my own core activity. I had a lot of support when I started — I was in a small town and it was pretty exciting. All the youth would go to Ruhi and once I had that experience I felt somewhat equipped. There was an older community member who was on the Local Spiritual Assembly and helped me to start my own activity. It was not just on me to figure it out. From there I had my weekly junior youth group, and when I graduated from high school I moved to Canada to study in Vancouver.

When I moved here, I started to get to know the community and then I started my first term of university. I didn't have any activities — I would just attend Feast or go to a youth devotional — and I felt something was lacking.

I wanted to get more involved, I wanted to do something again. At a Feast, a family said they needed an animator. So, I volunteered and they helped me out. It was with their junior youth and the friends that they knew. The whole family supported me with the group. I was with them for four years and as I graduated from university, they graduated from the junior youth program.

I finished school in April and, after graduation, I told myself I would take a break. I had no thought of full-time service in my mind. My plan was to relax for the summer but then, in May, one of my friends told me about a learning site seminar that had happened. My friends had been there and to me this was a big contrast to what I was doing. The fact that I had been laying on the beach not doing anything while they were dedicating their time to this made me realize that I had to do something. There were so many dedicated souls and I wanted to be one of them.

I got connected to the next teaching project and asked around to find out what activities I could get involved in. I started serving a lot and ended up focusing exclusively

I knew that service was important to me and it made me so happy to contribute to something bigger than myself.

on that. Then, sometime that fall, the idea of serving full time arose.

I didn't feel ready when this happened. I avoided the thought. I thought I had too much going on with needing to figure out what to do with my education. But I managed to sit down with a resource person and an Auxiliary Board member, and they helped me look at the whole picture.

They helped me to see that serving full time would actually help me develop a lot of skills that I wanted, like team collaboration, planning and organizing. They helped me look at how this would be another step toward the future that I wanted to have in all areas of my life. I

knew that service was important to me and it made me so happy to contribute to something bigger than myself. They helped me put all the pieces in place to understand what it meant to serve in this way. The resource person sat with me in silence for an hour while I worked on a life plan in my notebook. The fact that she was there, quietly working on her own things while I sorted this out, was very comforting.

I decided to serve full time for two years, and now I'm one year into it. I've moved into the neighbourhood where I've been serving because it's helpful to be living there full time; things move faster this way.

No matter what I'm doing — school, service, work — I learn so much. My role has changed over the past year: at first, I was just learning from the team doing whatever was needed, then I started accompanying other groups over time. Now I'm accompanying five groups in this neighbourhood and a couple of the study circles. There is a great support system around me to turn to while I serve — a wonderful team of people who I see at least once a week as we study and reflect together. I don't feel like I'm doing this alone but we're all helping each other to reach for the same goals.



The delegates of the 70th National Convention, including former Universal House of Justice member Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri and his wife Vida Javaheri (third row, sixth from left) seated among the members of the National Spiritual Assembly (third row, third from left) with Counsellor Dr. Borna Nouredin (third row, fourth from right). Photo: Liam Moore

From Across Canada

Canada's 70th National Convention

The 70th Canadian National Convention opened with a resounding “Canada is here!” from the chair of the National Spiritual Assembly, Deloria Bighorn.

The main hall of the Toronto Bahá’í Centre, warmed through the presence of so many friends from across the country, was decorated with fresh flowers and stories of the many celebrations that took place for the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh. The Convention was further enhanced by the presence of three special guests, two of whom had served as members of the Universal House of Justice: Mr. Douglas Martin and Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri, along with Dr. Javaheri’s wife, Vida Javaheri, newly returned from service in the Holy Land.

The Riḍván message from the Universal House of Justice was read in French and English, and at its close, the delegates began their consultation on the message.

“... now there is this confidence that is really quite exciting.”

While many topics were brought up over the four days of the Convention, the transformation to the Bahá'í community — noted by the Universal House of Justice in the Ridván message — was a common theme throughout the consultations of the delegates.

One delegate from rural Alberta said that the Convention's consultation had evolved since the last time she attended.

“I haven't been here in about three years,” she told *Bahá'í Canada*, “and it's so amazing to hear the confidence in everyone's words. Before, people seemed so unsure about what they were doing but now there is this confidence that is really quite exciting.”

Love for the Institutions of the Faith

A number of delegates expressed a deep sense of gratitude from their communities for the flood of guidance and encouragement that came to every community in Canada through messages from the Universal House of Justice and the letters sent by the National Spiritual Assembly throughout the year.

“We are so grateful for all the messages sent to us last year,” said one delegate from British Columbia, directly addressing the members of the National Spiritual Assembly from where they sat across the room. “They were love letters to our community from you.”

She explained that every time a message came, a team of friends would meet to translate it into Persian and get it to the Persian-speaking friends as soon as possible.

The study of these letters became a natural part of her community's activities.

“We started to see a unified language in our community and we were able to take steps towards our bicentenary. The language is rising,” she said, “and we are so grateful. Thank you.”

Many delegates shared stories about how support from different institutions, such as the Auxiliary Board members, their assistants, Area Teaching Committees and planned intensive campaigns, played an important role in the growth of their community-building endeavours.

A delegate from Nunavut shared how the number of activities in the North has increased.

“In the past three years we have had growth with the support of a coordinator and the Auxiliary Board member,” he said. “We have children's classes, devotionals, and for the bicentenary we restarted our Bahá'í radio program. We had some youth go and take part in a Book 5 intensive in Thunder Bay [Ont.], and when they came back they did some outreach. Now we have a junior youth group in Iqaluit. Most of our participants are from the wider community and most are Inuit.”

Love for the Universal House of Justice was commonly referenced and was further deepened through the stories told by the members of the National Spiritual Assembly who attended the International Convention in April. Each member stood and shared personal accounts of this Convention — which takes place every five years — helping to connect the friends in Canada to the extraordinary experience of gathering, with the peoples of the world, to elect the Universal House of Justice.

At the midpoint of the National Convention, the delegates engaged in their sacred task of electing the members of the National Spiritual Assembly for the coming year. Both the delegates and the observers —

who watched from a room upstairs in the Centre — took time to pray and to create a sacred and rarified atmosphere that was sustained while the delegates filled out their ballots.

Then the name of each delegate was called by locality, and one by one their ballots were dropped — either by their own hand or delivered by the head teller if the delegate had not been able to attend the Convention in person — into the election box. When the last ballot was cast, the delegates broke into song, singing one of the prayers revealed for the Bahá'ís of Canada.

A first-time delegate from a small community in B.C. said the election process deeply touched her heart. “When I was walking up to put my ballot in the box, I don't have the words. I felt humble,” she told *Bahá'í Canada*. “My parents were delegates in the past and I felt them with me as I was walking up to put my ballot in. It's a real honour.”

When the head teller returned with the election results, she announced that all 171 delegates cast ballots. The delegates cheered upon hearing of the 100 per cent participation of the friends in the election, as has been the case in previous years.

After the names of each member of the National Spiritual Assembly was announced, and the nine chosen friends stood together in front of the delegates, applause rang through the main hall as every person present stood to welcome the members to their service for the coming year.

Supporting the youth

On the second day, the delegates watched the film *A Widening Embrace* which had been presented at the International Convention in April. Counselor Borna Nouredin, while greeting the delegates the evening before, described how the film shows the Plan in action. He encouraged the delegates to treat the film like a message from the House of Justice; deserving repeated viewing and study alongside the Ridván Message.

“One has to be alert to how this film was produced. There are 25 communities in this film. For every minute you see there, hundreds of hours were recorded,” he told the assembled delegates. Its content, he explained, was guided by the Universal House of Justice. “It’s not hard to imagine its connection to the Rīḡvān Message and it’s important to look at it through this lens.”

“We have also learned the power of the institute and the importance of attending the intensive campaigns. Those who are coming fall in love with the process and see themselves as protagonists in that process.”

With these comments in mind, and fresh from their initial study of the Rīḡvān message, the delegates watched the film while taking note of the patterns of action that lead to the growth hoped for in every cluster.

A major component, many delegates commented, was the need to systematically support youth and raise up junior youth groups. One delegate from B.C., for example, explained how reflecting regularly in groups has helped to remove many of the barriers felt by those struggling to maintain a junior youth group over a long period of time.



An atmosphere of reverence filled the hall as the delegates cast their votes.

“For the past 10 years, we have been trying to move youth through the institute process and into the field. What we realized is that we haven’t had the discipline [to reflect on] action. Now we are trying to meet at least on a weekly basis to reflect. It has removed any feelings of being alone and we are able to collaborate as a larger group.”

She added that people shouldn’t hesitate to ask youth to take part in intensive campaigns to study the sequence of Ruhi courses, but rather should recognize the energy and capacity that allows them to dedicate their time to intensive study of the institute courses and participation in its community-building activities.

“We have also learned the power of the institute and the importance of attending the intensive campaigns. Those who are coming fall in love with the process and see themselves as protagonists in that process.”

From the Atlantic Provinces, a delegate shared how community building is enhanced through the united efforts of the youth and the other members of the community.

“We developed teams during the [expansion] phase where it was

everyone together — pairing youth with a non-youth — for home visits,” she said. She shared that when they decided to hold a junior youth camp — a period of intensity when one or more junior youth groups come together to study, serve and delve into the arts — they found that it wasn’t just the junior youth arriving to participate. “They came with their families, not just sending their children, but the whole family! It was a real relationship because everyone was there together.”

Preparing for the next bicentenary

With so much learned over the past year from preparing for and celebrating the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh with the wider community, the conversation among the delegates naturally included thoughts for the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb. A common suggestion was that the friends begin studying *The Dawnbreakers* and Ruhi Book 4: *The Twin Manifestations*.

Delegates discussed how love for Bahá’u’lláh translates into love for the Báb, and vice versa.



“O Thou incomparable God! O Thou Lord of the Kingdom! These souls are Thy heavenly army. Assist them and, with the cohorts of the Supreme Concourse, make them victorious, so that each one of them may become like unto a regiment and conquer these countries through the love of God and the illumination of divine teachings.”



Photos of the delegates at National Convention, along with former House of Justice member Dr. Firiyadoun Javaheri (top left) and Counsellor Borna Nourredin (above), surrounding the prayer sung by the delegates after the last ballot was cast.

Photos: Liam Moore and Mapendo Ngilinga de Carvalho





O God! Be Thou their supporter and their helper, and in the wilderness, the mountain, the valley, the forests, the prairies and the seas, be Thou their confidant—so that they may cry out through the power of the Kingdom and the breath of the Holy Spirit.

Verily, Thou art the Powerful, the Mighty and the Omnipotent, and Thou art the Wise, the Hearing and the Seeing.”





Delegates rejoice in the election of the National Spiritual Assembly.

“I couldn’t speak after the reading of the Riḍvān message yesterday,” said a delegate from Quebec. “For the first time in my Bahá’í existence I realized my proximity to the Báb and that we have the same mission as the Báb: to turn people toward Bahá’u’lláh. This is our way to clarify that it was so important that God sent a Manifestation to prepare humanity for the magnificence of Bahá’u’lláh. This is the most cherished desire of the Báb. We all must be a part of it.”

So many stories of friends coming together to celebrate the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá’u’lláh have helped show the Bahá’í community just how much needs to be done to not only prepare for the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb but also to consolidate the efforts made to bring more people into the community-building activities of the Faith. A number of the delegates commented that the community must continue

“For the first time in my Bahá’í existence I realized my proximity to the Báb and that we have the same mission . . . to turn people toward Bahá’u’lláh.”

to make sacrifices for this work and to bring the spirit of teaching into everyday life.

“The bicentenary was a great move forward,” said an Ontario-based delegate. “The world will take on a new plateau that has not been taken before. We want to make this way of inviting so many people to our Holy Days a way of life, not just a singular celebration for the bicentenaries.”

A delegate from Quebec offered words of encouragement to the friends, reminding them that every day calls for action.

“How many times have we heard this weekend that what is needed is herculean effort?”

Dr. Javaheri, in his address to the assembled delegates on the final evening of the Convention, shared how devotion to Bahá’u’lláh’s vision for humanity is one of the most precious assets for the betterment the world. He asked everyone to consider how their time is spent each day and called them to push towards whatever higher levels of sacrifice they could offer Bahá’u’lláh in teaching His Cause.

While the weight of the work was not lost on those present, it was viewed with a sense of determination and strength born out of the intensity and the love shown through the period of the bicentenary by individuals in their neighbourhoods, villages and cities and through the messages of the National Spiritual Assembly and the Universal House of Justice.

“I was reading the first paragraph from the House,” said a delegate from Ontario, holding up the Ridván Message. “It says that no community is the same since the bicentenary. I am not the same as I was two hours before this Convention. It is so beautiful how the guidance can transform us. There is no limit to how our communities can evolve and how we can evolve with them.”

In closing remarks, the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly expressed gratitude for the friends’ “gifts of thought” and said the

“. . . no community is the same since the bicentenary. . . It is so beautiful how the guidance can transform us. There is no limit to how our communities can evolve and how we can evolve with them.”

consultations of the friends during the days of the National Convention will influence the consultation of the Assembly for the coming year.

She then told a story of a flower that blooms and leaves behind a beautiful fragrance as it fades, and she likened that flower to the spirit of the Convention.

“It’s the fragrance of faithfulness,” she said, looking out over the assembled delegates for the final time. “The faithfulness of friends who have given their all in this past year.”

The Convention closed with prayers and one final song sung in memory of the Báb and His sacrifices. The delegates then bid farewell to one another before returning to their homes across the country to share both the spirit and the content of the Convention with the friends.

For more content from National Convention, including a video of this year’s display, and other stories, visit the Bahá’í Canada website at www.bahaicanada.bahai.ca.



Shirin Nuesslein observes the Convention from the upstairs hall at the Toronto Bahá’í Centre.



As part of his year of service, Mapendo animates junior youth groups. Two of the members of his group take a quick break during a service project in their neighbourhood. Photo: Mapendo Ngilinga de Carvalho

The Fund is here and helping us to serve

The Funds of the Faith allow people of all ages to support the work of the Cause. Three youth in Ottawa, along with a Treasury Aide, sat down to reflect on the role the Fund plays in their day-to-day life.

For many youth serving at the frontlines of the Cause, the Funds of the Faith are a necessity to their work.

“I’m pretty much dependent on the Fund in my year of service,” said Mapendo Ngilinga de Carvalho, a 19-year-old serving full-time in Ottawa. “And it really helps me to strengthen this idea that it’s all an endeavour to advance the Cause and it’s not just financial. It’s so intertwined with the process of community building.”

In December of 2017, the Bahá’ís in Ottawa invited youth to come learn about the Fund at an event called “Chatting about the Fund over French Toast.” Together they deepened on the guidance of the Fund and learned about the role it plays in their service and everyday life.

Arian Taherzadeh, a 14-year-old in the community, and Kaia Dallaire, who’s 15, said they were deeply impacted by what they learned at the breakfast.

“It was really nice because it wasn’t just at a Nineteen-Day Feast which just gives the report, but it gave a sense of what it means,” Arian said. “Before I would obey my parents and give my little contribution and not really think about it. But now I know what that contribution means and how that affects your soul.”

Kaia had attended one of the deepenings last year as well, but said that now that she’s a bit older and doing more service, she sees how much the Fund makes her service possible.

“With my junior youth group, which is in Book 1 now, I never really

thought about where the money was coming from for the community centre or anything. I've realized now how I'm relying on the Fund in my service."

Mapendo runs an Instagram account that shares information about the Fund with members of the Ottawa Bahá'í community. He said he thinks it's very important for youth to learn about the Fund as soon as possible.

"Youth are just getting their first jobs and their first pay cheques," he said, adding that choosing to give to the Fund rather than spending on something like fast food is a choice very different than what is expected of their peers. "I feel like it's a really cool thing that more youth should be involved in."

Frank Rusk, who works as an aide to the Treasurer in Ottawa, said that as the community tries to increase education on the Fund — through events like the French Toast breakfast, using social media, and a regular Fund bulletin — that he is seeing changes in the contributions being given in the city.

"I see names I didn't see before, and I think we have more youth in particular donating online. And having the National's website¹ makes it so that people can contribute wherever they are."

Arian agreed that the online system is great for people his age to use. "I don't often have cash on me," he explained. "So, having something online is very helpful."

He also said that, even though he doesn't have a lot to give, the spirit of giving talked about in the guidance makes him want to contribute what he can.

"Before I thought about it going to Haifa and the World Centre and not something that I really interacted with," he said, laughing, "but now I know that it's not only going to the World Centre but it's helping to pay for Mapendo's bus pass!"

Seeing the Fund at work in their everyday service activities, and understanding that this material resource exists to support their spiritual endeavours, the youth said it has changed the way they interact with the support given to them through the Funds of the Faith.

"But now I know what that contribution means and how that affects your soul."

"I attended a [junior youth] graduate camp for youth turning 15, and we studied *Spirit of Faith*, which was provided by the Fund," said Arian. "There was a cost, but they said that it should not be a barrier for anyone. During that week I was very aware that this food was not just endless and to be more moderate. I recognized that other people had given to the Fund and didn't want to take that for granted."

Mapendo agreed. "Where I live is partly supported by the Fund, so we are really careful with not only how we treat what is in the house but how we ourselves act within it," he said. "We recognize that it's a house of

the Local Spiritual Assembly, so we watch our music and our language and see that it is really a spiritual house. The fact that the Fund is behind these things and recognizing that the Fund is here and helping us to serve makes it obvious that we can't just be fooling around."

Since learning more about the Fund, Arian and Kaia have become "Fund Ambassadors" in the community. After the French Toast event, they presented what they learned at their local Feast, which helped to show all ages that they can support the work of the Faith.

"We are seeing a lot more reaching out from the older adults to the youth," said Kaia. "The older adults are providing the means and opportunities for the younger generation to arise because we don't have a lot of money and wouldn't be able to do this without them."

Mr. Rusk agrees that the Fund helps to unite everyone of all ages in their work for the Cause.

"My generation can't work on the frontlines the same way your generation can, or like we did when we were your age," he said, turning towards Arian, Kaia and Mapendo. "But we can support you in everything that you're doing, and the Fund is one of the ways that we can do that."



Kaia Dallaire and Mapendo Ngilinga de Carvalho read a quotation that was shared at a deepening about the Fund.

¹ www.bahaifunds.ca

Striving to put service at the centre of family life

Through deepening, friendship and mutual support, a group of parents in Toronto is learning to make service the focal point of their families' activities.

In the spring, a group of parents with young children met to reflect on their efforts to live coherent lives in light of guidance from the Universal House of Justice. Together, they shared ideas on how their family units can become foundations of community life.

“This generation of youth,” the Universal House of Justice has said, “will form families that secure the foundations of flourishing communities. Through their growing love for Bahá'u'lláh and their personal commitment to the standard to which He summons them will their children imbibe the love of God, ‘commingled with their mother’s milk’, and always seek the shelter of His divine law.”¹

One parent, whose two children are under the age of five, said that once he had a child, his interactions with his neighbours changed drastically.

“The whole of the community opened up to us,” he said, “because we could talk to grandparents, parents, other kids – and youth because we are working and studying still – it didn’t feel like any part of the community was distant from us...A family, more easily than anyone else, will become more integrated because of school and playing together in the park.

1 From the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Board of Counsellors, 29 December 2015.

The family has a certain reach that an individual cannot have.”

His wife agreed. “Our neighbours see how we are raising our kids and they ask us what we are doing differently,” she said. “Then we get to talk about the Faith and invite them to children’s class.”

“Our attitude is very much a part of teaching our children about this love for Bahá'u'lláh and the eagerness we have to serve Him.”

The group agreed that children’s classes are a major part of developing a Bahá’í culture for their children. “The society for our children is the five families we know,” said one mother. “We invite the children to come and play at our place...This lets your children see other children living with similar principles. We need to have children’s classes not only for our communities but for our own children too.”

They discussed some of the rights and responsibilities of children. One of these rights was that of education and, ultimately, the right for every individual to know and to love their Creator.

“If we think of the right of education...we have a right to a spiritual education and to know of the love of God,” said one mother. “If you are serving the Cause without educating them on the love of God, then you are neglecting the rights of your child. Even if you need to ask someone else to do it on your behalf, it must be done.”

The parents discussed how developing a life of service starts from birth and continues to progress through childhood, taking on new forms as the family unit grows and develops. The following guidance from the Universal House of Justice was particularly illuminating:

It should also be realized that a child, from early life, is a conscious and thinking soul, a member of his family with his own duties towards it, and is able to make his own sacrifices for the Faith in many ways. It is suggested that the children should be made to feel that they are given the privilege and opportunity of participating in the decisions as to the services their parents are able to offer, thus making their own conscious decision to accept those services with consequence for their own lives. Indeed, the children can be led to realize that it is the earnest wish of their parents to undertake such services with their children’s whole-hearted support.²

One mother noted how teaching her children the responsibility to serve others has helped them view their lives as an unfolding path of service. “When we rephrased things,” she said, “we said that everything we are doing in our life is so that we can serve better. For example, we learn piano so that we can bring joy to other people. It’s not to be on a stage or be better than someone else, but to bring joy. This changed everything and completely changed [my son’s] motivation to learn.”

The families also discussed how it’s important to treat service with the same enthusiasm that other activities receive, allowing each family member to look toward opportunities to serve with anticipation.

“How we look at holidays versus service matters,” said one participant. “Sometimes when we talk about a service we’re going to do together our tone can be that of a chore, but when we talk about vacation we are very joyful. Our attitude is very

2 From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 23 August, 1977.

much a part of teaching our children about this love for Bahá'u'lláh and the eagerness we have to serve Him.”

Along with analyzing the outward-looking orientation Bahá'í families strive to adopt, the participants also discussed their responsibility to make “the collective life of the family a spiritual reality.” Central to this, they realized, was reading the Writings and saying prayers as a “daily family activity.”³

Many of the families mentioned that a devotional atmosphere in the home could be established through patterns that already exist in their regular activities, elevating their atmosphere and purpose. “We can use mealtimes as a space to help develop the reading of the Writings and reflecting on our reality to help make it spiritual,” said one father as an example.

It was also mentioned that collaborating with other families and community members to contribute

to the devotional character of a neighbourhood helps to develop these habits within a family.

“During the expansion phase we were getting up early three times a week to go and pray with the other families,” said one mother. “I thought this was going to be very difficult but, in the end, it was actually very helpful to our family and made life easier. When we get together with other families like this we are building that collective life both in our family and community.”

These structures of support among families, along with encouragement from the community and co-ordinators, helped to open the way for the participation of several parents in intensive teaching campaigns. Often parents of young children find these campaigns, in which participants meet from early morning to late in the evening for several days, challenging to participate in.

Many parents, several of them part of the deepening on family life, made creative arrangements to participate

in the campaigns this summer. With the support of a handful of youth – acting as volunteers rather than campaign participants – their children were taken care of each day while they studied and served in neighbourhoods.

“We organized our family life so that my husband can take part in the neighbourhood activities every evening,” said one mother. “I get home from work, we share about our days and then my daughter and I wave goodbye saying, ‘have fun serving the Cause!’”

Knowing the children are happy and well supported as their fathers and mothers advance their service to the Cause has been a source of encouragement and great joy.

“I loved this so much,” one parent shared “Words cannot describe! Thank you all so much for taking such wonderful care of the kids. We are so lucky to have friends that treat our kids like their own. Thank you, thank you.”

³ From the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 17 April, 1981.



What started as a few families in Toronto meeting in a nearby park for the Holy Day on 10 July turned into a large group of children, parents and youth commemorating the Martyrdom of the Báb together as part of their intensive training campaign. Photo: Ramin Rameshni

Finding my profession

True reliance is for the servant to pursue his profession and calling in this world, to hold fast unto the Lord, to seek naught but His grace, inasmuch as in His Hands is the destiny of all His servants. - Bahá'u'lláh, *Asl-i-Kullu'l-Khayr, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh.*

My 20s have been an unexpectedly busy time of planning, decision making and preparation. One of the things I have been searching for is a profession that I can pursue for many years of my life. I've worked in a few different fields and I've started to see how my work is another avenue through which I can contribute to society. Regardless of exactly what you're doing, if done with love for God and humanity, it is a way to offer your skills to the world and contribute meaningfully to the lives of others.

It was my love for God that clarified my process of searching for a career. When I turn my heart to Him, focus my sight on the vision of a life of service that He has offered us and remember, with gratitude, the many gifts that I've been given and the beauty of the world we've been placed in, I find myself longing to offer my talents and gifts to society through my work. The challenge for me was that there seemed to be far too many potential paths to take - which one would fulfill me? Which one would allow me to offer the most to society? There didn't seem to be any clear answers.

Since I was seven years old I believed that I was going to do one thing and one thing alone. I've also had to contend with societal expectations and the belief that some professions are better, more noble, more prestigious or more respected than others. It has been so difficult for me to let go of these misguided beliefs to see that there are other options that suit me.

But, by orienting myself towards the love of God, identifying my path became much easier. The purpose

of my career came into sharper focus: service to humanity and the development of my talents and abilities. With that in mind I found I was better able to be detached from society's expectations and my own stubborn ideas of professional accomplishment. I could finally see that there are things that I could do so much better because they truly match my talents.

The purpose of my career came into sharper focus: service to humanity and the development of my talents and abilities.

I think my ability to perceive confirmations was also enhanced as I focused on the love of God. I was more consciously looking for them. With many choices before me, I started to work towards the potential careers I shortlisted and found that as I investigated each one the picture of my life became clearer. I could see what a future in each could look like and which options offered space for the service and growth I want in life. And, as with any confirmation, I found some doors opened and others didn't.

Thinking about my career as another avenue for service alongside other aspects of my life actually changed my choice of career and how I see myself working within it. It helped me to see the value in pursuing the many elements in my life that allow

me to grow and contribute to society: my family life, my community life, my personal relationships, my hobbies and skills and, of course, my profession. Rather than all my service coming from one aspect of my life and the rest being there for just my personal benefit, or to simply support the "service-focused" element, I can see how every part of my life contributes to my dedication to Bahá'u'lláh and His vision for humanity.

Realizing that these different elements are all valuable contributions to humanity helped me see my life as a canvas filled with many colours. Together they blend and enhance one another to make this beautiful picture of a life of service.

I don't think there is any formula or one way to live a life that is focused and guided by the love of God, but I think that as we concentrate on Bahá'u'lláh's vision and make sincere and honest efforts to express this in our lives, learn from each other, share our tests and confirmations and take time to think and reflect along the way, we find ourselves closer to this goal, little by little.

For me, pursuing this career will mean going back to school and I see that as part of the picture of a life of service. As I turn my focus towards this new and exciting endeavour, I'll be searching for ways to infuse it with the love of God and let my eagerness to serve Him be my guide. For now, I'll be doing all I can to prepare myself for this career and I'll continue to develop the other aspects of my life while focusing on my studies - they are, after all, part of one beautiful canvas.



The Mansion of Bahjí. Artist: Keith Eldridge

Forever servants of Bahá'u'lláh

Keith and Janet Eldridge are the oldest Bahá'ís in Sussex, N.B. at the ages of 97 and 93. Keith became a Bahá'í in 1947 and Janet joined the Faith eight years later. They have travelled to China three times to teach the Faith and have desired to travel to China again, but instead have chosen to stay in New Brunswick, much to the joy of their community members. Keith is a renowned artist whose work has been greatly inspired by

the Faith, including paintings of the Shrine of the Báb and the Mansion of Bahjí. They continue to remain active in the Faith, often opening their home for children's classes and sharing what they have learned through their many years of faithful service to the Cause.

– Eima Hajizadeh

Dear Bahá'í Canada

From Tiny Township, Ont.

Dear Friends,

I would like to express my appreciation for the delightful spring issue of *Bahá'í Canada*. It was filled with so many wonderful stories and expressions of the celebrations of the bicentenary.

I am a member of the small Bahá'í community of Tiny Township, Ont., sitting on the eastern shores of beautiful Georgian Bay. Tiny Township is a very large, mainly rural agricultural community spotted with a few small hamlets. Our Bahá'í community is made up of seven seniors.

We began consulting about what our community might do for the celebration of the bicentenary back in May of 2016. We had lengthy consultations on ideas and began making timelines in the planning process. Our final plan was to host a dinner in our community. There, we would recognize the importance of service – something so central to living a life focused on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. The evening was attended by approximately 70 individuals with about 30 friends of the Faith and local members of parliament. It was a huge success put together by a small group of very dedicated individuals to celebrate such a momentous occasion.

After reading so many diverse accounts of the activities and celebrations that took place across Canada last October, the one moving realization that has occurred to me is the unity of thought that was so prevalent. Many of the activities that took place were similar ideas that our Tiny community had consulted about as possibilities for our own celebration. It will be a wonderful and inspirational resource for our communities in the planning of our next bicentenary in 2019. Thank you to all who contributed to such a cross-sectional picture. It makes me proud to be a part of this extended family of the Faith. Maybe our Tiny community is not so tiny, after all.

– Darlene Paterson



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Records Department: records@bahai.ca

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.bahaifunds.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)

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The Deputization Fund

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The Community Properties Fund

The Wilmette House of Worship Fund

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The International Fund

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To purchase **Bahá'í books in English, Persian, Chinese or Spanish**, visit bookstore.bahai.ca

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@bahai.ca

Phone: 1-800-465-3287 or 905-889-8168

To purchase **Bahá'í books in French**, contact the Service de distribution bahá'í-Québec (SDB-Q)

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Phone: 418-692-2402

Online catalogue:

<http://librairie.bahai.ca>

To travel teach or pioneer within Canada or internationally, contact the Pioneer Desk at

pioneer@bahai.ca 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@bahai.ca.

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@bahai.ca.

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? 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@bahai.ca can provide you with the necessary contact details.

Submit news, photos, etc. to Bahá'í Canada through email bcanada@bahai.ca 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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جان مک لود

اطلاعیه مهم در خصوص نحوه پرداخت "حقوق الله"

با توجه به راهنمایی هیأت بین المللی امنای حقوق الله، هیأت امنای حقوق الله در کانادا برنامه مرکزی جدیدی را برای دریافت وجوه، صادر کردن رسید و نگهداری سوابق حقوق الله در اداره مالی دفتر محفل ملی کانادا برقرار کرده است. لذا امور مربوط به حقوق الله دیگر توسط افراد معاونین و یا نمایندگان امین حقوق الله اجرا نخواهد شد. وجوه مزبور مستقیماً باید به صندوق حقوق الله به آدرس زیر ارسال گردد:

Bahá'í National Centre Ḥuqúqu'lláh Treasury, 7200 Leslie Street Thornhill ON L3T 6L8

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