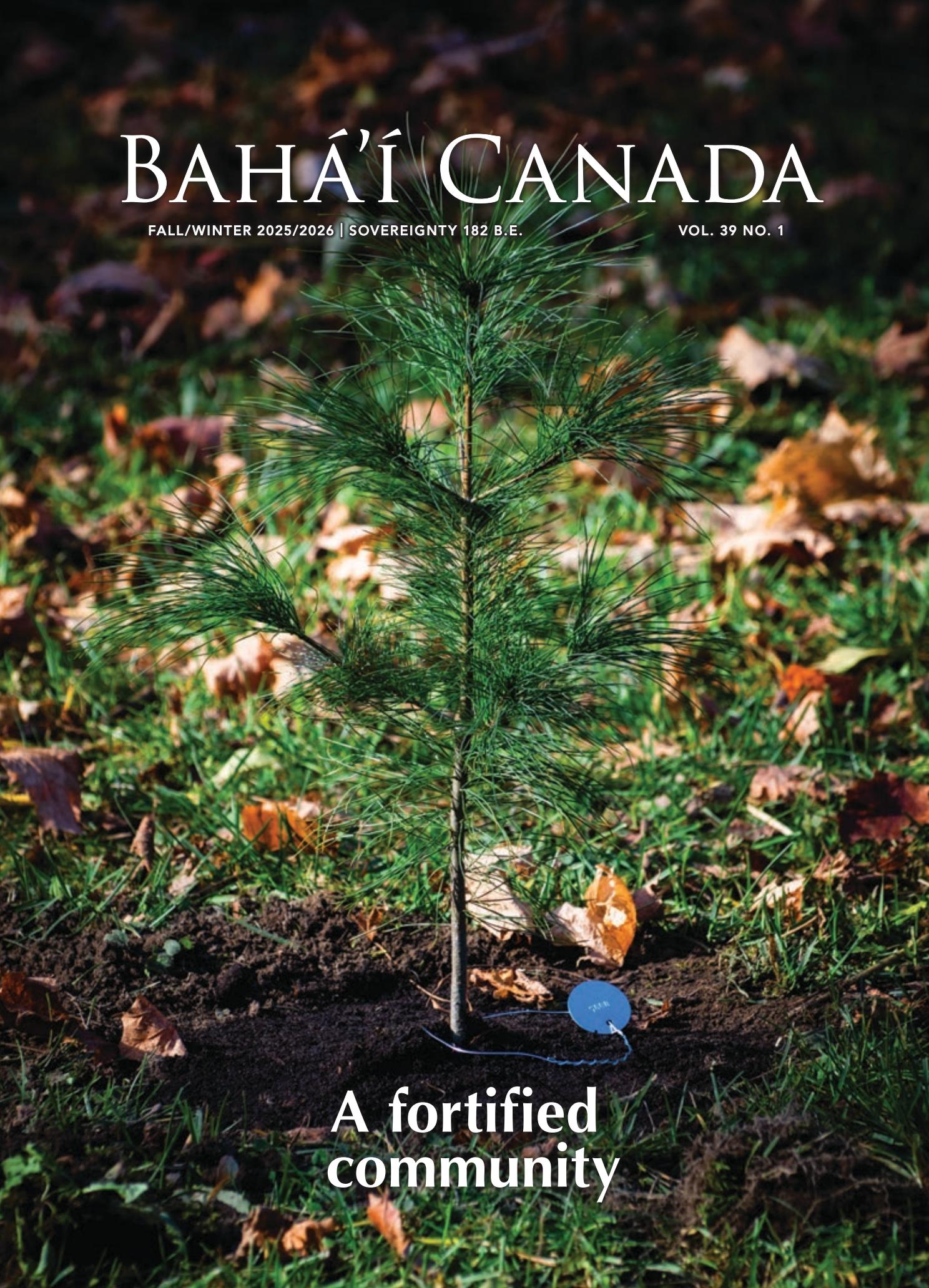


BAHÁ'Í CANADA

FALL/WINTER 2025/2026 | SOVEREIGNTY 182 B.E.

VOL. 39 NO. 1



A fortified
community

From the Writings

Great is the blessedness of him who hath in this Day cast away the things current amongst men and hath clung unto that which is ordained by God, the Lord of Names and the Fashioner of all created things, He Who is come from the heaven of eternity through the power of the Most Great Name, invested with so invincible an authority that all the powers of the earth are unable to withstand Him. Unto this beareth witness the Mother Book, calling from the Most Sublime Station.

— *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 48.

They that have forsaken their country for the purpose of teaching Our Cause—these shall the Faithful Spirit strengthen through its power. A company of Our chosen angels shall go forth with them, as bidden by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Wise. How great the blessedness that awaiteth him that hath attained the honor of serving the Almighty!

— *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, sec. 157, p. 334.

Wert thou to consider this world, and realize how fleeting are the things that pertain unto it, thou wouldest choose to tread no path except the path of service to the Cause of thy Lord. None would have the power to deter thee from celebrating His praise, though all men should arise to oppose thee.

— *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, sec. 144, p. 313.

O Ye Dwellers in the Highest Paradise! Proclaim unto the children of assurance that within the realms of holiness, nigh unto the celestial paradise, a new garden hath appeared, round which circle the denizens of the realm on high and the immortal dwellers of the exalted paradise. Strive, then, that ye may attain that station, that ye may unravel the mysteries of love from its windflowers and learn the secret of divine and consummate wisdom from its eternal fruits. Solaced are the eyes of them that enter and abide therein!

— *Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words*, From the Persian, no. 18.

How good it is if the friends be as close as sheaves of light, if they stand together side by side in a firm unbroken line. For now have the rays of reality from the Sun of the world of existence united in adoration all

the worshippers of this light; and these rays have, through infinite grace, gathered all peoples together within this wide-spreading shelter; therefore must all souls become as one soul, and all hearts as one heart. Let all be set free from the multiple identities that were born of passion and desire, and in the oneness of their love for God find a new way of life.

— *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 36, p. 81.

O my God! O my God! Verily, these servants are turning to Thee, supplicating Thy kingdom of mercy. Verily, they are attracted by Thy holiness and set aglow with the fire of Thy love, seeking confirmation from Thy wondrous kingdom, and hoping for attainment in Thy heavenly realm. Verily, they long for the descent of Thy bestowal, desiring illumination from the Sun of Reality. O Lord! Make them radiant lamps, merciful signs, fruitful trees and shining stars. May they come forth in Thy service and be connected with Thee by the bonds and ties of Thy love, longing for the lights of Thy favor. O Lord! Make them signs of guidance, standards of Thine immortal kingdom, waves of the sea of Thy mercy, mirrors of the light of Thy majesty.

Verily, Thou art the Generous. Verily, Thou art the Merciful. Verily, Thou art the Precious, the Beloved.

— *'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 89-90.

O Lord! Unite and bind together the hearts, join in accord all the souls, and exhilarate the spirits through the signs of Thy sanctity and oneness. O Lord! Make these faces radiant through the light of Thy oneness. Strengthen the loins of Thy servants in the service of Thy kingdom.

— *'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Prayers*, pp. 238-9.

Wherefore, O ye beloved of the Lord and friends of God, arise, and with the whole enthusiasm of your hearts, with all the eagerness of your souls, strive to unfurl the standards of unity in the midmost heart of the world and cause, with valiant might, the ocean of oneness to surge. Thus may the body of humankind be freed from the constraint of these variegated robes and patched garments, and be adorned instead with the sanctified raiment of unity.

— *'Abdu'l-Bahá, Light of the World*, p. 9-10.

Fall/Winter 2025/2026

January | 182 B.E.

Vol. 39, No. 1

Published for the Bahá'ís of Canada



ON THE COVER: A sapling is planted and tagged in the vicinity of Canada's future House of Worship. Photo: Niaz Noori

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Bahá'í Canada (ISSN 1199-1682) is published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada three to four times per year. 7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill ON L3T 6L8 phone: (905) 889-8168 fax: (905) 889-8184 email: secretariat@bahai.ca

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Publications Mail Agreement 40050758

Appointment of members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 15 October 2025.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

On the Day of the Covenant, 25 November 2025, a new five-year term of service for the members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors for the Protection and Propagation of the Faith will commence. We are delighted to announce the names of the Counsellors appointed for the coming term, whose number remains at ninety.

AFRICA (20 Counsellors): Izzat Abumba Mionda, Mariama Ousmane Djaouga, Alain Pierre Djoulde, Augustino Ibrahim, Mati Issoufou, Hamed Javaheri, Musonda Kapusa-Linsel (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Linet Nafula Kisaka, Townshend Lihanda, Makoena Martha Masha, Judicaël Mokolé, Amélia Mujinga Ngandu, Nsika Mutasa, Justave Ndjibu Kapenga, Mélanie Ngalula Muambangu, Michael Okiria, Nana Yaw Otu-Ansah, Nancy Oloro Robarts, Djamila Tchakréo, Annie Yohari Kingombe

THE AMERICAS (21 Counsellors): Vafa William Akhtar-Khavari, José Luis Almeida, Sonya Appadoo, Ayafor Temengye Ayafor, Louis Boddy, Natasha Bruss, Brígida Carrillo, Ingrid Umpierre Conter, Blas Cruz Martínez, Daniel Duhart, Farah

Guchani-Rosenberg, Badi Hernandez, Nazanin Ho, Irene Iturburo, Jasmine Miller-Kleinhenz, Borna Noureddin (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Wedzer Saintea, Pejman Samoori, Bernardino Sbnchez, William Silva, Margarita Valdez Martínez

ASIA (27 Counsellors): Yam Prasad Acharya, Vafa David Amirkia, Bhavna Anbarasan, Walid Ayyash, Marijini Deraoh, Gulnara Eyvazova, Shareen Farhad, Rahul Kumar, Nicholas Loh, Parimal Mahato, Tarrant Matthew Mahony, Uttam Mitra, Fares Naimi, Melonna Jane Montalban Njang, Rasha Oflazoğlu, Thi Thuc Quynh Ho, Zafar Rahimov, Foad Reyhani (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Hesham Saad, Niroshini Saleh, Omid Seioshanseian, Oxana Shulga, Dregpal Singh, Sadhu Ram Tamang, Fang Jung Tseng Chung, Lyazzat Yangaliyeva, Ozoda Zoidova

AUSTRALASIA (10 Counsellors): Bob Ale, Latai 'Atoa, Bererin Barnabas, Julie Joekari, Kirk Johnson, Taraz Nadarajah, Daniel Pierce Olam, Vahid Saberi (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Jeffrey Sabour, Reena Torabi

EUROPE (12 Counsellors): Faina Berger, Marina Bruckmann, Raffaella Capozzi Gubinelli, Orlando Ravelo Hernández, Varqá Khadem (Trustee of the Continental Fund), Ana-Maria Marian, Puria Mahally, Veronika Medvedeva, Hedyeh Nadafi-Stoffel, Navid Sabet, Alexis Semple, Shirin Youssefian Maanian



Aerial image of the International Teaching Centre Building. Photo: Bahá'í International Community

The following believers, now being relieved of the duties of membership on the Boards of Counsellors, have earned our abiding gratitude for their sacrificial contributions to the progress of the Cause:

Jamil Aliyev, Ritia Kamauti Bakineti, Beatriz Carmona, Nadera Fikri, Kam Mui Fok Sayers, Agatha Sarinoda Gaisie-Nketsiah, Sonlla Heern, Nwandi Ngozi Lawson, Ada Micheline Leonce Ferdinand, Sabà Mazza, Jalal Rodney Mills, Maina Mkandawire, Myint Zaw Oo, Yevgeniya Poluektova, Arthur Powell, Sokuntheary Reth, Artin Rezaie, Mehdi Rezvan, Kessia Ruh, Tessa Scrine, Zebinusso Soliyeva, Ircham Sujadmiko, Jacques Tshibuabua Kabuya, Paul Verheij

These dear friends will no doubt remain a source of inspiration and strength to the believers as they continue to dedicate their efforts to the advancement of the Faith in the years ahead. We shall offer supplications in the Holy Shrines on their behalf, that their every endeavour in the path of service to the Cause of God may receive an abundant share of divine blessings.

Since the launch of the Nine Year Plan at Ridván 2022, the Bahá'í world has been focused on the aim

of releasing the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures. Already great strides have been made, and in places, early signs that portend a profound transformation in the life of society are becoming evident. As the Bahá'í world enters the second phase of the Nine Year Plan this coming Ridván, there is much experience to draw from and build upon, and we look to the Counsellors to nurture the increasingly complex processes of learning unfolding in all parts of the globe. We are calling the Counsellors from all continents to the Bahá'í World Centre for a conference that will take place from 31 December 2025 to 4 January 2026, during which deliberations will be held on the exigencies of the second phase of the Nine Year Plan and on the decisive role the Counsellors, together with their auxiliaries, are to play in meeting the challenges and taking advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead.

It is our ardent prayer at the Sacred Threshold that the Blessed Beauty may vouchsafe unto these ninety souls His unfailing protection and unceasing confirmations as they, together with cohorts of His loved ones, labour for His Cause.

– The Universal House of Justice

Regarding the acquisition of a building in Haifa

From the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, 1 December 2025.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are pleased to announce that, after many years of patient negotiation, the city of Haifa has agreed to transfer to the Bahá'í World Centre the ownership of a two-storey Templar house on the lower slopes of Mount Carmel where Bahá'u'lláh Himself once stayed during a visit to the city. The property is to the east of the plaza at the foot of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and adjacent to land where Bahá'u'lláh's

tent was pitched. The building, which sits on three hundred and sixteen square metres of land, is located in the World Heritage area of the Shrine of the Báb and its surroundings. It was built by a family of German Templars who inscribed the capstone above the front door of the house with the prophetic words "Der Herr ist nahe", the Lord is nigh. When the Blessed Beauty visited Haifa in the summer of 1891 and suffered a short illness, He stayed for a few days in the house as a guest of the family. Plans are being prepared for the restoration of the building so that, in time, it may be opened to pilgrims and visitors.

Kindly share this message with the members of your community.

– The Universal House of Justice

Visiting the Bahá'í Shrine in Montreal

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 12 August 2025.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

We are writing to remind the friends of the opportunity to visit the Bahá'í Shrine in Montréal, that sacred spot blessed by the visit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His stay in Canada in 1912. More information about the Shrine, including the regular hours that it is open, can be found on the Canadian Bahá'í website at <https://www.bahai.ca/en/bahai-shrine-in-montreal/visiting/>. Visitors are asked to book a time to

visit through a link on that web page, ideally in advance of their arrival date.

As well, you may recall that in 2019, a program of special visits was launched to allow the friends to visit the Shrine in groups, whether of those working together in a cluster or in a particular neighbourhood. Those wishing to register to visit in such a group context are asked to apply by email at montrealshrinegroups@gmail.com.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Karen McKye, Secretary

Expansion of website for Bahá'í books in Canada

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 12 August 2025.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

One of the aims of the Publication and Distribution Board, an agency of the National Spiritual Assembly that oversees systems for the production and distribution of Bahá'í literature and materials, is to strengthen the flow of literature across the country. Last year, the Bahá'í Distribution Service (BDS) streamlined and simplified its online ordering platform, enabling the friends to order items in its inventory directly online. However, as you may recall, the Bahá'í Distribution Service carries only texts of the Central Figures of the Faith and a selection of additional material related to the advancement of the current Plan in Canada. To increase the selection of Bahá'í literature available online, the Board has been in consultation with several Local Spiritual Assemblies that operate bookstores and we are now pleased to share that the inventories of these bookstores are now accessible through the

distribution.bahai.ca website operated by the Bahá'í Distribution Service. With the inclusion of the inventories from the local bookstores, many more categories of literature are available to order online.

Many book titles are carried by more than one bookstore and perhaps by our Distribution Service as well. When the friends click on a link to purchase a specific book, the ordering system will automatically select the closest bookstore that carries it to fulfill the order. You can arrange to pick up the order or have it delivered to you. Links to available digital versions of the materials are also included for many titles. As well, the website contains links to contact information and online inventories for each of the three local Bahá'í bookstores.

Should you have any questions or require any assistance with the website, please contact the Bahá'í Distribution Service at bds@bahai.ca.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Karen McKye, Secretary

Special initiative - Tree planting project

Since the National Assembly wrote this letter, an overwhelming response to the project has meant that every tree has been assigned in the name of a loved one. The program has been suspended until the next acquisition of new saplings, expected next year, and the National Assembly will write to the community to let them know of the renewed opportunity to contribute.

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils and Registered Groups, 21 November 2025.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

One of the first steps taken in 2024, parallel with pursuing the rezoning process for the lands on which Canada's House of Worship will be raised up, was the purchase of 850 saplings that will enrich the surrounding environment and forest, replacing invasive species and deadfall with carefully chosen native species. The arrival of these small saplings was a moment of sheer delight. They were a symbol of our confidence in both the successful conclusion of the rezoning process, and of the processes of growth gaining strength in the country that attracted the blessing of a national Temple. A group of friends and families gathered to plant these saplings in pots, and over the next year they were tended and protected, including over the winter, growing faster and stronger than was predicted. This year, another 600 saplings were purchased, and the first group of what are now young trees have been planted in the earth.

The National Assembly wishes to announce a special initiative, offering to the friends the opportunity to support this aspect of a historic project through contributing towards the cost of one or more saplings in the name of a loved one. The suggested amount is anywhere between \$250 and \$500 per tree. Each of the trees is tagged, and those contributing will be alerted when the tree is planted. Contributions can be made via the Canadian Temple Fund – Tree Planting Project, along with the name of the person in whose honour the tree is being planted. For this project, to simplify accounting and ensure an accurate record of both donor and the person in whose name the contribution is being made, the contribution should be made directly to the Bahá'í



A sapling is planted in an open area. Photo: Niaz Noori

National Centre—either through the online contribution portal or by cheque sent to the Bahá'í National Centre, 7200 Leslie Street, Thornhill, ON L3T 6L8. Instructions for the online contribution portal are appended below.

Bahá'u'lláh says: "Incline your hearts, O people of God, unto the counsels of your true, your incomparable Friend. The Word of God may be likened unto a sapling, whose roots have been implanted in the hearts of men. It is incumbent upon you to foster its growth through the living waters of wisdom, of sanctified and holy words, so that its root may become firmly fixed and its branches may spread out as high as the heavens and beyond." In the Ridván 2025 message, the Universal House of Justice employs similar imagery: "...the seed of the Faith has yielded new green shoots and the capacity for working with many souls at once has begun to emerge." In the saplings, these beautiful comparisons come to life, drawing together the elements of one divine enterprise—the Temple with its sacred environs and the community-building endeavors that have attracted this blessing to Canada. As the young saplings around the Temple land grow into trees, and the trees into a forest, so too may the seeds you are planting in the hearts of your friends, neighbours, and family take root, blossom, and flourish.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Karen McKye, Secretary

Message to the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Canada

To the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in Canada,
25 November 2025.

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

At Ridván 2025, the Universal House of Justice addressed these stirring and urgent words to the Bahá'ís of the world:

Against the gloom of a stormy sky, how bright the light that gleams from your devoted efforts! Even as the tempest rages in the world, the havens that will shelter humanity are being built in countries, regions, and clusters. But there is much to do. Each national community has its own expectations for the progress to be made during this, the Plan's opening phase. Time is passing. Beloved friends, and promulgators of the divine teachings, and champions of the Blessed Beauty—your efforts are needed now. Every advance made in the fleeting months before next Ridván will better equip the community of the Greatest Name for what it must accomplish in the Plan's second phase. May you be granted success. For this we beseech the sovereign Lord; for this we implore His unfailing aid; for this we entreat Him to send forth His favoured angels to assist each one of you.

On this Day of the Covenant—now with but five months remaining in the opening phase of the Nine Year Plan—we are eager to share with you the progress that has unfolded across the country, and to place before you the tasks that yet lie ahead. It is impossible to be brief: the House of Justice stated that “there is much to do,” and much has been done.

A new conception of what it means to be a Bahá'í and to be part of a Bahá'í community is taking shape, as many who are not formally enrolled as Bahá'ís arise to contribute to the progress of their communities.

Across Canada, signs of profound spiritual transformation abound. We begin in the intimate settings of small

pockets of neighbourhoods in clusters that are embracing large numbers. A new conception of what it means to be a Bahá'í and to be part of a Bahá'í community is taking shape, as many who are not formally enrolled as Bahá'ís arise to contribute to the progress of their communities. This passage from the 30 December 2021 message describes what we witness today: “The enkindled souls being raised up through the processes of the Plan are seeking to gain an ever more profound understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings.... They are committed to the prosperity of all.... In places where growing numbers are helping to build communities of this character, the power of the Cause to transform people's social existence, as well as their inner lives, is becoming increasingly visible.” Neighbourhood after neighbourhood is now blossoming, vibrant communities emerging from once-tiny seeds, whether a first conversation with a neighbour, a first devotional meeting, a first mothers' gathering, or a first group of youth arising to serve their younger peers.

One example among many may illustrate this movement. In a Toronto neighbourhood, a single children's class began in 2016 when two mothers gathered a few families together. By early 2022, this had grown to six activities that engaged 40 participants. As the friends learned to adapt the delivery of the training institute's content to the rhythms of everyday life and the hopes and aspirations of families, and as devotional, educational, and service-oriented activities multiplied, the families themselves—particularly the mothers—began to shape a new pattern of community life. Today, more than 600 friends in this neighbourhood are engaged in conversation about the health of their community and the education of their children, and are participating in core activities, festivals, camps, or social action initiatives. The vast majority are among the enkindled souls described by the House of Justice who may previously have been considered “friends of the Faith,” but who are now recognized as equally shouldering the work of advancing this divine enterprise.

From such small settings, we move to a national perspective, where we see signs of a strengthening training institute in clusters at every stage of development. Since Ridván 2025, for example, the number of clusters where there is at least one junior youth group has risen from 62 to 72. Of the 20 clusters where the programme involves more than 50 junior youth, three—Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver—are together engaging over 1,200 participants and increasingly, their families. Regular participation in devotional gatherings and those involved in regular, systematic study of the Revelation through study circles, children's classes, and junior youth groups has reached 35,500, an increase of over 2,000 since Ridván. Outside



Canada's international pioneer goals, as of December 2025. Photo: Bahá'í Canada

... in numbers impossible to tally, are those who are connected to the community and learning about the Faith in many ways, through conversation in varied informal settings, including firesides and home visits.

of these regular spaces, it is estimated that an additional 7,500 friends are studying institute materials in family camps, campaigns, festivals, and conferences. Beyond this, in numbers impossible to tally, are those who are connected to the community and learning about the Faith in many ways, through conversation in varied informal settings, including firesides and home visits. Together, they form what the House of Justice has described as “a vast and growing number of kindred souls”¹ who are “labouring together to build the world anew”², whether they come from families whose Bahá’í heritage spans generations or have only recently encountered the Faith.

This new conception of community is propelling the movement of clusters towards the farthest frontiers of learning, which the House of Justice says “will usher in the time anticipated by Shoghi Effendi at the start of your collective exertions, when the communities you build will directly combat and eventually eradicate the forces

of corruption, of moral laxity, and of ingrained prejudice eating away at the vitals of society.”³ How precious and pressing is the privilege of advancing this movement and witnessing its transformative effects as it increases in intensity!

In its 30 December 2021 message, the House of Justice explained that “the essentially spiritual undertakings of diffusing the light of Bahá’u’llah’s Revelation ever more widely and extending the roots of His Faith ever more deeply into the soil of society have measurable outcomes: the number of clusters where a programme of growth has been initiated and the degree of intensity that each has reached.” Since the beginning of the Plan, Canada has experienced a surge in the movement of its clusters, particularly those moving from the second to the third milestone, from 26 third milestone clusters at the beginning of the Plan to 39 today. This is surely a testament to the growing capacity of regional institutions and agencies to implement sound strategies and creative approaches to disseminate learning from the clusters at the frontiers of learning to those earlier on the continuum of development. In the remaining five months before Ridván 2026, ten additional clusters are expected to pass the third milestone, and five more will pass the second. Thus, by the close of this first phase, more than one-third of Canada’s 137 clusters will have reached the third milestone, learning to embrace larger numbers. This is an extraordinary achievement.

To sustain and widen these advances, teams of travel teachers from advanced clusters have arisen to support

1 Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the World, Ridván 2022.

2 Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’ís of the World, Ridván 2023.

3 Universal House of Justice to the recipients of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, 26 March 2016.

neighbouring areas. These efforts will need to be further strengthened if we are to meet the audacious goals adopted in each region before Ridván. In addition, current estimates indicate that at least 23 clusters require homefront pioneers. This number is expected to rise as this phase of the Plan concludes and the next phase opens.

On the international front, 17 consecrated souls have arisen to pioneer to ten countries assigned as Nine Year Plan goals, with several more preparing. A minimum of 11 additional pioneers must arrive in their posts by the end of the first phase. We appeal especially to experienced friends who are familiar with the framework for action, and who are prepared to dedicate significant amounts of time and energy over a number of years to serving the Cause in this way: the moment to respond has not yet passed. In addition, in response to the House of Justice's call for pioneers to China, and mindful of the Master's hopes for that land, the National Assembly has set a goal of sending 15 pioneers annually over the next several years. The door to this form of service at home and abroad, this prince of all goodly deeds, stands wide open.

Finally, with hearts full of joy, we share news of the next stage in the raising up of Canada's national House of Worship. As shared earlier, the rezoning of the Temple site was successfully concluded in February, paving the way to invite professional architects to contribute design ideas. From a rich pool of submissions, a small group has been selected to develop new concept designs. This brings us a step closer to a final design for the Canadian *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, the erection of which the Guardian said "will incarnate the soul of a flourishing nation-wide community". We ask for your prayers for these devoted friends as they approach their sacred task.

The movement of neighbourhoods, the advancement of clusters, the deployment of pioneers and raising up Canada's House of Worship are all elements of one divine plan that you have been generously, sacrificially supporting through your service and your contributions. This steady flow of resources has allowed the National Assembly to respond with confidence to the exigencies of the Plan and the needs of the Temple. Among the material instruments that have provided singular support to the processes of growth have been the neighbourhood spaces that have been acquired, now numbering 20, as well as the educational facilities in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia that serve several advanced clusters and neighbourhoods. It is no exaggeration to say that without these facilities, the current progress would have been impossible.

Dear friends, we hope that news of these advances has brought you the same joy it brought to the National Assembly and the Counsellors as we recently reflected, and offered heartfelt prayers for your efforts. On this Day of the Covenant, we close this letter in gratitude to the Blessed Beauty for the gift of His Covenant, for 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Centre towards which our hearts turn, and for the unerring guidance of the Universal House of Justice, the last refuge of humankind, as it charts a course towards a new civilization. Whatever path of service is before you as you play your part, may the remaining months of this phase of the Plan open up new possibilities in the field of action.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Karen McKye, Secretary



A group of friends gathered in November 2025 to start planting the saplings. Photo: Niaz Noori

About this issue

The title of this issue, “A fortified community,” comes from the House of Justice’s 30 December 2021 message to the Continental Boards of Counsellors, which states, “By the conclusion of the new series of Plans recently begun, the Bahá’í community will need to have acquired capacities that can scarcely be glimpsed at present.” The House of Justice then encourages the Counsellors to explore “what is required to bring into being such a fortified community.”

As we approach the end of the first phase of this nine year endeavour, the Canadian Bahá’í community has learned much. As the National Assembly wrote in its 25 November 2025 message, “Neighbourhood after neighbourhood is now blossoming, vibrant communities emerging from once-tiny seeds, whether a first conversation with a neighbour, a first devotional meeting, a first mothers’ gathering, or a first group of youth arising to serve their younger peers.”

A fortified community is both a protection from negative social forces and a setting infused with rich spiritual nutrients. As more individuals and communities apply the Word of God, the divine elixir, to their individual and collective lives, signs of positive transformation abound. To pray together, to refrain from backbiting, to educate children to develop a noble and upright character; these are all fortifying elements of communities.

The feature article in this issue, “Arbor Glen: Nurturing children, a community’s most precious treasure,” illustrates how such a community was formed. In this Toronto neighbourhood, a single children’s class initiated almost a decade ago has evolved into a process in which 600 people are engaged in meaningful conversations, with many emerging as protagonists in the community-building process. The institute process has provided a set of coherent concepts through which family members are realizing their aspirations, overcoming challenges, and drawing closer to one another.

In the From the History section of the magazine, a book review of Paul Hanley’s *Adasiyyih: The Story of Abdu'l-Bahá's Model Farming Community*, by Rhonda Gossen, also explores the theme of a fortified community. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá purchased a plot of land in Jordan that was degraded and covered in thorny brush. The community of farmers that he tasked with cultivating it undertook what is now called “regenerative agriculture,” and after extensive labour, the land yielded a variety of crops. This community became a model from which others in the region learned, and as is known, grains transported from ‘Adasiyyih protected many in Haifa and ‘Akká from famine during World War I.

In the article “From Morocco to Canada: A path of confirmations,” Núr Elmasri describes his journey as an international pioneer, first training in Jordan before arriving at his post in Morocco, where he serves today. The article highlights how pioneering in this Nine Year Plan is a means of sharing learning generated about the educational process from one community to another, across the globe—the benefits of which are felt by both the community sending and receiving a pioneer.

Another article focuses on a recent multimedia art exhibition in Aurora, Ont. The exhibit, titled “SABZEH” (sprouts in Farsi), much like Arbor Glen, started with a seed of an idea that grew as a collective of artists joined the enterprise. They interpreted the concept of growth through sound, fibre arts, dance and visual arts. The exhibit was also inspired by the #OurStoryisOne campaign, which highlights the Bahá’í women executed in Iran solely because of their Faith.

Finally, the poem *The Dawn of Unity*, by Robin Kers, reflects on the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh—the two Figures Who bind the hearts of the growing worldwide Bahá’í community and Whose message gives humanity spiritual life and purpose.

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.



'Abdu'l-Bahá with some of the Bahá'í farmers of 'Adasíyyih, taken during or shortly after World War I.
Photo: Iraj Poostchi, *'Adasíyyah: A Study in Agriculture and Rural Development*, 76

'Adasíyyih: The Story of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Model Farming Community

The following book review of *'Adasíyyih* (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2024), by Paul Hanley, recounts early Bahá'í contributions to agriculture, rural development, and building vibrant communities.

This remarkable piece of Bahá'í history, captured in detail by Canadian author and environmentalist Paul Hanley, is significant on multiple fronts. It sheds light on the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as, under His guidance, a group of Persian farmers transformed 'Adasíyyih from a degraded, abandoned land to become what is today considered the best farmland in Jordan. Here, prosperity was created at the community level, and the village became a model of regenerative farming for the region. The surplus harvest from these lands ultimately helped avert famine in Haifa and 'Akka during World War I. The village of 'Adasíyyih is an early illustration of the current framework for action in which a community arises as a protagonist in its own spiritual and material progress.

The significance of agriculture in the lives of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The story begins in the days of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, portraying Their interest in farming and the

importance of agriculture in Their lives and in the teachings of the Faith. In The Tablet of the World, written in 1891, Bahá'u'lláh "makes his most significant statement about the centrality of agriculture in the new world order,"¹ describing it as foremost among principles for the administration of human affairs and central to a just and sustainable civilization.²

Hanley recounts Bahá'u'lláh's love for the diversity of the natural world and His interest in agriculture through stories from His lifetime. The story of the village of Saysan in Iran, where a whole province was saved from famine because potatoes had been brought back and cultivated by pilgrims from 'Akká at the request of Bahá'u'lláh, is a shining example of His foresight, and a service later repeated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. These stories set the context, showing how Bahá'í villages prospered spiritually and materially, putting the teachings into practice with the guidance and encouragement of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The book goes into considerable detail on this important historical context, leading up to the actual story of 'Adasíyyih, which appears midway through. But it is valuable to see the history recounted against the backdrop of agriculture, rural development, and food security.

There are many references in the book to *The Chosen Highway*, written by Lady Blomfield, which refers to 'Adasíyyih and stories of agriculture in the lives of the Central Figures of the Faith. She also refers to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's purchase of land in various villages.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, recounts His secretary Ahmad Sohrab, "always enjoyed visiting farms and villages, being among rural people, and joining them in feasts. He often invited a passing Bedouin or a shepherd to come and sit beside him and share his meal. The Master might use the occasion of a feast to share insights on the spiritual significance of food and feasting."³ This is very much part of Bahá'í life everywhere today.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was also a skilled cook. "I am the servant of the believers of God. I must demonstrate my claim to service with deeds. Words are not sufficient...Today I will prepare dinner for the believers who are coming tomorrow from Haifa to visit the Holy Tomb of the Blessed Perfection." Thus spoke the beloved while he was preparing a sheep to be cooked in the oven.⁴

Gardens were also a feature in the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; He walked and worked in His beautiful garden in Haifa, which also provided food for the family and pilgrims and "was a wonderful space for memorable meetings and elevated conversations."⁵

1 Hanley, Paul. *'Adasíyyih: The Story of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Model Farming Community*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2024, p. 48.

2 'Adasíyyih, p. 117. In His Tablet of the World, Bahá'u'lláh writes, "Special regard must be paid to agriculture. Although it hath been mentioned in the fifth place, unquestionably it precedeth the others."

3 'Adasíyyih, p. 70.

4 'Adasíyyih, p. 72.

5 'Adasíyyih, p. 95.

The Master continued to support farmers and villagers everywhere. During his historic travels in America in 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke several times on agricultural development. He contributed to the discourse on agriculture and rural development through talks on systematic approaches and the Bahá'í concept of the general storehouse, a kind of local development bank.

The development of 'Adasíyyih

'Abdu'l-Bahá recounts that purchasing the land of 'Adasíyyih was a mandate from Bahá'u'lláh:

I never dreamed of buying land bordering on the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River, but the Blessed Perfection commanded me to do so in consideration of their biblical sacredness and their historical association which run back into the oldest antiquity, thus connecting, in a prophetic manner, this new Dispensation with Judaism and Christianity.⁶

'Abdul-Bahá purchased the village estate in 1901. The land was in ruins and covered in wild thorny scrub that had to be removed by hand. Hanley describes that, "Lawlessness combined with poverty, inequality, and injustice in a near feudal system of land ownership—was indicative of a lack of state control"⁷ at the time, and many small-scale farmers had left the area. The first two farmers that 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent also left after three years, as their meagre crops were plundered. The land was then rented to a wealthy Lebanese family, who also failed after two years due to the same reasons.

'Abdu'l-Bahá then changed strategy, and 15 Bahá'í families, many from Zoroastrian background, from villages on the outskirts of Yazd, in Iran, came together to face the formidable task. The land had to be cleared with hoes, forks, and pickaxes in hot weather that they were unaccustomed to. Malaria was rampant. A grove of eucalyptus trees was planted in the centre of the village, which helped drain the malaria-infested swamp. Each farmer planted 10 to 30 eucalyptus saplings around the lagoon. The river was diverted through a ditch to irrigate the fields. The farmers then built a dam and hauled large loads of stones and small rocks to construct a sturdy dike. The ditch had to be cleared of debris every two weeks during the growing season.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was adept at diplomatic relations with all levels of authorities in the region, including Turkish and Palestinian, which helped to secure the village. He built a close relationship with the Turkish military commander of Jerusalem, who accompanied 'Abdu'l-Bahá on one of His four visits to 'Adasíyyih.

In the early days, the farmers used hand tools to prepare the soil for cultivation. Before long, they were using mules or oxen to plough the land. Soon, every household raised cattle, sheep, goats, poultry, and pigeons to produce manure to fertilize the soil. They began making animal

6 'Adasíyyih, p. 114.

7 'Adasíyyih, pp. 148-9.



'Abdu'l-Bahá receiving knighthood for relief of distress and famine during the war, 27 April 1920.

Photo: Bahá'í International Community

products, including yogurt, cheese, and butter. The farmers built other small infrastructure, such as bridges and canals, in addition to their mud-brick houses. This strenuous effort gradually improved the community's well-being.⁸

'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged them to persevere in this difficult service. His added incentive was that the land would serve as an endowment dedicated to the future development of the Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. Although the farmers did not own the land themselves, mutually beneficial tenancy agreements encouraged sustainable farming.⁹ When visiting, 'Abdu'l-Bahá advised the community on material, social, and spiritual aspects of community life and recommended practical measures.

By 1915, the farmers were able to produce a surplus of crops, beyond their own subsistence needs. 'Abdu'l-Bahá began to stockpile grain from 'Adasíyyih. By 1917-18, when World War I was at its peak, He organized a train of 200 camels to transport substantial amounts of grain from 'Adasíyyih to Haifa and 'Akka. He distributed limited rations to all the people in the area, which prevented the starvation of thousands. At the end of the war, at the capture of Haifa, he supplied corn to the British army, which had run out of supplies. He was awarded the

Order of the British Empire with a Knighthood for relief of distress and famine during the war.

The farm estate of 'Adasíyyih—a collection of smallholder families—grew 51 crops, cereals, pulses, vegetables, and fruits and raised seven species of animals. 'Abdu'l-Bahá introduced banana production there, which is today the centre of Jordanian and Israeli banana industries. Members of the Ein-Gav kibbutz visited 'Adasíyyih in 1941 and made the following observation:

At the entrance to the village is a beautiful boulevard of acacia trees, through which are seen the various fruit tree gardens and beautiful vineyards...Most of the land is planted with gardens, an orchard of pomegranates of various varieties...we moved to a vineyard. There are different varieties, everything is arranged on cordons and beautifully processed...From there we reached the fruit trees, pineapples, apples of all varieties, pears, guava...we saw bananas standing in the water half a meter high...In the orchard there are two varieties of golden oranges, grapefruits, mandarins, lemons...In the corners of the farm there is cane and some vegetables. In conclusion, we saw here a perfect mixed farm.¹⁰

Under 'Abdu'l-Bahá's loving guidance and leadership, 'Adasíyyih flourished, with the community managing

10 'Adasíyyih, p. 283.

8 'Adasíyyih, p. 208.

9 'Adasíyyih, p. 153.

its day-to-day operations and affairs. The building of a Bahá'í Centre was undertaken during the time of Shoghi Effendi. Under his guidance, the village consolidated and strengthened community life, and a Local Spiritual Assembly formed in 1924. Committees appointed by this Assembly administered the village, its agriculture, and schools. When the construction of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh was in progress, Shoghi Effendi called on the Bahá'ís of 'Adasíyyih to send 100 sacks of fine gravel for landscaping work around the Shrine. Hanley writes, "Today, one can still see the gravel shipped from 'Adasíyyih at Bahjí."¹¹

Long term impact

After years of effort, 'Adasíyyih's transformation impacted the entire region. Visitors came from all over to learn from the work that had been done there. By the 1940s, it was a model village under local governance. However, by 1968, the last Bahá'ís left the village due to geopolitical and other factors, the main reason being the wars between Israel and Jordan.

Hanley views 'Adasíyyih against current United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization guidelines, finding it to be an exemplary social and economic development

¹¹ *'Adasíyyih*, p. 203.

project well aligned to the circumstances of millions of villages in the world today. Are there lessons for communities in Canada to be drawn from this inspiring story? Links between the individual, community, and institutions working in harmony; glimpses of the society-building power of the Faith, a vibrant and transformative pattern of Bahá'í life, creating strong and vibrant communities as fortresses for well-being and resilience, are some. Although the present economic structure and society in North America may not be conducive to establishing Bahá'í villages exactly like 'Adasíyyih, elements of the approach applied to community projects or social action can be relevant.

This historical book holds something of interest for everyone in the Bahá'í community and beyond. The history of 'Adasíyyih will continue to inspire and illustrate the transformative power of Bahá'í life.

– Rhonda Gossen

For further reading on this topic, the article "Begin with the Village: The Bahá'í Approach to Rural Development," by Paul Hanley, appears on the *Bahá'í World* website: <https://bahaiworld.bahai.org/library/begin-with-the-village/>



Aerial view of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, Mansion of Bahjí and surrounding gardens, 1976.

Photo: Bahá'í International Community



Junior youth study the text *Habits of an Orderly Mind*.

Arbor Glen: Nurturing children, a community's most precious treasure

Over the last decade, and through consistent action, a single children's class expanded into an educational process that involves nearly 200 families in a small neighbourhood.

Humble beginnings

“Aware of the aspirations of the children of the world and their need for spiritual education, they extend their efforts widely to involve ever-growing contingents of participants in classes that become centres of attraction for the young and strengthen the roots of the Faith in society.¹”

¹ From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2008.

In 2016, a Bahá'í family with two children moved into the Arbor Glen neighbourhood, attracted by its quiet, maple tree-lined streets, good schools, and close-knit community. Dwellings consist of modest homes—semi-detached, townhouses and one four-storey condo building. The neighbourhood is bordered by a highway and several major roads, contributing to the sense of being a defined area. The neighbourhood

is about 0.47 km², with 3,500 residents in 1,170 households. It is also a 35-minute walk from Canada's future House of Worship.

There are many young Chinese families in Arbor Glen, and the majority settle with the intention of working or studying. There are also quite a few of Indian families. These two populations have existing patterns of community life that include arranging academic activities for their chil-



Families in the neighbourhood connect through Friendship Soccer.

dren, communal physical exercise, and social and cultural gatherings. Additionally, there is a smaller number of Vietnamese, Korean, Persian and other families. As the Bahá'í mother is Chinese and speaks Mandarin, she can easily communicate with the Mandarin-speaking parents.

From hesitation to confirmation

“There may also be other resources available to assist in the material, social, and spiritual education of young people of which the family can take advantage—schools, community life, service projects, and so on. Yet the ultimate responsibility to ensure the proper and complete education of children resides with the parents.”²

Soon after moving, the Bahá'í family celebrated their eldest child's sixth birthday, and the mother was becoming increasingly anxious because her son was not part of a regular Bahá'í children's class. There was no children's class in this neighbourhood, and the family could not find a suitable one nearby. Although the mother had been a professional school teacher and also served as a children's class teacher in China, she shares, “As an immigrant, life has gifted you with a notion that your previous professional training and experience are not sufficient to qual-

ify you to work as a teacher in Canada, and you learn to live with it.” She explains that given this reality, some newcomers lack confidence when it comes to serving their community. However, the question “What am I going to say if Bahá'u'lláh asks me why I did not organize and teach a class to my son and his schoolmates?” prompted her to act. With much loving encouragement from her husband and a close Bahá'í friend, the mother invited two of her son's school friends to her home and began teaching Grade 1 Bahá'í children's classes to three children, including her own son.

Over time, the family befriended the mothers of the children in her class and gained their trust. The parents observed that their children's behaviour improved week by week, and their commitment to the classes strengthened. To deepen these friendships, the family started hosting dinner gatherings every three months. During these evenings, the children presented what they had learned through art, song and short plays. Over a period of two years, the number of children in the class increased, and the quality of teaching improved. The parents showed signs of ownership, such as offering to bring food to the gatherings (even though the word “potluck” does not exist in Mandarin).

The gathering also led to meaningful conversations among the parents, who looked to each other for advice and encouragement. For example,

one of the mothers turned to the children's class teacher because her son had been having nightmares for weeks. They would cause him to scream at night, waking up the whole family. Although the mother was like most Chinese people in that she did not believe in God, and praying was foreign, the Bahá'í mother printed a suggested prayer for her to place on her son's bedside. Each night, mother and son said this prayer until he fell asleep. A few weeks later, she shared that her son was not having nightmares anymore. The boy said, “Someone has put this prayer in my mind, and I know all the lines.”

The second Bahá'í children's class

“Independent of the level of their education, parents are in a critical position to shape the spiritual development of their children. They should not ever underestimate their capacity to mold their children's moral character.”³

In time, the family's youngest boy turned five, and the Bahá'í friend who initially encouraged the Chinese Bahá'í mother had a son similar in age, so they decided to work together to start another class, even though the other Bahá'í family did not live in Arbor Glen. By now, the two mothers had developed a conviction that parents need to be involved in strengthening the educational process, and no family should

² From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 19 March 2025.

³ From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 19 March 2025.



Junior youth from the Arbor Glen neighbourhood in Toronto help look after saplings for the Temple grounds.

passively wish for an experienced teacher. They noticed that when the parents of the children stayed for the duration of the class to help and take part in what their children were learning, their own understanding of the process naturally increased.

This second class had a noticeably higher level of parental involvement. The teachers encouraged parents to support their children at home by reviewing quotes, prayers, and stories. The children attended regularly, and new parents supported the class by preparing snacks and meals. The teachers also incorporated parents' suggestions into their classes. For example, the parents wanted the children to improve their spelling, so they planned spelling tests using words from the materials, such as "fountain," "courage," and "garden."

The parents' understanding of the classes has deepened their commitment to the process. One child who had challenges with her physical health was offered prayers as they consulted on avenues for physical healing. Her father said, "We are Hindus, but we do not have a system to teach the children spiritual things at home." When the children's class teachers shared the concept of building a routine to ensure we feed our souls with spiritual food through reciting prayers, reading, and reflecting on Holy Writings, the mother said, "This is why the Bahá'í children's classes are important for my children. It is food for their souls."

An emerging junior youth program

"What has become especially apparent during the current Five Year Plan is the efficacy of educational programs aimed at the spiritual empowerment of junior youth. When accompanied for three years through a program that enhances their spiritual perception, and encouraged to enter the main sequence of institute courses at the age of fifteen, they represent a vast reservoir of energy and talent that can be devoted to the advancement of spiritual and material civilization."⁴

The onset of the coronavirus pandemic meant that the classes shifted online, and the activities faced difficulties; nevertheless, the very first children's class completed Grade 4, and the children were 10 and 11 years old—almost junior youth. The mothers realized that they needed a junior youth animator, and very much in the spirit of that first class, determined that they would need to train themselves. They approached a tutor in the community and completed *Ruhi Book 5: Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth* in six months through online studies. The group of 10 and 11-year-olds was eager to continue with children's class Grade 5 while starting the junior youth program, particularly as many oth-

er activities had stopped during the pandemic, and the classes had become a lifeline of activity for the families.

The mothers continued to learn how to help families draw on the institute when dealing with personal problems. When a mother brings forward a particular concern, they turn to the institute materials together to try to find a solution or a next step that can be taken. For example, a few mothers expressed concern that three of the junior youth had become addicted to video games and seldom even spoke with their parents. Through the support of the junior youth group, the three boys gradually began to converse with their parents and their fellow junior youth. The boys were able to reduce their gaming time to a level that was less concerning to their parents. In total, nine junior youth participated in the group.

Once public health restrictions were eased, friends began to meet in increasingly larger groups outside, and an idea arose for Friendship Soccer; soccer games informally organized by families that focus on skills and cooperation. Many of the families that took part in Friendship Soccer learned about the educational process and met others who lived nearby, strengthening social cohesion. Several of the fathers of the children stepped up to organize these games regularly.

⁴ From the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 27 December 2005.

During a home visit, one mother shared, “Although the pandemic was scary, it created new opportunities. For example, because sports facilities were closed, my son joined Friendship Soccer in the neighbourhood. As a result, we learned about the junior youth spiritual empowerment program, and he joined a group. Now I am part of a study circle. I think when life gives us lemons, we must find ways to make lemonade.”

The majority of the nine junior youth completed the 13 available texts of the junior youth program. As youth, five of them completed Ruhi Books 1, 2, 3; three of them continued to study and complete Books 4 and 5 in 2025, and two of them have been serving as children’s class teachers since they began to study Ruhi Book 2. Starting September 2025, the third youth in the Book 5 study circle has been co-animating a junior youth group.

Growing in number

“And as the flow of people beginning a path of service swells, considerable progress is made in all aspects of the community-building efforts of the friends. Animators of junior youth groups and teachers of children’s classes multiply in number, fuelling an expansion of these two vital programmes. Children are enabled to move from one grade of the classes to another, while groups of junior youth progress from year to year and ground their learning in service to society.”

In 2021, two Bahá’í families with extensive experience in the educational process moved into the area, creating opportunities to expand the process further. The families decided that they would each also invite their own children’s classmates, creating more classes.

The Chinese Bahá’í mother describes how they went about inviting families. When meeting a new family, she typically explains that the

purpose of attending the classes is to increase one’s capacity for service and contribute to the community. Without service, gaining knowledge has a potential risk of making the participants swell with pride, which would be detrimental. This conviction awakened youth, junior youth and parents to view service in a new light and see themselves as protagonists. Many were galvanized to create and seize opportunities to contribute to their community.

Candid and in-depth conversations with the parents led to the realization that there was a need for a space to discuss parenting and improve conditions in the home. A foundational concept for the parents seems to be that to educate their children, they should also educate themselves. Families are asked the question: Do we want our children to perpetuate the same traditions and customs of our generations or be better? Therefore, a weekly parenting class started, and after six months of studying relevant Bahá’í materials, they eventually began Ruhi Book 1 and are currently studying Book 3 in Mandarin.

Although the women had numerous obligations to their work and family, their commitment to study never wavered. Much of the conversation during the study circle centred on how the principles applied to their daily lives, and at times, only one section was covered per session. The mothers longed for the space to share their concerns and questions around parenting and family life, and to look for solutions together from the Bahá’í Writings and the personal experience of the other mothers. One mother said the quotation “A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men...”⁶ transformed her relationship with her husband and children, bringing greater unity at home and strengthening her relationship with her children.

A mother of two children, who started studying Ruhi Books 1 and 2 concurrently in an intensive manner, said her teenage daughter asked

her one evening, “What is happening with you these days? You seem to be extra happy and nice all the time.” Another mother commented, “Studying the junior youth materials together is the best way to strengthen bonds between family members.”

The more the mothers experienced transformation, the more eager they became to serve and invite others to the process. Some took initiative based on their own aspirations and the needs of their community. One mother worked with her 14-year-old son to tutor younger children in math, while another started a yoga class in the park to support women’s well-being. Other initiatives include a Mandarin institute choir, an English institute choir, a community cross-country running team, a dance group, and a drawing class. The initial Bahá’í families include the growing group in all their planning spaces, expanding the nucleus of those coordinating activities. In this way, they were not, however well-meaning, a small group planning things for others. The friends in the Mandarin study circle now directly nurture those new to the process.

By fall 2025, the neighbourhood had six children’s classes, five of which were taught by youth and junior youth with support from accompanying adults. The sixth one is taught by a Chinese parent and accompanied by a more experienced teacher. Coincidentally, the number of junior youth groups in the neighbourhood is also six, and all the animators are mothers, aunties and youth from within the population.

Community gatherings and camps

“Uplifting, well-prepared community gatherings—extending in some cases to camps and festivals—occur with increasing frequency, and music and song feature prominently on such occasions.”⁷

⁵ From the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 29 December 2015.

⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 15.

⁷ From the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 30 December 2021.



Junior youth study the text *Making Sense of Data* during a camp.

Embracing many new families without compromising quality requires universal participation in every aspect of the work. Six years after the first children's class, regular large community gatherings, which take place twice a year and typically have 80-100 participants, became an element of the community-building process. These take place at the nearby Don Valley Educational Centre, a Bahá'í property.

The gatherings are a beautiful demonstration of universal participation. They start with a potluck lunch with many tasty dishes; the participants also contribute \$10 towards the upkeep of the facility. There is a prepared list of who will take on various responsibilities, such as setting up the sound system and putting away chairs, which is arranged ahead of time. There is a saying in the neighbourhood, "No one is a guest," which reflects the principle of universal participation.

Community gatherings are opportunities for each group to present what it is learning—from the youngest children and junior youth to those moving through the institute process—and to celebrate their achievements. This is done through speeches, skits and songs. These gatherings are an opportunity to introduce new families, as they witness a seamless educational process from those aged five to seniors in their 70s. The chil-

dren and junior youth also use it as an opportunity to perform musical pieces on the piano and violin.

Another development over the last few years has been family camps, where families travel together to the Bethany Bahá'í Centre of Learning for a few nights to study, consult, and deepen friendships. These camps now have around 100 participants, including adults and children. This was a further opportunity for the children to learn to become protagonists. For example, children and junior youth not only attend classes, but also wash dishes, sweep floors and wipe tables after each meal. The conviction of giving each person a suitable opportunity to serve meaningfully was confirmed by the children, junior youth and youth's enthusiastic response. This conviction was also fueled by the parents' request to create more opportunities for the younger generation to take on meaningful responsibilities.

At the end of one family camp, a parent said, "The way people serve here is real. They are very sincere, and it is not beautiful words or slogans; people work hard with a good spirit. Our family wants to come here and serve in the kitchen."

The family camps also spiritually invigorate the participants. After the neighbourhood family camp in May 2025, a nine-year-old child approached his children's class teach-

er's accompanier and said, "When we have a family camp in October, I want to say the longest prayer Bahá'u'lláh has made. If you give me the prayer now, I will have a few months to work on it and I will memorize it by Thanksgiving weekend." His wish was granted (although the prayer may not be the longest prayer Bahá'u'lláh revealed.)

The Grade 3 children's class materials have also influenced the children's outlook and behaviour. At a summer camp, one child reported that another child was repeatedly calling him ugly, and the camp counsellors did not seem to notice it. Every day, the boy's mother would ask him about his day, and he would report how many times he was told that he was ugly. When his mother asked him if he needed her support to change the situation, he said, "Remember, the man was mean to 'Abdu'l-Bahá for 24 years and 'Abdu'l-Bahá endured with patience. I can also bear it."⁸ Less than 24 hours later, when his mother asked him the same question about his day, the boy said, "We are already friends. Today we played basketball together."

Accompanying others to serve

"As one Plan succeeded another, and engagement with the work of community building became more broadly based, advances at the level of culture became more pronounced. For instance, the importance of educating the younger generations became more widely appreciated, as did the extraordinary potential represented by junior youth in particular. Souls assisting and accompanying one another along a shared path, constantly widening the circle of mutual support, became the pattern to which all efforts aimed at developing capacity for service aspired."⁹

The teachers in Arbor Glen have learned about accompanying junior youth and a few mothers to start

⁸ This references a story in Grade 1 children's class on the virtue of love.

⁹ From the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2021.



A children's class in Arbor Glen.

their own children's classes. The first junior youth teacher needed help writing lesson plans, creating visually attractive materials, teaching the lesson itself, communicating with parents and reflecting after each class. However, once he finished teaching Grade 1 in a little over a year, he became confident to plan, teach, and communicate with the children's parents independently. The friends in Arbor Glen shared that when people arise to serve, they must be empowered to see themselves on a sacred mission in life. Drawing on their natural skills and carefully accompanying them with diligence to undertake tasks step by step is necessary. Junior youth and youth need to be encouraged, but not overwhelmed, with the daunting task of teaching a class by themselves.

In one instance, a Chinese mother was trying to bring her teenage daughter to the park to meet an animator, but her daughter did not want to come. After much persuasion, the mother and daughter came to the park. But the daughter looked away from the animator and did not want to have a conversation. Eventually, she responded to the animator and said, "I am useless in Canada, and I have no friends." The animator pointed out that her Mandarin pronunciation was pure with a beautiful Beijing accent. She explained

that being able to speak Mandarin well was a huge asset, and it creates opportunities for her to teach it. The teenage girl widened her eyes and said, "But nobody would want to learn Mandarin here. This is Canada. I need to learn English from others." The animator told her that she would organize a small class for her if she was willing to teach, and she would accompany her to prepare and execute lesson plans. The girl reluctantly agreed, and they immediately planned the first lesson. The youth taught the class to five Canadian-born Chinese junior youth the next day in the animator's home. A few hours after the class, the girl's mother sent a message to the animator and said, "My daughter has not been so happy in a year since we came to Canada. It is the first time she feels needed in Canada."

Junior youth who were once in the children's classes themselves describe how their own development is closely tied to the development of their community. One junior youth, who moved to the Arbor Glen neighbourhood when she was in Grade 3 and found herself detached from many of her previous friendships, describes how joining the Bahá'í children's classes helped her to learn about the spiritual world: "How our hearts can be pure, and ways to strengthen our connection with God." She made friends and gained confidence

to speak. She says, "The Bahá'í children's classes, the junior youth spiritual empowerment program, the opportunities to serve as a children's class teacher, the joy of being part of a concert have helped strengthen my intellectual and spiritual capacities. When we are together, we unite and build a better world."

Another junior youth shares, "Before I attended Bahá'í children's classes, I wasn't the nicest, and I was scared to face many things. I also had no idea about my capacities and had a very poor self-image. After I attended the Bahá'í children's classes at age nine, I gradually became a better person. I became kinder, and I learned how to face things instead of running away from them. By having kind and motivating people around me, I began to develop new skills. For example, I became a much better speaker, a better singer, and a better storyteller! I began to teach younger children when I turned 13 years old. This has provided me with opportunities to become a more organized, more patient, and more creative person. I hope I can help others as much as these children's classes and the junior youth program have helped me!"

The Chinese Bahá'í mother does not romanticize this work and has pointed out that with each victory, there have been many crises, and that there is much still to learn. However, she is also in awe of the transformation that has occurred, with the small efforts of many rather than the large effort of a few. Although she does not teach in a government-registered school, she is the principal of a dynamic educational process that aims to reach all those in her community.

There are currently over 600 friends in conversation, participating in core activities, festivals, camps, or social action initiatives. There are 60 core activities with 285 participants, 26 parents are in study circles, and some 23 mothers and youth facilitate weekly educational activities.



A gathering of youth in Jordan, with Núr on the far right.

From Canada to Morocco: A path of confirmations

After deciding to pioneer to Morocco, Núr Elmasri describes his experience in Jordan, where he stayed for a three-month orientation.

During the first year of the Nine Year Plan, a conversation with an Auxiliary Board member first opened my mind to the idea of pioneering internationally. By arising as a pioneer, I could share what we were learning about the community-building process in Canada and help other neighbourhoods to advance. At that time, the idea felt distant—I liked serving in my neighbourhood in Canada and was still completing my university degree—but the seed was planted.

I later attended an institute seminar alongside a group of pioneers leaving Canada, and the seed began to

germinate. One of my friends (and a soon-to-be pioneer) asked, “If ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were here and asked you to pioneer, what would you say?” That moment sparked deep reflection. I told her I couldn’t leave Canada because my parents needed me. She asked me how I knew this, but I didn’t have an answer. An encouraging phone call with my mother alleviated these concerns and provided clarity. She told me that others in our family had pioneered and that it was a blessing. I saw this as confirmation.

Through consultation with others, including family members and my Auxiliary Board member, I began to explore the idea of pioneering

more seriously. Soon, Morocco was selected as my pioneering post. Being of Egyptian heritage, I speak Arabic reasonably well. Also, although it did not materialize, my workplace offered me a job at their location in Morocco. I still had one semester left to complete my degree, which included writing an undergraduate thesis paper. Before I left, the option of completing it remotely and undertaking field research with a Bahá’í-inspired NGO in Jordan became available. One by one, the doors opened.

Though I was preparing to leave my home, the bonds with my family strengthened. During this time, my mother and I visited the Wilmette



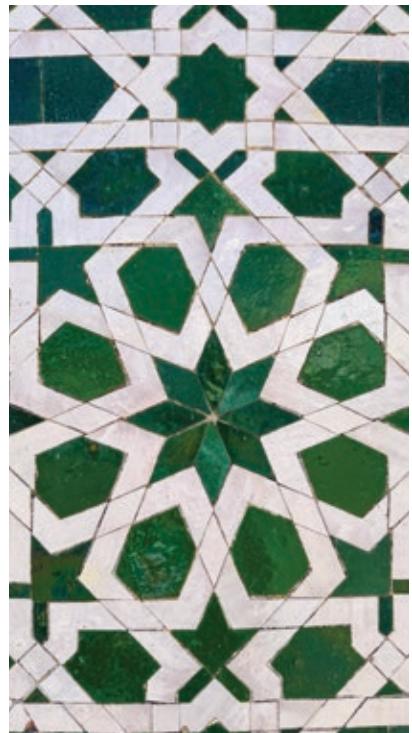
A street view of Rabat, Morocco, where Núr currently resides.

Temple as a spiritual preparation. On the drive there, she shared stories from our family history. During our conversations, I learned that my grandfather pioneered to Morocco many years ago! We also recalled that when we went on pilgrimage to the Bahá'í World Centre a few years ago, the first group of Moroccan pioneers were in the same group as us. Again, I took these as signs that I was on the right path.

As I was leaving to fly to Jordan for my orientation, I was surrounded by the love of my friends and family, but was in a strange position knowing that I had no idea what the rest of my future held.

Before beginning at my pioneering post in Morocco, I spent three months in Jordan, arriving in January 2025. When I first arrived in Amman, everything felt foreign. The cold seeped through the thick walls, the heating system was unfamiliar, and I did not yet have data or internet. Sitting alone in an empty house at 3 a.m., wrapped in seven blankets, a deep sense of isolation began to settle in. But by





Top: A few scenes in Morocco;
Bottom: Making jams for neighbours in Jordan.



morning, determined to shift my mindset, I turned to prayer and the Writings. Almost instantly, a sense of calm washed over me.

Over the weeks that followed, Jordan became a site of profound learning for me. I spent most of my time working alongside friends in two neighbourhoods. During Ramadan, the children prepared small gift bags of dates and water for their neighbours. Their joy and spirit of service showed me how simple, consistent acts can bring people from different backgrounds together.

Whenever we began a new study circle or devotional meeting, the first question was always: Who else can we invite?

There was a genuine openness among the friends in Jordan to welcome others into spaces of learning and reflection. Whenever we began a new study circle or devotional meeting, the first question was always: Who else can we invite? That natural inclusivity taught me that community building is not about numbers, but about hearts drawn together by the Word of God.

Conversations about faith arose effortlessly. In coffee shops, during study circles, and even late-night walks, youth asked deep questions about life, justice, and the existence of God. Many came from difficult circumstances, yet their sincerity and hunger for meaning was moving. In those moments, I learned that listening with empathy is sometimes the greatest act of teaching.

The Bahá'ís I served with in Jordan modelled humility and awareness of local culture. They reminded me of the importance of tutoring in pairs, visiting families with sensitivity, and understanding that modesty and boundaries are forms of reverence, not restriction. Through these experiences, I came to see how service



Youth study Ruhi Book 12 in Jordan.

requires both courage and discernment.

Building connections with neighbours took time. One older man often complained about us making noise. Around the time of Ayyám-i-Há, we decided to make gifts for the neighbourhood, including jars of homemade naranj jam¹. When we handed one to him, he looked sceptical. The next day, he called us over, smiling: "This jam is amazing."

He invited us inside, shared his story, and played us his music. We spent the evening listening to songs in Arabic, French, and Spanish; each one carried a different part of his life. He told us that although he didn't believe in God, when his children were young, he made sure they prayed and fasted, because he wanted them to have faith in something bigger than themselves. His honesty stayed with me; it reminded me how belief and love can take many forms. After that, he didn't complain once. In fact, he said that "noise means life."

Another neighbour, an older woman living below us, began bringing us food every morning, like homemade cakes, dates, and other snacks. Her

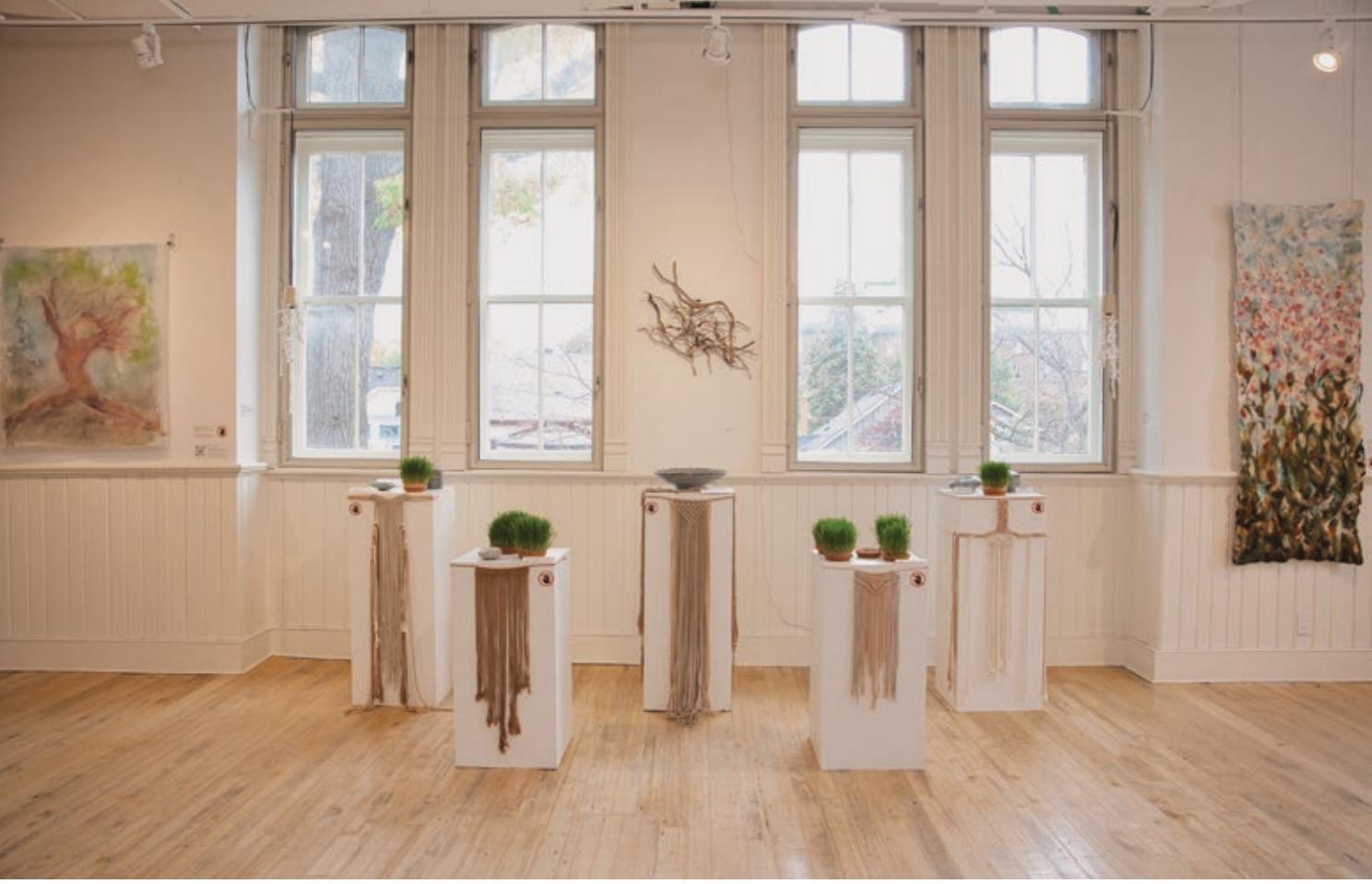
cheerful 7 a.m. visits became part of our daily routine, sometimes accompanied by small stories or jokes that would brighten the morning before the day even began. It was such a simple exchange, but it became one of the most heartwarming parts of daily life here.

As my departure for Morocco approached, I realized that Jordan had been more than a stop on the way; it was a training ground for the heart. The friendships formed, the lessons learned, and the quiet confirmations along the way deepened my understanding of what it means to arise in service.

As I prepared to leave Jordan, I thought about how easy it is to become attached to the people you live around. My view of this place and its people was completely different from what it had been three months earlier. As I walked through the neighbourhood and spotted my friends at the coffee shop or the tiny grocery store around the corner, I found myself smiling. If there's anything this experience has taught me, it's this: be chill, listen deeply, and never stop inviting.

- Núr Elmasri

¹ Naranj is a variety of orange.



Sprouts, or *sabzeh* in Farsi, are displayed at various stages of growth as part of the exhibition.

Multimedia art exhibit explores themes of collective growth

A team of Bahá'í artists collaborated to create the multimedia installation "SABZEH" (SPROUTS), which was exhibited at the Aurora Cultural Centre for two months.

Sprouts are a fitting metaphor for collective growth; their roots intertwine, creating a foundation for the young, green shoots. The immersive exhibition "SABZEH" (SPROUTS) took inspiration from this process, focusing on the strength to be found in community. The exhibition, which took place at the Aurora Cultural Centre Home-room Galleries, in Aurora, Ont. was a convergence of sound, dance, fibre and visual arts. It invited audiences into a sensorial meditation on growth, resilience, and connection. Rooted in Persian cultural tradi-

tions, it featured imagery of growing sprouts, carpets, and tapestries.

The initial spark of inspiration for the exhibit was a short story, also

called "Sabzeh," by Omid Fallahazad, which drew on the tragic execution of 10 Bahá'í women in Shiraz in 1983, carried out be-



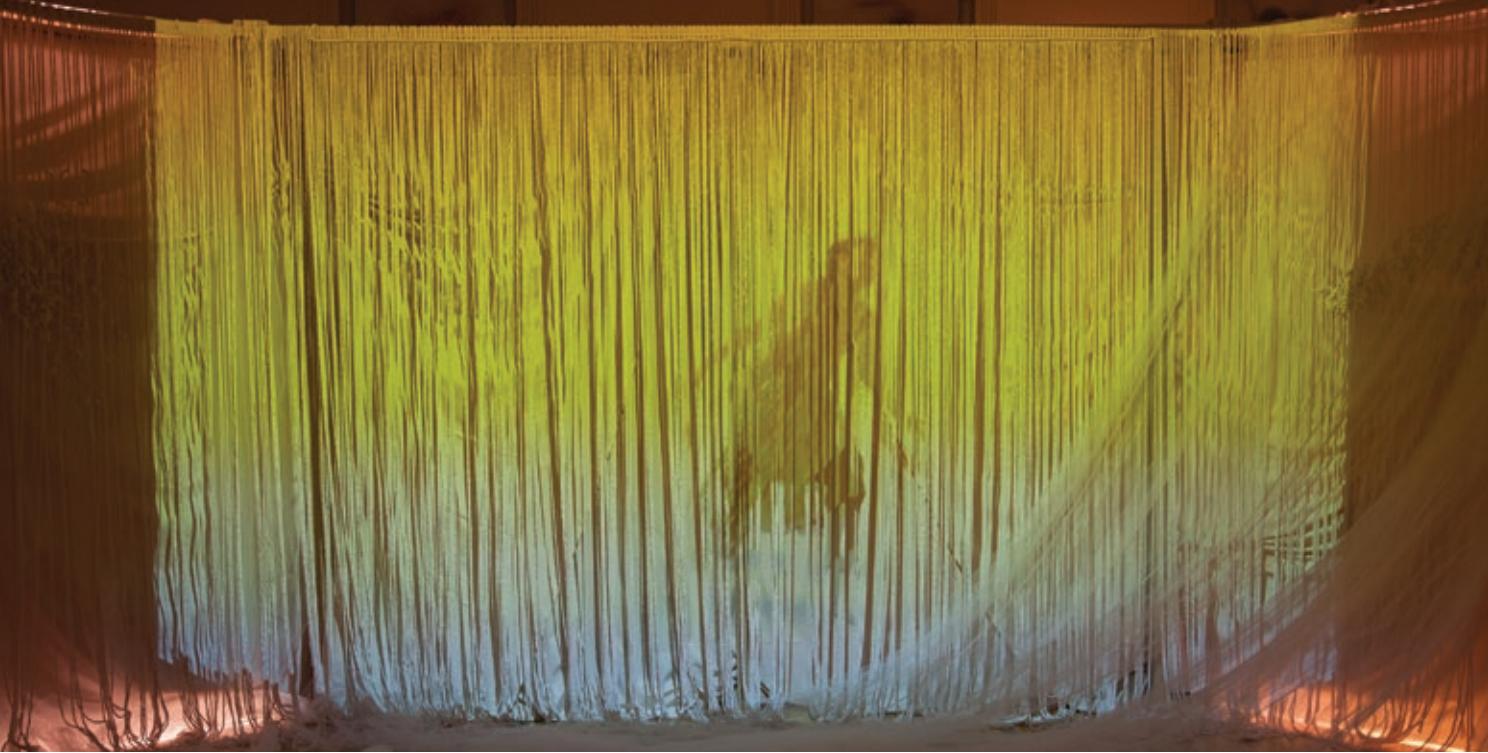


cause they refused to recant their Faith. Over the last few years, the #OurStoryisOne campaign, launched by the Bahá'í International Community, has drawn renewed attention to the lives of these women on the 40th anniversary of their deaths. Their story is one of resilience and sacrifice in the hope of a just world where all can grow and thrive.

Composer Parisa Sabet and fibre artist Laura Friedmann spearheaded the exhibition, which became a greater collective endeavour. In addition to the participation of

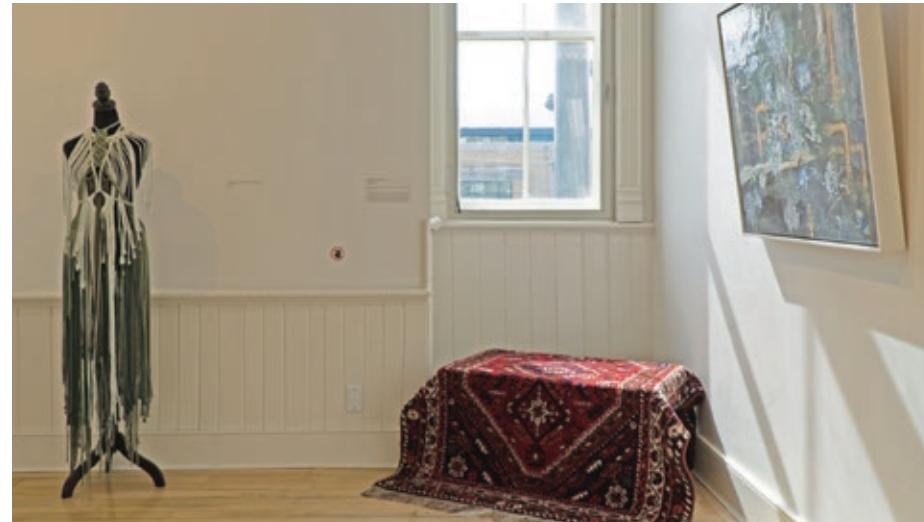


A choreographed dance inspired by the growth of sprouts was recorded and projected onto a fibre arts screen.

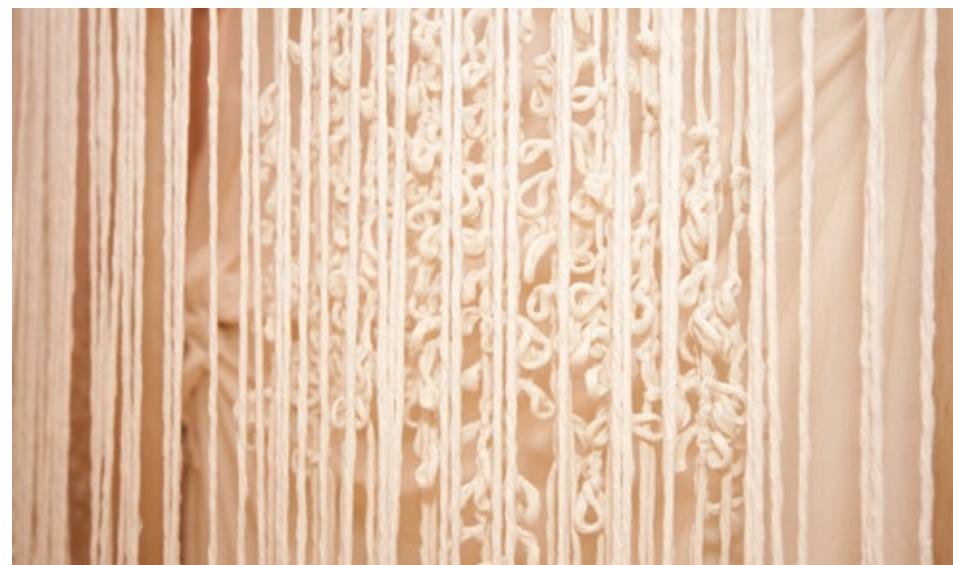


artists from the Bahá'í community, including Emily Dragoman, Bahia Marks, Hamed Saberi, Afsar Amiri, and Eden Naylor, the project was also supported by a multidisciplinary team of over 40 contributors, including designers, choreographers, and technicians.

The team aspired to embed the theme of collective growth within the creative process itself. When it came time to work with the larger group of artists, they approached the process with openness and a deep trust in the capacity of others. This allowed for a beautiful convergence of ideas, resulting in a rich and diverse body of work.



A carpet woven by Akhtar Sabet, one of 10 Bahá'í women executed in Iran, on display.





A triptych fibre art piece explores the theme of collective growth.

The exhibit was held in two rooms. The main room featured an immersive 8x39-foot wooden structure, covered with hundreds of fibres and pieces of fabric, and interactive lighting that responded to the soundscape's beats. The structure, supported by 10 pillars representing the 10 women of Shiraz, was a central element of the space, allowing visitors to experience a 12-minute multi-sensory loop of binaural soundscape and dance. A video was projected onto a layered screen made of hundreds of suspended knotted threads and fabric, so the dancers' movements merged with the fibres. The dance choreography was inspired by the growth stages of sprouts.

The second room featured the work of five female artists in the Toronto area, including paintings, ceramics, sculptures and mixed media. All the pieces were related and inspired by



Visitors participated in the exhibition by writing messages on a community loom.

the concept of sprouts and collective growth. An original carpet made by Akhtar Sabet, who, at the age of 25, was one of the 10 Bahá'í women executed in Shiraz, was also on display. Outside the room, visitors were invited to contribute to a community loom by writing names and messages in memory of people they had lost.

Hundreds of people of all ages visited the exhibit. Many remarked on the spirit they felt during the visit. A common theme was the feeling of upliftment, sacredness and peace,

It is through our shared recognition of interconnectedness, despite our unique journeys, that strength and hope emerge.

sparking meditation. Meaningful change is often the result of collective spiritual growth. We may be growing at different speeds. Lives cut short can have profound significance. It is through our shared recognition of interconnectedness, despite our unique journeys, that strength and hope emerge. It is

through collective unity that we can truly make a lasting difference.

- Laura Friedmann

The artists wish to thank the Ontario Arts Council and the Government of Ontario for their support.

The Dawn of Unity

In Shiraz, where whispers stirred the earth,
A voice rose soft, yet full of worth.
The Báb, like dawn's first tender flame,
Spoke of a world no longer the same.

His words were arrows, sharp and bright,
Piercing through Persia's quiet night.
He spoke of One who soon would rise,
To light the path beneath the skies.

Through sorrow's veil, Bahá'u'lláh stood tall,
A prisoner's chains could not forestall
The torrent of His ocean's grace,
Or dim the light that touched His face.

He called for hearts to leave behind
Old shadows, narrow ways confined.
Through prison walls, His vision bloomed,
In gardens where His soul had roomed.

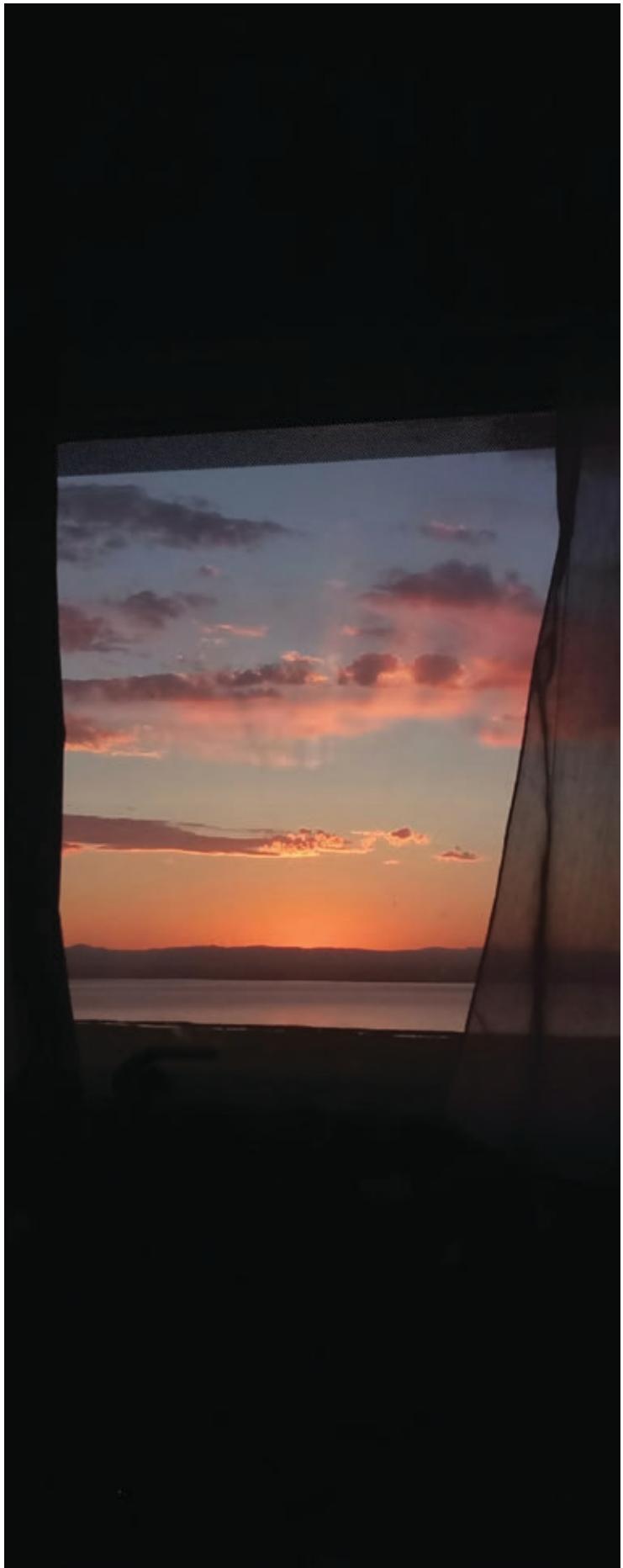
And then His son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá,
With footsteps light, but purpose raw,
Walked among the rich, the poor,
And opened wide each human door.

In London streets, or desert sands,
He touched the hearts with gentle hands.
His wisdom soft, yet deep as sea,
Taught love, and true humility.

From Báb's lone cry to Bahá'u'lláh's voice,
A world awakened, hearts rejoice.
And 'Abdu'l-Bahá, with love as guide,
Brought faith's great wave from side to side.

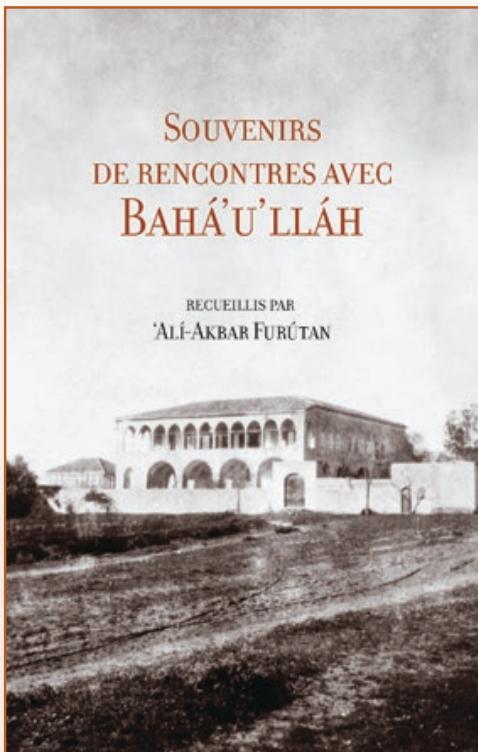
Now, as we stand in this new dawn,
Their light endures, though years have gone.
The path they paved, we walk today,
In unity, we find our way.

- Robin Kers



New publication

Souvenirs de rencontres avec Bahá'u'lláh



\$6.25

Taxes, postage, and handling charges extra.

Visit the website, which contains some interesting additions.

First complete translation into French of *Stories of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Collected by the Hand of the Cause of God 'Alí-Akbar Furútán, the 144 anecdotes recounted in this publication paint a picture of Bahá'u'lláh's life in Iran as well as in Baghdad, Constantinople, Adrianople, Acre, and Bahjí, and reveal both His majesty and authority and His compassion, humility, and sense of humour.

Author : 'Alí-Akbar Furútán

Type of publication : Soft cover | 118 pages



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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)

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Email: bds@bahai.ca
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For inquires regarding Bahá'í books in French, contact
75 d'auetul Street, Québec, QC, G1R 4C3
Email: sdbs@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, use the online Membership Portal, and 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 <https://pilgrimage.bwc.org> or by post or email: Office of Pilgrimage, PO Box 155, 3100101, Haifa, Israel;
Email: pilgrimage@bwc.org

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

"Huqúqu'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, *Huqúqu'lláh – The Right of God*, p.5.

ḤUQÚQU'LLÁH PAYMENT INFORMATION

In response to guidance from the International Board of Trustees, the Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Canada has set up a centralized system of receiving and recording of payments at the Treasury Department of the Bahá'í National Centre. Payments of the Right of God (Huqúqu'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 "Huqúqu'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.

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