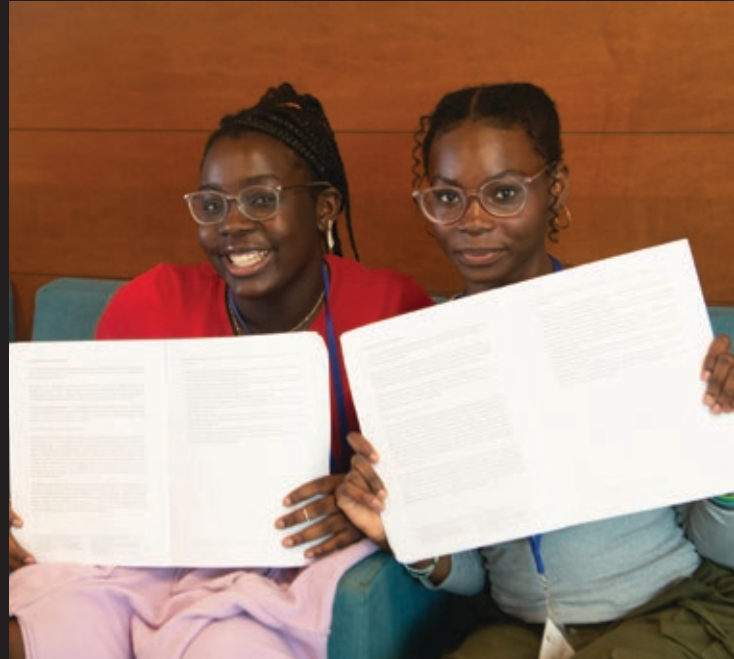


BAHÁ'Í CANADA

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VOL. 37 NO. 2



**Practitioners
of peace**

From the Writings

O Son of Glory! Be swift in the path of holiness, and enter the heaven of communion with Me. Cleanse thy heart with the burnish of the spirit, and hasten to the court of the Most High.

– Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, no. 8.

The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable. It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being. The Great Being saith: The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked. No sooner had but a glimmer of its effulgent splendour shone forth upon the mirror of love than the blessed word 'I am the Best-Beloved' was reflected therein. It is an ocean inexhaustible in riches, comprehending all things. Every thing which can be perceived is but an emanation therefrom.

– Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 173.

Now amidst all the peoples of the world must the beloved arise, with a heart even as the day-star, a strong inward urge, a shining brow, a musk-scented breath, a tongue speaking ever of God, an exposition crystal-clear, a high resolve, a power born of heaven, a spiritual character, a confirmation nothing short of the divine. Let them one and all become as a splendour on the horizon of heaven, and in the skies of the world a dazzling star.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 232.

Know thou that all the powers combined have not the power to establish universal peace, nor to withstand the overmastering dominion, at every time and season, of these endless wars. Ere long, however, shall the power of heaven, the dominion of the Holy Spirit, hoist on the high summits the banners of love and peace, and there above the castles of majesty and might shall those banners wave in the rushing winds that blow out of the tender mercy of God.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 174.

Rest thou assured that in this era of the spirit, the Kingdom of Peace will raise up its tabernacle on the summits of the world, and the commandments of the Prince of Peace will so dominate the arteries and nerves of every people as to draw into His sheltering shade all the nations on earth. From springs of love and truth and unity will the true Shepherd give His sheep to drink.

O handmaid of God, peace must first be established among individuals, until it leadeth in the end to peace

among nations. Wherefore, O ye Bahá'ís, strive ye with all your might to create, through the power of the Word of God, genuine love, spiritual communion and durable bonds among individuals. This is your task.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 246.

Among the greatest of all services that can possibly be rendered by man to Almighty God is the education and training of children, young plants of the Abhá Paradise, so that these children, fostered by grace in the way of salvation, growing like pearls of divine bounty in the shell of education, will one day bejewel the crown of abiding glory. It is, however, very difficult to undertake this service, even harder to succeed in it. I hope that thou wilt acquit thyself well in this most important of tasks, and successfully carry the day, and become an ensign of God's abounding grace; that these children, reared one and all in the holy Teachings, will develop natures like unto the sweet airs that blow across the gardens of the All-Glorious, and will waft their fragrance around the world.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 133-4.

O Thou kind Lord! From the horizon of detachment Thou hast manifested souls that, even as the shining moon, shed radiance upon the realm of heart and soul, rid themselves from the attributes of the world of existence, and hastened forth unto the kingdom of immortality. With a drop from the ocean of Thy loving-kindness Thou didst oft-times moisten the gardens of their hearts until they gained incomparable freshness and beauty. The holy fragrance of Thy Divine Unity was diffused far and wide, shedding its sweet savours over the entire world, causing the regions of the earth to be redolent with perfume.

Raise up then, O Spirit of purity, souls who, like those sanctified beings, will become free and pure, will adorn the world of being with a new raiment and a wondrous robe, will seek no one else but Thee, tread no path except the path of Thy good-pleasure, and speak of naught but the mysteries of Thy Cause.

O Thou kind Lord! Grant that this youth may attain unto that which is the highest aspiration of the holy ones. Endow him with the wings of Thy strengthening grace—wings of detachment and divine aid—that he may soar thereby into the atmosphere of Thy tender mercy, be able to partake of Thy celestial bestowals, and may become a sign of divine guidance and a standard of the Concourse on high. Thou art the Potent, the Powerful, the Seeing, the Hearing.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 249-50.

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ON THE COVER: Clockwise: Youth from Thunder Bay, Ont. dance on stage in their Indigenous regalia; participants hold up the conference program materials; a youth from Brampton, Ont. participates in a cultural dance; youth from Waterloo, Ont. share their experience with educational activities; tutors from Toronto, Ont. present their summer plans.

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Ridván 2024 message

From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2024.

Dearly loved Friends,

Two years of a formidable nine-year endeavour have sped by. The friends of God have taken its objectives firmly to heart. Across the Bahá'í world there is an increased depth of understanding about what is required to further extend the process of community building and effect profound social transformation. But with every passing day, we see too the condition of the world grow more desperate, its divisions more severe. The escalating tensions within societies and between nations affect peoples and places in a myriad ways.

This demands from every conscientious soul a response. We are all too aware that the community of the Greatest Name cannot expect to be unaffected by the travails of society. Yet, though it is affected by these travails, it is not confused by them; it is saddened by humanity's sufferings, but not paralysed by them. Heartfelt concern must prompt sustained effort to build communities that offer hope in place of despair, unity in place of conflict.

Shoghi Effendi described clearly how a process of “progressive deterioration in human affairs” is occurring in parallel with another process, a process of integration, through which the “Ark of human salvation”, society’s “ultimate haven”, is being built up. We rejoice to see, in every country and region, true practitioners of peace occupied with building this haven. We see it in every account of a heart being enkindled with the love of God, a family opening up its home to new friends, collaborators drawing on Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to address a social problem, a community strengthening a culture of mutual support, a neighbourhood or village learning to initiate and sustain the actions necessary for its own spiritual and material progress, a locality being blessed with the emergence of a new Spiritual Assembly.

The methods and instruments of the Plan allow every soul to contribute a share of what humanity needs in this day. Far from offering a temporary salve for the ills of the moment, the prosecution of the Plan is the means by which long-term, constructive processes, unfolding over generations, are being set in motion in every society. All of this points to an urgent, inescapable conclusion: There must be a sustained, rapid rise in the number of those committing their time, their energy, their concentration to the success of this work.

Where else but in Bahá'u'lláh's principle of the oneness of humankind can the world find a vision broad enough to unite all its diverse elements? How else but by translating that vision into an order based on unity in diversity can the world heal the social fractures that divide it? Who else can be the leaven through which the peoples of the world can discover a new way of life, a pathway to enduring peace? Extend then to everyone the hand of friendship, of common endeavour, of shared service, of collective learning, and advance as one.

We are conscious of how much vibrancy and strength is generated in any society by its youth being awakened to the vision of Bahá'u'lláh and becoming protagonists of the Plan. And so, with what immense kindness, courage, and complete reliance on God must Bahá'í youth resolve to reach out to their peers and bring them into this work! All must surge, but the youth must soar.

The urgency of the present hour must not obscure the special joy that comes from service. The call to service is an uplifting, all-embracing summons. It attracts every faithful soul, even those weighed down by cares and obligations. For in all the ways in which that faithful soul is occupied can be discovered deep-rooted devotion and a lifelong concern for the well-being of others. Such qualities give coherence to a life of manifold demands. And the sweetest moments of all for any enkindled heart are those spent with spiritual sisters and brothers, tending to a society in need of spiritual nourishment.

In the Holy Shrines, with overflowing hearts, we thank Bahá'u'lláh for having raised you up and trained you in His ways, and we entreat Him to send you His blessing.

– The Universal House of Justice

Membership of the International Board of Trustees of Ғуқúқu'lláh

From the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 19 May 2024.

We are delighted to announce the appointment of the members of the International Board of Trustees of Ғуқúқu'lláh, whose number now increases

to seven, for a five-year term commencing on the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb, 23 May 2024: Ho Yuet Mee, Salomeh Mohebbaty, Adam Robarts, Remy Rowhani, Neysan Teckie, Anis Towfigh, and William Wieties. We are profoundly grateful to Enos Makhele and Manijeh Reyhani for the exemplary service they have rendered to this institution.

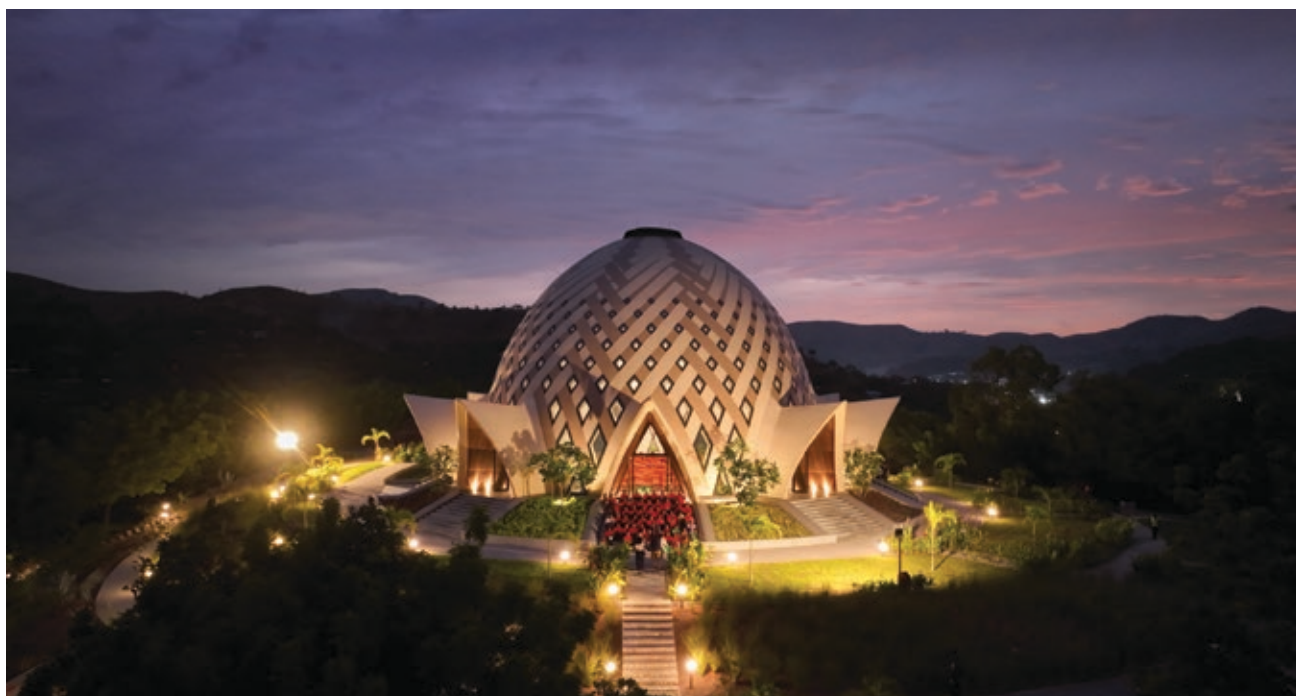
– The Universal House of Justice

Message marking the dedication of the House of Worship for Papua New Guinea

To the Friends gathered in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, for the Dedication of the House of Worship, 25 May 2024.

Dearly loved Friends,

With hearts filled with love and abundant joy, we greet you on this auspicious occasion, the inauguration of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár for Papua New



The Bahá'í House of Worship in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea stands as a beacon of light and hope.

Photo: Bahá'í World News Service

Guinea. The emergence of this national House of Worship is a testimony to the rapid progress of the Faith across the country. We join you in expressing heartfelt praise and gratitude to Bahá'u'lláh, Who has showered upon you His grace throughout the history of the Cause in your land and now has blessed you with this momentous accomplishment.

The raising of a House of Worship in Papua New Guinea, this crowning achievement, has called forth your community's resilience, resourcefulness, and determination, as demonstrated through years of strenuous labour, earnest consultation, and ardent supplication of the Almighty. Through your dedicated efforts, a sacred space has been created in which all may, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "gather together, and, harmoniously attuned one to another, engage in prayer; with the result that out of this coming together, unity and affection shall grow and flourish in the human heart."

Purity of heart, deep spirituality, and unshakeable faith—these attributes are inherent in the noble people of Papua New Guinea. They are the qualities that have characterized the believers in your country ever since the Faith reached your shores; they are the foundation upon which the House of Worship has been built. This physical edifice, nestled in the hills of Port Moresby that overlook

the Coral Sea, has a profound spiritual significance. By welcoming all within its walls, it expresses the unity of the human race and the oneness of all religions. It weaves together the diverse peoples of this mighty nation by inviting them all to come together in service to humanity and worship of God. Indeed, souls across the country are already being stirred by these ideals. We rejoice to see how, in villages and neighbourhoods, worship and service have come to form the basis of a rich pattern of collective life wherever community-building activities are flourishing. In such places, brothers and sisters in spirit are learning together how they can contribute their share to the betterment of their communities—and beyond this, how they can provide for the material and spiritual prosperity of their whole society. May the dedication of this Temple, in the heart of your nation, inspire the emergence of many more communities aspiring to such noble aims.

Let all rejoice! For this is the moment when faith, hope, and shared purpose all converge. May the anthems of praise that are raised within this sacred space send your spirits soaring and call down blessings upon all who assemble inside.

– The Universal House of Justice

Message regarding renovation of the Shrine of the Báb and its surrounds

From the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 26 July 2024.

Dearly loved Friends,

We are pleased to inform you of some significant construction and renovation work that will be undertaken this summer in the Shrine of the Báb and its surrounds. The Shrines of the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá are now closed and will reopen by 28 October. During this time, the main terracotta path to the Shrine of the Báb will be paved so as to make it more accessible to pilgrims and visitors who find it physically challenging to walk from the Haifa Pilgrim House to the Shrine. The approaches to the Shrine from both the east and the west

will be paved with Jerusalem Red Limestone, which was used to pave the current accessible path. In addition, the plaza immediately in front of the Shrine of the Báb will be paved in stone as envisaged in the original design by the Hand of the Cause of God William Sutherland Maxwell; the same Galil Gold Limestone that was chosen for the floor of the Shrine's colonnade and for the Terraces will be used. Necessary adjustments will also be made to the layout of the surrounding gardens.

Meanwhile, the opportunity will be taken to carry out some preparatory work inside the Shrine so that, in due course, all rooms can be dedicated to prayer and worship as part of the single Shrine of the Báb. This work will involve the creation of new door openings in the interior walls. Kindly share this information with the members of your community.

– The Universal House of Justice

New website of the Bahá'í Distribution Service

From the National Spiritual Assembly to all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 22 March 2024.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are delighted to announce the introduction of a new online platform for ordering Bahá'í literature from the Bahá'í Distribution Service. The new website, which has been designed to work on desktop and mobile devices, provides access to the texts of the Central Figures of the Faith and a selection of additional material related to the advancement of the current Plan in Canada. Links have been provided to various entities producing and supplying Bahá'í literature, for ease

of access to materials that are not stocked by our own Distribution Service, whose focus is on core literature and access to the Word of God.

All orders are now fulfilled directly by the Bahá'í Distribution Service. The new platform facilitates the whole ordering process, including payment and the selection of delivery options. It is hoped that these refinements in the operation of the Distribution Service and its new ordering platform will simplify and streamline the ordering and fulfillment processes.

The new website is now available and can be reached at distribution.bahai.ca. As always, if you have any questions or require any further assistance, please contact the Bahá'í Distribution Service at bds@bahai.ca.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Karen McKye, Secretary



The new website provides access to the texts of the Central Figures of the Faith and a selection of additional material. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

Election of the National Spiritual Assembly

From the National Spiritual Assembly to all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 29 April 2024.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are happy to share with you the results of the election of the National Spiritual Assembly on Saturday, 27 April 2024. The following individuals were elected by the delegates at the National Convention

to serve as members of the National Spiritual Assembly for the coming year: Mehran Anvari, Alex Arjomand, Jordan Bighorn, Zelalem Bimrew Kasse, Nabet Fani, Hoda Farahmandpour, Judy Filson, Ciprian Jauca and Karen McKye.

In addition, the National Spiritual Assembly is pleased to convey the results of the election of its officers on 11 May 2024: Chair – Ciprian Jauca; Vice-chair – Jordan Bighorn; Treasurer – Mehran Anvari; Secretary – Karen McKye.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Karen McKye, Secretary



Members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada. From left to right: Alex Arjomand, Zelalem Bimrew Kasse, Judy Filson, Ciprian Jauca, Hoda Farahmandpour, Mehran Anvari, Karen McKye, Nabet Fani, and Jordan Bighorn. Photo: Liam Dousti

Launch of second video about the House of Worship

From the National Spiritual Assembly to all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 6 May 2024.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are delighted to share with you a link to the second video about the path towards

the establishment of Canada's first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, on the website devoted to the Temple at <https://temple.bahai.ca/en/temple-site/>. We pray that this glimpse of the ecology of the site and the work that has gone into safeguarding it will bring the friends joy, even as they join us in prayers for each step of this mighty and historic process.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Karen McKye, Secretary

Universal House of Justice responds to the 2024 National Convention message

To the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 19 May 2024.

The beautiful message from the delegates at your National Convention conveyed to us the clarity of thought with which your community is setting about its work in these early years of the Nine Year Plan. This fills us with hope for what it can achieve. By the grace of

God, we see the friends in Canada resolute and united in their efforts to build up a pattern of community life founded on the very principles that are required for societal transformation. Day by day, in home after home, in heart after heart, they are planting the seeds of unity and universal love. As the dear friends respond to this most urgent and sacred calling, rest assured that we will remember them all in the Holy Shrines, beseeching Bahá'u'lláh to bestow upon them His constant aid.

– The Universal House of Justice

Letter from the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Canada

To the delegates gathered for the 74th National Convention, 25 April 2024.

Dear Friends,

With great joy and love, the Board of Trustees wishes to convey its greetings to you at the outset of this blessed gathering of friends from every region of this vast land. We are most grateful to the National Spiritual Assembly for this opportunity to share some thoughts on the individual's responsibility in observing the mighty law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and its transformative impact on the entire world.

This past year we have all been blessed with the release of the final unit of Ruhi Book 11, Material Means, entitled “The Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh”. Building on our developing attentiveness to the themes of unit 1, “Giving: The Spiritual Basis of Prosperity”, and unit 2, “The Institution of the Fund”, unit 3 “seeks to foster an understanding of the significance of the law for the individual and society and to inspire a commitment to discharge this sacred obligation.”¹ During the study of this unit, we are reminded that, “as the laws and principles of the Faith are propagated and applied

more and more widely, the pattern of the World Order that is to emerge in the fullness of time will gradually take shape before our eyes.”² We learn that the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is “fundamental to the individual's spiritual life, and the attitude with which it is carried out is an essential feature of its observance.”³

We observe this law as individuals, and yet its collective impact is far-reaching. Bahá'u'lláh has stated, “If the people attain the privilege of paying the Ḥuqúq, the one true God—exalted be His glory—will of a certainty confer blessing upon them. Moreover, such payment will enable them and their offspring to benefit from their possessions.”⁴ Elsewhere, in reference to the Right of God, Bahá'u'lláh writes, “Beseech ye God—magnified be His glory—to grant that His loved ones may be privileged to take a portion from the ocean of His good pleasure, for this would serve as the means for the salvation of mankind”⁵. Further, the Universal House of Justice has written that obedience to this law has thus far had a “profound impact... on the worldwide activities of the Bahá'í community, an impact which portends far-reaching implications for the transformation of society.”⁶

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 Compilation on Ḥuqúqu'lláh 2009 ed., no. 17

5 Compilation on Ḥuqúqu'lláh 1985 ed., no. 22

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

1 Ruhi Institute, Book 11, Unit 34 Compilation on Ḥuqúqu'lláh 2009 ed., no. 17

The conversations that we have within our families and the choices that we make through consultation together contribute to the advancement of civilization. *“The family unit offers an ideal setting within which can be shaped those moral attributes that contribute to an appropriate view of material wealth and its utilization.”*⁷ Rearing our children to see that their welfare is inseparable from the welfare of others highlights the principles of cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity *“on which the institution of Ḥuqúqu’lláh is established”*⁸. While each believer has the personal responsibility to observe this mighty law, *“upholding one’s right to adhere to one’s spiritual principles and to carry out one’s spiritual obligations”*⁹, in the case of married couples *“the Universal House of Justice has indicated that they may choose to pay their Ḥuqúqu’lláh jointly”*¹⁰.

Contributions to the Right of God may be made by a corporate body, a business, a company, or a professional practice owned wholly by Bahá’ís, or even by one Bahá’í. However, *“the obligation to pay Ḥuqúqu’lláh rests on individual believers, not on corporate bodies”*¹¹ and these contributions do not *“reduce the obligation of the individual believers concerned to pay their own Ḥuqúqu’lláh.”*¹²

Observing the law of the Right of God does not necessarily mean that a payment is required. Each individual must assess their own situation and determine if a payment is owing. This is a *“profoundly private act of conscience that promotes the common good, which directly connects the individual believer with the Central Institution of the Faith”*¹³. Obedience to the law is manifested in how we live our economic lives: *“the moral duty to lead a coherent life demands that one’s economic decisions be in accordance with lofty ideals, that the purity of one’s aims be matched by the purity of one’s actions to fulfil those aims.”*¹⁴

Our individual duty extends to the writing of our will. *“In truth, the wisdom of this perspicuous and most mighty ordinance is that no one should draw breath without a will.”*¹⁵ This spiritual duty, to be implemented after our

passing, allows the deceased to *“be carried to his resting-place with dignity and honour.”*¹⁶ We are also reminded that *“the event of death does not remove from a believer his obligation to pay Ḥuqúqu’lláh.”*¹⁷ To ensure that the payment is made according to our wishes, clear provisions should be made in our last will and testament. It may also be helpful to have conversations with our executor so that they may be guided in their approach to this sacred task.

The Writings and guidance make it clear, then, that each of us has the individual responsibility and immense bounty to observe the law of the Right of God. In the words of the Chief Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. ‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá:

Rearing our children to see that their welfare is inseparable from the welfare of others highlights the principles of cooperation, mutual aid and reciprocity...

The effect on individuals of obedience to the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh is reflected in the creation or development of divine virtues and attributes, including trustworthiness, honesty, loyalty to and firmness in the Covenant, and the ability to maintain balance in their personal lives and home economics. Bahá’u’lláh says:

It is indeed a most excellent favour, a boundless grace vouchsafed unto whosoever is privileged in this day to render service to the Cause of God and to offer the Right of God, for its goodly results and the fruits thereof will last as long as the kingdom of earth and heaven will endure.

Ḥuqúqu’lláh is a spiritual discipline capable of transforming human attitudes and behaviour. Through this law, the

*Blessed Beauty has honoured humanity with a kind of partnership between us and Himself. Being God’s partner in this respect, and eventually His trustee, motivates man to behave accordingly, so that God’s presence is observable in all one’s activities and actions.*¹⁸

Dear friends, in the coming year the members of the institution of the Right of God stand ready to facilitate and support education in this mighty law. Our hope is that all in Canada may be touched by the bounties associated with observing Ḥuqúqu’lláh and that we can all learn more, together, about our personal application of this law. We are eager to assist. We yearn to serve.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

The Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu’lláh in Canada

7 The Universal House of Justice, 2 April 2010 letter to the Bahá’ís in Iran.

8 Compilation on Ḥuqúqu’lláh 2009 ed., no. 23.

9 Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 5 August 1992 letter to an individual believer.

10 Compilation on Ḥuqúqu’lláh 2009 ed., no. 74.

11 Compilation on Ḥuqúqu’lláh 2009 ed., no. 76.

12 The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1991 letter to the Bahá’ís of the world.

13 Ibid.

14 The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017 letter to the Bahá’ís of the World.

15 Extract from a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Bahá’í Reference Library.

16 Bahá’u’lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, paragraph 28.

17 The Universal House of Justice, 5 August 1994 memorandum to the Office of the Ḥuqúqu’lláh.

18 Chief Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh, the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. ‘Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, October 1999, excerpts from a talk given during the Ḥuqúqu’lláh Conferences in Barcelona, Spain, and Hofheim, Germany.

Letter from the delegates of the 74th National Convention

To the Universal House of Justice, 28 April 2024.

To our cherished Universal House of Justice,

Your Riḍván message has revived our community—drawing us beyond ourselves and into a new perspective. Friends across our country testified that this message has resonated with the experience of all who are blessed to interact with it. The consultations at this 74th National Convention formed humble footnotes to each word and phrase of the Riḍván message. Our words, our vision, our very imagination were recast in its logic and imagery. Our deliberations were encouraged and guided by the loving preparation of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada; broadened and refined by the framing remarks, stories, and insights of members of the Continental Board of Counsellors for the Americas, Mr. Ayafor Temengye Ayafor and Dr. Borna Nouredin; enriched by a message from the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and by the presence of two members of that Board; edified by the presence of two special guests, Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri and Mrs. Vida Javaheri; surrounded by the loving presence of many members of the Auxiliary Board and a record number of observers, a large proportion of whom were youth.

We were eager to share insights from victories and challenges, large and small, occurring across our nation. As the consultation progressed, we gained a sense of the nature of the processes of integration and disintegration presently unfolding in our country. For every advance in community building in a neighbourhood, a wider perspective of the state of families and communities emerged; for every challenge observed, a ready recognition followed of the evident and potential power of the “methods and instruments of the Plan” in urgently seeking a remedy. Our consultations, raised to ever higher heights by the contributions of our Counsellors, assisted us in gaining a deeper appreciation of the oneness of humankind and offered practical examples of how this understanding can reshape our actions. Above all, reflecting on our vigorous efforts to prosecute the Plan in Canada in light of the Riḍván message inspired in us a heightened sense of hope and enthusiasm.

The Canadian Bahá'í National Convention was further blessed by taking place in the vicinity of the future National Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, an edifice which has already been spiritually erected, and to which we are

now exerting every effort to give physical form. We were delighted to view two short films, commissioned by our beloved National Spiritual Assembly, which speak to the physical and spiritual impact of this temple—exemplified in the principle of environmental stewardship, resonating with cultures across our country. We were stirred by the news that the funds for the construction of the central edifice were raised or pledged in one year, and we are learning to see ourselves as a community of strength, recognizing that this divine edifice will stand as “...evidence of the penetration of the Faith of God into the soil of society”¹. Alongside this, we also see the need for more funds to support the current increase in community-building activities, as well as to support, “a sustained, rapid rise in the number of those committing their time, their energy, their concentration to the success of this work”².

Foremost amongst our deliberations were numerous accounts of the feats of the youth of our nation who, from coast to coast to coast are learning to find within the institute the tools to address their challenges and aspirations. We were acutely aware that it is the spark of joy that quickens one's step on the path of service, for in the words of the Master, “Joy gives us wings!”. An ardent desire to learn what additional conditions will enable youth to “soar” and all to “surge” was palpable throughout the Convention.

An unprecedented number of delegates rose to share their insights and experiences as participants in a unified conversation shaped by a deepening understanding of the objectives of the Plan. The arts infused the consultative spirit of the Convention, and these “spiritual brothers and sisters” were inspired to share their poetry, songs and stories. This Convention, this “sweetest moment” was crowned by a powerful, rarified atmosphere wherein we were honoured to elect, with universal participation, this beloved institution of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada.

Our gratitude for His Universal House of Justice knows no bounds; may each day bring fresh opportunities to demonstrate in deeds what words cannot contain.

– The delegates of the 74th Canadian Bahá'í National Convention

1 From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Riḍván 1922.

2 From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Riḍván 2024.

About this issue

The Universal House of Justice's 2024 Ridván message has been a tremendous source of inspiration and energy this summer. At the 74th Bahá'í National Convention—a description of which is included in this issue—delegates spoke about how open this message is, with one delegate sharing “It addresses each one of us.” It has been studied with parents whose children are engaged in classes for moral education, youth serving their communities, elders who, through meaningful conversation, are bridging generational divides, and individuals working with like-minded organizations.

The imperative that “All must surge, but the youth must soar” was particularly stirring, prompting several youth conferences across the country, including on Vancouver Island, B.C., in Waterloo, Ont. and in Sackville, N.B. Several stories and a selection of photographs from these occasions have already been published on the Bahá'í Canada website.¹

The “From the history of the Faith” section of this issue looks to the past for insight into two undertakings the Bahá'ís of Canada are currently pursuing—raising up Canada's National House of Worship and the identification, training and deployment of international and homefront pioneers.

“Temple-builder: Hájí Mírza Muhammad-Taquí, the Afnán,” from ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's *Memorials of the Faithful* describes the qualities of an individual who was instrumental in the erection of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, someone who nearly “expended everything he possessed to rear this building” and who exemplified “what it means to be faithful.”

The Canadian Bahá'í community has a rich history of pioneering, including during the Ten Year Crusade.² In the story “Shoghi Effendi illustrates the role of pioneers,” a car ride involving John, Audrey and Patrick Robarts became an analogy of how pioneers should remain in the background as the local population takes charge of its own development. This issue also includes an article regarding the experience of a team of present-day pioneers from Canada to Dominica. It demonstrates

how pioneering is a way for learning to be disseminated throughout the world.

An excerpt from the article “Rising to the challenge of reconciliation,” originally published on the *Bahá'í World* website, is published here. It investigates the systems of oppression against Indigenous peoples embedded in Canada's colonial past; this is an issue that recently came to the forefront of our national discourse. The article explores how addressing injustices requires making them “seen.”

This resonates with our feature article, which chronicles how a group of Indigenous youth from Thunder Bay, Ont. travelled 15 hours by bus to attend a regional conference. They were encouraged by community members to use their voice to speak out and shared a statement that brought tears to many of those present. Acknowledging injustice in their lives helped them to see how, through an educational process, steps can be taken to build a better world.

This year's Ridván message states, “Heartfelt concern must prompt sustained effort to build communities that offer hope in place of despair, unity in place of conflict.” In the article “An expanding nucleus in Oak Bay, B.C.” the author reflects on how the efforts of two friends through an initial English Corner led to the engagement of an increasing number of people in community-building activities: a junior youth group, Ruhi Book 1 study circle, regular devotional gathering and now a children's class. The members of 15 families are currently acting as protagonists in this process and are seeing change in their individual and collective lives.

This issue also includes a short account of conservation efforts to plant over 800 tree saplings that will mature and eventually be planted on the grounds of Canada's future House of Worship. The spirit of service with which this work is being undertaken is an expression of the sacrificial contributions of the national community and beyond as we move forward in this historic undertaking, raising a Temple “dedicated to uniting the worship of God and service to humanity, both vital to the regeneration of the world.”³

¹ <https://bahaicanada.bahai.ca/>

² The article “Canada's Knights of Bahá'u'lláh” was published in the Summer 2019 issue and can be found online here: <https://bahaicanada.bahai.ca/canadas-knights-of-bahauallah/>

³ From the Universal House of Justice to the Friends Gathered in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, for the Dedication of the House of Worship, 25 March 2023.

Submitting stories to *Bahá'í Canada*

The *Bahá'í Canada* magazine and 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 bahaicanada@bahai.ca.

The Temple-builder: Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí, the Afnán

The following excerpt from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Memorials of the Faithful* describes the individual who was instrumental in raising the first House of Worship in 'Ishqábád, making him "the first builder of a House to unify man".¹

Among those souls that are righteous, that are luminous entities and Divine reflections, was Jináb-i-Muhammad-Taquí, the Afnán. His title was Vakílu'd-Dawlih. This eminent Bough was an offshoot of the Holy Tree; in him an excellent character was allied to a noble lineage. His kinship was a true kinship. He was among those souls who, after one reading of the Book of Íqán, became believers, bewitched by the sweet savors of God, rejoicing at the recital of His verses. His agitation was such that he cried out, "Lord, Lord, here am I!" Joyously, he left Persia and hurried away to Iraq. Because he was filled with longing love, he sped over the mountains and across the desert wastes, not pausing to rest until he came to Baghdad.

He entered the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, and achieved acceptance in His sight. What holy ecstasy he had, what fervor, what detachment from the world! It was beyond

Construction of the Continental Bahá'í House of Worship of Central Asia (Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan), 1900s. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

¹ 'Ishqábád is today the capital of Turkmenistan. The structure was confiscated by Soviet authorities in 1938 and later demolished after being irreparably damaged in an earthquake.

description. His blessed face was so comely, so luminous that the friends in Iraq gave him a name: they called him “the Afnán of all delights.” He was truly a blessed soul, a man worthy to be revered. He never failed in his duty, from the beginning of life till his last breath. As his days began, he became enamored of the sweet savors of God, and as they closed, he rendered a supreme service to the Cause of God. His life was righteous, his speech agreeable, his deeds worthy. Never did he fail in servitude, in devotion, and he would set about a major undertaking with alacrity and joy. His life, his behavior, what he did, what he left undone, his dealings with others—were all a way of teaching the Faith, and served as an example, an admonishment to the rest.

After he had achieved the honor, in Baghdad, of meeting Bahá’u’lláh, he returned to Persia, where he proceeded to teach the Faith with an eloquent tongue. And this is how to teach: with an eloquent tongue, a ready pen, a goodly character, pleasing words, and righteous ways and deeds. Even enemies bore witness to his high-mindedness and his spiritual qualities, and they would say: “There is none to compare with this man for his words and acts, his righteousness, trustworthiness, and strong faith; in all things he is unique; what a pity that he is a Bahá’í!” That is: “What a pity that he is not as we are, perverse, uncaring, committing sins, engrossed in sensuality, the creatures of our passions!” Gracious God! They saw with their own eyes that the moment he learned of the Faith he was transformed, he was severed from the world, he began to emit rays from the Sun of Truth; and still, they failed to profit by the example he set.

During his days in Yazd he was, outwardly, engaged in commercial pursuits, but actually teaching the Faith. His only aim was to exalt the Word of God, his only wish, to spread the Divine sweet savors, his only thought, to come nearer and ever nearer to the mansions of the Lord. There was no remembrance on his lips but the verses of God. He was an embodiment of the good pleasure of Bahá’u’lláh, a dawning-point of the grace of the Greatest Name. Many and many a time, Bahá’u’lláh expressed to those about Him, His extreme satisfaction with the Afnán; and consequently, everyone was certain that he would in future initiate some highly important task.

After the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh, the Afnán, loyal and staunch in the Covenant, rendered even more services than he had before; this in spite of many obstacles, and an overwhelming load of work, and an infinite variety of matters all claiming his attention. He gave up his comfort, his business, his properties, estates, lands, hastened away to ‘Ishqábád and set about building the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar; this was a service of very great magnitude, for he thus became the first individual to erect a Bahá’í House of Worship, the first builder of a House to unify man. With the believers in ‘Ishqábád assisting him, he succeeded in carrying off the plan. For a long period in ‘Ishqábád, he had no rest. Day and night, he urged the believers on. Then they too exerted their efforts, and made sacrifices above and beyond their power; and God’s edifice arose, and word of it spread throughout East and West. The Afnán expended everything he possessed to rear this building, except for a trifling sum. This is the way to make a sacrifice. This is what it means to be faithful.

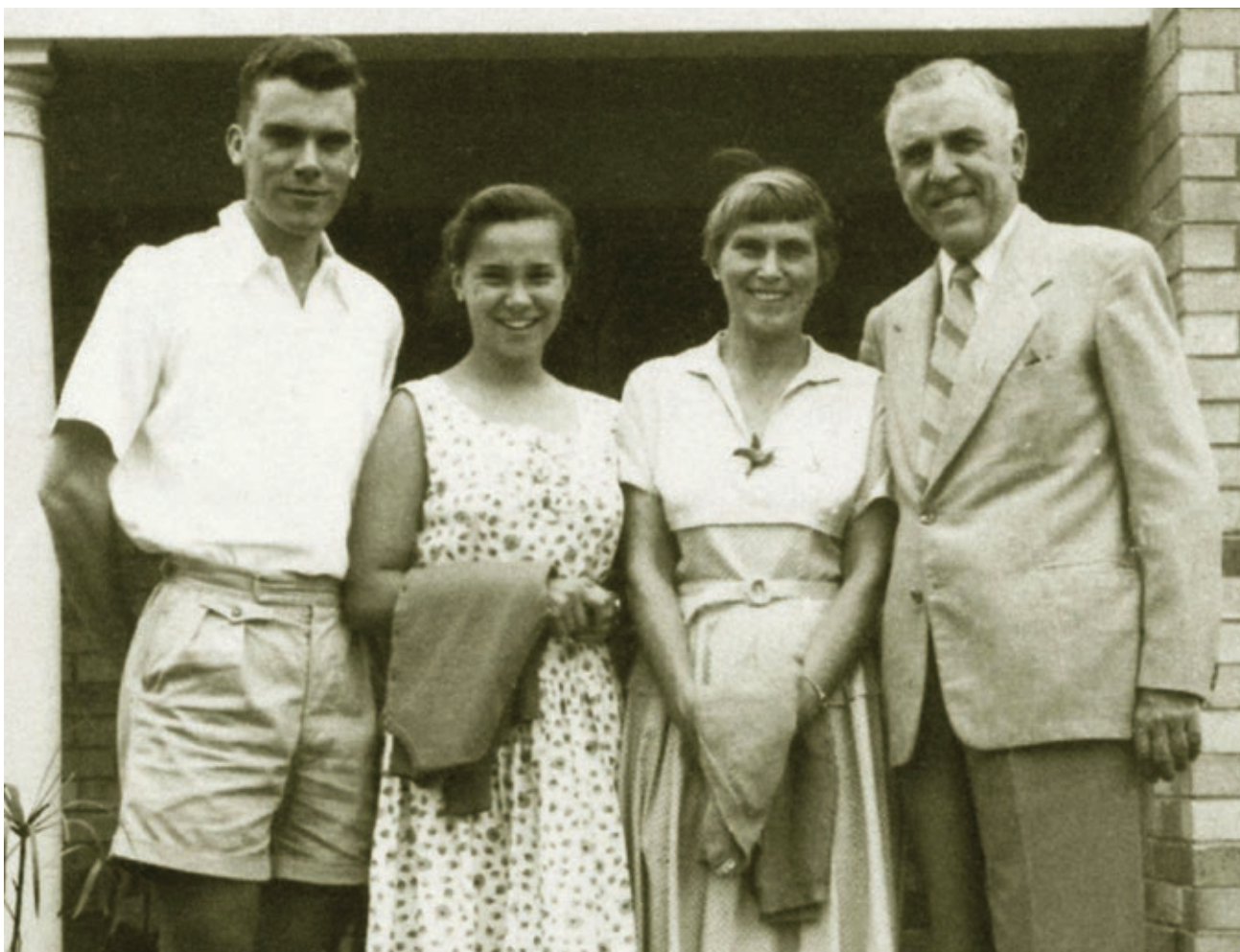
Shoghi Effendi illustrates the role of pioneers

The following excerpt from Earl Redman’s book *Knights of Bahá’u’lláh*, tells the story of how the Roberts family first pioneered to Bechuanaland (now Botswana) to fulfill a goal of the Ten Year Crusade, and their later meeting with Shoghi Effendi while on pilgrimage.

The Canadian Roberts family, including parents John (1901-1991) and Audrey (1904-2000) and children Patrick (1934-2013) and Nina (1940-2024), pioneered to Bechuanaland in October 1953. Audrey’s great-great-great grandmother was a Cree Indian from British Columbia. Audrey studied piano in Paris and became fluent in French. John and Audrey were married in 1928 and became Bahá’ís in 1937. John was instrumental in developing the Bahá’í communities in

Hamilton and Ottawa, served on the Ontario Regional Teaching Committee and was the chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada between 1949 and 1953. In 1949, John visited seven of America’s ten European goal countries for the second Seven Year Plan. The next year he visited the British Isles and Ireland.

When Hand of the Cause Fred Schopflicher died shortly before the New Delhi Intercontinental Teaching Conference, John offered to attend the conference



Hand of the Cause John Roberts (right) with his wife, Audrey, and children, Patrick (left) and Nina (second from left). Photo: Bahá'í World News Service

in his stead; Shoghi Effendi quickly accepted. While there, John and his wife, Audrey, became enthused with pioneering and cabled the Guardian offering their services, suggesting Iceland, Labrador, or the Yukon. On 22 October 1953, Shoghi Effendi cabled back 'Bechuanaland highly meritorious'. Upon receiving the cable, John 'phoned Audrey and asked her where Bechuanaland was. She didn't know. He said "Well, we'd better find out – because that's where we're going!" Audrey 'read from an encyclopedia about this small British protectorate in South Africa, it sounded awful – snakes, extreme heat, malaria.'

Initially, since he was in university, 19-year-old Patrick was not included in the pioneering efforts. Patrick cabled the Guardian and Shoghi Effendi replied that he could go to a university in South Africa.

In spite of never having heard of the country before, the Roberts immediately began preparations. Just after Christmas, John and Audrey, along with son Patrick, aged 19, and daughter Nina, 13, boarded a ship for the three-week trip to Cape Town, South Africa. Surprisingly, John was offered jobs by two insurance companies before he was even off the boat. He accepted one as a district

manager with Prudential Assurance Company of South Africa.

In February 1953, just 16 weeks after receiving Shoghi Effendi's cable, the Roberts family crossed the border into Bechuanaland. When the family went on pilgrimage two years later, Shoghi Effendi asked who was driving the car when they crossed into their goal country. Patrick said that he was, whereupon the Guardian said that he was the first pioneer into Bechuanaland. Patrick later said that that meant he became a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh before his illustrious father, who was riding in the back seat. Shoghi Effendi used this story to explain that the pioneers should remain in the background and the Africans should be in front. He explained what he meant by saying that when the family first crossed into Bechuanaland, the young and inexperienced Patrick was driving the car, but his older, wiser father was in the back seat. The pioneers should similarly let the young, inexperienced African believers drive the car of the Faith. The pioneers should be in the back seat ready to offer guidance whenever it was needed.

– From the book *Knights of Bahá'u'lláh* by Earl Redman (George Ronald 2017) pp. 109-111

Printed with permission from George Ronald, publisher.



Youth from Thunder Bay, Ont. embark on their long journey to the conference.

Envisioning a better future: youth from Thunder Bay, Ont. attend regional conference

A group of 28 youth representing 15 First Nations communities strengthened bonds of friendship and cultivated hope at the recent conference in Waterloo, Ont.

The Universal House of Justice's *Riḍván 2024* message states:

“We are conscious of how much vibrancy and strength is generated in any society by its youth being awakened to the vision of Bahá’u’lláh and becoming protagonists of the Plan. And so, with what immense kindness, courage, and complete

reliance on God must Bahá’í youth resolve to reach out to their peers and bring them into this work! All must surge, but the youth must soar.”

In a resounding response to this call, several youth conferences for those aged 15-25 have taken place across Canada, including a regional Ontario conference in Waterloo, Ont., with a remarkable 700

participants. The conference, which took place on the weekend of June 29-30, served to galvanize the youth for a summer of intense activity and widen the circle of friends engaging in the community-building process.

Among these participants were 28 youth from Thunder Bay, Ont. Their presence at the conference was itself a victory, requiring a high level of



During a stop on the way to the conference, the youth made banners with Bahá'í quotations and later posted them on the walls of their breakout room.

community support, as they travelled by bus for 15 hours over the course of two days to attend. One youth shared, “Our youth themselves arose very quickly with great courage and motivation, one saying that ‘this conference feels like a call to action’ and that we were being called together by an institution that is universal, for all peoples...Many have made tremendous effort,” he continued, “many have made immense sacrifices.”

Bahá'í institutions facilitated their participation, making practical arrangements for their travel, accommodation, and meals. Local organizations and businesses, upon hearing about the conference, also arose to support these youth, donating money towards the expense of the bus, gift cards to buy food, coolers, water and even sleeping bags. In one instance, youth reached out to the leader of a like-minded organization who, after studying parts of the Ridván message, pledged financial support and opened a space for the youth to present at a regular meeting of the organization, which resulted in over a dozen registrations. In the days leading up to the event,

a few youth travelled to a powwow north of Thunder Bay and, on their own initiative, raised funds to cover the cost of participating in this historical moment. Youth continued to register for the conference right up until the departure of the bus.

This support was an indicator of the trust and hope that the adults had in these young people, which instilled them with confidence. “Being so far away, the Northwest can feel quite isolated from the rest of Ontario,” a youth tutor described. “The conference was an opportunity for our youth to have access to the conversation at the regional level. One of our goals was to go and learn from the other youth in Ontario. On the flipside, our voices from the Northwest, particularly those of Indigenous youth, should be heard in that space.”

When the bus was ready to leave, one of the mothers led a smudging ceremony as a form of spiritual preparation. Another mother expressed how proud she was of the group and encouraged them to speak out at the conference. The significance of the “sacred journey,”

as the youth called it, was heightened by several breaks on the way, in what became a relay of community support. The youth stopped in Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury—where they stayed overnight—on their way to Waterloo, Ont. At each city they were warmly greeted by friends and offered meals. This support was very moving to the youth, who became conscious of the common purpose that united them with many people who they hadn't met yet.

At the conference itself, the group was warmly welcomed. During the plenary sessions, where all 700 youth gathered and talks were shared as well as experiences from a number of centres of intense activity in Ontario, there were also many opportunities for artistic expression.

Some of the friends from Thunder Bay had prepared a dance, which they performed on the first morning of the conference. To introduce it they shared:

“We come with the prayers of our families and communities, and we are grateful to have made it so far, so that our voices contribute to the transformation of Ontario. As



The youth perform a dance during the first morning of the conference. Photo: Rayyan Vejdani

“...As Indigenous Peoples, our dances are a central part of community life. When we dance, we pray to our Creator...we would like to offer this dance for all of you, to pray for this gathering and those who could not come with us, that many, many more may enter the circle and walk together on this Naadmaagewin Miikaanhs—this Path of Service.”

Indigenous Peoples, our dances are a central part of community life. When we dance, we pray to our Creator. Many of our youth who have come are dancers. And so, we would like to offer this dance for all of you, to pray for this gathering and those who could not come with us, that many, many more may enter the circle and walk together on this Naadmaagewin Miikaanhs—this Path of Service.”

The youth were excited by the artistic expressions from other

localities, particularly the cultural dances, which illustrated that this movement is for all peoples. The youth from Thunder Bay were able to hear from many centres of intense activity in the region, as groups took turns sharing their experience with the community-building process. It was clear that a growing number of young people were thinking about the same things as them. Notably, when some areas shared their plans, including plans for a summer of service, this inspired the Thunder

Bay youth to make plans of their own. They also had time during breaks to engage in meaningful conversations with young people from all over Ontario.

During the conference, the youth studied materials, particularly selections from messages of the House of Justice, in smaller groups based on their geography. Those from Thunder Bay reflected on the challenges that youth in their area face and how to address them. Most of the friends had not yet become involved in the institute process, however, they recognized that through walking a path of service, they can enable growing numbers in their community to have access to education—both spiritual and intellectual.

At the end of the conference, in the main plenary session, they raised their voices to collectively share their hopes for a better future. It was clear that this voice was reinforced by a community that had surged in support, and that despite the

...build communities that offer hope in place of despair,
unity in place of conflict.

The Universal House of Justice

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The youth stood together while their collective statement for the conference was shared.

presence of significant obstacles, they had immense hope.

“We envision a future where our youth are leaders. Where we can all elevate ourselves, to elevate our frequency, vibration, and energy as a community to achieve unity.

We envision a future where our youth will be able to walk around freely day or night and feel safe being Indigenous, not having to constantly look over our shoulders scared of being followed and scared of whoever walks by us.

We envision a future where our youth are proud to be who they are and free from prejudice in our community.

We envision a future where our youth can experience a life with their mothers and sisters, where we don't have to mourn more missing and murdered Indigenous women.

We envision a future where we aren't scared of our youth going missing and found in rivers, or never found at all.

We envision a future where our youth are strong in the language and can freely speak their truth. We want attention brought to their voices as well.

We envision a future where our youth don't experience such intense grief and sadness. We would like a future where we don't lose as many friends and family as often.

We envision a future where many youth are in the junior youth program.

We envision a future where our youth can soar!”

On the way home from the youth conference, their bus broke down, so they spent an extra night at a campground in Sudbury, Ont. This became a fortuitous time for consolidation, when both their understanding of concepts introduced at the conference and the bonds of friendship that had been developed during it were strengthened. It was time spent on the land, swimming, participating

in sharing circles, and dancing. They became more conscious of their connection to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and began to recognize in these teachings the highest aspirations of their home communities.

Despite being exhausted after the long journey, once home, some of the youth wanted to meet soon after the conference to discuss what comes next. During their first institute camp, 15 youth studied Ruhi Book 1, and five are offering a period of service. They are eager to continue to reach out to others and build peace in their communities.

When one youth was asked what the future of youth in Thunder Bay looks like, she replied, “I see a lot of service, a lot of love...A lot of healing and connection building.”



A delegate casts her ballot.

The 74th Bahá'í National Convention

With great joy, delegates gathered to elect the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, to take stock of the year's achievements as well as consult on the requirements and challenges of the next one.

Delegates from across Canada gathered from 25-28 April at the Toronto Bahá'í Centre to elect the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada and consult on the progress of the community two years into the current Nine Year Plan. The atmosphere revived the spirits of those present, energizing the delegates throughout the hours and days of consultation.

The delegates were joined by members of the Continental Board of Counsellors, Mr. Ayafor Temengye Ayafor and Dr. Borna Nouredin, whose comments served to frame

the consultation, as they illuminated concepts such as the oneness of humanity, creating conditions for youth to “soar,”¹ and the expansive vision of the Nine Year Plan, which requires deep knowledge and experience of its “methods and instruments.”²

They also shared uplifting stories of how individuals, communities and institutions are advancing in their efforts to “release the society

building power of the Faith in ever greater measures”—many from a recent conference of the Continental Board of Counsellors for the Americas and their Auxiliary Board members. These accounts beckon new horizons for the peoples of Canada, who have been so recently gifted with the task of erecting a National House of Worship.

The Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Canada was also represented and delivered a letter to the Convention that spoke to the individual and collective impact of obedience to this Law. Others in

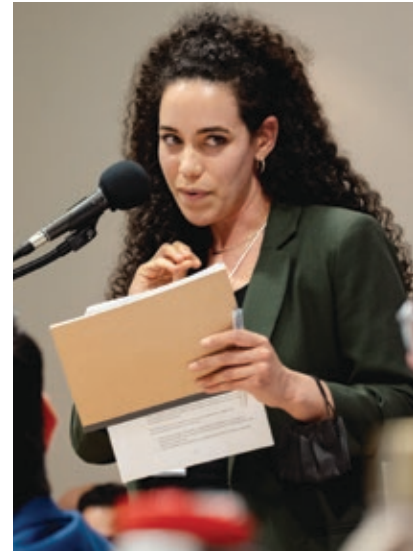
1 The Ridván 2024 message states that “All must surge, but the youth must soar.”

2 From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2024.

attendance included special guests Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri and Mrs. Vida Javaheri, Auxiliary Board members, and a record number of observers—a large proportion of whom were youth.

The delegates consulted on the Ridván message, which was a source of joy and fresh insights. A delegate from Quebec commented “What a gift this message is. It is meant for all of our friends...” A delegate from Saskatchewan also noted the openness of the letter, saying, “It addresses each one of us.”

The call from this year’s Ridván message, that “All must surge, but the youth must soar” was a prominent strand throughout the Convention as the delegates discussed how communities can create conditions for youth to arise to teach and live coherent lives. The delegates also shared stories of how increasing numbers of families are seeing themselves as expanding nuclei, offering the “methods and instruments of the Plan” to their friends, family and neighbours learning to take charge of their spiritual and material progress. This often requires those who initiated the process to detach themselves from notions of how things should be, relinquishing any perceived sense of control.



A record number of delegates participated in the consultation.



Observers watch the Convention from the upper hall of the Toronto Bahá'í Centre.



From top to bottom: Members of the Continental Board of Counsellors Dr. Borna Nourredin and Mr. Ayafor Ayafor, member of the Board of Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh in Canada Mr. John Macleod.

The movement of populations was also an area of reflection, as experience working with specific populations is growing in Canada. The expanding capacity of young mothers contributing to the community-building work was also a clear refrain. Additionally, several delegates noted that spaces for inter-institutional collaboration have assisted with the dissemination of learning and created a vision around how clusters can advance from milestone two to three.

Those present at the Convention also had an opportunity to watch two films regarding Canada's emerging Bahá'í House of Worship: one which explores the Temple as a haven for quiet contemplation and prayer, and the other which explores the natural surroundings of the future Temple and describes how the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith are intertwined with environmental stewardship.³ They also revisited segments of the film *An Expansive Prospect* commissioned by the Universal House of Justice.

The material needs at the national level were also highlighted during the Convention. Due to the growing requirements of the Plan, The National Assembly made the decision to draw on its reserve funds—funds that are set aside for times of deficit—this year. This is not so much due to a decrease in contributions as an increase in need. It was also reported that the funds for

³ These films can be viewed at the following website: <https://temple.bahai.ca/en/films/>

“It was also reported that the funds for the central edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar have already been raised or pledged—a significant achievement.”

the central edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar have already been raised or pledged—a significant achievement. There were allotted times before and during Convention for the delegates to visit the Temple Site and Bahá'í National Centre.

It is clear from the Ridván message that “There must be a sustained, rapid rise in the number of those committing their time, their energy, their concentration to the success of this work.” The Treasurer of the National Assembly also brought attention to the needs of the Deputization Fund, for which the National Assembly set a goal of one million dollars for the coming year. Contributing to this Fund is distinct from the other Funds of the Faith as it is connected to our spiritual duty to teach and can be used to support those dedicating significant time to the training institute, such as coordinators.

The universal participation of delegates was noteworthy; a high



Many young people attended the Convention as observers.

percentage of delegates spoke during the consultation. Songs filled the hall, poems were shared, and a spirit of devotion kindled the hearts. The rarefied atmosphere of the election itself, which was conducted in a spirit of reverence and humility, was a reminder to all present of the haven that the institutions of our Faith provide. Counsellors and National Assembly members spoke of their love for one another, expressed through cooperation and unwavering support.

The following individuals were elected to serve as members of the National Spiritual Assembly for the coming year: Mehran Anvari, Alex Arjomand, Jordan Bighorn, Zelalem Bimrew Kasse, Nabet Fani, Hoda Farahmandpour, Judy Filson, Ciprian Jauca and Karen McKye.

The National Assembly's closing comments spoke of its confidence in the Canadian Bahá'í community: "Our own inescapable conclusion must be that what we rejoice in this year may be but a minor victory at this time next year: as individuals, communities, institutions we will all see more, know more, and be capable of more. Next year, we will speak together of how the more that was needed was given, how though worthiness and capacity were lacking, God bestowed them on hearts that were ready to receive them."

All photos were taken by Nur Elmasri and Eugene Pace.



The atmosphere of the Convention was spiritually rejuvenating.



A delegate contributes during one of the consultative sessions.



Construction by Otto Donald Rogers. Photo: The Bahá'í World

Rising to the challenge of reconciliation

The following excerpt, by Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III, was originally published on the *Bahá'í World* website in January 2023.

In 2021, Canada had a moment of reckoning. The Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, a First Nation in British Columbia in western Canada, announced the identification of potentially more than 200 unmarked burials of Indigenous children the Canadian state had forced to attend the Kamloops Indian Residential School. The response to the announcement set off a form of national convulsion. Many non-Indigenous Canadians appeared shocked and stunned, unaware of the reality that their country's history included children being removed from their

families for "schooling," only to die and never return. Some in the national media called it "shocking."¹ Political leaders called it "unimaginable."² Perhaps more than at any other moment in Canadian history, Indigenous peoples and their experiences and realities were at the foreground of Canadian public life, discourse, and debate. There was a growing chorus of calls for substan-

tive action, change, and impromptu gatherings and memorials.

But something was puzzling in this reaction. Of course, we are appropriately horrified by acts that amount to genocide, such as those experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada.³ But how could it be that the predominant response of Cana-

1 <https://nationalpost.com/news/what-happens-next-after-shocking-discovery-of-215-childrens-graves-in-kamloops>.

2 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/tk-eml%C3%BAps-te-secw%C3%A9pemc-215-children-former-kamloops-indian-residential-school-1.6043778>.

3 In recent years, the colonization of Indigenous peoples in Canada has increasingly been described as a genocide. The reporting on unmarked burials across the country since 2021 has solidified this understanding. In July 2022, Pope Francis, at the conclusion of his trip to Canada to apologize for the role of the Catholic Church in the residential school system, acknowledged that the history of assimilation and abuses amounted to genocide.

dian governments, institutions, and organizations, as well as the general public, was surprise that such a thing could ever have occurred?

The history of Indigenous peoples⁴ in Canada, and their enduring struggle for justice, has been thoroughly documented. The broad strokes are undeniable. At the core of European colonization was the “doctrine of discovery,” a precept from the Papacy that, if no Christians lived in a land, the lands were to be considered “discovered” and uninhabited. Simply put, the ugly root of this principle was that if there were no Christian inhabitants, then there were no human inhabitants.⁵ Consequently, such lands were terra nullius, or empty of human beings. In the lands that now make up Canada, this racist doctrine justified a process of European settlement—and ultimately the founding of Canada in 1867—that included subjugating and displacing the diverse Indigenous peoples by imposing massive systems of oppression upon them.

Two policy programs became the foundation of Canada. The first policy was assimilation, which aimed to destroy Indigenous knowledge, culture, spirituality, family, governance, and social systems. Sir John A. McDonald, Canada’s first prime minister, stated that there was “nothing in [Indigenous peoples’] way of life that was worth preserving” and explained the goal of the government as being “to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the other inhabitants of the Dominions as speedily as they are fit to change.”⁶ Residential schools were one tool of this policy of assim-

ilation. Their object, as explained by Hector-Louis Langevin, one of the founders of Canada and an early government leader, was as follows: “in order to educate the (‘Indian’) children properly we must separate them from their families. Some people may say that this is hard but if we want to civilize them we must do that...if you leave them in the family they may know how to read and write, but they will remain savages, whereas by separating them in the way proposed, they acquire the habits and tastes...of civilized people.”⁷

The second policy program was denial and dispossession. Reflecting the “doctrine of discovery,” any claim by Indigenous peoples that they had sovereignty, ownership, or a relationship with lands and resources that made up Canada was rejected, ignored, and even outlawed. This was foundational to Canada’s economic and political creation, in addressing both the interests of different European powers—most notably the English and French—and the demands of increasing numbers of European settlers. First Nations peoples were, in various ways, forcibly removed from their lands and segregated in a system of small reserves. Even in areas where historic treaties were signed with the British Crown, both before and after Confederation, promises regarding land have been continually and systematically violated.

One of the central vehicles for implementing these assimilation and denial policies is the racist and colonial Indian Act, which passed soon after Canada was formed in the nineteenth century. The Indian Act formalized and entrenched the reserve system, authorized the removal of Indigenous children and their placement in residential schools, denied basic human rights including voting, freedom of movement, and the right to legal counsel, outlawed Indigenous forms of government, and imposed a foreign system of administrative governance through

Indian Act band councils overseen and controlled by the federal government.

While some elements of the Indian Act have been amended over time, as of 2022, the Indian Act remains the primary legislation governing the lives of First Nations people in Canada.

The counterpoint to this history of colonialism has been the enduring effort led by Indigenous peoples, at times with the support of allies from many backgrounds, to address these injustices, secure recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, and establish proper relations between governments and Indigenous peoples. From Canada’s earliest days, visions of this proper relationship have been advanced in various ways. For example, in some First Nations cultures, wampum—made of white and purple seashells and beads—is woven into belts to symbolize peoples, relations, alliances, and events. The Two Row Wampum Belt of the Haudenosaunee expressed a vision of peaceful co-existence between Europeans and Indigenous peoples where “it is agreed that we will travel together, side by side, on the river of life...linked by peace, friendship, forever. We will not try to steer each other’s vessels.” As Ellen Gabriel explains:

Ka’swenh:tha or the Two Row Wampum Treaty is a significant agreement in history of the relationship between European monarchs and Indigenous peoples. Ka’swenh:tha is more than visionary. As a principled treaty it is grounded in an Indigenous intellect providing an insight and a vigilant awareness of the inevitability of the evolution of society. Ka’swenh:tha is an instrument of reconciliation for contemporary times if openness, honesty, respect, and genuine concern for present and future generations is a foundational priority.⁸

8 Ellen Gabriel, “Ka’swenh:tha—the Two Row Wampum: Reconciliation through an Ancient Agreement,” in *Reconciliation & the Way Forward* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2014)

4 When using the term “Indigenous” in reference to Canada, it applies to three distinct peoples—First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. Within each of these peoples, there is further diversity and distinction. For example, amongst First Nations, there are more than 70 language groups and 60 to 80 separate peoples.

5 <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-title-and-the-doctrine-of-discovery>

6 Session of the 6th Parliament of Dominion of Canada, 1887, quoted in “Facing History and Ourselves,” in *Stolen Lives: The Indigenous Peoples of Canada and the Indian Residential Schools* (City: Publisher, 2018), 37. <https://www.facinghistory.org/stolen-lives-indigenous-peoples-canada-and-indian-residential-schools/chapter-3/introduction>

7 J. Charles Boyce, ed., “Debates of the House of Commons, 5th Parliament, 1st Session: Volume 2,” Library of Parliament, 1883, https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debatess_

Another example is the vision of co-existence with the British that is shared by several interior First Nations in British Columbia, including the Secwepemc, Okanagan, and Nlaka'pamux. In 1910, they wrote to Prime Minister Laurier to raise the alarm about the intensifying oppression, poverty, and hardship facing their peoples. As part of their letter, they shared how their earlier leaders had envisioned proper relations:

Some of our Chiefs said, "These people wish to be partners with us in our country. We must, therefore, be the same as brothers to them and live as one family. We will share equally in everything – half and half – in land, water and timber, and so on. What is ours will be theirs and what is theirs will be ours. We will help each other to be great and good."⁹

Efforts by Indigenous peoples to advance these visions of peaceful co-existence have included political actions and organization and the completion of treaties and agreements that they hoped would serve as the foundation for the manifestation of this vision. Alongside this, there has been extensive use of the courts and all forms of social movements and social action.

At the same time, Indigenous peoples have worked to maintain and pass on their culture, knowledge, and social systems to future generations, although they have often had to do this work in the shadows. Jody Wilson-Raybould, the first Indigenous person to serve as Canada's Minister of Justice and Attorney General, shared an example of this resilience in her own family:

My grandmother, whose English name was Ethel Pearson and whose Kwakwaka'wakw name was Pugladee, had to struggle for change in the shadows, out of sight and invisible, to ensure our culture and our ways survived. To keep our traditions of the Big House alive—our governance system—she and others had to hide

their gatherings and the work they were doing from agents of the federal government, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), who had direction to stop those gatherings and that work. Our people had a system of lookouts that would let them know when the officials were close, so they could switch from the work they were doing to singing church hymns.¹⁰

There has also been extensive study and analysis of Canada's legacy of colonialism, its enduring impacts on Indigenous peoples and society at large, and the necessary solutions to overcome these realities. For example, in 1996, it was estimated that in the previous three decades, almost 900 reports were written on the conditions of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous policy in Canada. Since then, the pace of study has only grown. All of these studies include recommendations and solutions for moving forward.

Similarly, the residential school system was the subject of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission¹¹ that completed its work in 2015 and heard evidence from more than 6,500 individuals. The Commission's work included producing a volume titled *Missing Children and Unmarked Burials*¹² which confirmed 3,200 deaths of children at residential schools, based only on a limited review of documents which were often not kept and not complete. For example, almost half of these confirmed deaths did not list a cause of death, and nearly a third lacked the child's name. Given this, it has long been clear that properly supporting the search for these lost children would return evidence of far more deaths, by many thousands.

So to return to our question: How could the 2021 unmarked burials announcements be a "shock" and "unimaginable" to many Canadians?

They were not, of course, a shock to Indigenous people. As Jody Wilson-Raybould explains:

While the reports were indeed horrific for Indigenous peoples, they were not shocking. Yes, they are triggering and extremely painful, on a personal level, for many. But in our communities, it has always been known that children never returned from residential schools, that they died there. In various ways, these missing children have always been spoken of, as part of our telling of our history in this country.¹³

Being incapable of seeing injustices that are right before one's eyes is a perpetuation of injustice. Bahá'u'lláh highlights this truth in one of His definitions of justice, when He equates justice with being able to see the realities around oneself. Writing in the mid-1800s, He stated that the "best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice," explaining that, by the aid of justice, "thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others"¹⁴ and "know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge" of others. He goes on to say, "justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes."¹⁵

Without the capacity to see justice and injustice, we allow injustice to prevail. We passively bestow upon the status quo a taken-for-granted quality and fail to look beyond what is immediately and directly in front of our eyes. What looks normal, no matter how pernicious and destructive the reality it perpetuates for others, we come to accept as right, having never sought to understand what may be, at first glance, unseen to us. According to Bahá'u'lláh, this dehumanizes us as individuals. In His view, it is a complete failure to use the capacities that make us truly human. We become blind imitators; we do not see for ourselves and are

9 <http://www.skeetchestn.ca/files/documents/Governance/memorialtosirwilfredlaurier1910.pdf>

10 Jody Wilson-Raybould, *True Reconciliation: How to be a Force for Change* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2022), 4.

11 <https://nctr.ca/about/history-of-the-trc/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-of-canada/>

12 https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/trc/IR4-9-4-2015-eng.pdf

13 Wilson-Raybould, *True Reconciliation*, 49.

14 <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/HW/hw-3.html>

15 <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/HW/hw-3.html>

Truly achieving justice is impossible until we rip these veils away and reshape predominant narratives and discourses in ways that support systemic, structural, and transformative change.

trapped by illusions, unable to effect change that is grounded in principle, progress, and truth in our lives, in our communities, and the world at large. As He writes:

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.¹⁶

In the context of Canada, despite decades of revelations about the true history of the country and the racist and colonial treatment of Indigenous peoples, the reality of unmarked burials (among other aspects of the experience of Indigenous peoples in Canada) remained mainly invisible to governing institutions and the general public. This is not to say there hasn't been some progress and change. There has been change, much of it vital and important in addressing harms and seeking a more just future. This change has been facilitated by growing awareness and knowledge. What has also been revealed, however, is how powerful and deeply entrenched narratives about Canada—portrayed as a nation forged by English Europeans and French Europeans and as a model of multiculturalism through diversity achieved by immigration—veil the true story of Canada's foundation being built through exclusion, racism, and colonization. Truly achieving justice is impossible until we rip these veils away and reshape predominant narratives and discourses in ways that support systemic, structural, and transformative change.

Within this veiling is the erasure of Indigenous peoples and their

knowledge and experience. What becomes predominant is a version of reality in which Indigenous peoples simply do not, and never did, exist. Douglas White III (one of the authors of this paper), recounted the following vivid illustration of this pervasive erasure:

At the time I was Chief of the Snuneymuxw First Nation and had been asked to give a public talk about the history of our Nation. The talk was being held in Departure Bay, which was the site of our major winter village site—Stliinup in our language. We had been pushed out of Stliinup in the mid 1800s even though the village was to be protected for our people by the treaty we entered into in 1854. Settlers named Sliinup “Departure Bay” when they came across the village at a time of year when our people were across the Salish Sea at the Fraser River for our summer salmon fishery. They assumed we were gone for good, not understanding our yearly cycle of movement throughout our territories.

After the talk, during which I shared the history of Stliinup, a member of the public approached me to say that he had lived in Departure Bay for three decades. He said he was shocked to learn the history of where he lived, and that he had no idea that this was the main winter village of the Snuneymuxw.

I was stunned as well. It had never been made so explicitly clear to me how powerful the predominant narratives of history, time, and place were, and the extent of how they erased my people. But this was a reality that I confronted more and more in my years as

Chief. I realized that the reality of erasure was all-encompassing. It extended to every aspect of our reality, from where we lived, to our way of life, to our culture, to our history, to our territory, to our contributions to broader society. Even those elements of our reality that were fully shared with the Crown—like our Treaty of 1854—were effectively forgotten and ignored. Even though the Treaty was recognized and affirmed by Canada's Constitution in 1982, decades later, as Chief, I was constantly interacting with government officials who didn't seem to see or understand a version of history that included my people, our experience, or the basis of our relationship with the Crown.

This importance of seeing injustice and justice, and the challenge we have in doing so, is at the core of much current study and action in response to racism. Recent anti-racist literature emphasizes this. For example, Ibram X. Kendi writes, “the only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it—and then dismantle it.”¹⁷ Identification and description are necessary because of the blindness people often show toward the ways their choices, actions, and realities uphold forms of racism. Absent critical self-reflection, consciousness-raising, and shifts in perception of self and others (and the relationship between self and others), biases and ignorance remain unchallenged. As individuals and collectives, failure to see and apprehend this reality is not some neutral act for which one is not responsible. On the contrary, it perpetuates and reinforces beliefs, patterns, and unjust and harmful structures.

– Dr. Roshan Danesh and Douglas White III

Read this entire article on the Bahá'í World website at <bahaiworld.bahai.org>.

¹⁷ Ibram X. Kendi, *How To Be An Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019), 9.

¹⁶ <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/tb/TB/tb-11.html>



A lush landscape that is part of the territory the pioneers live in.

The movement of pioneers: a way that learning is being disseminated throughout the world

A team of three friends discuss their experience preparing to serve as international pioneers.

At the end of February, during the festival of Ayyám-i-Há and right before the Bahá'í Fast, three Bahá'í pioneers landed in Dominica, an island country located in the East Caribbean Sea and one of Canada's international pioneer goals for the Nine Year Plan.

One of the chief objectives of this Plan, now entering its third year, is for every country or region to have at least one cluster that has reached the third milestone of development, where “intense activity” is “occurring in specific neighbourhoods or villages” and there is “a rising spirit of universal participation in the work of community building” which “entails families and individual believers working together and making a conscious decision to see themselves as belonging to an expanding nucleus.”¹ A new element in this Plan is the degree to which clusters in a

country sending pioneers are to remain connected to those receiving pioneers, helping to advance the community-building process.

Pioneering is a means of disseminating learning about the educational process globally, so that experience gained in more advanced clusters can be shared with those at an earlier stage of development. It is most effective when those who arise to pioneer are equipped with the necessary experience and accompanied in their efforts. When Lua Boschman and Farbod Behshad—a young married couple—heard about the call for pioneers, they felt immediately drawn toward this area of service. They consulted and decided to take steps to realize their aspirations.

They attended a nine-day orientation in Vancouver, B.C., in June 2022, and started the journey of preparing themselves to pioneer, a process that was closely guided by institutions of

the Faith. Their preparation involved serving in several third milestone clusters in British Columbia. “We had never had experience serving in a centre of intense activity,” Ms. Boschman shared, “so we did six months serving in the Guildford neighbourhood in Surrey, B.C. There we served in a daily pattern working alongside a team. We were able to experience animating [junior youth groups] and teaching children's classes, holding camps and intensive outreach campaigns... it was really beautiful how they accompanied us and supported us in that learning.” In May 2023, the couple moved to North Port Coquitlam, B.C. where they learned about working with entire families and holding community gatherings.

Wendy Rosen, a member of the British Columbia Pioneer Task Force, cited the guidance from the House of Justice that “the deployment of teams of international

1 From the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 30 December 2021.



The house where the pioneers live.

and homefront pioneers who are familiar with the framework for action”² is proving to be especially fruitful. A team of pioneers soon came together, including Ms. Boschman, Mr. Behshad and Anissa Jahromi, a recent university graduate with a decade of experience in the Harewood neighbourhood of Nanaimo, B.C., (Mid-Island cluster), which has also reached the third milestone. Ms. Jahromi was particularly drawn to the call to pioneer internationally after attending a subsequent orientation. “It was so galvanizing,” Ms. Jahromi says of the pioneering orientation, “We had past pioneers come and share their experiences and stories and it was really encouraging.” She soon began consultations with the relevant institutions to pioneer herself.

Ms. Rosen describes how a high level of institutional collaboration regionally and between nations has allowed for an in-depth understanding of the needs of a destination cluster. Consultations that occur between the pioneers, the host and receiving countries help match those with relevant experience to clusters that have favorable conditions for growth. The prospective pioneer’s own circumstances and experience are taken into consideration by the relevant institutions and a goal best suited is suggested.

In the case of this team, after a period of consultation, Dominica

was chosen as their pioneering destination. It is an English-speaking country and the cluster in which the pioneer team works is the territory of the Kalinago people, an Indigenous population. The Kalinago people are the only Caribbean community directly descended from the Indigenous peoples who populated the entire region before colonization over 200 years ago. Ms. Jahromi’s experience serving in the Harewood neighbourhood in Nanaimo, B.C. alongside Indigenous friends was relevant in this regard.

The pioneers continue to receive love and support from the clusters that accompanied them, and they reciprocate by sharing their own experience and challenges. “There’s a connection with the nation of Canada aside from just individual friendships that were formed,” Ms. Boschman said. They are also in touch with a resource person in Canada on a weekly basis and through WhatsApp groups communicate with friends, on one occasion even studying the *Ridván* message together. These constant interactions help them feel supported.

Mr. Behshad explains how in one instance, “I had some challenges with engaging the youth and I reached out to my friend in the Edmonds neighbourhood...she led me to some guidance from the House of Justice that helped me.”

The pioneers’ love for their new country is palpable as they discuss the resilience of its natural landscape

...the House of Justice’s pioneer call is “not only to those who are able to physically rise up and pioneer... it’s for all of us.”

and people, demonstrated through its recovery from a devastating hurricane in 2017. The friends they converse with are eager to discuss spiritual concepts and to pray. “We pray with everyone we visit,” Mr. Behshad comments.

Ms. Rosen emphasized that the House of Justice’s pioneer call is “not only to those who are able to physically rise up and pioneer...it’s for all of us.” She asked, “What does it mean to rise up and support this?”

More international pioneers are required, many of whom will serve full-time or will be deployed in areas where it is less feasible that they would be able to take up employment. This requires a strong commitment to the Deputization Fund, which is another means through which we may participate in these goals. Other friends have assisted with these goals by arising to serve in the neighbourhoods that the pioneers left, ensuring that growth is not stalled.

Morgan Suhm, another member of the Pioneer Task Force, continued, “It’s really all of us who are fulfilling these goals together...we need to see this as a collective effort.”

To express interest in pioneering, please contact the Pioneer Task Force in British Columbia if you live west of Ontario at pioneering@bc.bahai.ca, or the Pioneer Task Force in Ontario, at pioneering@ontariobahai.org, if you are in Ontario, Quebec, or the Atlantic Provinces.

² From the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 30 December 2021.



Members of a junior youth group decorate cookies made by one of their mothers.

An expanding nucleus in Oak Bay, B.C.

An individual describes how through an educational process over the last three-and-a-half years, 15 families have arisen as protagonists working together for their own good and the good of their communities.

Oak Bay is a small locality in beautiful southern Vancouver Island, B.C. with approximately 18,000 inhabitants, many of whom are retired. Although efforts have been made over the years to reach out to neighbours, it has been challenging to learn about community building beyond a small handful of core activities.

In January 2021, an English Corner started with two participants, one of whom, a friend of the Faith, had just completed Ruhi Book 2: *Arising to Serve*, and was eager to reach out to others. Through consistent effort in fostering an outward-looking orientation, the English Corner gradually grew. With the gatherings starting on Zoom during the

pandemic, the group met in person for the first time in June 2021 for a memorable birthday celebration for one of the friends. The first of several study circles with adults began in July 2021 through one-on-one visits, followed by a more formal space to introduce the purpose of the sequence of courses. The first four paragraphs of “A Few Thoughts for the Tutor” from Ruhi Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* were used to explore the concepts of walking a path of service and our two-fold moral purpose.

The populations represented in this “specialized form of the community-building work”¹ were from across the Southeast Victoria cluster and

predominantly newcomers from Thailand and China. Early in the process it became clear that most of the mothers engaged had middle-school-aged children. With growing understanding and vision among a handful of families about the merits of the junior youth spiritual empowerment program, the conversations about the program expanded over several months. After two community meetings in January and March 2023, it was possible to

1 In its 30 December 2021 message the House of Justice wrote, “We also acknowledge, in this connection, the steps being taken in some clusters to systematically reach out to a specific population that has shown receptivity to the Faith but is dispersed throughout the cluster. This can be seen as a specialized form of the community-building work, and one which continues to show great promise.”

form a junior youth group in May. The group began with the help of a Bahá'í animator and started with three participants. In the months that followed, the group consistently grew and currently includes 12 participants. It has also attracted three high school students from the Thai population who have now taken responsibility for animating the group.

Although a Book 1 study circle began with the youth, a challenge arose when the facilitators realized that the youth weren't seeing a clear relationship between the course content and their service as animators. Consultation with the youth and some of the adults resulted in support from one of the mothers who had completed the first two institute courses. She was better able to relate to these young friends and their educational backgrounds, and together they found a flexible way to move forward with simultaneous study and service. The quality of the junior youth group was enhanced through the involvement of the parents in a weekly gathering that takes place at the same time as the group and during which they study lessons from the junior youth texts and other relevant materials from the institute courses. A few months ago, one of the mothers suggested starting a homework club for some of the junior youth; however, this has not yet been implemented.

In addition to study circles, a variety of other activities gradually emerged over the years as both the number of adults entering the courses of the institute and their capacity for service grew. A monthly devotional gathering, open to all, began in response to a desire for spaces of collective worship after the completion of the second unit of Book 1. This "unity gathering," as the friends call it, has been instrumental in fostering an ongoing conversation centred around the Word of God that addresses themes of interest to the parents.

At a recent gathering it became clear, for example, that several friends

would like to learn more about the history of the Faith, which has opened possibilities for direct conversations about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh and utilizing the films commissioned by the Universal House of Justice. The study circles became spaces in which the friends are taking ownership of the process—reflecting, consulting and planning for activities—and addressing any setbacks that arise.

The devotional character of the community was also strengthened by fostering the habit of memorization and daily prayer through study of the courses of the institute. When one of the friends at the forefront of the process encountered a health crisis recently, she was able to rely on the short obligatory prayer she had committed to memory in her study circle. A few families also began to participate in Holy Day commemorations. The Local Spiritual Assembly was supportive of these efforts and provided suitable content for them, creating welcoming environments and involving friends from the wider community in the program.

The adults from the population co-tutor study circles, facilitate discussions in unity gatherings and parent gatherings, offer rides to the youth, provide snacks for the group, and support the younger generations with their service projects. Home visits also became a more prominent feature of the culture in the expanding nucleus, complementing weekly activities, and strengthening bonds of friendship, love, mutual support and trust.

This work now engages about 15 families and several other individuals from the wider community. With the start of the Nine Year Plan and the release of the 30 December 2021 message of the Universal House of Justice, there is a growing consciousness and commitment to learning about releasing the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures by taking a more expansive view of the training institute. To see everyone, young and old, as a potential protagonist

in the community-building process, and to channel their talents and energies for the common good requires detachment and faith in the capacity of those who have a desire to serve. At a recent study circle, one of the mothers pointed to Book 1 and said, "My nine-year-old daughter needs this!" The conversation about the importance of the spiritual education of children followed naturally. It was then possible to provide encouragement and support for her and another mother to use the content of Ruhi Book 3: *Teaching Children's Classes Grade 1* to start a children's class.

Signs of transformation are becoming increasingly evident. At a recent community gathering, one junior youth said that before joining the program, he was not interested in communicating with his parents and spent much time in his room. Now he makes a conscious effort to have conversations with both parents, especially his mother. Another junior youth shared that nothing in this life is permanent and that he is now grateful for all the difficulties he has encountered, as they contributed to his personal growth. With tears in her eyes, one of the mothers mentioned that although she has only been participating in the process for seven months, this period has been one of the most significant in her life, as she has learned to look inside herself which has made her much happier. As the process of change and movement of the population towards the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh gains momentum, there is a heightened consciousness about one of the characteristics of engaging in a learning process: "maintaining a humble posture of learning, whether celebrating successes or persevering in the face of obstacles and setbacks."²

– Alaleh Rohani

2 From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 28 November 2023.



The tree seedlings must grow and strengthen before they can be planted in the ground.

Tree seedlings planted for grounds of Canada's House of Worship

Volunteers gathered to participate in a service project that will help ensure the serenity and beauty of a site that has been reserved for prayer and meditation.

In early May, as the greenery of spring unfolded, over 50 volunteers gathered at one of the tennis courts at the Don Valley Education Centre, located in the vicinity of the Bahá'í National Centre in Markham, Ont. These friends, mostly from neighbourhoods in Toronto surrounding the Temple Site, participated in a tree nursery project that was initiated and guided by the National Spiritual Assembly.

In total, 885 tree seedlings were planted by the volunteer children, junior youth, youth and adults present in an act that will help guarantee

the serenity and beauty of the site for generations to come. The tree seedlings, all native species, are well-suited to the local climate, and were among those recommended by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

Part of the conservation work underway requires replacing invasive, non-native species of trees present in the forested areas around the Temple site. It is envisioned that the seedlings being nurtured will mature and be planted on the grounds of the future House of Worship. Each volunteer did their personal best and

contributed to the project regardless of his or her existing knowledge and skills. A horticulturist on site supported the volunteers.

Parents guided their children and junior youth to cooperate to fill the pots, cover the roots with an appropriate amount of soil, and transport them in wheelbarrows. This service was carried out with a spirit of joy and friendship, with laughter and elevated conversations filling the air, all enhanced by the sunny afternoon, bringing warmth and life.

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Membership Portal: Use the online membership portal to update your personal information in the national database, participate in Bahá'í elections and contribute to the Funds of the Faith. Log in or register by visiting the website <<https://member.bahai.ca/member>>. To register, you will need your Bahá'í ID card information.

Other ways to **Contribute to the Funds of the Faith** include through the Treasurer of your Local Assembly, or the Regional Bahá'í Council in your area. You can also donate through the National Spiritual Assembly. In this case, kindly make your cheque payable to "Canadian Bahá'í Fund" and mail it to:

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

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

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

The National Fund

The Deputization Fund

The Continental Fund

The Community Properties Fund

The International Bahá'í

Development Fund

Humanitarian Relief Fund

The North American House of
Worship Fund

The International Collaboration Fund

The International Fund

The World Centre Endowment Fund

The Canadian Temple Fund

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Ontario

7200 Leslie St.
Thornhill, ON, L3T 6L8
council@ontariobahai.org
(647) 479-8650

Quebec

84 Ch Juniper
Chelsea, QC, J9B 1T3
secretariat@conseil.bahaiqc.org
(819) 743-7778

Atlantic Provinces

313 Arcona St. Summerside, PE,
C1N 2X1
regional.council@atlantic.bahai.ca
(902) 439-7263

GENERAL INFORMATION

Purchase Bahá'í books online in English and French <<https://distribution.bahai.ca/>>.

Email: bds@bahai.ca

Phone: 905-889-8168

For inquires regarding Bahá'í books in French, contact

75 d'auteuil Street, Québec, QC, G1R 4C3

Email: sdbc@bahai.ca

Phone: 418-692-2402

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 <bahaicanada@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 receipting 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 online membership portal <<https://member.bahai.ca/member>>. 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.

Members of the Board of Trustees:

اعضای هیات امنای حقوق الله در کانادا

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Mrs. Charlotte Mosleh, Secretary

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Dr. Faran Vafaie, Chair

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

خزانه دار هیأت امنای حقوق الله رسید وجوه دریافت شده را که در عین حال رسید مالیاتی نیز محسوب میگردد برای فرستنده ارسال خواهند داشت. تقدیم کنندگان حقوق الله میتوانند از این رسید ها در زمان تهیه اوراق مالیاتی استفاده نمایند. در روی چک، حواله بانکی یا پسندی باید عبارت Canadian Bahá'í Fund – Ḥuqúqu'lláh ذکر شود. شماره تسجیل بهائی نیز باید در هر پرداخت قید گردد. از چندی پیش امکان پرداخت حقوق الله از طریق سایت اینترنتی "www.bahaifunds.ca" و با استفاده از کارتهای اعتباری نیز میسر شده است. وجوه تقدیمی برای حقوق الله به هیچ وجه نباید توسط محافل روحانی محلی ارسال شود.